

# Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital 2022 Annual Report (May 2021 – April 2022)

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 to existing, and opportunities for new, 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 provides something of a report card on our action over the period of May 2021 to April 2022. 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*

#### *Chalk River*

The consideration by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission of the proposed Near Surface Disposal Facility at Chalk River neared completion in the past year. The CSNC published its

report on January 24, 2022 followed by a Phase 1 hearing on February 22, which the GA attended. The deadline for making submissions for the final hearing was April 11, with the hearing itself on May 31. The GA submitted its comments ahead of the April 11 deadline and will attend the final hearing. In general, the GA's view is that the technical solution proposed is not secure enough in the long term and puts the downstream Ottawa River at risk.

While the hearing will be strictly dealing with technical matters, the GA is of the view that this issue needs to rise to the political level, and that giving it greater visibility is key. In this respect, we intend to press the City of Ottawa to take an official position on the NSDF. Likewise, candidates in the upcoming municipal elections should be confronted with taking a stand on the issue. At the federal level, the Atomic Energy of Canada Crown Corporation is still the official overseeing agency reporting to Parliament via the Minister of Natural Resources, and measures could also be taken to engage with these agencies and the federal elected officials on the matter.

### *Urban expansion*

The new Official Plan approved in October 2021 would see 1281 hectares of rural land added to the urban area of Ottawa, a large loss of greenspace. This expansion includes the planned development of a new suburb called Tewin located on 445 hectares of land between Leitrim Road and Thunder Road in south-eastern Ottawa. It is now mostly agricultural lands, large wetland areas and woodlands. Local residents and the GA expressed concern about the environmental impact of this development.

While reversing this urban expansion is very unlikely in the current context, every effort should be made to limit its scope, and minimize its impact on the area's natural features. Working with local residents and like-minded organizations, the GA will focus on the goal of safeguarding greenspace within the area of the proposed expansion.

### *Burnt Lands Quarry Expansion*

An Official Plan and Zoning By-Law Amendment application was submitted to the City of Ottawa concerning a proposed expansion of the existing West Carlton Quarry located at 4048 March Road. The proposal is to expand the aforementioned quarry by 18.2 hectares (44.9 Acres), and would require the rezoning of the related lands from Environmental Protection to a Mineral Extraction zone. What is particularly concerning about this application expansion is that it is located in the Burnt Lands Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI). This type of development in an ANSI should require additional scrutiny and subject the lands to a higher level of protection. Information on the threat was communicated widely through the GA's network, and organizations such as the Ottawa Field Naturalists Club were notified. Opposition to the proposed expansion will be mounted according to the developing situation.

b. Major urban greenspace

Several major greenspace protection issues came to a head in 2021-22, the culmination of multiple years of advocacy.

*The Ottawa Hospital New Campus Development Project*

The sustained campaign to protect the Central Experimental Farm that started in 2014, in which the GA took a leadership role, came to an end in 2021, with the result that the new Ottawa Hospital Campus will definitely not be built on the research fields of the Central Experimental Farm. In our view, turning over research land to development would have marked the end of the CEF as a research station and hastened the loss of this unique greenspace in the heart of Canada's capital. The campaign succeeded in having the deal made by the previous Conservative government cancelled and a new search started for another location for the new campus of the Ottawa Hospital, a process which resulted in the former site of the Sir John Carling Building selected as the new site in 2018. The GA remained engaged with the new hospital project, with GA Chair Paul Johanis accepting to co-chair the Campus Engagement Group. The CEG was established as a deliberative body of local community associations, interest groups and institutional members to advise hospital management and solve contentious community issues, with a view to attaining the best possible results for all concerned with a hospital located on this site. The group got off to a good start and managed to lay out broad guiding principles for the new hospital design from the community perspective. However, COVID intervened and that momentum was lost. When the group reconvened in early 2021, new hospital senior management, new project management and a new hospital communications team completely changed the picture and the CEG was frozen out.

Following a presentation to FEDCO on May 4 and the submission by The Ottawa Hospital of the Master Site Plan Application for City approval on May 7<sup>th</sup>, events dramatically accelerated for this project. Project documents were not posted on the City website until May 21<sup>st</sup>. which was the first time the CEG saw any of the planning documentation. Over a series of meetings in May, the CEG came to the conclusion that it was necessary for it to be dissolved so that individual members, while continuing to cooperate, could defend the interests of their communities in their representations to the City planning process. The GA submitted its comments on the Master Site Plan application for the new campus and made representations to Planning Committee at its October 1 meeting.

