

# Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital 2021 Annual Report (draft, revised) (May 2020 – April 2021)

The Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital (GA) has been active in the last year in its work to protect and preserve greenspace and shape and influence federal, provincial and municipal policy and plans that have an effect on greenspace, while continuing to maintain itself and develop as an effective advocacy organization.

Our action starts with monitoring threats and developments to greenspace in Ottawa-Gatineau and also keeping abreast of new or revised policy or plans that touch on local greenspace. We are assisted in this by the eyes and ears of our members, of our list subscribers and of community members at large, to whom we are indebted for their care and concern for greenspace. We also get a steady stream of information through subscriptions to email alerts from the City of Ottawa, the National Capital Commission, the Ontario Environmental Network and many others groups and organizations.

We then educate ourselves and others regarding the issues that arise from this monitoring so that we can better focus our action, which is mainly to advocate. We do this through the preparation of briefs and submissions, appearances at committee and council meetings and participation in public consultations. In certain cases, we may take it a step further and participate in events such as demonstrations and marches, or launch letter writing or media campaigns meant to influence public opinion and sway decision makers. In rare cases, we may go as far as taking cases to appeal and adjudication bodies for review.

This annual report is meant to provide something of a report card on our action over the period of May 2020 to April 2021. What did we do in terms of protecting and preserving greenspace and how successful was it? It will be presented under the headings of threats to greenspace that were faced during the year, policy and plans that we shaped or influenced, and our own governance as an organization.

## **1. THREATS TO GREENSPACE**

### *a. Rural greenspace*

#### *Urban expansion*

The biggest threat to rural greenspace in the last year was the loss of rural land to urban expansion as part of Ottawa's new Official Plan. As of the end of the reporting period for this report, we stand to lose 1280 hectares of rural land to urban expansion unless the current

process is somehow delayed or derailed until after the 2022 municipal election. With the current Council hell-bent on approving a new official plan in the fall of 2021, there is little likelihood of this occurring. This despite the strongest ever rationale against urban expansion – 1) it's a no-brainer in the context of climate change; 2) the GA produced a clear PPS compliant demonstration that a small increment in intensification targets would avoid the need to expand the urban area; and 3) the largest, most organized and vocal community engagement ever for holding the line. This was exemplified by the three day marathon City committee meeting where public delegations outnumbered and bested developer representatives with better briefs and better communications. That the end result was a large majority vote in favour of urban expansion tells us everything we need to know about this Council. The full story is told under the Policy section of this annual report.

#### *Goulbourn Provincially Significant Wetland*

In better news, it would appear that the entirety of the Goulbourn Provincially Significant Wetland will finally be designated as such in the new Official Plan. The City had previously so designated only the part located in the Flewellyn Special Study Area, covering about half of the total area of the wetland. Appeals of that decision, in which the GA has standing, started to make their way through LPAT in 2020, leading to some settlements with minor boundary adjustments. A final appeal is outstanding but the schedules of the draft Official Plan released in November 2020 show that the Significant Wetlands designation will be applied to the entire wetlands, as delineated by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. This would culminate 20 years of activism and advocacy to achieve this aim. A special vote of thanks and recognition to Ken McRae and local supporters for their tireless efforts in this matter.

#### *Chalk River*

Our watch continued over the development of a nuclear waste facility and the entombment of a nuclear reactor upstream of the Ottawa River. We extended our concern to the federal government's plans to develop Small Modular Reactors at the Chalk River labs. There was broad agreement to continue to stand with local residents against activities that could result in seepage and nuclear contamination of the Ottawa watershed.

