Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital 2026 Annual Report (draft)

May 2025 – April 2026

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.

This annual report covers the Greenspace Alliance's actions over the period of May 2025 to April 2026. 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, policy 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 2025-26 were Paul Johanis, chair, Nicole DesRoches, vice-chair, and directors J.P. Unger, Jason Kania and Iola Price. Total membership numbers held steady, with the loss of members made up by the registration and retention of several new members.

In the fulfillment of its role as an alliance, the GA continued collaborating with like minded organizations through the Peoples Official Plan coalition, leveraging this position to be part of a POP delegation to a series of meetings with Debbie Stewart, General Manager of Strategic Initiatives for the City of Ottawa and facilitating a POP retreat in person in July 2025.

The GA continued to be closely associated with the Federation of Citizens' Associations, with which it has a cross-membership, and with CAFES, which is now an association member of the GA. Similarly, it has maintained close ties with Ecology Ottawa, participating in their events and registering their Executive Director as a member of the GA.

Relations with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS – Ottawa Valley chapter) have been revived, particularly regarding the review of the NCC Greenbelt Masterplan.

Neighbourhood sustainability audits were conducted in partnership with Sustainable Eastern Ontario and the University of Ottawa.

As regards consultative bodies, the GA now sits as a member of the Mayor's Environmental Roundtable, is a member of the City's Climate Change Working Group hosted by the Director, Climate Change and Resiliency Services, is part of the Urban Forest Community Forum, and the Chair is the community co-chair of the NCC Public Advisory Group for the review of the Greenbelt Masterplan.

Finally, the GA has worked closely all year with the Poets' Pathway team to support the restoration and revitalization of this important greenspace.

2. Policy

Trees and greenspace protection

As part of the second 4-year planning period of the Urban Forest Management Plan, the City undertook public consultation on the planting guidelines and species list to be used for replenishing the urban forest to reach and maintain the canopy target set in the Official Plan. The first meeting of community stakeholders, to which the GA was invited, was held on June 16. A consultant retained for this work gave a presentation and collected feedback from the participants on various aspects of the guidelines and the desired principles that should underpin the species list.

The second regional Tree Canopy Study was released in September 2025, based on 2022 data. As per the initial 2017 study, it was sponsored by the City of Ottawa, the City of Gatineau and the NCC and covers all the lands under their jurisdiction. The 2022 study shows a slight increase in the tree canopy cover under City of Ottawa jurisdiction, from 34% to 36%, mostly attributable to an increase in the rural area from 36% to 39%. However, in the urban area, there was a decrease from 21.5% to 20.6%, this against a target of 40%. Many of these findings seem to conflict with views and perceptions communicated to the GA by members and residents over this period. A deep dive to really understand what is driving these numbers and how to interpret these high-level aggregated figures would be very useful to the community.

Following the debate on the acquisition by the City of a property on Ferry Road for conservation purposes, staff was directed to re-examine the process and criteria by which candidate properties are selected for this purpose. That report was presented and approved at the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee September meeting. The adoption of the proposed process should solidify and strengthen staff's ability to discharge their duties under the approved greenspace acquisition and stewardship program.

A notice of motion brought by Councillor Lo at the Environment and Climate Change Committee, if adopted, would have completely eviscerated the City's Tree Protection Bylaw. The GA and allied groups were prepared to delegate at the Committee meeting of April 21 against the motion. Thankfully, staff had greatly reduced the scope of the motion and had reduced its impact to exceptional cases in a small area of Barrhaven with marine clay subsoil. Despite the softening of the motion, the GA urged the committee to reject even this reduced motion and to uphold the Tree Protection Bylaw. Unfortunately, the motion was passed and, as predicted, additional homeowners are now coming forward with similar requests.

The National Capital Commission has initiated a review of the 2013 Greenbelt Masterplan. The GA is engaged in the review of the Masterplan in serval ways. In addition to having a seat on the Public Advisory Group, the GA has the benefit of the insight of member Arto Keklikian, former senior

planner at the NCC, who is also working closely with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society on its Greenbelt protection strategy. The FCA is also keenly interested, and, through POP, it should be possible to assemble a Greenbelt coalition as wide as the 2013 one, which was quite impressive. Many of the recommendations in the Position Paper developed in 2013 are still valid. Assessing the extent to which the NCC has fulfilled the Implementation Plan for the Greenbelt MP could also be instructive.

