

Presentation to Planning and Environment committee
24 April 2007
by Ottawa Forests and Greenspace Advisory Committee

Agenda Item 9 – Urban Natural Features Strategy

The Ottawa Forests and Greenspace Advisory Committee has been supportive of the City's efforts to secure (by acquisition if necessary) ecologically valuable land. As outlined in the staff report, we have been active participants in and supporters of the Urban Natural Areas Evaluation Study and the Greenspace Master Plan. The City is to be congratulated, not only for doing this great study, but for taking it to the next level and identifying priorities for land acquisition. Now it is up to you to take it to the level beyond and work with your fellow Councillors to pass the report's recommendation to have the money spent and the land secured.. This will be money well spent.

The Mayor says he wants to make our city a leader among G8 capitals and to create a city with "swagger". He noted that it would be necessary to balance economic competitiveness with environmental considerations. His only mention of the environment was in relation to waste management – important but not the whole story. You know and we know that what really gives a city class is the quality and quantity of its greenspace and the care and attention the green infrastructure receives. Sustainability, in the life sense, includes the atmosphere and the trees that purify our air and produce the oxygen we breathe. We in Ottawa and you on the Council need to consider trees, forests and greenspace as green infrastructure and pay as much if not more attention to it as you do the grey (built) infrastructure.

This study and this strategy is a real reason to swagger; let's make it happen.

We applaud the proposal to acquire 15 moderately or highly rated sites in private ownership. We will be pushing at budget time in late 2007 and into 2008 if needed to ensure that you follow through. We recognise budget limitation and while it is sad that only three sites are proposed for acquisition this year, that is a fiscal reality and was your decision at budget time this year.

We also note that the amount of money proposed for allocation in 2008 and beyond is less than the 2007 amount, and that the 2008 and beyond funding is based on 2006 land values. That does not bode well for land acquisition in the future, as land values will only keep rising while the amount of money to acquire land diminishes in real terms.

But, for the sake of the urban canopy and the future of Ottawa, we are also asking that you look beyond those 15. There are many more green spaces that could be on the development chopping block. Either the City comes up with an alternative mechanism for protection or money must be found or allocated for their acquisition. There is a ground swell occurring out there. People are concerned about the environment and greenspace protection.

The UNAEES study has 192 sites on the list. Some are already lost. Thankfully, some are in the City's ownership and some belong to the federal government and so may be free of development pressure for a while. But many of those that are not on the "A – list" are in private hands and are subject to development at any time. These sites may be rated Low on the environmental scale, but they, and many other un-rated sites, are important to the people who live near them. So, a more aggressive and innovative strategy for protection is needed.

Given that the City uses the 5% parkland dedication only for the creation of active recreation fields (soccer, softball etc) there is no mechanism for retaining wooded areas as passive parks. You need to direct and support staff in devising alternative measures to protect valuable woodlands, greenspace and wetlands. And, that includes really small areas, that we call pocket parts (the kind mentioned by Councillor Bédard this morning) in the urban core.

So, please support the purchase of the Cardinal Creek Valley, Fernbank Wetland and the Bridlewood Core Park this year. And, at budget time next year, we will be back to urge you to vote additional funds to protect land in the urban area and work with your colleagues in the rural sector to vote additional funds to secure land in the rural area.

Make this truly a green and pleasant city – one that provides greenspace outside the lands owned by the NCC and the City's vacant land bank. Make this a city that is moving towards, not away from the Official Plan goal of 30% canopy cover. Make this a city that finds a mechanism to protect those magnificent woodlots, greenspaces and wetlands that remain.

To sum, we applaud this measure and all the hard work that has gone into making this strategy a reality. We want to join you in a celebration when those first three parcels are acquired and we are truly set on a course to acquire the next 12 and others beyond that.

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Chair
Ottawa Forests and Greenspace Advisory Committee