After years of advocacy on this issue led by the Concerned Citizens of Renfrew County, which the GA has supported throughout, the planned nuclear waste storage facility at Chalk River finally made it to the agenda of City Hall in March 2021. On a motion from Councillor Kavanagh, Council directed that the question be considered by the Environmental Protection, Water and Waste Management Committee, where public delegations were heard, including Greenspace Alliance director, J.P Unger. The night before the meeting, Councillor Kavanagh's motion was modified to merely question the nuclear waste storage plans rather than oppose them outright. Most of the over 30 intervenors, all supporting opposition to the proposed plans, were unaware of this change until the morning of the meeting. The proper democratic course of action would have been to defer consideration of the motion but this was not done – a low point in Council's way of doing business. The watered down motion was carried by Committee

and subsequently endorsed by Council on April 14, putting Ottawa offside of most of the municipalities along the Ottawa River.

*b. Major urban greenspace*

*Jock River floodplain*

In early 2020, a number of development applications in south Barrhaven, including one involving a major alteration of the Jock River floodplain, made their way through the City planning system, many with apparent irregularities, for new residential and industrial uses. These lands had long been designated urban but left undeveloped as a result of being in or near the Jock River floodplain. With Barrhaven having expanded north and south of the Jock River, these lands are now centrally located and take on a special importance in the re-imagining of the Barrhaven town centre. What is missing, at least from publicly available information, is an overview plan that shows the interrelationships between all of these developments and implications for road and water infrastructure and preservation of greenspace, canopy and permeability. Some of these projects involve repurposing quarries and mineral extraction sites for residential purposes, with risks to ground water. There is also a potential involvement of the leachate plume from the Trail Rd landfill, which is immediately to the west of the area, across Highway 416. Some of the developments require large alterations to the floodplain, which in general should not be made, or if they are, only in concert with broad public and scientific consultation. These decisions were being made by the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority under City pressure and through extraordinary decision processes closed to the public. The GA questioning of these decisions to build in a floodplain led to some media interest and pointed questioning at committee by Councillors McKenney and Leiper. The fate of these floodplain developments was still pending as of the end of this reporting period.

*Chaudière Islands development*

The GA has in previous years opposed the development plans for the Chaudière Islands, proposing instead the re-naturalization of the site. Residential construction is now well advanced and in 2020, Zibi development submitted a planning application to increase the height of one of the residential structures planned for the new complex on the Chaudière Islands. The GA submitted comments on the application, focussing on the lack of accessible greenspace in the application.

*Central Experimental Farm*

The GA has continued its watch over the new campus project of the Ottawa Hospital on the site of the former Sir John Carling Building, adjacent to the Experimental Farm and Dow's Lake, participating actively in the Campus Engagement Group, a public engagement forum created by the Ottawa Hospital with broad community representation; the forum is co-chaired by GA Chair Paul Johanis. The site plan is nearing completion and a major announcement is expected in May

2021. The new plans do not encroach beyond the 50 acre site leased by the NCC to TOH for this purpose, and significant greenspace is expected to be retained/restored on the site itself.

#### *Embassy Row*

A development application made by the NCC to build six structures suitable for embassies on vacant greenspace along the Sir John A Parkway attracted our attention in early 2021. Daniel Buckles, GA director, took the lead on this campaign, starting with a letter to Minister Marc Garneau, Minister of Global Affairs, questioning the need for new embassies. The location is adjacent to the Mechanicsville neighbourhood and the Mechanicsville Community Association is also actively opposing this development application. In addition to greenspace loss, the security risk posed by locating a multi-embassy complex so near a residential area was highlighted by a resident of nearby Champlain Park, a retired architect with a security background. The GA and its Mechanicsville partners have continued to collaborate, issuing news releases, organizing an online petition, writing to the CEO of the NCC and putting forward a positive green vision for the use of this land, now dubbed Lazy Bay Commons.

#### *Parliament Hill reforestation*

The GA was invited to a special briefing by the team at Public Services and Procurement Canada responsible for shoring up and reforesting the northern slope of Parliament Hill. It was clear that our previous advocacy for the parliamentary elm had raised our profile at PSPC and motivated this invitation to a special briefing. A very comprehensive presentation was given by the deputy project manager on the engineering and construction side, and also by the lead biologist on the project, whose task involves coordinating all the professional input. Detailed reports were shared and invitations extended to host site visits in the spring. An update was also given, at our request, on the propagation of saplings from the parliamentary elm that was removed in April 2019. Happily, a half dozen young scions are flourishing as part of the elm recovery project at the University of Guelph Arboretum.