Meanwhile, the issue of the site location and preservation of greenspace on the Sir John Carling site became a federal election issue in the Ottawa Centre riding, with the Liberal candidate making a commitment to sponsor a Bill to provide permanent legal protection to the Central Experimental Farm. After the election of a Liberal minority, the introduction of such legislation was included in the mandate letter of the new Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, another step forward in achieving a greater level of protection for the CEF.

With the Master Site Plan approved, the GA now needs to keep on top of development applications as they come through for the various phases of the hospital construction project with a view to minimizing greenspace loss and avoiding encroachment on CEF lands. Perhaps even more important is following up on commitments made to enact legislative protections for the Central Experimental Farm.

The Ottawa Hospital wasted no time in putting forward a site plan application for the first phase of the construction project, the parking garage, and held a public meeting on November 24. Planning Committee approved the site plan for Phase 1 of the new Civic Campus, the four storey parking garage on the north east section of the site, on February 10. As it conformed with the Master Site Plan approved previously by Council, this was the final approval required for this phase of the project and construction could start immediately.

With that decision on the books, and shovels in the ground, this foreclosed the possibility of sliding back to the previous decision of locating the hospital on CEF research fields, a position still espoused and promoted by powerful interests in the city, which was a constant concern of the GA throughout this period.

#### *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. The GA learned in early 2021 that a recommendation to lift the floodplain overlay on a reach of the Jock River in Barrhaven was included as part of an Omnibus Zoning Bylaw amendment on the June 24th agenda of the City of Ottawa's Planning Committee meeting. Having made representations on the issue previously, we made submissions to the Planning Committee to reiterate our opposition to the development. Nevertheless, the recommendation was maintained by the Planning Committee, and approved by Council on July 7th, 2021.

After seeking legal advice from two separate law firms listed on the Canadian Environmental Law Association website, it was decided not to proceed with an appeal of the lifting of the floodplain overlay on the basis that the chances of success were slim.

So overall nothing substantial was gained as a result of our advocacy in this instance. However, the scrutiny which this process was put under and the media coverage generated contributed to the forced resignation of Jan Harder, Chair of the Planning Committee over irregularities involving this developer and this development. There is no doubt our continued attention to this issue and representations we made contributed to this result.

#### *Embassy Row*

The GA supported local representations opposing the development of a number of embassies on vacant greenspace in Mechanicsville, bordering the Sir John A, McDonald Parkway. The NCC

updated its development application in response to community concerns, reducing the number of structures from 6 to 5, and expanding somewhat the parkland on the east of the site. This was far short of the community's hope to prevent any development on the site and to preserve it as useable greenspace.

The NCC application was approved by Planning Committee at its August 26 meeting, modified by a motion from Councillor Leiper to provide less surface parking and reserve a larger remaining greenspace/park area. In an unusual move, the development application was rejected by Council as the result of several eastern ward councillors voting against it, ostensibly unhappy with the NCC's position on the City's Brian Coburn extension project. This was an unexpected win for the local community association and the GA which actively supported their opposition.

However, the NCC appealed Council's decision to deny their development application to the Ontario Land Tribunal and this potential loss of greenspace is therefore still in play.

#### *Brian Coburn extension*

The Environmental Impact Study for the extension of the Brian Coburn Boulevard, with associated Bus Rapid Transit lanes, through Greenbelt lands from Orleans to Blair Road, made its way to Transportation Committee in March 2022. The GA has taken a clear and unwavering position on the file since the inception of the study in 2019, favouring what is called Option 1, a path that follows the existing corridor of the Blackburn Hamlet Bypass, rather than any other option that opens a new corridor through the Greenbelt on lands just north of the Mer Bleue area. This is also the NCC's preferred position, holding it so firmly that its Board of Directors has formally stated that it will not relinquish the lands that would be required to implement the City's preferred option, which would open a new corridor through the Greenbelt. Both options score well in the Environmental Impact Study, but Option 1 is considerably more expensive.

Committee deferred its decision on the matter, launching instead a 100 day period of intense negotiation to achieve a compromise between the two positions. The issue is complex, with strong arguments advanced for the new corridor, in particular by local community associations on behalf of their residents, who are extremely poorly served by transit and basic transportation infrastructure. The GA has reached out to local residents in a bid to find a solution that resolves the local issues without further fragmentation of the Greenbelt.