The Chair and members of the GA attended the National Capital Greenbelt Forum on February 21 2026, organized by CPAWS on the future of the Greenbelt. While well organized and featuring many excellent speakers, the event failed to focus on any specific, imminent threats to the Greenbelt and so no clear strategy emerged going forward. Nevertheless, it provided much food for thought and an opportunity to meet with NCC staff regarding the review of the Greenbelt Master Plan currently being initiated.

The inaugural meeting of the Public Advisory Group for the review of the Greenbelt Masterplan was held on April 9. The scope and timeframe of the review was presented, and initial feedback was provided by members on draft terms of reference for the review. A second meeting on vision and guiding principles was held in early May, at which time the GA Chair was selected as community co-Chair of the group. The review will be a major focus of attention through to early 2028.

Official Plan

The Planning and Housing Committee and ARAC considered a staff report regarding changes that must be made to the Official Plan to comply with the provisions of the new Provincial Planning Statement. The only policy issue that was of immediate concern to the GA was the introduction of one-off applications for urban expansions, outside of the normal 5-year comprehensive review cycle. The staff report was consistent with the broad guidelines the City published in an October 2023 memo on how to deal with private applications for urban expansion, which the GA supported.

Five such applications have now been received from proponents to add specific parcels of rural land to the urban area. The latest one was for a parcel adjacent to the Goulbourn Provincially Significant Wetlands south of Stittsville. All were rejected by the City on the basis that no new expansion is required at this time to accommodate the 2022 Official Plan's growth strategy.

However, a new review of the Official Plan was launched, focussing on the Growth Management Strategy, providing an updated baseline for population and residential growth for the purpose of assessing any need for urban expansion. The methodology is sound and consistent with recent City practice, which the GA helped establish, and supports. The only difference is that the Ministry of Finance population projections must now be used as a starting point. The GA closely followed and analyzed how the City intends to validate these projections. The chair attended a stakeholder's meeting on November 19 to discuss the methodology and assumptions that will be used for this purpose.

The Chair also delegated to the Joint Meeting of Housing and Planning and ARAC on February 18. While not contesting the population projections, he cast doubt on the validity of the assumptions

underlying their conversion to household counts and dwelling types. His delegation, and a similar one by the Federation of Citizens' Associations, seemed to resonate with several committee members and led to a motion co-sponsored by Councillors Gower and Kitts being passed to submit the household and dwelling projections to further tests and alternative scenarios during the next phase of the process, including a no-expansion scenario. The Committee report was heard at full Council at its meeting of February 25, including the Gower-Kitts motion, where it was carried by a large majority.

City staff held a follow-on meeting of stakeholders regarding Ottawa's growth projections on April 13. Staff presented a new projection report, which reflected the feedback and directions of the Joint Planning and ARAC Committee and full Council. These directions reflected the GA's submission and delegation on the matter. As a result, the household formation and housing type propensities of the initial consultant's report have not been retained and are being replaced by five growth scenarios, including zero urban expansion. Staff confirmed that household formation and propensity assumptions will be modified such that a no expansion scenario is feasible and supported by observed trends, and not just a strawman as was the case for the current Official Plan.

However, with the province introducing new bills that have a direct effect on the work conducted to date, all further action has been deferred to 2027 pending the resolution of any conflicts. The status quo is thus maintained, with no new urban expansion being considered at this time.

Zoning By-law review

The intent of the Official Plan to have more than 50% of new housing growth achieved through intensification will largely be accomplished through a fundamental review of the Comprehensive Zoning By-law. The GA's main interest in the review of the ZBL was to ensure that it facilitates intensification so as to prevent future expansions of the urban boundary into the rural area, balanced by zoning conditions that preserve trees and greenspace in the urban area. Along with its partners in the Peoples Official Plan coalition, the GA was deeply involved in this review. The GA supported the POP submission on Draft 2 of the new Zoning Bylaw, particularly those sections that dealt with the preservation of trees and greenspace. At a high level, the third and final draft of the new Zoning By-law attained the intensification aims the GA supports, although in a hub and corridor pattern rather than the polycentric pattern we preferred. However, review at a very detailed level to detect errors or anomalies that convert open space and other greenspace zones to development reserve or outright development was still needed.

