

Lansdowne Park Committee – John Dance

It's been a busy month on the Lansdowne front. Three things to report:

OOECA Lansdowne Committee

Ron Rose, Alexandra Gruca-Macaulay, Doug Macaulay and I have formed the association's informal Lansdowne committee. This committee will review proposals relating to Lansdowne with a view to offering advice as to what would be best for users and residents at large, particularly those from OOE. Both Ron and I represent OOE on the Lansdowne Community Consultation Group (LCCG), the Councillor-created advisory group that meets occasionally to offer advice on Lansdowne operations and initiatives of the City and Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group

We welcome others who may wish to join. We specifically need a member who lives across the Canal from Lansdowne and may be affected by Park noise.

Proposed Changes to help OSEG with Pandemic and Other Financial Challenges

As per emails in November, at the City's Finance and Economic Development Committee (FEDCO), OOECA presented the attached position (Attachment 1) regarding the City's recommended changes to the partnership agreement. Specifically, the city staff recommended short-term relief through allowing OSEG to access a capital reserve, changes to rental revenues for the City and a 10-year extension to the 30-year deal. The association supports the short-term relief but opposes the other provisions. FEDCO approved all of the staff recommendations which, at this writing, were to be considered at City Council December 9 (i.e. the date of the OOECA Board meeting).

Two weeks after the FEDCO meeting the City's Audit Committee received an audit on the so-called Lansdowne Waterfall agreement which sets out the distribution of revenues from the Lansdowne partnership's operations. Numerous deficiencies were cited in the audit. The OOECA Lansdowne Committee is of the view that until such time as these deficiencies are remedied there should be no consideration of extending the term of the partnership agreement.

Proposed Changes to Aberdeen Square

In August OSEG outlined to the LCCG the improvements it would like to make to Aberdeen Square, now to be known as Plaza Lac-Lemay Casino as a result of a sponsorship deal. The improvements include moveable stage components that would double as seating; entrance and stage towers; and bollards that would demarcate the square while maintaining through traffic on the northern side of the square.

Community representatives asked that before any decisions were taken that there be a consultation session open to all. This occurred via Zoom on October 19 and the general sense was that the proposed changes should not proceed as proposed. OSEG responded by rewriting their report, however, none of the recommended changes was modified.

The rewritten report was discussed at a meeting of LCCG November 30 and OSEG was adamant that they did not want to change their plans. Councillor Shawn Menard requested that the plans be changed to reflect the consultation, including that the stage be smaller, the towers be scaled down, and electricity be installed to allow events, and permanent seating be created. OSEG responded to this request that the proposed changes had already been agreed to by Casino Lac-Lemay and the Ontario Heritage Trust and if they didn't proceed as proposed it's possible the Casino wouldn't provide the funding for the changes. Ron and I have written to Councillor Menard expressing support for the changes he proposed (Attachment 2). So we'll see what happens next.

Attachment 1

OOECA Presentation to FEDCO, November 12, 2020

We support the thoughtful position of GCA [below] as outlined many hours ago by June Creelman.

Most of us - residents, businesses, and City staff - can agree on two things: these are tough days and Lansdowne is a very important park for all Ottawans

But what has been thrust upon us with very short notice and no consultation are recommendations to extend for a decade a massive OSEG subsidy in the form of free rent in the heart of Ottawa. I suspect that a lot of non-millionaire Ottawans would also like to have free rent for 40 years.

The basis for staff's recommendations seems to be that the extension would save the City from having to operate the stadium and arena.

Yet no investigation has been done to see what other options exist to manage the stadium and arena after the end of the 30 year deal.

What's before FEDCO is evidence that the deal approved in 2012 is a bad deal.

Taxpayers were led to believe the massive investment by the city would result in a fully restored stadium and arena and that the City would receive a real financial return on its investment. Both appear to be false.

Yes, allow OSEG short-term relief in this difficult pandemic period through use of the capital reserve but, at this point, don't give away the arena and stadium for another 10 years and don't make the rental arrangements even more favorable to OSEG.

One final point: The city and OSEG should better engage with neighbouring communities.

- We had no heads-up on the recommendations before you
- Proposed improvements to Aberdeen Square have had inadequate consultation
- There was no consultation on the renaming of Aberdeen Square

- Last year at this time there was a rushed, no-consultation proposal before FEDCO to give OSEG control over the urban park portion of Lansdowne.
- There has been no community engagement with the strategic review that OSEG has had underway for more than a year.