#### *Parliament Hill reforestation*

As a result of its previous advocacy for the preservation of the last remaining centenary elm on Parliament Hill, members of the GA were invited to an extensive tour and briefing on the clean-up, erosion control and planting work occurring on the steep slopes down to the Rideau Canal to the east and to the Ottawa River to the north. As work started in early summer at the eastern end, it was possible to observe the various stages of the operation, with the Canal side slope work being completed and work on the slopes furthest west on the Ottawa River side just

started. Over 70,000 native plants, including ground cover, shrubs and trees, were planted over the summer.

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.

*c. Other greenspace*

Tree removals continue to be reported by residents 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.

Sometimes, institutional rather than private interests are the culprits. For example, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board removed approximately 60 to 100 trees from its property at Westwind Public School in Stittsville. Alerted by local residents, the GA investigated only to find that all the trees had already been cut and chipped. The LRT construction consortium is another opaque, barely accountable to the community, institutional structure. The GA was alerted of the potential loss of approximately 60 mature trees where the now closed Transitway joins the SJAM parkway. This was due to a slight change to the south of the path of the new LRT line decided without notice and against what local residents believed had been agreed in previous consultations. After learning of the imminent threat, the GA supported local residents in a flurry of contacts with the LRT authorities, and was present on the morning of the planned removal, managing to convince staff to spare a few mature specimens. Unfortunately, the team returned the next day and removed even these few spared trees. You can fight City Hall, but you can't fight the LRT.

On a more positive note, private interests are sometimes more sensitive to the concerns of local residents. In the case of the Nantes Woods (Lalande Conservation Park), community members reached out to the GA to seek support in protecting a greater extent of this urban woodlot than what was planned in a residential development application. The GA provided background information and options for pursuing this objective but it became apparent that all bureaucratic avenues had been exhausted and that only a political response would provide further protection than what had been established through existing policy. This set the local community groups on a wholly different path and it was later learned discussions between the developer and the City would result in the preservation of the woodland that was threatened.

In another case, community members reached out to the GA to seek support in opposing a development that would cut down a 1.57 hectare section of a red pine plantation to make way for a parking and car storage lot for a local BMW dealership in the Hunt Club area. The GA supported the request and made a number of recommendations for consideration by

concerned community members. It also made its own submission to the City in opposition to the application. As a result of the organized community outcry, and media coverage, the proponent paused the application. As of the end of this reporting period it had not been resubmitted.

### *Pinesi Portage Trail*

On some rare occasions, our work involves creating or animating existing greenspace. One such opportunity presented itself this year. In 2021 we were approached by a group called Kichi Sibi Trails seeking to partner with us to rehabilitate and promote an ancient indigenous portage trail connecting the Rideau and Ottawa rivers around the Rideau Falls. A critical mass of support for the plan had been established, including from local indigenous communities, in particular the Pikwakanagan First Nation. With the discovery of strong archeological evidence supporting the contention that such a trail had once existed, we agreed to partner on a grant application to the Canada Healthy Communities Initiative to establish the trail and promote its use for healthy outdoor activity. The grant application called for the establishment of the trail, appropriate signage, a website with directions and background information on the historical portage and a commemorative mural at the New Edinburgh Park field house, which is near the path of the historical portage. The trail would be named the Chief Pinesi Portage trail, in honour of the leader of the local Algonquin peoples who lived in this area at the time of its settlement in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In September we learned that our application was successful and that the grant would be awarded. Several months of discussions and negotiations with City and NCC staff ensued in a bid to uncover what permissions or approvals would be required and the steps and processes necessary to obtain these approvals. Matters progressed well with the City of Ottawa and eventually all necessary documentation, designs, plans and assurances were pulled together. Things went more slowly with the NCC, remaining mostly non-committal and at one point withdrew its support altogether. However, in the end they relented and agreed to have the trail cross NCC land. By the end of this reporting period, all approvals seemed imminent, but a June 30 2022 deadline loomed large.

(Note: In acknowledgement of the progress made, the funder, Community Foundations of Canada, allowed a three month extension and the release of grant funds that had been withheld pending confirmation of necessary approvals. The Chief Pinesi Portage Trail will now undoubtedly become a reality).

## 2. POLICY

### *a. City Hall*

#### *i. New Official Plan*

By far the major policy activity in which the GA engaged this past year was the City's new Official Plan, which entered the final year of its development and made its way to Council for final approval during this reporting period. 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 GA played a leadership role in this process, with Chair Paul Johanis and Director Daniel Buckles being active participants on all or most files addressed by POP. The GA was also ably represented by members Erwin Dreessen and David McNicoll, both of whom made significant contributions, and supported by the wise counsel of other Directors and members. Perhaps the best way to report on the GA's work in this respect is to recap the milestones and achievements of the POP process over the last three years.

