

Inspired by the Farm

www.ottawasocietyofbotanicalartists.ca/gallery-botanica-2021



An online exhibition inspired by Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm

Magnolia | Kristin Rothschild

This year's exhibition by the Ottawa Society of Botanical Artists, entitled 'Botanica', was inspired by the flowering trees, shrubs, and plants of the Central Experimental Farm's Ornamental Gardens, Arboretum, and Fletcher Wildlife Garden.

Artists selected plant specimens of interest, and visited the Farm over several months to research, write, draw, and paint their chosen plants. The watercolour, coloured-pencil, and graphite artworks in the exhibition are the artistic results of their study.

The online exhibition, launched in November and running until March 20, 2022, is at www.ottawasocietyofbotanicalartists.ca/gallery-botanica-2021

A New Hospital on the Farm: Brief History to Date

Construction of a new hospital at the Farm was first proposed in 2014, to be sited on research fields across from the current Civic Hospital. Among those who opposed the location were the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) scientists using the land for research. A citizen's coalition, including the Friends of the Farm and many others, was formed to oppose the loss of important research land, part of a National Historic Site, while supporting the need for a new hospital.

With a change in government in 2016, the National Capital Commission (NCC) was tasked with assessing 11 federally-owned properties, including two areas on the Farm, for a new location for the hospital. The NCC selected Tunney's Pasture as the best site and offered a portion of the property at that location. The Ottawa Hospital (TOH) board declined this offer and, at a press conference in Mayor Watson's office in December 2016, a group of federal, provincial and municipal politicians announced that the hospital would instead be located on a 25-hectare parcel of land at the north-eastern corner of the Farm.

The site selection was not open to public debate, so the planning process began. A number of stakeholder groups were invited to participate in a Campus Engagement Group (CEG), created by TOH to provide public input on its plans for the

new hospital. The Friends of the Farm took part in this group until it was dissolved in 2020. The process was abandoned without the group being consulted on the actual hospital design plans.

In June 2018, a by-law was enacted to rezone the 25-hectare parcel of land to allow for its use for a hospital. A Holding Provision required that a master plan, transportation study, and cultural heritage study be first approved by the Ottawa Planning Committee and City Council.

The Master Site Plan for the hospital was submitted to the City on May 10, 2021. It included transportation, environment, and cultural heritage impact studies. The Friends were one of many organizations expressing concerns about the new hospital design and the potential impact it will have on the Farm.

Because the site is on federal property, the Master Site Plan needed the NCC's approval, which was granted on October 5. On October 13, City Council voted 19-4 in favour of the Master Site Plan and the lifting of the Holding Provision. Councillor Riley Brockington, who had sought legislative protection for the Farm for many years, moved that the Mayor, on behalf of Council, write to federal ministers responsible and the NCC requesting that the Government of Canada pass legislation that would ensure the long-term protection of the remainder of the Central

Experimental Farm, and that a new Master Plan for the Farm would be developed, seeking local input and the input of expert scientists. Council unanimously passed the motion.

With the Master Site Plan approved, the TOH will next submit individual site plans for City review and approval to implement the project's various phases. City staff have the delegated authority to approve these applications unless a ward councillor decides to withdraw this authority. Staff have already committed to bring the site plan for the hospital parking garage — part of the development's first phase — to the planning committee for approval.

Newly elected MP Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre) pledged during the federal election campaign to introduce a law to protect the Farm in perpetuity, either through federal legislation to protect federally owned heritage properties generally, or failing that, through a private Member's bill. At a post-election Friends of the Farm event, Mr. Naqvi reaffirmed his intention to seek legislative protection for the Farm.

The Friends of the Farm hope that this chain of events will lead eventually to a better understanding of the Farm's importance to the city and to Canada, and improved status for maintaining it as a National Historic Site.