The GA reviewed the proposed conversions for areas currently zoned as Environmental Protection and Open spaces. GA delegated at the December 17 meeting of the Joint Planning and ARAC committee meeting, stating it was in general agreement with the new Zoning Bylaw but objected to Development Reserve Zoning for two greenspace parcels owned by the NCC, the McCarthy Woods corridor and the Woodroffe-Merivale corridor, arguing that the current zoning should be maintained for these two parcels. Councillors Brockington and Johnson sponsored a motion to give effect to this proposal, which was passed 11 votes for, 4 votes against, despite the very vocal opposition of co-Chair Leiper. The motion by Councillors Brockington and Johnson to retain the current zoning

for these parcels was endorsed by full Council on January 28. This was a win for the community and kept alive the current alignment of the Poets' Pathway.

Following the controversy regarding the re-zoning proposed by the NCC of two greenspace parcels to Development Reserve, eventually turned down by Council, the City and the NCC agreed to establish a framework agreement for the future consideration of development proposals on NCC land. A motion backed by Mayor Mark Sutcliffe was introduced by Cllr. Glen Gower to *accelerate* housing development on other NCC lands, highlighting an ongoing tension between protecting specific greenspaces and the city's overall goal of increasing housing supply. An amendment from Coun. Riley Brockington calling for clear criteria for the selection of suitable lands and public engagement in the process was approved by full Council on February 11. A direction to staff was given to provide a report on the subject by March 25.

Instead, a framework for smooth collaboration between the City and the federal agency Build Canada Homes was presented and approved by Council on April 10. The agreement covered two large projects that were already known and for which there are no major greenspace issues (re-development of Confederation Heights and of the Campanile Campus on Heron Road).

It was initially thought that a similar agreement with the NCC would be part of the discussion, but it seems that has been pushed back several months in the absence of a final list of NCC lands for redevelopment.

Other municipal policy matters

The GA supported the POP submission on the Draft Climate Resiliency Strategy, which was submitted on July 8.

It also endorsed a POP originated letter to the City's Chief Financial Officer regarding high level metrics and analyses that should be included in the staff report to facilitate effective engagement.

The GA made its own budget submission to the City calling for the greenspace acquisition fund to be appropriately topped up now that the City has adopted formal criteria for the acquisition of rural lands for conservation purposes and also that that the activities scheduled for the year as per the Urban Forest Management Plan be fully funded.

Provincial

The province has again this year passed many bills that directly weaken environmental protections and reduce local autonomy, all in the name of building more homes, a convenient subterfuge.

Many, such as Ontario Bill 5, were quickly passed into law, with potential damaging implications for both the environment and for civil liberties. Groups such as the GA are reduced monitoring court challenges by groups like the Canadian Environmental Law Association or Environmental Defense.

A more direct threat is the provincial announcement that it intends to reduce the number conservation authorities in Ontario from 36 to 9. This would mean that one single Conservation Authority would cover all Eastern Ontario. We believe this is just another centralizing power grab meant to further reduce local autonomy and expedite the destruction of wetlands and habitat in

the name of increasing housing supply. The government has already decided on the boundaries for Ontario's new regional conservation authorities. It intends to introduce legislative amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CAA) this spring. Nine regional CAs could be in place by early 2027.

Federal

The Prime Minister made an announcement in Wakefield, Québec, on March 31 regarding Canada's strategy to protect nature. It includes statements that are germane to a constant challenge that we face, the tension between development vs greenspace protection.

"When conservation and economic activities are seen as competing priorities this risks weaker conservation outcomes and project delays. However, these goals need not be at odds.
As part of our second pillar, Canada will integrate its nature and economic agendas to support timely development decisions while protecting nature."

These principles ought to apply to the housing versus greenspace conflicts that are proliferating in Ottawa, with the NCC offering up greenspace lands for housing willy nilly, some right in the PM's riding. As well, the worry that one day the Greenbelt will fall prey to this same pressure is never very far form the surface. The GA would do well the follow this file closely to see if any real benefit for greenspace protection materializes.

3. Threats

Rural greenspace

Chalk River

Recent reports indicate that radioactive waste, including high level waste like spent fuel, is being transported and stored at Chalk River, an activity above and beyond the scope of the Near Surface Disposal Facility, which has already been the focus of much controversy. The lack of public awareness among Ottawa residents over this issue is worrisome and problematic. These developments were reported directly to the Mayor's Environmental Roundtable.

Miller-Taggart Landfill

City of Ottawa's purchase of the Miller-Taggart landfill was an issue of concern for local residents. But from the broader municipal waste management perspective, it is a very positive development, adding decades to the inventory of secure municipal waste storage capacity well ahead of the eventual closing of the Trail Road landfill.

