

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf. (23) 02-99-0018
 Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 5 May 2000

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator, Planning and Environment Committee

FROM/EXP. Commissioner, Planning and Development Approvals

SUBJECT/OBJET **CORE AREA CONCEPT OF CANADA'S CAPITAL
 NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION**

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning and Environment Committee recommend that Council approve this report as the RMOC response to the National Capital Commission's *The Core Area Concept of Canada's Capital*.

PURPOSE

The National Capital Commission released *The Core Area Concept of Canada's Capital* for public review and comment (copies previously distributed to Councillors by the National Capital Commission). This report provides a response to the document. The deadline for submission of comments to the National Capital Commission is June 2, 2000.

BACKGROUND

In 1999, the National Capital Commission (NCC) approved its *Plan for Canada's Capital*, its lead policy statement on the physical planning and development of the National Capital Region over the next fifty years. The *Plan for Canada's Capital* recognizes the Core Area as the most significant part of the National Capital Region (NCR). The Core Area includes the Hull and Ottawa downtown areas.

The Core Area Concept of Canada's Capital builds on the *Plan for Canada's Capital* and on *A Capital For Future Generations - Visions for the Core Area of Canada's Capital Region* (1998).

The 1998 Vision was the first phase of the NCC's three-step planning process for the Core Area. It puts forward a series of proposals designed as a long term planning guide for the Core Area.

The Core Area Concept of Canada's Capital constitutes the second phase of the three-step planning process for the Core Area. It outlines in more detail the proposals put forward in the 1998 Vision, including amended versions for opening up Metcalfe Street. The third and final planning phase will involve drafting a Sector Plan exclusively for federally owned properties.

DISCUSSION

The Core Area Concept of Canada's Capital is presented in two documents bearing the same name: a consultants' report and a synthesis of the report published by the NCC. The synthesis outlines most of the ideas of the consultants' report. The consultants (du Toit Allsopp Hillier and Delcan Corporation) also prepared a strategic environmental assessment that identifies and evaluates the potential environmental effects of the proposed concept plan. The NCC is conducting consultation on all three documents. The intent of this section is to present a response to the NCC's current thinking on the development of the Core Area, as presented in the consultants' report and the synthesis document entitled *The Core Area Concept of Canada's Capital*.

Each document outlines the context and objectives of the Core Area concept. Each also provides demonstration drawings of the following elements of the Core Area concept:

- Confederation Boulevard
- Capital scenic approach routes
- Capital highway approach routes
- Civic street approaches
- Transit routes
- Pathways
- Waterways
- Capital districts
- Civic districts
- Capital and civic connections
- Open space connections
- Views protection
- Heritage protection
- Destinations

The synthesis provides additional illustrations of the following core area initiatives:

- LeBreton Flats
- Chaudière and Victoria Islands
- Sparks Street Area
- Connecting with Gatineau Park
- Bank Street Axis
- Industrial Land Scott Paper

Many of these elements are already well known and some have already been specifically endorsed by the Region, e.g. Confederation Boulevard and LeBreton Flats. The Region supports the *Core Area Concept*'s goal of strengthening the Central Area as the seat of Parliament and as the focal point of Ottawa-Carleton with its unique combination of employment, retail, tourism, housing, entertainment and cultural pursuits.

This report will focus on only a few elements. As a general comment, it is not clear whether all the consultants' proposals are endorsed by the NCC as several proposals appear in the consultants' report but not in the synthesis.

Capital scenic approach - Realignment of Queen Elizabeth Driveway

The consultants' report proposes the realignment of Queen Elizabeth Driveway to improve its ceremonial connection to Confederation Square "possibly via a new Laurier/Elgin Street node".

The realignment would negatively affect Confederation Park. It would also have a costly impact through an area that was recently improved (Elgin Street and Confederation Boulevard) or will be shortly improved (Laurier Avenue). While the Driveway could provide a better scenic entrance near Parliament Hill, its realignment via Laurier, Elgin and Confederation Park should be avoided.

Road Connection to Gatineau Park

The concept proposes a road connection to Gatineau Park. This road would in effect connect Aylmer to Alexandra Bridge and the Byward market area. This will increase vehicle traffic on Alexandra Bridge and on Mackenzie Street and the Market area. Studies should be done to assess the impact of such a proposal.

Chaudière and Victoria Islands

The concept proposes new public streets, pathways, public open space network as well as an aboriginal centre and incremental mixed-use intensification (office and retail).

The Region supports the creation of new visitor destinations, the interpretation of our cultural heritage and the building of footbridges, pathways and lookouts. Victoria Island is currently designated in the Regional Official Plan as Waterfront Open Space. This designation permits open-air recreation, heritage conservation and interpretation uses, and small-scale recreational facilities, commercial facilities and institutional uses which contributes to, or are ancillary to, but do not detract from the above uses. The illustrations provided in the synthesis feature fairly compact development that do not fit with the permitted designation of Waterfront Open Space. Further development of Victoria Island will require an amendment to the Regional Official Plan. In the interim, public access to the islands should be improved.