#### *Alexandra Bridge*

In early 2021, a coalition to preserve the Alexandra bridge arose following the announcement by the federal government that it plans to demolish it and replace it with a new structure. The Coalition has proposed to preserve the historic bridge and to repurpose it for active transportation and perhaps the tram loop between Gatineau and Ottawa proposed by the STO. Based on the proposed use for active transportation and the preservation of major urban greenspace on both sides of the river at this location, the GA has signed on to this campaign.

### *c. Other greenspace*

#### *Trees*

More tree removals have been reported by residents in Lower town, Centre town, along Scott Street in Wellington Village and elsewhere across the city. In these cases, we try to connect residents with the appropriate City services to ensure that protection and preservation required by city policy and bylaws is exercised but it is often too late. Tree loss continues unabated in Ottawa.

In the case of the Scott Street reconstruction, City staff gave a presentation to local residents. The main purpose of the work is to replace sewers and water pipes. However, as the street is being torn up, the City has also proposed to include in the rebuild a protected bike lane on the south side of Scott. This would require using some of the right of way, which is now used as garden and greenspace by some residents, and the loss of several mature trees. Most of the local residents oppose this addition, pointing to the Multi-use path that runs along the north side of Scott Street. In response to questions, City staff indicated that is unlikely that any right-of-way currently being used by residents for greenery can be saved if the plan goes ahead but that with a few small tweaks, it might be possible to save some the mature trees. Following the presentation, we supported the residents in communications with Councillor Leiper but also recognized that the cycling community supports the plan, to which he is also sensitive. At a minimum, the tweaks required to save some to the mature trees should be made.

The GA received an enquiry from a Stittsville resident regarding available protection for distinctive trees under the Tree Protection bylaw. This is another case where a tree on or near a property line is damaged by an adjacent owner who claims a right to cut roots or branches that extend onto their properties. It seems City bylaw officers will not act unless and until the damage is already done. This continues to be a gap in the City's tree protection regime.

The GA has also been assisting a local resident in similar circumstances who has sued a developer for the loss of a distinctive tree as result of a construction project on an adjacent property. The case has been in Ontario Superior Court for going on two years now, with the defendants using every tactic to delay and complicate the process. In the absence of any legal capacity, the GA offered translation services, documenting the case history from its beginning, seeking volunteer law students from the local university placement programs and using our media contacts to get coverage of the story if desired.

As reported further in the Policy section of this report, the new Tree Protection came into effect on January 1, 2021, introducing a new regime of distinctive tree protection. Soon thereafter, a resident contacted us concerning the potential removal of distinctive trees on his property as a result of an infill project on an adjacent property. After providing some initial advice to the resident and committing to find some support to assist him, the GA noted that the case was at Committee of Adjustment for a variance. The builders had submitted a variance application on zoning matters for the project and, while the City had no zoning based opposition to the application, the forestry staff did have issues with the proposed tree removals. The new tree bylaw was judged not to apply as the application to COA predated the coming into force of the bylaw, but new internal City processes to catch potential threats early

in the planning stages, including variance applications to COA, have come into effect and this case was thus being treated under these new guidelines. As a result, a COA decision was deferred until additional information and potential design changes were worked out between the builder and the City. The case was to be taken up again by the COA on April 7.

However, a settlement was arrived at prior to the meeting. In this settlement, the builders agreed to change the plans such that two large trees in proximity to the building envelope will be preserved, in addition to two boundary trees that were already slated to be retained. This is a direct result of the City's new process for considering tree preservation as part of the Committee of Adjustment process. It is a hopeful sign that these internal process changes at the City combined with the new Tree Protection by-law might provide effective protection for trees in the context of infill development.

