

REGION OF OTTAWA CARLETON
 RÉGION D'OTTAWA CARLETON

REPORT
 RAPPORT

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TO/DEST. Coordinator, Planning and Environment Committee

FROM/EXP. Commissioner, Planning and Development Approvals

SUBJECT/OBJET **RMOC RESPONSE TO NCC'S *A CAPITAL FOR FUTURE
 GENERATIONS - A VISION FOR THE CORE AREA OF
 CANADA'S CAPITAL REGION***

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning and Environment Committee recommend that Council approve this report as the RMOC response to the National Capital Commission's *A Capital for Future Generations - A Vision for the Core Area of Canada's Capital Region*.

PURPOSE

The National Capital Commission released two documents for public review and comment in June 1998. These are the *Draft Plan for Canada's Capital* and *A Capital for Future Generations - A Vision for the Core Area of Canada's Capital Region*. This report provides a response to the Core Area Vision. A response to the *Draft Plan for Canada's Capital* is provided in a separate report.

BACKGROUND

The stated purpose of the Core Area Vision is "to initiate a process of reflection and to stimulate discussion about the future of this important sector"—the Capital Core Area. The ideas presented "are intended primarily to respond to the desire for continuity in the mission and building of the Capital. They also take into consideration the specific needs of the municipal milieu."

The deadline for submission of comments to the National Capital Commission (NCC) is 28 Sep 1998. Comments received during the consultation process from June to September 1998, as well as the results of other more detailed studies, will serve as the basis for a second stage of consultation by the NCC in late 1998 or early 1999.

DISCUSSION

The text of the Core Area Vision is broken into two major parts. The first part provides graphic illustrations and explanatory texts on various Core Area elements. The intent of this section is to present the NCC's current thinking on development of the Core Area, as context for the second part of the document. The Core Area elements are:

- Core Area Context
- Confederation Boulevard
- Parliamentary Precinct Area
- Urban Park Network
- A Window on Canada
- Providing the Capital Experience
- Commemoration and Symbols
- LeBreton Flats
- Diplomatic Missions

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. Other elements relate more to the NCC's interpretation and programming roles. This part of the document does not require a response from the Region.

The second part of the document presents four specific proposals, "set out for the purpose of dialogue and discussion." The proposals, presented under the theme of Core Area Connections, are for:

- Chaudière and Victoria Islands
- Industrial Land E.B. Eddy
- Bank Street Axis
- Opening Up (views of) Parliament Hill

The theme for the new proposals is **Core Area Connections**. These new connections are intended "to improve the interaction between the Capital's "Crown" attractions, its riverside spaces and the municipal urban areas around them." In the process they will also more actively link both sides of the Ottawa River. One connection, the York Street Steps, for example, links Ottawa's Byward Market area with Major's Hill Park and the Parliament Hill/Rideau Canal overlook. The graphic and text for Core Area Connections introduce a "preliminary concept" for "improving the Capital role and accessibility of Gatineau Park ... by transforming Saint Laurent and the McConnell-Laramée right-of-way (up to Lac-des-Fées Boulevard) into an Urban Parkway linked directly to Confederation Boulevard." There is no further elaboration of this concept, as there is for the four specific proposals discussed below.

Proposal

The first specific proposal concerns **Chaudière and Victoria Islands**. The NCC has prepared a concept plan for the Chaudière and Victoria Islands which emphasises a continuous pedestrian system and activities associated with water (e.g. boardwalks, piers, docking facilities). As an important new destination for visitors and residents, the islands would contain a variety of commercial, cultural, recreational and industrial activities. The islands provide an opportunity to interpret the heritage of the country with respect to rivers, the Aboriginal Peoples and nineteenth century industrial activity. The continuous pedestrian system will provide a new physical link between Ottawa, Hull and the three founding cultures.

Response

The Region supports the creation of new visitor destinations, the interpretation of our cultural heritage and the building of pedestrian footbridges to create a new physical link between Ottawa and Hull.

