

160 Lees Avenue – OECA meeting

Wednesday, December 19, 2012

Speakers:

John Dance (OECA president), Christine Loth-Bown (resident, organizer), David Chernushenko (Capital Ward city councillor), Matt Eason (Communication and Outreach Coordinator, Rail Implementation Office, City of Ottawa), Hieu Nguyen (Development Review, Urban Area, Planning and Growth Management), Nancy Schepers (Deputy City Manager, Planning and Infrastructure)

Introductions:

Councillor Chernushenko – While we support LRT, no community should shoulder too much burden for the construction of it. Too little time has been given to provide response to proposal. Councillor notified of proposal in early December, has since been working with city staff at possible changes/solutions.

Presentation by city staff:

Matt Eason

- Largest infrastructure project since canal, will have impacts on the city and they will try to minimize them
- Have an alternative proposal already to discuss tonight
- General information about RTG (Rideau Transit Group)
- Parking lot K from University of Ottawa to be used as a staging area – 120 parking spaces lost
- 110 parking spaces off Lees Avenue campus to be affected
- Downtown parking/on-street parking is already tight around university – people already parking on the grass at the arena
- City examined different sites – question of who owns the land
- MTO (Ministry of Transportation – Ontario government) – will not allow alternate uses such as parking lot on their land
- Other land owned by NCC
- Other land is private (Iranian property – currently being sued)
- Private parking lots already at capacity
- Lands already to be used for staging areas

Hieu

- Zoning application for 160 Lees Avenue – city initiated because city owns the land
- Initiated in early December
- Applying for temporary zoning for three years – if longer, then another zoning amendment required
- Parcel of land – the northern portion is designated as mixed use centre, southern portion is major open space

- Site identified as part of Transportation Master Plan (Phase II, Alta Vista Transportation Corridor)
- Zoned R4M – allows residential
- Circulation period to public ends January 4, 2013 (circulation period is 28 days)
- January 14, 2013, to planning committee for vote
- Accompanying site plan control application to be submitted in 2013
- Initial concept plan has been circulated
- Subject to circulation period of 28 days
- Based on initial feedback from community and councillor, alternative site plan concept for discussion tonight

Matt Eason

- Comments from councillor, work with RTG to minimize impact to the space
- Alternative concept: no longer staging at 160 Lees
- Instead of parking lot running more north-south, turn it east-west for more frontage along Lees Avenue
- Room for willow tree
- Keeps parking entirely in mixed use, not in the open space area
- Allows Ultimate Frisbee to continue
- Meets needs from parking perspective – 360 spots
- Why 360 from 230 parking spots lost at university campus?
- Negotiations with university – compensation number reached
- University plans to run shuttle service to transfer students to main campus from 160 Lees
- 360 parking spots a product of negotiations with university (Note: no further reason given for that number)
- Overall, will see impacts on Lees Transitway station – make it more pedestrian friendly, pathway connections, more user friendly

Question & Answer portion: (response by city staff will be indicated with their initials)

- Q – This is just a stepping stone from paving it for parking lot to paving it for Alta Vista Transportation Corridor (AVTC). Carrot and stick needed to get people on mass transit. Don't accommodate all the parking spots, encourage them to get out of their cars. Coddling people with cars. Why a shuttle when Lees Transitway station is open? Can the councillor kill it if we ask him to?
- A (ME) – Community always has power through councillor. By not providing the facilities, people will scramble to find parking. Until the LRT system is online, a short-term accommodation is required to the university. AVTC is a separate issue.
- Q – Worried it will become permanent. Not worried about other people having to park downtown. We have no guarantees that it will be temporary. Stated that it will be reviewed and up for review every three years.