The expansion of the Tomlinson Quarry was made possible by the de-complexing of a section previously designated Provincially Significant in the Goulbourn wetlands, an unfortunate result of Ontario Bill 23.

ALTO High Speed Train project

The issue of the location of the corridor for the ALTO high-speed train project presents many challenges for rural communities and rural greenspace. Bill C-15, the Budget Implementation bill,

introduces the *High-Speed Rail Network Act* to facilitate rail projects between Quebec and Ontario, including provisions for land expropriation. It received Royal Assent on March 26. A Petition to the House of Commons (E-7203) called upon the House to decline to approve or advance provisions in Bill C-15 that grant extraordinary powers to expedite rail corridor approvals. With the passing of the Bill, other means of communicating our concerns regarding the loss of greenspace and connectivity will need to be established. Fundamentally, we ask that any new high-speed train service use existing road or rail corridors.

Major urban greenspace

NCC Core Plan

The NCC Core Plan, which GA members Arto Keklikian had been monitoring on behalf of the GA, gets an overall positive review as regards efforts to preserve and develop new greenspace in the city core. Of note is the emphasis placed by the plan on opening up and featuring greenspaces all along the core shoreline from Lebreton Flats to Rockcliffe Park.

NCC Eastern Bridge project

The NCC has established an Environmental Public Advisory Group for the proposed Eastern Bridge across the Ottawa River. The GA was invited to sit on the advisory panel. The chair of the GA attended the first meeting of the group on July 10, where an informative presentation and question and answer period filled the 90 minutes allocated. The next meeting is planned for September.

Rideau River riverfront development

A development application for multiple residential and mixed-use structures on a 5-acre waterfront lot at the corner of Riverside Drive and Hunt Club Road was back on the agenda. This property on the Rideau River was first proposed for development in 2018, at which time the GA attended the open house and made representations at Committee. This new proposal is an improvement, with appropriate environment, parkland and cultural heritage dedications obtained.

Central Experimental Farm

After a long hiatus, the Central Experimental Farm Advisory Committee (CEFAC) was reconvened on June 19, 2025. The GA chair attended and heard from the other participants about plans and activities to bolster the image of the Central Experimental Farm and the perception of its value in the general population. The GA considers the Farm as a very valuable major urban greenspace and is dedicated to its preservation. Of direct interest to the GA is the news that the working group that was supposed to be struck to study how to mitigate the shadowing of research fields by new high rise development projects on the perimeter of the Farm has finally been constituted, with the City having hired a consultant to represent its positions. The GA is following up on the work of this working group through the office of Councillor Riley Brockington, whose staff direction gave rise to the formation of the group.

Meanwhile, the City received the site plan control revision application for The Ottawa Hospital's new campus development adjacent to the Farm. The overall building placement and approved master plan remain unchanged; the updates reflect refinements resulting from the final detailed design. Several graphics illustrating the Tree Conservation report, the tree planting plan, and the

understory planting plan are included in the reports accompanying the application. The City's Natural Systems staff will review to ensure they conform to the commitments made in the approved master plan.

Other greenspace

Poets' Pathway

The Poets' Pathway is a 37-kilometer walking and cycling trail through linked greenspaces girdling Ottawa's outer urban area from Britannia Beach in the West to Beechwood Cemetery in the East. It was originally conceived by the GA two decades ago, and it remains closely associated with the Poets' Pathway not-for-profit that has since carried out the project.

The East-West trajectory of the Poets Pathway mainly goes through what is called the Southern Corridor. At the western end, the Woodroffe-Merivale corridor is a linear greenspace that runs north of the abandoned Beachburg sub rail line. This section of the pathway is within the study area for the new Baseline-Merivale Secondary Plan. It is also on the list of vacant lands that are being offered for residential development by the federal government. At the eastern end, the Poets' Pathway runs from Riverside Drive to McCarthy Road through McCarthy Meadow and McCarthy Woods. In draft 2 of the new Zoning Bylaw, while McCarthy Woods retained its EP zoning, the zoning for McCarthy Meadow was shown as Development Reserve rather than Open Space. This was done at the request of the National Capital Commission, according to Hunt Club Community Association sources. The GA raised the alarm and with its partners prevented these changes from happening.