#### 2019

- February 14 2019: Launch of new Official Plan
- May 15 2019: Inaugural meeting of the Peoples Official Plan

About 25 people in attendance, convened by the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital, Community Associations for Environmental Sustainability (CAFES), Ecology Ottawa and the Federation of Citizens' Associations

- Detailed comments submitted on 9 discussion papers prepared by City staff
- Workshop with 125 attendees over a 2 day period. Detailed positions from the floor on the City's strategic directions.
- Public delegations at the Joint Meeting of the Planning and Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee (JMPARAC) on strategic directions. Of the 25 delegations, ten are delegations associated with POP.

#### 2020

- Second workshop on "Just Healthy Neighbourhoods", co-hosted by the Healthy Transportation Coalition and the City for All Women Initiative and attended by nearly 100 participants; consolidates the social justice theme in POP's work.
- Public delegations at JMPARAC on urban expansion. Of 90 public delegations over a three day period, 45 were associated with POP or carried the POP message. POP presented a detailed no urban expansion scenario developed using the City's own data and methodology.



- Review of draft chapters of the new OP, meetings and workshops, including an online event focused on key features of 15 minute neighbourhoods.

## 2021

- Technical report (115 pages), with specific proposed revisions to policy language, and associated high level summary;
- Two online workshops to broaden public support for POP policy positions and develop capacity to undertake advocacy actions.
- Eight one-page summaries and graphics highlighting deficiencies in the revised draft OP released; several OPEDs published in the Ottawa Citizen.
- Well-attended online press conference, which resulted in significant media coverage.
- Face to face interviews with 13 city councillors to gauge their positions on POP policy proposals.
- Sixteen motions to amend the draft OP developed and several sponsoring councillors secured.
- Public delegations at JMPARAC over a three day period. Of the 94 registered speakers, half were associated with POP, or community associations and individuals espousing positions consistent with POP proposals.
- Open letter to Mayor and Council on the eve of the Council vote on the OP. All POP motions approved by full Council
- Letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing formally endorsed by 20 organizations representing environmental, civic and social justice organizations across the city calling on the Minister to exercise his authority on matters related to urban expansion, consultation with indigenous leaders, housing affordability, livability, food, climate, financial risks and monitoring success.

By the end of the process the following organizations were signatories to the letter to the Minister: Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, Bike Ottawa, Citizen Climate Council (C3), City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), Climate Reality Hubs, Community Associations for Environmental Sustainability (CAFES), The Council on Aging of Ottawa / Le Conseil sur le vieillissement d'Ottawa, Ecology Ottawa, Energy Mix Productions, Federation of Citizens' Associations (FCA), For Our Kids Ottawa/Gatineau, Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital, Just Food, MD Moms for Healthy Recovery, Ottawa Renewable Energy Coop and CoEnergy Coop, Ottawa Street Markets, Ottawa Transit Riders, Walkable Ottawa, Waste Watch Ottawa

The general assessment we can make of the POP process can be summed up by this comment by senior staff in a note to Council:

“As Council is aware, there has been an unprecedented level of public engagement on the draft new Official Plan, far surpassing anything we had projected and what occurred during the last Official Plan update.” (Stephen Willis, General Manager, PIED, March 17 2021)

*ii. Other City Policy issues:*

In addition to the Official Plan, the GA participated and made representations on several other City of Ottawa policies over this period, for example the *Parks and Facilities Master Plan*. As parks are recognized as an important component of publicly accessible greenspace in the Official Plan, this Master Plan is of particular interest to the Greenspace Alliance. For this reason, the GA made an oral submission at Special Joint Meeting of the Community and Protective Services and Planning Committees on September 27 2021 where the final version of this plan was approved. The GA emphasized the link between this plan and the new access to greenspace standards in the new Official Plan. It also spoke in support of Just Foods' request to explicitly recognize community gardens as an accepted land use in parks so that it is included in the provision ratios in park planning. The GA also participated in the review of the *Parkland Dedication By-Law*. This by-law specifies how much parkland must be set aside for new residential and commercial developments and is an essential tool towards meeting the improved access to greenspace standards set out in the new Official Plan.