- A (ME) – The renewal process is your protection. Every three years, have to reapply. No interest in staying longer than is required to build LRT.
- A (HN) – This land is viewed as a greenspace and a park, but Official Plan says mixed use centre. Not touching the major open space designation.
- Q – OECA identified vacant lands through councillor’s office that might be used. Those pieces of land are not used for anything. Why can’t you ask the province for use of their land?
- A (ME) – In discussion with MTO, they require access to those on-ramps as part of their policy. They won’t entertain it as a possibility. Other land is NCC and other private land is not possible (ongoing lawsuit).
- Q (President of rugby association) – can’t use south end of lot because it’s not in the best shape. Can you upgrade the space to keep it useable for us and others who use it for activities?
- A (ME) – We can enter into dialogue in 2013, happy to look into it.
- Q (Executive director of Community Activities Group) - Not enough outdoor community space. Don’t know where people are supposed to go. Removing outdoor recreation for people.
- A (HN) – Springhurst Park is not part of 160 Lees Avenue, can be condition of development to fix up south end
- Comment by Christine Loth-Brown and Carol Workun (CAG) about city permit for parks, has always referenced Springhurst Park and grassy area so city currently treats it as a park through their permit process
- Q – What kind of environmental assessment (EA) has been done? Why no EA as part of broader LRT?
- A (ME) – A broader EA was done as part of the LRT. Site plan requires an environmental study, will be looking into it in the new year when site plan moves forward.
- Q – In discussions with university, identified need for parking spots – why no more innovative plan to accommodate parking/transportation? What did the city say to the university? Can city go back to the university?
- A (ME) – Aware the OECA trying to get meeting with city and university in the new year. At the university, over 80% of students take public transit. They are great supporters of public transportation. Don’t beat up on university too much.
- Q – But still no answer to the 360 new parking spots vs. 230 parking spots being lost. We can see how the monetary worth is less (ie: can’t charge as much at 160 Lees Avenue because it is further from campus, not premium space). But won’t people still not park at Lees Avenue and then wait for shuttle bus?
- A (ME) – G4 parking lot at Lees Avenue campus is always full
- General disagreement from neighbours in area that parking lot is always full – OECA to speak to university about that
- Q – Impact on kids/schools – elementary school uses that field (ie: Terry Fox event). Have been to Sylvia Holden Park during early construction at Lansdowne. Lots of dust, pollution. Opportunities for outdoor play are shrinking.
- A (ME) – By moving the construction staging area away from 160 Lees Avenue under alternate proposal, we are removing that dust, pollution, etc. Can look at landscaping options through site plan process.

- Q – Will any trees be cut down? How many? Why?
- A (ME) – That will be addressed through site plan process, will include tree preservation/inventory.
- Q – A parking lot will bring an increase in traffic to the whole community. More than 360 cars, because this will include a turn-over throughout the day. A thousand more cars a day? Safety issues with school in area. A lot of people in apartment buildings. Have you done outreach into the buildings? A lot of residents are new to country, this is their backyard. They will be marginalized.
- A (HN) – Traffic analysis part of site plan application. Following standard procedure for consultation.
- Q – Concern for safety around parking lot/playground.
- A (ME) – Those concerns are part of the site plan process.
- Q – Museum of Nature parking lot was supposed to be temporary. What about other side of river? We were inconvenienced during football field construction. Put parking lot on other side. A lot of spots will likely go unused, students will drive to destination.
- A (ME) – NCC land on other side of river. Difficult to negotiate with them. It was considered, but not considered a viable option.
- Q – Were they even asked?
- A (ME) – Will follow up on that.
- Q – This is being sold as the only possible place. Any alternate site? What about land adjacent to Hurdman?
- A (ME) – Most other options owned by someone else. Some used as construction staging area for 417 widening. One option is the Sandy Hill parking arena. Problem is programming going on in the evening and now those users are displaced.
- Q – Closing of Lees Avenue on-ramp is pending, and Main Street will undergo reconstruction in 2014. All this happening at the same time. All parking on Main Street will be lost too.
- A (NS) – Valid point about Main Street. Reassure that we are thinking about it. Not going to be easy, but we are carefully thinking the sequencing of various projects throughout community and the impacts.
- Q – What other city assets were considered? Shuttle already runs between University of Ottawa and Carleton (and SPU). The shuttle bus is never full.
- A (ME) - Will follow up on other city assets.
- Q – Why give priority to single person driver vs. other options. Put them on buses, or car-pooling. Permit parking only for car-pooling as an example.
- A (ME) – Interesting idea, will look at it in new year with university.
- Q (Executive director, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre (SHCHC)) – Investing a lot of time into developing Springhurst Park with new playstructures. Why are we here today when the university and city were talking about it in May? Why do we only have until January 4 to provide comments given holiday time.
- A (ME) – University and city started talking about this in August, not May. Confidential procurement process. Couldn't announce much until after deal finalized.
- Q – Why is this a fait accompli?

