

Thursday, January 30, 2014

### **Statement by Russell Mills, Chair of the NCC**

Residents of Canada's National Capital Region are privileged to live in one of the world's most beautiful urban spaces. Much of this is the result of more than a century of work by both local governments and by agencies of the federal government charged with the responsibility of building a great Capital for all Canadians.

Since 1959 this national responsibility has been exercised by the National Capital Commission.

Most of the time local interests and the national interests are not in conflict and, in fact, can work together to produce superior results. The first phase of Ottawa's new Light Rail Transit (LRT) system is a good example. Some of the rail line and stations are located on land owned by the federal government.

Senior staff from the City of Ottawa and the NCC worked together for years and came up with a plan which is better than either institution could have done on its own. The line is now under construction and we believe that the finished downtown LRT will do an excellent job of serving both the City of Ottawa and the National Capital of Canada.

The western extension of the LRT line is another story, however. For years, the City's transit maps showed a rail line running right along the Ottawa River from Westboro to Lincoln Fields. This rail line would have featured overhead wires and fences that would have walled off the river from the city.

In this case, the NCC said "No". The Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway and surrounding riverfront green space is too important to the character of the National Capital. Our three rivers are the main natural features of the area and access to them must be protected and preserved whenever possible.

The City of Ottawa listened and responded appropriately. The City and NCC are working on the details of a plan that would affect much less of the Parkway's green space. The NCC's conditions are unimpeded access to the river and minimal visual impact on the parkland.

We received a letter from the mayor assuring us that the NCC's conditions could be accommodated with the existing budget for the project.

This week, however, Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson and Gatineau Mayor Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin wrote a letter to the Prime Minister accusing the NCC of “meddling in municipal affairs” and asking for seats on the NCC board.

Building an appropriate National Capital Region for our great country will always be more than a municipal affair. Any steps that would undermine the need to focus on the national interest in the Capital is unlikely to result in better decisions for either local residents or all Canadians.

The City of Ottawa seems to recognize this. The City’s Urban Design Review Panel, for example, has six members and five of them are from outside the National Capital Region. The only local member is a retired NCC employee.

Members of the NCC board are appointed by the elected national government of Canada which is accountable to all Canadians. The NCC reports to the Parliament of Canada through Foreign Affairs John Baird, a senior minister in the government and lifelong resident of the National Capital Region. We are accountable.

We believe that the vital interests of local residents in their cities must be balanced with the national interest of all Canadians in their Capital. This has produced our great community and we believe it will do so in future.

Anything that would undermine the role of the NCC is unlikely to produce better results. We need to retain the authority to stop bad ideas like a railroad along a precious riverfront.