#### *Kanata Golf and Country Club*

The court hearing regarding the validity of the 60/40 agreement in Kanata Lakes was held remotely from July 13 to 15, 2020. The Provincial court decision released in February 2021 upheld the 60/40 agreement struck between the former City of Kanata and Campeau Corporation in 1985, meaning that 40% of the Kanata Lakes development is legally required to remain as greenspace, including the Kanata Golf and Country Club. Clublink, the current owner of the golf course, had made an application to the City, in partnership with Minto and Richcraft, to convert the golf course to a residential development. The City took the case to court to enforce the 60/40 agreement, and won their case. The Kanata Greenspace Protection Coalition, a grassroots community movement that emerged from the controversy, gained intervener status and was very successful in mobilizing the community and raising funds. They deserve a share of the plaudits for this outcome.

#### *Stonebridge Golf Course City purchase*

Residents of Stonebridge in Barrhaven have agreed to a local levy which the City will use to purchase the Stonebridge Golf Course. Mattamy, the current owner, had been planning to close down parts of it for residential development. This is a win for the residents, who organized and resisted these development plans and wished to preserve the greenspace that the golf course provides for the community.

#### *Petrie Island Development application*

The GA submitted comments in opposition to a development application for two high rise towers in the floodplain of the Ottawa River adjacent to the Petrie Island PSW. This Planning file is still pending.

## 2. POLICY

### *a. City Hall*

#### *i. New Official Plan*

Participating in the development of Ottawa's new Official Plan was the major policy activity of the GA over this reporting period, continuing on work undertaken in the previous year. Much of this work was done in collaboration with the Peoples' Official Plan, an informal collective including the Federation of Citizens' Associations (FCA), Community Associations for Environmental Sustainability (CAFES), Ecology Ottawa, Walkable Ottawa and other groups. The general position of the POP is that in the context of the climate emergency, projected growth should be accommodated through intensification focused on green, healthy, inclusive and connected neighbourhoods, with no urban expansion.

#### Urban expansion

At the April 22, 2020 general meeting of the Federation of Citizens' Associations, the GA presented a proposal to have CA representatives write directly to their councillors in support of holding the line on urban expansion, even if this meant more intensification in their local areas. This received the FCA's endorsement and a draft model letter was sent to all members for customization as required.

An online rally to Hold the Line organized by Ecology Ottawa took place on May 8 and was attended by 500+ participants. Dianne Saxe, the former Environment Commissioner of Ontario, and the GA Chair spoke at the rally, among others. The joint letter to Mayor and Council signed by the POP coalition organizational members and a petition to Hold the Line with 4000 signatures was transferred to the Mayor and Council as part of the rally.

At the marathon May 11, May 12 and May 19 Joint Meeting of Planning and ARAC, an urban expansion of 1650 hectares was approved, with Councillor Leiper the sole vote in opposition. This despite 43 in-person delegations opposed vs 41 landowner and allied delegations for, 64% of written submissions opposed versus 8% for and a survey conducted by a reputable pollster, EKOS, finding 52% of Ottawa residents opposed urban expansion. The proposed expansion was subsequently reduced to 1281 ha at the May 27 Council meeting, on a motion from Councillor Menard, instigated by the GA.

A staff report and recommendations on which land should make up the 1281 ha urban expansion approved in May 2020 was released on January 15 2021. The GA reviewed the report and the location of the expansion parcels and made a submission for the Joint Meeting of Planning and ARAC scheduled for January 25.

In the intervening period between the approval of the quantum of the urban expansion and the selection of parcels to fill that quantum, a new proposal for a 35,000 resident suburb in the southeastern part of the City was announced by Taggart Investments. Located on 1100 ha near the intersection of Boundary Road and Highway 417, just outside the current urban boundary, it offered a whole new way of accommodating residential growth forecast in the new Official Plan, which had not been previously considered.