In other Official Plan related policy development activities, the GA played a role in providing input to City staff and making submissions to Planning Committee regarding the trees and greenspace aspect of the new *High Performance Development Standards* for new builds. Of particular concern were the very low proposed targets for plantings of native species for projects covered by the HPDS. We advocated for targets similar to the parallel standards used by the City of Toronto.

On the climate front, the GA accepted the City's invitation to join a new external working group being formed to help develop the *Climate Resiliency Strategy*. This involved attending an initial webinar, participating in an online survey and participating in a workshop on Climate Impact on Environment, Parks and Land Use.

Looking ahead, given the achievements of POP and the strength of the network of organizations working together under its umbrella, it was agreed that it should continue operating after Official Plan approval. The coalition of participating organizations would continue to ensure that the community principles and perspectives it developed on climate and climate equity issues continue to be pressed through the implementation vehicles of the new OP. These instruments include the Review of the Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw, the Urban Forest and Greenspace Master Plan, the Transportation Master Plan, the Infrastructure Master Plan and other measures triggered or informed by new Official Plan policies that have a bearing on the climate and housing and homelessness emergencies. To support this work, a new grant application to the Ottawa Community Foundation has been prepared. The Greenspace Alliance will be maintaining its active participation in the POP process.

Finally, the GA turned its attention to the upcoming municipal election in October 2022. With the mayoral office open and many councillors announcing they will not be running again, there is an opportunity to shift the composition of the next Council towards more friendly climate, greenspace and environmental perspectives than the current council, which we adjudge to be primarily development oriented. The outcome of the discussion is that the GA will adopt a more direct role in upcoming election, using its relative institutional and funding independence to seek out, endorse and support specific candidates and do so in collaboration with other institutional actors in the political sphere.

#### *b. Provincial*

Although a lot of bad legislation was passed by the provincial government during this period, the GA did not devote much energy to participating in consultations or to advocacy, deeming the exercise to be fruitless given the majority government's propensity for ramming Bills through the Legislature. We spent some time however on the provincial election, issuing a statement regarding said bad legislation on climate and greenspace grounds and rallying behind candidates in the hope of unseating government party incumbents in the Ottawa area. All opposition party incumbents we supported were returned and one of our picks actually unseated the government member in Ottawa West Nepean. We received thanks from constituents for our leadership in this respect.

#### *c. Federal*

We accepted an invitation from the National Capital Commission to join a Public Advisory Committee on the Plan for the Sir George Etienne Cartier Riverfront Park. The PAC met once and is scheduled to meet three more times. In addition to the importance of this area as prime urban greenspace, there is a connection between this plan and the Chief Pinesi Portage Trail described above in section 1.c).

### **3. GOVERNANCE**

The members of the GA Board of Directors for 2021-22 were Paul Johanis, chair, Nicole DesRoches, vice-chair, and directors J.P. Unger, Jason Kania and Daniel Buckles. Ten monthly general meetings were held, with breaks in July and December 2021, all online and all establishing quorum. Minutes were kept and published. We reinstated the practice of issuing meeting highlights immediately after the general meetings, distributed through the GA list. This initiative resulted from a discussion on priorities for 2022 at the January 2022 general meeting, which laid out broad goals for the year and immediate improvements we could implement.

Membership remained stable this year, with small losses and gains of members, as did the number of subscribers to the GA list. Most membership fees are now paid by e-transfer, and so are all our payments out.

Of note, in January 2021, we learned with sorrow of the passing of our friend and colleague, Amy Steele (Kempster). Past co-chair and long serving board member of the Greenspace Alliance, she remained active as a member into her 90s. Her time with the Greenspace Alliance was just part of her nearly four decades of volunteer service, which saw her also take on leadership roles as President of the Champlain Park Community Association and Co-president of the Federation of Citizens' Associations of Ottawa.

Throughout this period we have maintained close and active relationships with many stakeholders in environmental advocacy, civic engagement and equity seeking groups in the POP coalition. This engagement will carry over to other matters of common interest going forward. The interactions and collaboration between the GA and the FCA has remained very close, with GA chair Paul Johanis remaining on the Board of the FCA as a Director at large. This year saw the renewal of communication and collaboration with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), which has expressed an interest in working with us on urban national parks in Ottawa.

The profile of the Greenspace Alliance remains high, with several media mentions and appearances by the Chair over this period, while GA Director Daniel Buckles keeps getting op-eds published. We also continue to receive many requests to speak or take part in panels and other public engagement opportunities.

The Greenspace Alliance continues to execute its advocacy mission for the preservation and protection of greenspace and provide leadership through its broad alliances across the community.