

Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital 2024 Annual Report (May 2023 – April 2024)

The Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital (GA) continues to protect and preserve greenspace and shape federal, provincial, and municipal policy and plans regarding greenspace in Canada's Capital region, while continuing to develop as an effective advocacy organization.

This annual report covers the Greenspace Alliance actions over the period of May 2023 to April 2024. What did the GA do to protect and preserve greenspace and how successful was it? The report is presented under the headings of threats to greenspace that were faced during the year, policies and plans that we shaped or influenced, and our own governance as an organization.

1. Governance

The members of the GA Board of Directors for 2023-24 were Paul Johanis, chair, Nicole DesRoches, vice-chair, and directors J.P. Unger, Jason Kania and Daniel Buckles (resigned mid year and replaced by Iola Price). Total membership numbers held steady this year, sustained by the registration and retention of several new members.

The Greenspace Alliance is more effective when working with other like organizations. In this spirit, it has maintained its relationships with the Federation of Citizens' Associations (FCA), continuing to hold a seat on the FCA Board. It has also further developed its relationship with the Réseau francophone des organisations environnementales de la Capitale nationale, an initiative of Sustainable Eastern Ontario, in particular through its direct participation in the development of a framework for neighbourhood sustainability audits. These audits were piloted in two neighbourhoods in the eastern suburbs of Ottawa, Greater Avalon and Blackburn Hamlet. The audit reports were enthusiastically received by the Community Associations and accepted as a basis for neighbourhood sustainability plans.

Through the maintenance agreement it entered into with the City of Ottawa, the GA was still involved with the Chief Pinesi Portage trail, which it sponsored with Kichi Sibi Trails in 2022. More investigation and programming is proceeding on ancient trails in the vicinity of Richmond and the Jock River, including possible connections to the Ottawa River via Stillwater Creek. The GA also rekindled its relationship with the Poets' Pathway group, conducting an inspection and evaluation of the Poets Pathway, the walking trail it helped establish over 20 years ago.

The GA also continued to work closely with partners such as Ecology Ottawa, CAFES and the 20 or so other members of the Peoples Official Plan coalition, through which it addressed many

municipal and provincial policies that deal with greenspace and broader environmental and climate issues.

The GA set several priorities in January 2023, including a project to improve the comprehensiveness and timeliness of its website content. An application was made to the federal Community Services Recovery Fund to support this activity, which was approved. By the end of the reporting period, a development team had been established and significant progress was made towards automating the content creation and updating of the website, as duly reported to the funder in an interim report on March 1, 2024. It is expected that a greatly improved website will be rolled out in the first quarter of 2024-25.

A few years ago, as GA founding member Erwin Dreessen was moving residences and drawing back on his involvement on new GA activities, he donated many boxes of documents accumulated over the decades to the Ottawa Archives. The GA as a group decided to seek having these historical records designated as an official fonds, named after Erwin in recognition of his central role in the creation and retention of this invaluable source of information on the work of the GA and the state of environmental advocacy in Ottawa over the last 20+ years. The Erwin Dreessen fonds at the Ottawa Archives was officially open to the public in 2024.

2. Policies and plans regarding greenspace

City of Ottawa policies and plans

Two City By-laws that are instrumental for the protection of greenspace were up for review during 2023-24, the Tree Protection Bylaw and the Site Alteration Bylaw.

City staff proposed a change to the Tree Protection bylaw that would reduce the threshold for recognition as Distinctive Trees in the suburban area to 30 cm trunk diameter at breast height instead of 50cm. This would match the definition that is in force inside the Greenbelt, a change for which the GA had been advocating. The GA supported the change in front of the Environment and Climate Change Committee on November 21, 2023. Our advocacy obtained significant media coverage. The Committee approved the changes to this Bylaw recommended by staff as did Council. The change came into effect on February 1, 2024. This was an important milestone that will protect many more trees in the suburban areas. Overall, this Bylaw is working well.