The scenario adopted by the City in May 2020 had called for a 1281 ha urban expansion. It was also decided at that time to exclude Agricultural Resource Areas as potential expansion lands, a position pushed and supported by POP. This reduced the stock of land from which to choose additions to the urban area.

The staff report on the results of its search for suitable expansion lands was considered at the January 25 Joint Meeting of Planning and Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committees. Only 1011 ha of land fully met the minimum criteria to qualify for expansion. Staff recommended adding these 1011 hectares to the urban area immediately, and setting up a study, to conclude no later than Q4 2026, on where to locate the additional 270 needed to fill their quota. They provided three general options that would be studied.

Committee instead directed that all 270 ha be added in one of the study areas, the Tewin lands proposed by the Algonquins of Ontario and Taggart Investments. In addition, it reallocated 175 ha recommended for expansion in South March to the Tewin lands, with a direction to include all 445 ha immediately without study. Many other Algonquin communities, who had not been consulted, have opposed this recommendation. The GA, along with the other organizations in the Peoples' Official Plan, issued a press release in protest. It became apparent afterwards that this had been brewing in backrooms for a considerable period of time. It made for good theatre but left in tatters any pretense that these expansion decisions are made with any integrity. That any urban expansion was approved at all in the context of the climate emergency is a tragedy, although it was played out as a farce. These decisions will become definitive once the full Official Plan is approved by Council and then the Minister

### The 15-minute neighbourhood

The flip side of no urban expansion is more and better intensification. The City's proposal in this respect is the 15-minute neighbourhood, which is essentially the main strategic direction of the new Official Plan. The GA supports this direction as it is consistent with more density, which reduces pressure on outward expansion into the rural area as well as reducing GHG emissions. Achieving intensification through such a neighbourhood design has the potential to bring more benefits and quality of life to residents affected than the current approach and be more broadly supported by the population.

Exactly what, where and how to achieve it remains to be determined. The City posted an online survey on what features constitute a 15-minute neighbourhood. The concept elicited many initiatives and approaches. The Federation of Citizens' Associations, building on the work it did in Barrhaven with the Telfer School of Management at UOttawa on assessments of

neighbourhoods from this perspective, conducted similar assessments in Overbrook and Carp village. Ecology Ottawa ran a major campaign on 15-minute neighbourhoods. Roseline Hill, an architect who is a member of GOHBA, is running a series of webinars and discussions, called Walkable Ottawa, on transitioning and building typologies for 15-minute neighbourhoods, all of these under the umbrella of the POP process. The GA for its part focussed on the preservation of greenspace, canopy and permeability in the context of 15-minute neighbourhoods.

As part of the continuation of the Peoples' Official Plan process funded by an Ottawa Community Foundation grant, the GA wrote a paper on greenspace and the 15-minute neighbourhood, which outlined the planning and protections required to optimize intensification and preservation of greenspace and tree canopy at the neighbourhood level. This paper provided the basis for an OCF funded workshop on the theme of 15-minute neighbourhoods, with a goal of popularizing the idea as a green, climate smart approach to growth. The GA supplied content for the virtual workshop, which was held on December 12 2020, and helped with its organization and conduct.

#### Draft Official Plan

The City released a first draft Official Plan on November 20, 2020. The GA focussed in the first instance on the policies dealing with greenspace, based on a compilation of all policies across the 263 pages of the draft OP that touched in any way on greenspace issues. This material formed part of the GA's contribution to the POP workshop on December 12.

The City set a deadline of February 17, 2021 for comment on the draft OP. To organize the review of this massive document, the GA produced compendia for specific domains (for example, Parks, Trees, Access to Greenspace, Protection of Greenspace). These, which range in length from 5 to 8 pages, compiled policies extracted from the full 263-page OP and allowed reviewers to quickly focus on specific topics. A number of external reviewers agreed to provide feedback on individual topic compendia. The full membership and GA list subscribers were engaged and past members or known authorities in the various domains were contacted.

