



Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital

Alliance pour les espaces verts de la capitale du Canada

MEDIA RELEASE

Foreign Affairs Minister must do security analysis for "Embassy Row"

City of Ottawa needs to pause land rezoning

OTTAWA March 10, 2021 — The Mechanicsville Community Association (MCA) and the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital are calling on Marc Garneau, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to immediately undertake a comprehensive risk analysis related to the string of foreign missions/embassies intended to replace a swath of open forest next to the Ottawa River (near Parkdale Ave. north).

"Based on [expert opinion](#) released publicly a week ago, our community association believes there is a risk of significant harm to our densely populated community located next to the proposed site," said Lorrie Marlow, president of the Mechanicsville Community Association.



"Minister of Foreign Affairs Marc Garneau must undertake and release a comprehensive and professional security analysis for the 5 or 6 foreign embassies that are planned here," said Marlow. She notes that this kind of analysis was missing from the National Capital Commission's (NCC) application for rezoning and Official Plan amendment submitted to the City of Ottawa in December 2020.

High-rise housing in the vicinity of the site includes a 32-storey rental tower, along with three condo and rental buildings of 11 to 14 storeys. Construction has begun on a 28-storey building. Two densely-populated Ottawa Community Housing complexes owned by the City, rooming houses and several types of supportive housing are nearby.

"Any foreign embassy can be the target of terrorist or malicious attacks at any time," she added. "In security circles, it is well-documented that high-rise towers are prone to progressive collapse from even small, street-level blasts."

In a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the MCA also urges the release of his Department's long-term plan and business case for construction of future embassies throughout the National Capital region.

"We know that embassies are an important feature of life in any Capital City," said Marlow. She cited an alternate example of proper planning: In Australia's capital of Canberra, the national government is meeting its responsibilities to house new foreign missions by building a precinct on lands large enough to protect residential communities from security threats.

"We need a security analysis to happen right now, and we want Ottawa's planning committee to do its own due diligence on behalf of the community by delaying any approval for rezoning until a threat analysis has concluded."

Security for Embassy Row would "obliterate" public green space

The NCC's application for rezoning and an Official Plan amendment grossly misrepresents the kind of physical security measures that will be needed to safeguard the proposed embassies.

"The plan shows shrubbery as a buffer between the fenced embassy grounds and homes at street level," said Daniel Buckles, a Director with the Greenspace Alliance. "In all likelihood, the security needs of embassy sites will obliterate all green barriers to sight lines, not just the 55 large trees that the plan says are slated for removal. Every shrub and hedge on the property will inevitably be removed and not replaced."

Excerpt from [security analysis](#) states: *Purpose-designed embassies in any kind of enclave are ... more often than not, hardened, walled, fenced, gated installations with barren highly monitored perimeter security exclusion zones.*

"It may be up to Global Affairs Canada to develop and deliver a sound security analysis," Buckles said. "But it is incumbent on the NCC to ensure that the land use here is consistent with its own guidance in the form of the 2018 Ottawa South Shore Riverfront Park Plan and its larger Capital Plan. It isn't, at present."

The Greenspace Alliance and the Mechanicsville Community Association are calling on the City of Ottawa to defer a decision on the NCC's rezoning application until Global Affairs has conducted a full risk assessment, and until the community, the City and the NCC develop a positive vision for the site as the vital greenspace it is. See [previous media release](#).

-30-

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