The Site Alteration Bylaw was also being reviewed, three years after its adoption, to evaluate its effectiveness in preventing undesirable site alterations, such as soil stripping, vegetation cover removal and wetlands draining and filling. The Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee considered changes proposed by staff to the Site Alteration Bylaw resulting from the first review of this bylaw, which was introduced in 2018. Staff recommended adding a notification requirement for landowners planning to conduct major tree clearing operations on properties in the periurban area, a 2 km wide strip of land beyond the urban boundary. Staff also recommended extending the coverage of the Natural Heritage protection provisions of the bylaw to the Rural area. The GA supported both these changes. However, the Committee did not approve these recommendations and instead introduced a motion to reduce the periurban area to 1 kilometer beyond the urban

boundary and to remove the notification requirement. This was approved by Council in November 2023, with the caveat that there be additional consultation on the final wording of the Bylaw and the issue return to Committee in the new year. As of the end of April 2024, this consultation was ongoing, but it seemed that the proposed extension of the coverage of Natural Heritage protection would be retained in the final wording.

Another very important bylaw review that has drawn the attention of the GA this year is the Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw (CZBL). The City's review of the Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw is a critical element in the implementation of the new Official Plan, in particular to support the achievement of its intensification targets. This puts pressure on the urban canopy. The City is aware of this tension between intensification and canopy cover and has dedicated one of its 8 discussion papers on the CZBL review to the issue of urban trees.

A draft staff report was published ahead of a joint meeting of ARAC and the Planning and Housing Committee on April 29, 2024. This was a first glimpse at the approach and broad directions that the ZBL Review will take.

Overall, the GA's assessment is that this draft comprehensive ZBL implements the Official Plan policies for which it advocated and reflects the feedback it provided through stakeholders group consultation in which it participated ahead of the publication of the discussion papers last year. Specifically, the draft ZBL is:

- exactly aligned with the new Official Plan designations;
- supportive of gentle intensification distributed equitably across the urban area;
- makes possible the establishment of commercial activity in those newly densified areas so that services and amenities are close at hand;
- provides flexibility for siting structures on development lots to preserve existing trees;
- sets adequate conditions for front and rear yard setbacks for planting new trees;
- ensures that soil volumes are sufficient to support the growth of new trees;
- sets minimum conditions for permeable surface areas; and
- provides zoning that aligns with OP greenspace designations.

The GA has made its supportive position known in a public delegation to the joint Committee meeting on April 29.

The City of Ottawa also initiated a review of its Wildlife Strategy during 2023-24. This strategy covers mostly the issue of resident-wildlife interactions, not the broader issue of wildlife conservation and biodiversity. The current policy, which dates from 2013, is considered regressive, involving mostly trapping and removal and in the case of beavers, habitat destruction. GA member Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has been very active preparing for this policy review, advocating for the adoption by the City of a progressive policy more focused on human-wildlife coexistence. The Centre has developed position papers on a series of wildlife issues. These have been shared with City staff but there is little evidence that they have been considered. None of the papers, nor the two meetings with staff organized by the OCWC, were mentioned in the What We Heard report. Given this lack of responsiveness, the push has been to get more residents and councillors engaged in the issue. The new policy will be presented to Committee and Council for approval in

June 2024. The GA supports the policy positions developed by the OCWC and has promoted them with its membership and followers, and with its POP coalition partners, encouraging them to contact their councillors to advocate for a more progressive wildlife strategy.

In collaboration with its POP coalition partners, the GA also provided feedback on several other City of Ottawa policy instruments: an update to the Right of Way bylaw, particularly in relation to plantings and greenspace, the Infrastructure Master Plan, focusing on intensification, permeability and nature based solutions, and an update to the Urban Forest Management Plan.

Provincial legislation and policies

This was another year of intense legislating by the provincial government aimed at increasing housing supply. The GA does not necessarily agree with the premise of many of these new bills and our observation is that they invariably sideswipe environmental protections, reducing or removing them altogether. The GA collaborated with its POP coalition partners for all of these responses and for many, led the collaborative effort.