In parallel, the GA is participated with other organizations as part of the Peoples' Official Plan in similar reviews covering a broader scope of policies that are relevant to the City's climate change response. These were also based on compendia of policies compiled by the GA on topics such as Transportation, Energy and Climate Change, 15-minute neighbourhoods, Water Resources, etc.

GA member and past Chair Erwin Dreessen undertook his own page by page review of the entire document, the results of which he shared with the POP members, and member David McNicoll produced his own submission as well; Erwin also wrote a 3-part op-ed. Members in a dedicated special meeting also raised a number of points and observations from their own review of the draft OP.

As part of the detailed review of greenspace related policies in the draft OP, many questions arose regarding the exact meaning of many of them. In addition, because they are spread out over several chapters of the draft OP, it was difficult to comprehend the full scope and extent of the actual protection being extended to greenspace. The GA assembled a summary table of all of the protections and requested a meeting with Nick Stow, the City planner who is the main author of these policies. He agreed and spent considerable time clarifying and validating this work and the table has been submitted with the POP technical document as a proposed new Annex to the Official Plan.

In response to wide-ranging pressure from the community, the City extended the comment deadline to March 12. GA members reviewed in detail draft GA comments on the greenspace related policies in the draft Official Plan, with particular reference to those dealing with protecting tree canopy and greenspace. Members offered many comments and suggestions, mostly in the direction of strengthening the response. These, in addition to points raised earlier, became part of the GA submission, which was amalgamated with those of Ecology Ottawa, Community Associations for Environmental Sustainability, Ottawa Transit Riders, Just Food and Walkable Ottawa, and reviewed and endorsed by many others. This combined document was submitted to the City on March 12.

The submission was a 117 page technical document addressing a wide range of policies dealing with climate change, greenspace, mobility, densification and other areas relevant to the Peoples Official Plan for Ottawa's Climate Emergency. The GA was a major contributor to the document, which was a truly collective effort. City staff acknowledged the value of this joint effort and a meeting is being organized with senior planning staff to go over the POP policy proposals. The City has confirmed a June 2 two hour meeting with POP representatives to go over the technical submission.

After the submission of the detailed Technical report, the GA worked with its POP partners on a summary communication piece to convey the top level messages it wants to deliver to a broader audience. This would be part of a home stretch campaign through to the fall that would include a press release in May, a response to the As We Heard It report, a survey of councillors, a summer workshop and a review of the final draft OP ahead of the Section 26 meeting currently scheduled for September 13-15.

There has been considerable debate over the rush by City elected officials to have the new Official Plan approved prior to the next municipal election in 2022. The GA took the position that a core package of OP policies could be passed in late 2021, but delaying the largely underdeveloped policies surrounding densification of neighbourhoods to the new term of council in 2022. Completing this work could then be done over a two year period in concert with the review of the Zoning Bylaw and Secondary Plans giving effect to the new policy directions. Stephen Willis, General Manager, Planning, Infrastructure and Economic

Development, issued a memorandum to City Councillors on the issue essentially espousing the position of the GA.

#### Other consultation activities

The team leader for the Infrastructure Master Plan gave a presentation on June 18 to the joint FCA/GOHBA stakeholders group, of which GA is a member, on the scope and timeframes for the update to the Infrastructure Master Plan resulting from the new Official Plan currently under development. Key messages to retain are that 1) the scope of the master plan concerns new water, wastewater and storm water infrastructure required as a result of the new OP, not all City infrastructure; 2) the expectation is that in urban expansion areas, new infrastructure will be built to support a complete community, 15-minute neighbourhood concept to the extent possible; 3) the infrastructure team is currently engaged in the evaluation of the candidate parcels for expansion from an infrastructure cost and feasibility perspective; 4) there will be a provision made in the masterplan for infrastructure refits in the existing urban area to support greater intensification in target areas; population projections are currently being developed at the neighbourhood level to assist in the identification of target areas for expansion. The GA the FCA and GOHBA expressed an interest in participating in this population projection work, which offer was unfortunately not taken up.

