

Joint Community AGM: Lots of Achievement and Goals

By John Dance

'Twas a time of celebration, accountability, planning and socializing at last week's well-attended joint annual general meeting of the Community Activities Group (CAG) of Old Ottawa East and the OOE Community Association (OOECA), held at the Church of the Ascension on Echo Drive.

Highlights included updates from Ottawa Centre MP the Honourable Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and Capital Ward Councillor David Chernushenko as well as thorough annual reports of CAG and OOECA chairs Melanie Gilbert and Phyllis Odenbach Sutton. See below for the full reports as well as the detailed financial information.

One key position was filled – with Don Stephenson succeeding Melanie Gilbert as CAG chair – but several others will require community members to step forward to be the new chair of Sustainable Living Ottawa East (SLOE), the chair of the Community Association's planning committee and the SLOE representative on the Community Association board. Also, additional members are required for the planning committee to ensure all of OOE's neighbourhoods are well represented.

Rebecca Aird, after serving as chair of SLOE for nine years, has stepped down. Similarly, after six years as Planning Committee chair, Stephen Pope has retired from the OOECA Board as has SLOE rep Ian McRae.

Chair of the Mainstreeter Board, Steven Begg announced that the newspaper will be seeking a new editor since the current editor Joe Paraskevas is stepping down. Steven also noted that volunteers for a variety of Mainstreeter positions are also sought.

Councillor Chernushenko, appearing at his seventh OOE AGM, highlighted a number of major initiatives in the community, most notably the reconstruction of Main as a complete street.

Before leaving for an American election night gathering with the U.S. ambassador, Minister McKenna reviewed her government's initiatives in Ottawa Centre and beyond - including the new paddling docks in the canal and the commitment of \$10.5 million for the Fifth-Clegg Canal footbridge. Other priorities she spoke of were the relocation of the Victims of Communism memorial, the revitalization of the old American embassy on Wellington Street and social housing. She will pursue the question of "How do we re-imagine the city and the water," a matter of some importance to Ottawa Easters.

Open Forum

Community members had the chance to ask questions about ongoing issues and they did so with great gusto. They enquired about: the cyclist-pedestrian detour onto Echo Drive; the viability of new commercial space on Main Street; the awkward reconfiguration of the southbound lanes of Main Street in front of the Subway restaurant; the desirability of the City assuming ownership of the 30-metre open space along the river frontage of Greystone Village; how the plan for the new park encompassing the Grande Allée - Deschatelets forecourt reflected community consultation; and why some community submissions have not been included in the Mainstreeter. The conversations were well moderated by OOECA vice-chair Ed Janes.

Ian Grabina of Councillor Chernushenko's office explained that the cyclist-pedestrian detour from the Colonel By pathway onto Echo Drive will provide a safe means of bypassing the re-construction of the Canal walls, work that will be finished by late spring. He also said that further improvements will be made to Main Street to resolve the southbound traffic problems in front of the Subway.

In his continuing effort to ensure community enjoyment of the Rideau River waterfront, Jamie Brougham proposed that the community association ask the City of Ottawa to take ownership of the Greystone Village's 30-metre open space along the river. Mr. Brougham noted that originally the City refused to accept Regional's offer of this land because of liability issues but these have proven not to be substantial. The issue will be reconsidered at a regular OOECA Board meeting.

Christine Honsl's question about the viability of new Main Street commerce was responded to by Stephen Pope who noted that new businesses will make the street more vibrant and said that the new enterprises will need to draw customers not just from OOE but from beyond, just as the Green Door and Watson's do.

Eddie Gillis, who led the community association's efforts with the new Grande Allée park, explained that the approved plan thoroughly reflects most of the many suggestions made during the park's consultation process.

Steven Begg noted that the Mainstreeter editor has the discretion to determine what submissions are used. But he also commented that the content is driven by volunteers and if anybody has comments on content they should provide them.

CAG & OOECA Highlights

CAG highlights included conducting the community survey with OOECA; being nominated for "an excellence of employment" award; taking over responsibility for all programming at Old Town Hall; increasing high-quality and affordable programming for children and adults including the summer paddling camps, the children's garden summer camp, Camp Brantwood and, for adults, the new women's ultimate frisbee, cooking classes and the free New Canadian Learn to Skate program.

And, once again, CAG organized major community events notably the Winter Party in the Park, the Valentine Skate, the new Thanksgiving Festival and Pumpkin Sale, weekly summer BBQs and the Main Event. Thanks were extended to the many community partners and the volunteers who made all of these events possible. In addition to continuing these many programs and events, the new year will see CAG investigating new facilities and partners.

In terms of the community association, transportation improvements such as the major reconstruction of Main Street and the MacIraith bridge, the acceleration of the construction schedule for the Clegg-Fifth canal footbridge, the new Clegg paddling dock and completed plans for the Rideau River Western pathway were noted. And substantial progress on planning files was made, with both Regional Group's Greystone Village and Domicile's "Corners on Main" becoming major construction sites. The association's OMB appeal regarding the height of triplexes in R3 neighbourhoods was concluded through a compromise with builders.

The planning committee reviewed numerous requests for minor variances, Regional's phase 2 ("North Shore"), the proposal for the north corner of Echo and Main, and a variety of other development proposals and city planning policy for such matters as coach houses, minimum parking requirements, and R4 zoning.

Other Community Association highlights included the completion of the plan with Regional and the city for the Grande Allée / Forecourt public park. SLOE also had an active year positively influencing innovative stormwater management for the Regional site and working with Margaret Vant Erve in the planning of a perennial garden at the new Main-Riverdale intersection.

SLOE also led the preservation of large dressed stone blocks from the demolished row housing on the Domicile site so that they can be used in the new parkland of Greystone Village. Other SLOE contributions included support for the Ottawa Urban Forest management Plan and the design of the Rideau River Western Pathway.

Ascension's new rector, the Reverend Rhonda Waters, welcomed the community to the church. After the formal part of the meeting was over, the church hall served as a delightful venue for casual conversation and the pursuit of specific matters while community members enjoyed a glass of apple cider or wine and munched on fare from the Green Door.