

GREENSPACE ALLIANCE OF CANADA'S CAPITAL
Greenspace Watch
Monthly General Meeting
MINUTES
April 15, 2024
Online meeting

Members present: Paul Johanis (chair), Iola Price, J.P Unger, Erwin Dreessen, Tony Keith, Arto Keklikian, David McNicoll.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The proposed agenda was agreed upon, with the addition of items 2(e), Membership report, 3(d) Waste to Energy webinar, 3(e) Bill 185 and 4(a)(ii) Goulbourn Provincially Significant Wetlands. Moved by Erwin, seconded by Iola.

2. Administrative items

a. Minutes of March 18 2024 meeting (for approval)

Moved by Erwin, seconded by Iola. Carried.

b. Website report

Paul reported on the status of the work on the project to improve the timeliness and comprehensiveness of our website content. The first phase of the project, research and evaluation of potential automation tools, has been completed. Of five candidate software packages, the consulting team recommends Make.com, which works well with Wordpress, has all the features we are looking for and is well priced. It has performed well in a test environment for all the tasks we plan to automate. After a discussion focused on the specific role of GA members in the proposed workflow and pricing, members approved a motion to purchase a license for Make.com and also for the Open AI API, which would handle the text summarization part of the automation. Moved by Iola, seconded by JP. Carried.

As contract costs are coming out below projections, several additional activities that could be undertaken by the team and would enhance the website were proposed.

c. Association reports

Paul, David and Arto reported on their participation in the second annual iteration of Grassroots Groundswell, a province-wide gathering of environmental NGOs organized by Ecology Ottawa. All found it to be a worthwhile exercise, in particular the exposure to other environmental organizations from across the province.

d. Annual General Meeting

It was agreed to hold the 2024 Annual General meeting on May 27, 2024. At members' suggestion, efforts will be made to organize it as an in-person gathering, with a high-profile keynote speaker to draw a larger attendance. Realizing that this is on short notice, if no one can be found by Monday April 22, we will revert to holding the AGM online.

e. Membership report

Paul reported that Terry McIntyre, who attended previous meetings as a guest, has submitted a membership application and paid the annual membership. In accordance with our bylaw, his application was submitted to the assembled members for approval and his membership was approved.

3. Policy instruments

a. City of Ottawa Wildlife Strategy

The City of Ottawa is reviewing its Wildlife Strategy. 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. They have 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, are mentioned in the What We Heard report. Staff is seen as an obstacle in this matter and the push at this time is to get more residents and councillors engaged in the issue. The new policy will be presented to the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee (June 6), the Environment and Climate Change Committee (June 18) and the Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services Committee (June 20). It will then be quickly moved to full Council for approval on June 26.

It was agreed that the GA should align with the policy positions developed by the OCWC and promote them with its membership and followers, encouraging them to contact their councillors over the next month to advocate for a more progressive wildlife strategy. The GA will also work with its POP partners to ensure that public delegations present this perspective at the various committee meetings in June.

Action: Assemble and make available the position papers and disseminate broadly a call for action through the GA list.

b. Changes to public engagement published in ERO

The deadline for submission for changes regarding certain public notices was Monday April 15. While the ERO entry sounded like this would be a serious curtailment of public engagement, upon further examination it was found to be restricted very narrowly to five specific types of orders under the Lakes and River Improvement Act. Under this change, public input would not be sought on the following types of orders:

- Subsection 17(1) - order to repair or remove a dam
- Subsections 17(2) - orders to rectify problems with a dam based on an engineer's report

- Subsection 17(3) – order to do what is necessary in respect of a dam to further the purposes of the LRIA based on an examination and report of an engineer
- Subsection 17(4) - order to construct a fishway at a dam
- Subsection 36(2) - order to take steps to remove a substance or matter from a lake or river

Many of these orders are sought in emergency situations and need to be acted upon urgently, hence the rationale for curtailing public input, and we suspect we would always support the orders for fishway construction. Accordingly, the GA did not make any submissions nor did it respond to the call for action from CELA.

Members at the meeting however underlined how some of these orders could have broad greenspace and environmental impact, in particular orders under 36(2). It was agreed that we would revisit the issue and take an appropriate position after further investigation.

c. Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw Review

The calendar for the Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw Review is taking shape, with the publication of an overview paper on April 18, followed by its presentation to a joint meeting of ARAC and the Planning and Housing Committee on April 29 2024. This will be our first glimpse at the approach and broad directions that the ZBL Review will take. It will be followed by the publication of the first draft of the new Zoning By-law on May 31, 2024. Our focus will be on zoning provisions that support the preservation of greenspace and tree canopy, and also on provisions that support intensification through more compact, connected and walkable neighbourhoods.

Action: Analyse the April 18 staff report and prepare summary positions on the points of interest to the GA. Coordinate with our POP partners on public delegations at the April 29 joint meeting of ARAC and Planning.

d. Waste to Energy

JP provided a summary of an international <webinar> he attended on waste management which dealt with the pros and cons of incineration as a solid waste management strategy. With the City of Ottawa in the midst of finalizing its Solid Waste Master Plan, the foreseeable end of service life of the Trail Road land fill and the outspoken support for incineration by some members of the current City Council, this webinar is very timely and relevant. The GA has not as yet taken any position on this issue but tends to align with its POP partners regarding the advisability of pursuing incineration as a main strategy.

Action: Disseminate webinar materials to members and followers through the GA list.

e. Bill 185

Just this week, the Province has announced yet another omnibus bill to spur more rapid residential construction, walking back some provisions of previous housing bills, bringing back provisions previously dropped in similar earlier bills and other general flailing around to address housing supply. There has been no time to analyze the new Bill more carefully but one provision that stands out is granting proponents the ability to apply for Official Plan amendments to expand the urban boundary at any time. Unless well framed and regulated, this could easily lead to more loss of rural greenspace.

Action: Analyze Bill 185 to identify the issues of particular interest to the GA and develop

summary positions. Work with our POP partners to coordinate our analysis and advocacy positions.

4. Threats and opportunities

a. Rural greenspace

i. 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.

ii. Goulbourn Provincially Significant Wetland

A recent article in a Nature Ontario publication reports that the loss of wetlands feared as a result of the changes made to the Ontario Wetlands Evaluation System in Bill 23 have unfortunately materialized, giving as example the loss of up to 55 ha of wetlands in the Goulbourn PSW. We have not otherwise been informed of this and need to investigate to confirm the circumstances of these losses.

Action: Paul to follow up with local sources and with the City to confirm.

b. Major urban greenspace

i. Protection of the Central Experimental Farm

Heritage Ottawa, along with other partners in the Coalition to Protect the Farm, which includes the GA, has sent a <letter> to the Minister of Agriculture calling on the department to engage with the City to develop a protocol to limit building heights on the perimeter of the CEF. As well, the letter requests representation from civil society on the working group.

c. Other greenspace

i. Tiny Forest plans in the Greater Avalon neighbourhood

The GA facilitated a meeting between the Greater Avalon Community Association and Forêt Capitale Forests, a non-profit engaged in promoting and establishing Miyawaki tiny forests in urban areas. This was in follow up to the sustainability audit conducted for this community as part of the Sustainable Eastern Ontario project which the GA is supporting.

ii. Carp River Floodplain mapping

We have learned that the Carp River floodplain mapping is being updated. The GA was much engaged in the Carp River Restoration project several years ago and has an interest in monitoring the impact of the changes made to the floodplain.

The Meeting adjourned at 9:01.