

Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital
11 December 2002

Submission to the Planning and Development, Environmental Services and Corporate Services and Economic Development Committees regarding the 2003 Budget

The Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital has reviewed the draft 2003 Budget for the City of Ottawa and it would like to bring a number of concerns to the Committees' attention.

A major concern of the Greenspace Alliance, which underlies the budget regarding environmental/greenspace matters, is the City's capacity to implement environmental protection and management policies that would help to achieve the vision of "a green and environmentally friendly city". The Greenspace Alliance strongly supports the view expressed by the Environmental Advisory Committee to the Council when deciding on its 2003 budget directions:

"That the City increase budgets for required staffing to adequately address the environmental, environmental health, and related development requirements which are increasingly coming before our municipality. The Environmental Advisory Committee is often told that important environmental issues and needs are not being addressed at all, or in a timely fashion due to lack of staff and operating dollars."

Our first plea, therefore, is that in both the Operating and the Capital Budget there be deliberate increases in the City's capacity to engage in evidence-based environmental management. The Greenspace Alliance has expressed concern previously about the fact that the environment area is understaffed and occupies a relatively low profile position in the City's administrative structure; not much has changed.

Further to the Operating Budget, **we oppose the "Recommended Solution" to save \$200,000/yr by closing the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre and the Wild Bird Care Centre.** Wildlife will not stop coming into contact with our urbanized world, so if these Centres don't provide the advice and the care, who will? These are a fool's savings.

We also noted, under the Operating Budget for the Development Services Dept. that the Planning, Environment & Infrastructure Policy branch will establish a Centre of Expertise for Environmental Policy (p. 335) which will concern itself with natural area protection, reducing emissions and the health of watersheds. The Centre is expected to produce annual monitoring reports and a state of the environment report. The Greenspace Alliance is heartened that such a monitoring centre is being established and it urges the City to give it appropriate funding to accomplish its tasks.

The lack of funding support for environmentally related projects and, in some cases, a questioning of the need, is evident in a number of projects listed in the Capital Budget. For example, one which the Greenspace Alliance views as crucial to preserving greenspace, is project 900138 - Environmental Resources Areas Acquisition (p. 218).

We are concerned that the important commitment to purchase Natural Environment Area A and B lands seems to have been decreasing since the 2001 budget. In that year's budget, \$1,150,000 was the proposed allocation for each of 2001, 2002, and 2003 for the Environmental land acquisition program. In the 2002 budget nothing was proposed for 2002 and 2003, and only \$700,000 per year for 2004 through 2006. In the current 2003 budget, nothing continues to be allocated for 2003, and \$70,000 less per year is projected for the years 2004-2006.

Furthermore, we feel that **the budget proposals for acquisition expenditures are inadequate for the requirement detailed in the 1997 RMOC Official Plan to protect 30% of the City's area as forest covered.** Instead of the increase as required by the Regional Official Plan, there has been a large decrease, especially in the South March Highland areas, the South Urban Community (Longfields) area and the Leitrim community. Now it is proposed to remove and return to reserve funds, \$3,000,000 that has been allocated to this project. Communities have been consistently told that there is no budget money to preserve neighbourhood greenspace from destruction. As we see it, money allocated for environmental area protection is not being spent and is being cut back, while taxpayers underwrite infrastructure costs in support of development far beyond what can be recovered through development charges.

The Greenspace Alliance strongly recommends that the financial commitment to this program not be decreased, but be increased, and we would like to see the program expanded to include natural areas within the more developed areas of the City.

In the Budget draft's own words, the demands on this Environmental Resources Areas Acquisition program have increased significantly recently due to the increased development pressure in potential acquisition areas. It further says that to determine the funding, further development of this program is required to establish a clear purpose and objectives for it - overall, the criteria for selecting land for City acquisition needs to be reviewed. We are not sure why there needs to be this review unless it is about the mechanism to determine additional types of land to be acquired. It is our opinion that the City should firmly shoulder its responsibility of protecting existing, natural environment areas, even from development pressure. This matter is addressed better in the June 2002 Preliminary Draft Official Plan where the objective of purchasing natural environmental resources is made clear. The Budget needs to reflect that objective, which is ongoing from the Regional Official Plan.

The City, if it is to grow smartly and preserve its "green" character, cannot spend huge sums of money to support development while providing meagre amounts to acquire natural areas. There must be a better balance of priorities and activities.

Another specific issue that has been of ongoing interest to the Greenspace Alliance has been the protection of the Leitrim wetlands. In regards to this issue, we wish to highlight project 900816 - Stormwater Management Facilities – Leitrim (p.282). The Federal Environmental Assessment by DFO, which has been ongoing since February

2000, has not been completed. Development at Leitrim continues nonetheless. Lacking approval for the real stormwater management system, the developer has proposed a temporary stormwater management pond in a development block originally slated to become a park in order to continue building. Streets have been partially laid out. They cannot be completely laid out where they were intended to cross small creeks because of the lack of DFO approval to alter creeks. We think the continued development of this site prejudices the outcome of the Federal Assessment and is an abuse of proper environmental process. Furthermore, it is not clear how an additional stormwater pond will be accounted for in the Budget for this project. Will it mean that there will be less development charge money to be used for other purposes, such as park development?

We urge an amendment to prohibit the construction of any temporary stormwater ponds in conjunction with development at Leitrim.