The GA held the pen for the drafting of a collective response by the POP Coalition to proposed changes to the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) which were put forward consequential to Bill 23. The GA's specific input was reviewed by members at a July 31, 2023 meeting concerning the process and criteria for urban expansion.

These revisions to the PPS included a provision for on-demand urban expansion rather than as part of 5-year comprehensive reviews. Rather than fighting for a dysfunctional status quo, the GA agreed to support one-off urban expansions, subject to strict conditions regarding the protection of agricultural land and greenspace, the timely provision of infrastructure, both utilities and transportation, and assurance that growth pays for growth through appropriate development charges.

The consolidated comments were submitted via the Environmental Registry of Ontario by the deadline of August 4, 2023.

In Bill 162, the province announced that it would reverse its decisions to add urban expansion lands to the Official Plans of municipalities, including Ottawa. This is very good news as they had added 500+ hectares to the 1,280 ha approved by Council in 2021. Whether the other changes to policies they made are to be reversed as well, indeed whether there was an opening to revisit provisions approved in 2021 remained an open question. The GA signed on to a letter issued by the POP coalition calling on the City to take this opportunity to reverse the urban expansion approved by the previous Council and to increase intensification targets instead. The City rejected this idea. The Bill was adopted and the provisions of the OP approved by Council in 2021 were restored. The GA ascertained that the urban boundary was restored to the status quo ante and took no position on the provision that, at Council's request, remained as per the provincial diktat regarding building heights on minor corridors. It did however comment on the Bill decrying the unilateral process

used to make these changes, from the initial ministerial additions to the City's response and requests in advance of this restoration bill, all without public input nor transparency.

Finally, Bill 185, another omnibus bill to spur more rapid residential construction, walked back some provisions of previous housing bills, re-introduced provisions previously dropped in similar earlier bills and otherwise flailed around to address housing supply. As of the end of this reporting period, the GA was working to analyze Bill 185 to identify the issues of particular interest and develop summary positions. Deadline for response was May 15, 2024.

Federal policies

The GA signed on to a letter regarding the Federal Radioactive Waste Strategy and reviewed a paper on the criteria and priority areas for ecological corridors.

3. Threats to Greenspace

a. Rural greenspace

Near Surface Disposal Facility at Chalk River

A final hearing for the Near Surface Disposal Facility for nuclear wastes at Chalk River was held on August 10, 2023, expressly for the purpose of allowing affected First Nations to present their concerns regarding the proposal. In response to CNSC's refusal to hold this hearing in person, the FNs organized an in-person gathering where their briefs were presented live, with Commissioners observing online. The GA was invited and attended this in-person gathering.

Eventually, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission approved the construction of the Near Surface Disposal Facility at Chalk River. The action on this file has now moved from the regulatory sphere to the legal scene, with several legal challenges already launched. In this respect, the GA was asked by the local sponsors of the opposition to this facility to endorse a letter to the Prime Minister and to local Cabinet Ministers. Subject to some proposed revisions, members agreed to endorse the letter.

Overall, this has been a disappointing campaign, conducted over several years. There is still fight in the community, however, and new willing partners so the GA will maintain its opposition to this plan and lend support to its opponents.

Expansion of the Cavanah West Carleton Quarry

The proponent for expanding an existing quarry located in the Burnt Lands Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) was required to provide an addendum to address the environmental impact in the context of the environmental provisions of the new Official Plan. Public comment period was open until April 8, 2024. The GA submitted comments against the expansion, consistent with the position taken when the application was first made in 2022.

b. Major urban greenspace

Enbridge Gas Compressor facility in Rockcliffe Park

Enbridge planned to expand and relocate an existing pumping/compression station on the eastern fringe of Rockcliffe Park, abutting Manor Park. The proposed location was unacceptable to the local community, imperilling the long fought for Mile Circle area. An alternative site, an underused NCC work yard nearby, seemed to be an obvious solution and it was agreed to support this option in any further communication with the NCC on this matter.