Concerns arise in three areas. Firstly, all of Victoria Island is designated Waterfront Open Space in the 1997 ROP. This designation permits open-air recreation, heritage conservation and interpretation uses, and small-scale recreational facilities, commercial activities, and institutional uses which contribute to, or are ancillary to, but do not detract from the above. The proposal is not detailed enough to know whether the proposed commercial and industrial uses will fit within the permitted uses of this designation. An amendment to the Regional Official Plan may be required. (Chaudière Island is designated Central Area which permits a very wide range of uses.) Secondly, the activities described run the risk of being primarily daytime and seasonal in nature. A residential component on Victoria Island should be considered by the NCC and in any amendment to the Regional Official Plan. Thirdly, only passing reference is made to the Chaudière Falls. The proposals for the Islands should include the explicit intent to open up new public views of the Falls as soon as possible, while avoiding conflict with continued industrial use by E.B.Eddy on Chaudière Island.

Proposal

The second proposal involves two key shoreline sites in the Core on the Quebec side, which the federal government wishes to acquire from **E.B. Eddy**. The westerly site on Taché Boulevard may have potential for mixed residential/commercial development. The easterly site on Laurier (part of Confederation Boulevard) would likely be reserved for a national or international function. “The acquisition of these two sites will allow for public access to the Ottawa River shoreline in a continuous fashion, both in Ottawa and in Hull. It will also permit the reinstatement of the shoreline and its abutting lands, and their integration into the Core Area open space network”.

Response

Comments on the future uses for these sites are left to the Region's Quebec counterparts. However, the Region strongly endorses the acquisition of the shoreline portions of both sites and the principle that redevelopment of these sites must provide public access to the Ottawa River shoreline in a continuous fashion and the integration of the shoreline into the Core Area open space network.

Proposal

The third proposal is named the **Bank Street Axis**. This is a proposal to provide a connection between Bank Street, the Parliamentary Precinct, the escarpment valley and the Ottawa River. Similar proposals were contained in the Holt/Bennett 1915 Plan and the Parliamentary Precinct Plan. The Bank Street Axis would cross Confederation Boulevard and pass between the Confederation Building and the West Terrace to a possible lookout at the head of the escarpment valley. This lookout would offer views across the Ottawa River. "Terraced steps, a possible funicular and paths across the wooded escarpment would connect the lookout down to a riverside dock" for water taxis and to the riverside recreational pathway. The Vision also indicates that the Bank Street extension will continue to be the main vehicular access to Parliamentary Hill.

Response

This proposal would definitely improve the connections from the downtown core through the Crown attractions to the riverside. If this is also to be the main vehicular access, care must be taken that the provision for pedestrians is as clear, attractive and safe as possible. The number of connections down to the riverside must be limited to that consistent with maintaining and reinforcing the natural or "wild" character of the escarpment. In this regard the funicular proposal may be particularly problematic.

The proposed water taxis linking attractions on the River could be implemented in the short term from the existing dock at the mouth of the Rideau Canal, connecting, for example, to existing docks at the Canadian Museum of Civilisation and Jacques Cartier Park. The Region supports the overall concept and encourages a proposal call to test the potential of such a service for the 1999 navigation season.

Proposal

The last of the specific proposals is termed **Opening Up Parliament Hill**. The concept "calls for new public spaces, of generous but human scale, landscaped streetscapes and vistas focused on Parliament Hill and enhancing the entrance by road to the Capital. The concept also suggests significant public buildings." One possibility is "a symmetrical opening to Parliament Hill, on the axis of the Peace Tower. This could be an urban 'Parliament Square'...combined with a landscaped boulevard along Metcalfe Street", which might extend to Laurier Avenue or south to McLeod Street and the Museum of Nature. Another possibility is an asymmetrical opening for a boulevard, "centred on the Peace Tower by realigning Metcalfe, from Laurier Avenue, and thereby providing a more generous esplanade on its east, most sunlit side.

A public park and new building could terminate the south end, connected by new streetscape and frontage improvements along Laurier Avenue to Nicholas Street and the 417.”

The graphic accompanying the text suggests that Nicholas to Laurier and then north on Metcalfe to Wellington is the road entrance to the Capital which should be enhanced. There is also reference to creating new locations for “underground parking for visitors, Hill users and the general public.”

Response

Council’s objectives for the central area as expressed in the Official Plan are:

1. To strengthen the Central Area as the focal point of Ottawa-Carleton, based on its unique combination of employment, retail, tourism, housing, entertainment and cultural pursuits.
2. To promote the unique image and historical character of the Central Area as the site of Parliament Hill and the symbolic heart of Ottawa-Carleton and Canada.
3. To enhance the diversity and attractiveness of the Central Area by supporting a broad range of land uses, and day/night, year-round activities.
4. To increase the number of dwelling units in the Central Area and in neighbourhoods adjacent to it.
5. To re-establish a vibrant, urban community on LeBreton Flats.
6. To give priority to walking, cycling, and transit to and in the Central Area, particularly during peak traffic periods.
7. To enhance the Central Area as a place where pedestrians can move safely and comfortably on all streets.