Sparks and Metcalfe Streets

The NCC proposes two concepts for Sparks and Metcalfe Streets. The two concepts follow the theme of creating a public space on Metcalfe. The first concept includes an open space area along Metcalfe between Sparks and Queen Streets with an 1,000-parking space underground garage. The

second concept includes a bigger open space area along Metcalfe between Wellington and Queen Streets to open up the area from the World Exchange Plaza to Parliament Hill. This would involve the removal of three buildings on the north side of Sparks Street, the relocation of two designated heritage buildings and a 1,200⁺-parking space underground garage.

Both options involve the demolition of buildings, some of which are significant heritage buildings. Sparks Street, between Elgin and Bank Streets, is being considered by the City of Ottawa for designation under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act as an Heritage Conservation District. The *Central Area West Heritage Conservation District Study* determined that the historic buildings on Sparks Street represent the most important concentration of heritage buildings in the Central Area and are an essential statement of Ottawa's heritage. These buildings should be retained in situ as part of an heritage district - not demolished, moved or rebuilt. The NCC should be consistent with its own stated goal of preserving the cultural, built and natural heritage of the Core.

Providing 1,000⁺ parking spaces in the Central Area is not in conformity with the City and Regional Official Plans which support the provision of short-term parking to serve the retail and commercial sectors and limit the provision of long term parking to discourage the use of private vehicles for work trips. There should be no increase in long-term employee parking in order to support Regional and City Official Plan objectives with regard to increasing walking, cycling and transit use. Preliminary data from the *1999 Central Area Parking Update* indicate that the long term parking supply west of the canal has remained constant while the short-term parking supply has decreased by 18%. Public transit works most effectively where there are high activity levels, limited parking, and quality pedestrian and transit access. Any new parking should be limited to accommodate some combination of parking for tour buses, replacement of some existing parking spaces on Parliament Hill, short term parking for visitors and residents and new parking required for new development.

Residential intensification is actively encouraged by all levels of governments. After a concerted and unsuccessful effort to introduce mixed uses on the north side of Sparks Street in the mid 1990's, the proposal to demolish buildings on the south of Sparks Street needs more justification. Sparks Street needs a broad range of activities to enhance its attractiveness. Opportunities should be explored to use the existing urban fabric before making a decision to demolish or move buildings.

The Region is concerned that the uncertainty about the future use of some leased buildings will increase the number of vacant space on Sparks Street and have a blighting effect on both residential and commercial properties in the Sparks Street area. As the major landowner on Sparks Street, the Federal Government must take the initiative to improve its properties to attract new tenants and encourage their redevelopment.

Opportunities not to be missed

- The surface parking lot to the west of the former US Embassy on Wellington Street should be developed with an important building contributing to the harmony of the streetscape. In the interim, it should be attractively landscaped as is the former Rideau Club site on Wellington.

- The NCC should be taking advantage of every opportunity to concentrate visitor destinations in the Core Area. For example, the new War Museum deserves a better location than the former Rockcliffe Airbase. Locating it in the Core Area would be a super attraction accessible to Parliament Hill, major hotels, the NAC, the Byward market and retail. The Ottawa River frontage on LeBreton Flats is being reserved for National uses such as this.
- There should be short-term progress on the redevelopment of LeBreton Flats. Regional and municipal Official Plans designations are now in place as well as zoning. The NCC now owns most of the land. It is time to move forward with implementation, including the allocation of federal funds for remediation of the contaminated sites.
- Extending Bank Street to the Ottawa River to provide more access is a good idea and should be implemented earlier rather than wait for the relocation of existing parking lots to a parking garage that may take years to materialize.

CONSULTATION

This report recommends a response by Regional Council to the NCC's *Core Area Concept of Canada's Capital*. The NCC is conducting a public consultation process on its Core Area Concept. Regional staff have not conducted a separate public consultation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications for the Region in approving the recommendation of this report.

CONCLUSION

For years, the National Capital Commission has played a positive and important role in the vision and design of the Core Area. The Region and the National Capital Commission share many common objectives for the Core Area. They have demonstrated their ability to work together in a number of Central Area projects such as Confederation Boulevard, LeBreton Flats, and Festival Plaza.

The Region supports almost all of the proposals outlined in the *Core Area Concept of Canada's Capital* with the exceptions mentioned above.

The Region anticipates a continuing and improved dialogue on the enhancement of the Core Area of which all Canadians can be proud.

Approved by
N. Tunnacliffe, MCIP, RPP

SG/jg