The GA is a member of the Ambassadors group, the City's social equity and inclusion lens consultation group. The online format provided a better forum for all participants to speak and have their views heard distinctly in comparison to the in person meetings held pre-COVID. This turned out to be one the best source for advance information on OP matters. At a July 27 meeting, Alain Miguez, the lead planner on the OP, gave a presentation on 15-minute neighbourhoods and participants were canvassed on their experience in their current neighbourhoods and what would need to be improved to achieve the goals of a 15-minute neighbourhood. This led to a good exchange with a number of useful insights that would not have surfaced otherwise. The theme of a September 2 meeting was the Energy Evolution plan and it followed a similar format. A session to sound out the equity and inclusion groups on the Transportation Master Plan was held on September 23. Robert Grimwood, the project lead, gave the presentation and took many questions. This topic was close to the concerns of participants and they raised many thoughtful issues and suggestions. The impact of the pandemic on transportation patterns is of particular concern. An immediate impact has been the postponement of the Origin and Destination Survey by one year, now scheduled for fall 2021. This will delay the TMP by another year, likely to 2023. Concerns we brought up include the lack of a common definition for a neighbourhood, the exclusive focus on commuting for employment purposes to the exclusion of destinations like shopping and other activities of daily living and distance and ease of travel to greenspace as a TMP issue. These issues fall out from a seeming lack of recognition in the TMP of the changes on transportation patterns that would be brought about by the successful implementation of the 15-minute neighbourhood as a growth management strategy.

The City's Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development department (PIED) held an information session on the status of its work on September 9, organized by the FCA for the

benefit of Community Associations. It covered the full scope of PIED's work, including its role in responding to the COVID 19 emergency. Stephen Willis, GM of PIED hosted the meeting and gave an introductory presentation. Alain Miguelez gave an extensive presentation on the new OP, and in particular on the new concept of Transects (labelled contexts in early 2019 discussion papers). A further in-depth briefing was provided by the City on September 24 for the FCA/GOHBA stakeholders' group, in which the GA participated.

### *ii. Accelerated implementation of the Tree Bylaw*

At the initiative of Councillor McKenney, and supported by community activism (Ecology Ottawa ran a campaign on the issue, members of the POP coalition made representations to staff and elected officials), City Council directed that the actual protective clauses of the Tree Protection Bylaw be implemented on January 1, 2021, eliminating the Covid-related delay that had previously been approved. This decision restored the effective date that was initially approved when the bylaw was passed. The protection of heritage trees and trees in peri-urban areas (the narrow strip of rural land that is adjacent to the urban boundary) remain as outstanding issues that the City has committed to address.

### *iii. R4 Zoning review*

The review of R4 Zoning undertaken by the City to facilitate the development of low rise multi-units in the existing R4 areas was completed in 2020. The recommendations of the review were consistent with our support for greater density and the concern for preservation of greenspace, tree canopy and permeability, a position that was well represented by individual community associations and the FCA, through which we followed the process.

### *iv. Tree Action Now report*

The GA contributed to a report prepared by CAFES on the current priorities regarding tree protection and conservation in Ottawa. It outlined positions and actions to be taken in regard to the many City policies and processes involved. The report was widely distributed among stakeholders and guided our collective advocacy.

## *b. Provincial*

Ontario Bill 197, an omnibus Bill using post-Covid19 economic recovery as the vehicle for weakening environmental protections, promoting development and increasing ministerial power in local planning affairs, was introduced on July 16, with an accelerated timetable to get it passed into law without review or public consultation. It was given Royal Assent on July 21. Ontario Bill 257, another omnibus bill, included a provision whereby the Minister would be empowered to approve Ministerial Zoning Orders, overturning Council decisions, and that such Orders could be applied retroactively and without regard for consistency with the Provincial

Policy Statement. The GA opposed this bill by signing on to an open letter circulated by Ontario Nature and also recording its own comments through the Environmental Registry of Ontario.