Staff are concerned that the proposals have not taken these objectives fully into account. While staff’s expertise is not in urban design the discussion below shows that the proposal is a significant departure from previous planning reports and urban design proposals:

Metcalfe Street does not align with the Peace Tower. The NCC proposes four alternatives for Metcalfe Street three symmetrical widenings aligned with the Peace Tower to either “south of Sparks Street” to create a “Parliament Square” or to Laurier Avenue, or to McLeod Street or an asymmetrical widening to Laurier. Any of the possibilities presented involves the demolition of buildings, many of which are significant heritage structures, such as two churches, the four corners building, the info centre and numerous residences along the west side of Metcalfe. In the proposals which extend south of Laurier, residential units would be demolished, thus compromising the ROP objective of increasing the number of residential units within and adjacent to the Central Area. Due to the resources required, implementation of this proposal will take a

long time. In the meantime, knowledge of this future intent could have a blighting effect on both commercial and residential properties on Metcalfe. If the buildings are expected to be acquired and demolished eventually, why spend money on maintenance and renovation?

While the grand boulevards of Washington form a major part of the image of the U.S. Capital, they were planned and implemented from the first plan for the Capital in 1792 and were not created by demolishing important heritage structures and part of the commercial and residential fabric of the urban area. It should also be noted that these boulevards are lined with public and commercial uses; they have not created an environment where people live.

The proposal for a symmetrical square and boulevard aligned on the Peace Tower axis is inconsistent with Ottawa's character. As explained in the Parliamentary Precinct Area plan of 1987, the established pattern in Ottawa is one of asymmetrical yet balanced composition. Maintaining this balanced asymmetry is one of the site plan recommendations of the Precinct Plan. "This approach is in clear contrast to the classical and imperial axiality and symmetry used in Washington." (p. 59).

Another site planning principle in the Precinct Plan is that "new development should follow the precedent of non-aligned axes and asymmetrically terminated vistas."

The new proposals in the Core Area Vision are a significant departure from the previous plans for the Capital. Although previous Capital planners considered correction of the off-axis alignment of Metcalfe Street to Parliament Hill, none of them recommended any measures as substantial as some of the possibilities raised in the Core Area Vision. For example, the Holt/Bennett report proposed creating a new block-long street from Wellington to Sparks the same distance west of the Peace Tower as Metcalfe was east of the Tower.

Previous Capital planners have recommended that the south side of Wellington form a continuous "Town" edge in contrast to the pavilions in a landscape character of the "Crown" lands on Parliament Hill. Gréber recommended that the south side of Wellington "be treated as a continuous monumental background to the north side." The Precinct Plan (and the Ceremonial Route Study) calls for the south frontage of Wellington to "form a distinct edge to the downtown and to spatially contain the river-related landscape." In fact, the Precinct Plan proposes that buildings between Metcalfe and O'Connor should work together with the Langevin Building to establish a strong "street wall", and to contain and "complete" the quadrangle space defined by the East, West and Centre Blocks.

The proposals for Metcalfe also calls into question role of Elgin Street, which is still shown as part of Confederation Boulevard as far south as Lisgar. Nowhere is there any mention of Elgin or of the implications of a Metcalfe boulevard for this street. There is no explanation as to why the NCC has selected Nicholas to Laurier to Metcalfe as the road entrance to the Capital which should be enhanced. For those arriving on Nicholas, why should it not continue to be Nicholas to Elgin to Wellington? Surely it is appropriate to take new visitors to the Capital past the War Memorial. Furthermore the Region proposes to improve Elgin Street in 1999.

Today there are a number of vehicular routes to the Central Area and Parliament Hill, including Nicholas, Metcalfe and Kent from the 417 and the Ottawa River Parkway, Queen Elizabeth Driveway and Colonel By Drive for more scenic routes. The Region would welcome the assistance of the NCC in streetscape improvements along all of the Regional roads leading to Parliament Hill, including Kent, Bank and Metcalfe.