As a result of public input and consultation, the plan was changed, and the facility will be located instead on the NCC parcel the community had suggested. This was quite a win for the local community and for Ottawa greenspace overall.

New threats to the Central Experimental Farm

A development application for two apartment towers at the corner of Parkdale and Carling Avenue, immediately adjacent to the Central Experimental Farm, was brought to our attention. The shading these structures would produce would render unusable a large section of research fields on the Central Experimental Farm. The whole point of the Protecting the Farm Coalition during the Ottawa Hospital siting controversy was to preserve the research fields, and thus the research mission of the CEF, which is the only long-term guarantor of the preservation of the Farm, one of Ottawa's most valuable urban green spaces.

The GA mounted a strong defence against this proposal by working with the heritage and scientific community through the Protect the Farm Coalition and through POP and the broader environmental community. The development application came before Planning and Housing Committee on August 16, 2023. The GA appeared as a delegation and made a written submission, focussing on the shading the towers would produce. Other delegations included the heritage and scientific community, the Protect the Farm Coalition, the broader environmental community and local community associations. Notable for their absence was any representation from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the "owners" of the CEF. Planning Committee approved the application. We subsequently learned that an official notice of the proposed zoning bylaw amendment was not sent to AAFC ahead of the meeting. As result, the item was not considered by Council as scheduled and was returned to Planning Committee, where it was on the agenda again for their September 20, 2023, meeting. Senior AAFC representatives attended, led by the Deputy Minister. AAFC expressed strong opposition to the proposal.

Sadly, the application was approved by Ottawa City Council. The only positive thing to come of it is the staff direction by Councillor Brockington to strike a working group between the City, AAFC and the NCC to develop a protocol for building heights around the Farm for future applications.

However, even before this working group was struck, a development application for three apartment towers across Baseline Road from the Central Experimental Farm was nearing approval stage. These proposed buildings would also cast long shadows on research fields. It was considered by Planning and Housing Committee but only one tower was approved, the one furthest from Baseline, which is set back far enough to avoid casting shadows. The file returned to the Committee in February 2024 for a final determination. The zoning for this project was approved but the decision left considerable latitude for further design changes that would minimize the shadowing impact of the proposed towers. It is expected that such changes would be dealt with through Site Plan control. The decision also indicated that a promised working group on building heights on the periphery of the Farm was finalizing its Terms of Reference. In the end, public

pressure influenced the outcome somewhat, but damage was nonetheless done to the Farm. There is some hope that the working group will mitigate further damage in the future but its workings are behind closed doors and our appeals for transparency and participation as member of the working group have fallen on deaf ears.

Conservancy development in Jock River floodplain

This development project in Barrhaven was the subject of much concern when it was being considered in 2020-2021. The GA made several submissions and delegations to Planning Committee highlighting the unusual process by which a major site alteration, a massive imbalanced cut and fill that completely changed the floodplain of the Jock River over a wide area, was maneuvered past Committee, Council and the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority. The file was back in the news this year as the Auditor General of the City of Ottawa tabled its report on the subject. There was a finding that there were several irregularities in how this file was processed which resulted in Council's position on the proposal being completely bypassed. The RVCA decision to allow this cut and fill and its role in the process is also in question, but it was considered to be beyond the Auditor General's purview. Given the opportunity, the current Council shamefully voted to turn the page on the whole sordid matter.

As agreed at its January 2024 meeting, the GA wrote to the Auditor General of Ontario requesting that an investigation be launched regarding the decision and the process leading to permitting a large site alteration in the flood plain of the Jock River. A timely and comprehensive response was received, which encouraged us to report this issue and request a review by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Ombudsman of Ontario. At the end of this reporting period, action on drafting these letters to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and to the Ombudsman of Ontario was pending.