In another development, the Supreme Court of Canada considered the application of Ontario's anti-SLAPP legislation (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation). The Supreme Court described SLAPPs as follows: "lawsuits initiated against individuals or organizations that speak out or take a position on an issue of public interest. SLAPPs are generally initiated by plaintiffs who engage the court process and use litigation not as a direct tool to vindicate a *bona fide* claim, but as an indirect tool to limit the expression of others. In a SLAPP, the claim is merely a façade for the plaintiff, who is in fact manipulating the judicial system in order to limit the effectiveness of the opposing party's speech and deter that party, or other potential interested parties, from participating in public affairs." In the context of the Greenspace Alliance, this could apply to a situation in which a developer might sue it for defamation because of negative statements made regarding a development application. The legislation provides for a quick and simplified means of having such lawsuits dismissed if they are found to be "strategic" ie. meant to delay or suppress legitimate expression in the public interest. The ruling (on September 10, 2020, *Bent et al. v. Platnick, et al. and 1704604 Ontario Ltd. v. Pointes Protection Association, et al.* ) upheld this part of the legislation and provided guidance on how to apply this provision on practice.

### *c. Federal*

Vice-chair Nicole DesRoches participated in a series of consultations on the Gatineau Park Master Plan, the last phase of which ended in September 2020. A final version of the plan, last revised in 2005, was approved by the NCC Board in January 2021.

## **3. GOVERNANCE**

The vacancy remaining on the Board after last year's AGM was subsequently filled, as per the procedure set out in the GA Bylaw, by Robb Barnes, Executive Director of Ecology Ottawa. He joined Paul Johanis, chair, Nicole DesRoches, vice-chair, J.P. Unger, Jason Kania and Daniel Buckles on the GA Board for 2020-21. Erwin Dreessen, past chair and co-founder of the GA, was conferred a Lifetime Achievement Award by the FCA at its 2020 AGM, a recognition well-deserved and heartily approved.

The GA adopted e-transfers this year for bill payments and reimbursements and also for receiving membership fees and donations. This has simplified and accelerated membership renewal.

A funding application by Ecology Ottawa to the Ottawa Community Foundation was approved and the multi-year grant (2 years) was used to support the ongoing collaboration between local environmental/equity organizations brought together under the Peoples' Official Plan process.

The GA is one of the organizations receiving funds to organize project activities, likely in the shape of convening or otherwise participating in workshops, preparing papers and writing submissions related to greenspace and tree canopy in the development of the City's new Official Plan.

The POP process evolved over the last year into a very active and deep collaboration between many stakeholders in environmental advocacy, civic engagement and equity seeking groups. This engagement is focused now on the Official Plan but will likely carry over to other matters of common interest as they arise. The interactions and collaboration between the GA and the FCA have deepened, to our mutual benefit, with GA chair Paul Johanis, joining the Board of the FCA as a Director at large. CAFES has now incorporated and adopted a more permanent structure, contributing very actively to joint efforts. The GA has maintained its cross membership with the Healthy Transportation Coalition and opened new channels of communication and collaboration with Walkable Ottawa, Waste Watch Ottawa and others.

This level of activity has raised the profile of the Greenspace Alliance, with several media mentions and appearances by the Chair over this period, while GA Director Daniel Buckles had a number of op-eds published. It also led to many invitations to participate in events as speaker or panel member: a panel on environmental issues organized by Carleton University's School of Journalism, panel member at the University of Ottawa International Development Week conference, panel member and facilitator at two FCA workshops on the new Official Plan, speaker and facilitator for a Walkable Ottawa workshop on 15-minute neighbourhoods and speaker at an event put on by Carleton University's Committee on Community Engaged Pedagogy.

The Greenspace Alliance continues to gain reach through its subscriber list, Twitter feed and Facebook page, draw strength and support from its membership, benefit from the leadership and engagement of its board and execute its advocacy mission for the preservation and protection of greenspace through its broad alliances across the community.