This is no way to run a park or a city. Let's have some good governance.

Glebe Community Association Position

Whereas:

* Lansdowne is one of Ottawa's most important public spaces and is well used by residents of the neighbourhood and the city as a whole.

* A 30-year private public partnership agreement was signed in 2012 setting out financial and operating arrangements for the site; this agreement still has 22 years left in it.

* The City has invested \$210 Million in Lansdowne, which is more capital than OSEG has contributed. The City has also provided publicly-owned land for virtually free rather than charging market value rents.

* OSEG's operations were in financial difficulty pre-COVID, and have never achieved expectations.

* COVID has hit Lansdowne particularly hard since mass gatherings and sporting events are cancelled indefinitely.

* Eight years into the 30-year agreement, OSEG approached the City asking for financial assistance and changes to the terms of the agreement.

* The City has prepared a report recommending short and long-term assistance for OSEG, including changes to the terms of the agreement and an extension for 10 years.

* The City report is incomplete and does not contained detailed financial analysis, a business plan or analysis of the financial implications for taxpayers over the long term.

* The City has had no return on its investment on its equity investment and the proposed changes to the agreement further weaken any potential benefit to the city and taxpayers, while increasing profits for OSEG.

* Audits of the Lansdowne Partnership Plan are underway and have not been completed.

* Many other businesses and non-profits in Ottawa, working in similar spheres, are in financial difficulty due to COVID, and are not receiving City financial support.

Be it resolved that the GCA:

- * Supports emergency short-term financial assistance for OSEG such as a loan, a city guarantee on a loan or, access to the reserve fund, whichever option has less financial risk for City taxpayers.
- * Encourages the City to provide similar emergency short-term financial assistance to other city partners and to sports, retail and entertainment venues across the City
- * Recommends that as a condition for the emergency short-term financial support, OSEG be required to make a legal commitment to keep its sports teams at Lansdowne beyond 2021 (as stated in the current agreement) until at least 2025
- * Opposes any long-term changes to the current Lansdowne Partnership Agreement until after City Audits are completed, and made public, in a post-COVID environment when the long-term situation is better understood.
- * Recommends that any changes to the LPP long-term agreement be undertaken through a rigorous and public planning process based on full financial transparency, including the audited financial reports of the sub-components of the LPP master agreement, an evaluation by a third-party, a detailed business plan, public consultations and the involvement of a public advisory committee with representatives of neighbouring communities as full partners at the table.
- *Believes strongly that changes to the LPP, if any, should not be driven by short-term circumstances, but need to be made in the interests of a better and more successful Lansdowne that works for the public good in the long-term.

Attachment 2

Email: Follow-up to Lansdowne Community Consultation Group meeting of November 30, 2020 - Improvements to Aberdeen Square / Casino Lac-Lemay Plaza

Tue, Dec 1, 6:58 PM (13 hours ago)

to councillor, Mark, Ottawa, Ron, Richard, Jonathan, gca, June, Bob, bcc: Lorne, bcc: Alexandra, bcc: Doug

Dear Councillor Shawn Menard, Mark Goudie and Dan Chenier:

We wish to express our support for the compromise position that Councillor Menard proposed at yesterday's meeting of the Lansdowne Community Consultation Group regarding improvements to Aberdeen Square.

Despite the public consultation of October 19, 2020, OSEG has not substantially changed its proposed plan for improvements.

The recent consultation results were clear that the OSEG proposals did not adequately address what had been sought when the communities were originally consulted on the future of Aberdeen Square back in 2019.

In our view changes should primarily improve the day-to-day attraction of the square, rather than be primarily to improve the square to host events.

Specifically, we recommend that a small stage, electrical infrastructure to support stage events, permanent seating and thriving trees should be funded through this initial phase of square improvement work. The proposed towers need to be reduced in number, scaled down and should complement rather than detract from the Aberdeen Pavilion architecture. Consideration should be given to delaying them until a subsequent phase.

We also will continue to push for the closure of Marché Way through the square. We see the need for emergency vehicles to have access through the square but this can be readily provided without allowing access for all.

We look forward to seeing what the City and OSEG have in mind for subsequent phases of improvements.

Ron Rose & John Dance, OOECA Representatives, Lansdowne Community Consultation Group