Brian Coburn Boulevard extension

Since 2017, the GA has been following and intervening in an Environmental Impact Study for the extension of this suburban roadway through a section of the Greenbelt near the Mer Bleue Bog, a RAMSAR designated natural feature. The GA supported the NCC's position, which was to run the roadway and new rapid transit lanes through the existing Blackburn Hamlet bypass, furthest from Mer Bleue, rather than through a new corridor in the Greenbelt, which was the City's preferred option. The NCC and the City of Ottawa were at loggerheads over this issue for over a year, neither budging from their positions. The GA reached out and interacted with the Greater Avalon Community Association, the leaders of the local opposition to the Blackburn Bypass option. Both parties sought to develop common positions. Finally, an agreement between the NCC and the City of Ottawa on the use of Greenbelt lands opened the door to the finalization of the Environmental Impact Study for this new road. The NCC agreed to open a corridor through agricultural Greenbelt land from Navan Road to the western segment of Renaud Road for a two lane roadway. In exchange, the City ceded to the NCC the eastern Renaud Road corridor, closest to the boundary of Mer Bleue, which will be closed to traffic and re-naturalized. In addition, new rapid transit lanes will run through the existing Blackburn Hamlet bypass, furthest from Mer Bleue. This was a complex file, which, while not ending with our preferred option, resulted in a supportable compromise in response to public pressure.

Second annual Chief Pinesi Day, July 1 2023

In 2022, the GA partnered with Kichi Sibi Trails to revitalize and promote a new walking trail retracing an ancient portage bypassing the Rideau Falls. The new trail was named in honour of Chief Pierre Louis Constant Pinesi, who led the Algonquin nations in this area at the time of settlement in the early 19th century. It was inaugurated on July 1, 2022 and it was agreed with the Pikwakanagan First Nation that this should be an annual event. The GA was present at the second annual Chief Pinesi Day on July 1. It was a well-attended gathering at New Edinburgh Park, with speakers, drumming and dancing, and walking tours on offer. The trail markers and the striking mural we sponsored on the field house have fared well over the winter. We hope this will be a lasting feature of the community landscape.

The Poets' Pathway

The Poets Pathway is a project in which the GA was much involved when it was first conceptualized almost three decades ago and throughout its implementation. It is made up of 12 individual segments, mostly through greenspace, girdling much of the outer urban transect of the City -- essentially the older suburbs inside the Greenbelt, from Britannia in the West to Beechwood Cemetery in the East. The installation of 14 plaques honoring Canadian poets from the 19th century to date was completed in 2017. Since then, however, there has not been much attention paid to this walking trail. Over the last months of 2023, however, GA members made it a project to walk the entire length of the pathway, a few segments at a time, to assess its state of repair and travel worthiness. This tour was completed by the end of 2023. A status report will be compiled and plans made regarding the use and promotion of the pathway in 2024.

c. Other greenspace

Kanata Golf and Country Club

Final court decisions have now been rendered regarding legal impediments facing the proposal to redevelop this suburban greenspace as a residential community. Unfortunately, it went against the position of the City, and area residents. There is still uncertainty about the feasibility of this development, but it regards stormwater management infrastructure and other planning matters, not legal ones such as the validity of the 60% development/40% greenspace agreement that had been established when Kanata Lakes was first developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There may yet be avenues for the community to explore to forestall this development, but this is a disappointing result. The Kanata Greenspace Coalition, which led this fight, ran an exemplary campaign, mobilizing thousands of residents and raising funds for the defence of their beloved greenspace.

Tree removal, 290 Holmwood

A resident contacted the GA to report an infill development in the Glebe that would cause the removal of several mature trees. As a development application was already in process, tree protection would be exercised through the development review. The GA confirmed that the relevant City staff were aware of the situation. The Committee of Adjustment heard this case on December 13, 2023, and in the absence of agreement between the City and the proponent on tree

conservation, it adjourned the hearing sine die. This item is included in the annual a report as a small example of the new Tree Protection Bylaw in operation. It works.