Further comments on selected Capital Projects:

9000004 - Environmental Management (p. 216)

The proposed expenditure for the Climate Protection and the Green Team programs is just \$250,000 for 2003 and \$225,000 for 2004 and no amount is budgeted for the years 2005 and 2006. Are these programs expected to have reached all their goals by 2005? Are we no longer committed to bringing corporate and region-wide greenhouse gas emissions down by 20% relative to 1990 levels by the year 2007-2010? Where are the plans for helping residents and businesses of an ever-growing city to achieve these goals? This is another example of where not enough resources are being devoted to environmental concerns.

902203 - Environmental Restoration Projects (p. 220)

Projects under this initiative are to include restoration of aquatic and terrestrial habitats that have been affected by existing development. We note that this will only involve studies such as subwatershed plans or environmental management plans to establish priorities for conducting restoration, since the City plans to pursue partnerships with developers, government agencies and other stakeholders to complete these projects. We can only hope that the priorities once identified will lead to actual restoration projects.

902204 - Groundwater Monitoring and Protection (p. 222)

This project was initiated by the former Regional Plan when an "aquifer management study" was to be completed. A "groundwater management strategy", along with "implementation plans" were initiated to further define priorities and identify "means to acquire regular, reliable data" and "a means of protecting groundwater for long-term use". The preliminary draft Official Plan also notes that groundwater management is required to protect groundwater for long-term use. However, there are no budget figures given except for 2007 (\$500,000). When we know little now, waiting five years for "regular, reliable" data seems a long time.

902216 - Environmental Planning Studies (p.242):

Under this rubric funding has been identified for: Community Environmental Project Grants and for the continuance of Subwatershed Planning studies in several areas including Lower Rideau River watershed, Greely/Shield's Creek, Sawmill Creek Update, and Flowing Creek. Again the sums allocated seem extremely modest - \$450,000 in 2003, \$405,000 in each of 2004-2006, and \$450,000 in 2007 - especially seeing that nothing less than an ecological inventory of natural areas within the urban area is promised as an output of this project. Acquisition of headwaters areas to protect them from development should become a budgeted component of groundwater management.

901859 – Sawmill Creek Constructed Wetland (p. 306)

The Greenspace Alliance fully supports this project (\$3.5 million in 2003 and \$5.4 million in 2004). We believe it will significantly help restore the health of Sawmill Creek. We also applaud the opportunity to provide social benefits along with this project, such as walkways through and around the wetland sections. We plead in particular for allowance of an east-west connection at the northern end, to integrate it with our cherished Poets' Pathway, a major project that has been proposed to Council in connection with the new Official Plan.

Various - Park Development Projects (Pages 224 to 230)

We support the expenditure of money for the planning, design, and development of parks and pathways. We wish in particular that plans come forward for the construction of a pathway along Sawmill Creek behind the new Home Depot store at Bank Street. Developer's money is now sitting in escrow; if the City does not act, the community will lose it. This section, as well, is on the Poets' Pathway.

In the portion of the Capital Budget under the purview of Environmental Services Committee we note the following:

Greening Program (p.822)

We support proposed expenditures for the tree planting project (#901107). (Budget: 2003: \$450,000; 2004-06: \$410,000; 2007: \$450,000).

Community Forest Program (p. 826)

We similarly support the planned expenditure for managing over 10,000 hectares of city forest land (including the Cumberland forest, the Marlborough forest, the Carp Hills, Pinery-Long & Swamp forests and the Torbolton forest) and key activities such as a rare plant study and an interpretative program. For a paltry \$119,000 in 2003, \$60,000 per year in 2004-06 and \$75,000 in 2007, this must be one of the best deals in town!

Other Comments, particularly addressed to the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee:

Cash-in-Lieu-of Parkland

We continue to be concerned about cash-in-lieu-of-parkland. Allowing grants in lieu of protecting greenspace is at odds with the principles and wording of the Official Plan. Where such funds do accumulate, they are never used to acquire land. This needs to change.

Environmental Advisory Committee

The Greenspace Alliance recommends continued funding for this important committee which has a wide range of responsibilities. We believe that providing adequate funding for the Work Plan of this important advisory committee will be a cost-effective way to raise the profile of environmental issues in the City and to provide Council with sound environmental information.

Public Consultation Process

This is the third budget that will pass that in our opinion has not had a proper airing in public. The Greenspace Alliance would therefore recommend that the City consider extending the time period for public consultation on the budget; make a greater effort to raise public awareness; and provide the budget documents in a more “user-friendly” way.

In principle, making the budget documents available on the web site is a good practice. However we urge that the capital works budget document be posted on the web site as a text document and not as a binary image. **The present capital budget document can not be searched, extracted as text for analysis and reference**, and is too large to be read by anyone using a dial up connection to the Internet.

We oppose the “Recommended Solution” of saving \$50,000 by reducing newspaper advertising. Though a website has its merits, it is not the only or even best way to encourage broad public consultation. Newspaper advertising is an efficient vehicle for providing in a compact format what is being proposed to the widest number of citizens, especially for the many who are not familiar with the Internet. It was wrong last year to reduce newspaper advertising, it is wrong today to reduce it even further.

The budget would be more useful if it presented more detail regarding operational numbers such as staffing numbers (position allocated, filled and vacant). As well, it would be more informative if it included a comparison of previous year’s budget/actual and statements of capital assets and liabilities.

Thank you for your attention.

Erwin Dreessen
Chair