It is already a challenge to tie together the two parts of the Central Area on each side of the Rideau Canal. A boulevard on Metcalfe in combination with Elgin Street would only add to the difficulty. The interruption in the continuity of Sparks Street mall may also be detrimental to its function as a pedestrian retail street and its economic vitality.

In the light of these concerns, if the NCC continues to pursue some variation of this proposal, the following comments apply.

- The maximum opening up of the view of Parliament Hill which should occur is from Wellington to Queen (working in conjunction with the existing open space between Queen and Albert at the World Exchange Plaza). This should be done in stepped fashion so that it continues the pattern of asymmetry. Even this short length will involve the loss (or relocation?) of heritage structures. Metcalfe Street should remain as a non-aligned axis. This is similar to the NCC's proposal to create a Parliament Square.
- If the intent is to open up views of Parliament Hill, any addition to the Metcalfe right-of-way should be configured as open space on the west side of the roadway. There should be no increase in road capacity for motorized vehicles, since the emphasis in the Regional and City Official Plans is on accommodating travel to the Central Area to the maximum extent possible through the modes of transit, cycling and walking. Elgin would remain the road entrance to Parliament Hill for motorists arriving on Nicholas.
- If new underground parking is part of the proposal, there should be no net 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. Any new parking should accommodate some combination of parking for tour buses, replacement of existing parking spaces on Parliament Hill (so that surface parking on the Hill can be removed), and short term parking for visitors.
- Further study should be undertaken of the impact of the slope and trees on Metcalfe on the new views of Parliament at pedestrian and at driver's eye level.
- Buildings should remain occupied and demolition of any structures along Metcalfe should not occur until resources are in hand to fully implement the replacement scheme, including creation of building fronts along the new open space where previously there were side walls.
- The NCC should follow the municipal planning process which may result in the need to amend the Regional and City of Ottawa Official Plans.

- The NCC should work with the Region and City of Ottawa to bring forward practical proposals to increase the number of housing units in the central area and surrounding communities.
- The NCC should publish an implementation plan with a clear timing of when they will acquire buildings so landowners can make informed decisions on maintenance and improvements to their properties.

Proposal

Following the four specific proposals, the document concludes with its Vision for the Core. The Vision involves (p.44):

- fostering the Core's continued dominance over the political, economic, cultural and social heart of the Capital;
- recognising and strengthening the Core's role as a focus for cultural activities and events;
- improving the Core's overall appearance and quality of design;
- promoting greater accessibility by all modes of transportation;
- enhancing its symbolic significance for Canadian identity and pride.

Response

Although not labelled as such, these ideas can be considered as objectives which should frame the evaluation of specific proposals for the Core Area. Almost all of these objectives are consistent with the objectives of the 1997 ROP for the Central Area. The exception is the one on "promoting greater accessibility by all modes of transportation", which does not reflect the ROP preference for walking, cycling and public transit as the means of access to and within the Central Area.

The Core Area Vision also lacks any reference to increasing the number of residences and residential population within and adjacent to the Central Area. A strong residential population base is a key element in maintaining the vitality and safety of the Core and should be taken into account in NCC proposals for the future development of the Core Area. While achieving this objective may be more a municipal than federal responsibility, the NCC proposals for the Core should not impede realization of this objective. Furthermore the NCC should work with the Region and the City of Ottawa to help achieve the objective, e.g. disposing of surplus land, conversion of non residential buildings to residential use.

CONSULTATION

This report recommends a response by Regional Council to NCC proposals for the Core Area over the next 25 to 50 years. The NCC is conducting a public consultation process on its proposals. 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

The Region and the National Capital Commission share many common objectives for the Core (Central Area). They have demonstrated their ability to work co-operatively together in a number of Core projects, including Confederation Boulevard, planning for LeBreton Flats, and the Festival Plaza. The Core Area Vision released by the NCC should stimulate a valuable public discussion on the future of this area which is so key to the significance of the Capital and the prosperity and quality of life of the entire region.

The Region supports almost all of the proposals for the Core Area (with a few qualifications in some instances). The exception is the proposals for widening Metcalfe Street to open up views of Parliament Hill, which generate the concerns identified.

The Region anticipates a continuing dialogue on this important topic and future opportunities for co-operation with the NCC in the enhancement of a core area of which all Canadians can be proud.

*Approved by
N. Tunnacliffe, MCIP, RPP*

CC/jf