- A (ME) – We have presented tonight a radically different proposal from two weeks ago, so this is not a fait accompli.
- Q (SHCHC community outreach) – Has worked a lot with apartment tower residents. Half of our population live in the towers. Most are new-comers. Disappointed with consultation process. Likely the 3000 in the towers are not being consulted. Asking if the planning committee could review this at a later date (ie: push back January 14 date for planning committee). How can this be evaluated without the traffic study, EA, etc?
- A (ME) - Will get back to OECA on that.
- Q – Live in towers, losing greenspace. Many people can't walk further than the greenspace. What about the traffic on our street? Already traffic going through red lights. Getting in and out apartments is difficult. Is it permit parking?
- A (ME) – Understanding is that it is permit parking. Re: safety – happy to review that through site plan process. Follow up on traffic impact, including apartment buildings.
- Q – If this is occupied until 2018, what happens with AVTC? What is required for returning the site to its original use? Possible improvements once/if land returned?
- A (NS) – Transportation Master Plan (TMP) is being updated, will deal with AVTC. Will occur in 2013.
- A (ME) – Returning site to original condition would form part of the site plan (ie: condition of site plan)
- Q – Can the city commit to restoring the area to its original use once they are done with it?
- A (NS) – That would be a condition of the site plan. If it's temporary, will need to be re-applied for. If during that time the TMP changes, then that may change how it is used.
- Q – Human factor was never considered during the presentation. Doubt comments will have impact.

Community discussion (city staff leave meeting):

John/Christine:

- It is an improvement that the staging area is no longer part of the proposal
- However, need to discuss how to proceed and identify next steps
- Number of follow-up items identified through Q&A section
- Will communicate with residents over OECA website
- Need to follow-up on alternative sites – felt brushed off by city
- Need to speak with university – how did they get the 360 spots when they lose only 230 spots? That was never answered.
- Moving forward: If we can't get an alternative site, how do we reduce the number of spots?
- OECA spoke with parking lot organizers from Museum of Nature
- Said letter-writing campaign was effective – mayor, planning department, etc. OECA will provide bullet points on website that can be included in letter. Will identify who to send letter to, provide email addresses as well. All the councillors on the planning committee need to be notified.

- Need to show that other organizations are opposed – ie: SHCHC, rugby association, Ultimate Frisbee, etc.

Comments from residents:

- Don't allow options. Have to approach this as no parking lot at all.
- We also need to change timeline, investigate pushing back January 14 planning committee date
- Need to include university as part of letter writing campaign
- Need to speak with Sandy Hill Community Association as they are impacted (Note: have reached out to community association prior to meeting)
- Need more consultation into the apartment building, suggestion to physically stand at the apartment buildings to distribute information
- Need to get in touch with Federation of Community Associations (FCA)
- Suggestion to start a petition
- Need to engage the school community, they use the space
- It was definitely May, not August, that the university was considering parking on Lees Avenue, need to push the January 14 date back
- Assuming it goes to planning committee, need representation at the meeting
- Sign-up sheet distributed for name, email address