The GA made it a priority this year to support the preservation and full restoration of the Poets' Pathway. While the zoning status quo has prevailed for these parcels, this Is only a temporary reprieve. Our focus now extends beyond the two parcels currently under threat to mount a campaign to preserve and protect the entirety of the linked greenspaces that form the inner greenbelt that is the Poets' Pathway.

The work to finalize and document the updated course of the pathway with GPS coordinates was completed with the help of a summer student obtained through the University of Ottawa placement program.

The GA applied to the City's Community Environmental Projects Grant Program to support its work in collaboration with the Poets Pathway team. The application was successful. The funding is intended to cover the redevelopment of the Poets' Pathway website as an application that caters to the needs prospective hikers and cyclists as well as nature and poetry lovers.

To raise awareness and mobilize ahead of the Council meeting on January 28, the GA participated as a panelist, along with nine other groups, in an event on January 17 at the Hunt Club and Riverview Park Community Centre. The OFNC led a guided walk to the riverfront greenspace to close off the day. The event was well attended with over 70 people participating. It also generated good news coverage, which no doubt kept the issue of protecting these greenspaces in the news and on Council's radar.

We distributed a Poets' Pathway map and leaflet to several hundred attendees of an Ottawa Choral Society concert on the theme of Canadian poets. Beechwood Cemetery helped by arranging for the printing of 500 copies of the latest map of the Poets' Pathway.

The Poets' Pathway was featured at the River Ward Earth Day event on April 18, at which the GA and the Poets' Pathway shared a table. Many visitors stopped at the table and a few unexpected but welcome contacts were made that will help promote the Poets' Pathway.

The Chair helped guide a Jane's walk on the Merivale-Prince of Wales section of the Poets' Pathway on May 2.

Finally, the plight of the Poets' Pathway was reported directly at the Mayor's Environmental Roundtable. At the end of the reporting period, the new website was near completion and it will be launched over the summer months.

Trillium Woods

The City of Ottawa has finalized the acquisition of a 4.77-hectare forested property from Canderel Real Estate Firm through the federal Ecological Gifts Program (EGP). The property, located adjacent to Trillium Woods, is part of a designated core area within the City's Natural Heritage System, as outlined in the Official Plan. It includes important wetland features along Shirley's Brook and provides critical habitat for species at risk. With City ownership, the site will be permanently protected for conservation purposes. Under the terms of the Ecological Gifts Program, the land must be preserved in its natural state in perpetuity. The GA is encouraged by the City's new acquisitions of greenspace.

Ring Road proposal

At the Public Works and Infrastructure committee meeting at which the final TMP was being considered, the Chair walked on a motion calling on all levels of government to support the planned transportation projects, including a ring road. This was the first mention of a ring road in the five years of development, consultation and finalization of the TMP. This of course took all the public stakeholders, and perhaps some of the elected officials, off guard. Nevertheless, it passed 9-2 at committee. The GA has been engaged on the TMP through its POP affiliation and directly in collaboration with the FCA Transportation Committee. It has not taken any position on a ring road but just on principle would not support this kind of major new direction being introduced as a walk on motion with no opportunity for analysis and input. As it turns out, when the topic came to Council for final approval, Councillor Johnson introduced a counter motion, removing the reference to a ring road and emphasizing adherence to the transportation policies in the Official Plan and due process. This motion was passed 16 to 8 by Council. However, we have not heard the last on a ring road for Ottawa, which is on a list of potential transportation studies by the Ontario government.

Major development near Petrie Island

A planning application has been received by the City concerning a major development proposed in the Ottawa River floodplain near Petrie Island. This is not the first submission for this development. The GA has previously opposed the application when it was originally made in 2020 and again in

2022. At first reading, nothing has really changed and there is no reason to change our position on the merits of this proposed development.

Canal Woods

A resident reached out to the GA to seek support in defending a small woodland owned by the NCC bordering Bronson Avenue in Old Ottawa South. The NCC is planning to sell this well-treed property for housing construction. The GA has agreed to fully mobilize its network to support the residents for whom this is a valuable greenspace.

Conclusion

Overall, 2025-2026 was dominated by a few very large, high impact policy files, on which we held our own and achieved significant gains. Another positive was the addition, through acquisition by the City and donations by landowners, of new protected greenspace and wetlands. Our work to preserve and promote the Poets' Pathway will hopefully lead the protection for these greenspaces as well. While the Provincial policy environment remains hostile to the aims and values of the GA, we believe that the municipal polity is swinging our way. The 2026 municipal elections will tell the tale.