

Community Dialogue on LeBreton Flats Redevelopment

Hosted by Paul Dewar, M.P., Ottawa Centre

January 19, 2008

Meeting Report

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BACKGROUND:

Ottawa Centre Member of Parliament Paul Dewar hosted a Community Dialogue on the redevelopment of LeBreton Flats on January 19, 2008. The purpose of the Dialogue was to draw together community associations, planners, advocacy groups, residents and neighbours, transportation experts, cultural organizations, decision makers, historians, and more to discuss the next phase of development on the Flats. The meeting was a follow-up to a successful meeting Mr. Dewar held on the reform

of the National Capital Commission (NCC), which has resulted in much needed changes to the structure and climate of the NCC.

As a result of internal changes, the NCC has yet to announce a process or set a timeline for the public consultation process around Phase 2 of the development (as of the date of this report). Concerns regarding the process surrounding the development of Phase 1, as well as subsequent related issues have raised a number of questions that must be addressed, in the physical design and use of the redevelopment, in the process to determine what shape the redevelopment takes, and in the underlying philosophy.

In response to preliminary outreach to community members and other stakeholders who had indicated an interest in participating, an agenda for the day was drawn up with some of the key questions and areas of interest established for further discussion.

The hope is that this dialogue will be a catalyst for the development of a robust process of public consultation by the NCC, and that the recommendations from each of the issue tables will be considered in the design and implementation of the formal NCC consultations and bidding processes, resulting in a redevelopment that reflects the community in which it is located, represents the best that planning, architecture, and culture can offer, and makes Canadians proud to have an example of smart, progressive, green development in the Nation's capital.

Historical Context

Phil Jenkins, author of *An Acre in Time*, provided a brief historical background of the LeBreton Flats to the group.

The area was part of the territory of the Algonquin people, who used it for a variety of purposes. It was a part of the hunting grounds of an Algonquin Grand Chief, Constant Penencey, whose unceded hunting territory Ottawa now sits on. He asked for a new piece of land when Colonel By - whom he called an "incursion" - turned up to begin building the canal .

The first land grant in Ottawa was to an American named Randall, and included the area we refer to as the LeBreton Flats. He subsequently lost the grant to a lawyer who took the land in lieu of payment of services. He sold it to Mr. LeBreton a year later, in 1820.

The Mayor of Ottawa asked a bunch of Americans to develop the timber, resulting in some of the largest sawmills in the world at the time, right on the edge of the Flats at the Chaudiere falls. Many people, including J.R. Booth (a Canadian), made a great deal of money.

The flats have been levelled twice, once in 1900 by a great fire. It was quickly rebuilt. William Lyon MacKenzie King decided that he wanted to refurbish Ottawa to make it the capital of an independent country. He brought in Jacques Greber, who in the '50s recommended clearing the flats of buildings to put in a parkway. Took a while, but in the early 60s, 4000 residents were given notice that they had 2 years to move, and in 1964-5 the flats were cleared.

The area was studied for a long time, and eventually what you see is the beginning of the redevelopment of the area.

This is an area that deserves respect, which we will all have to live with, and that was never ceded by the Algonquin. It should be representative of the calibre of imagination that exists in Ottawa.

Process:

The group was divided into a series of working groups, which were predetermined from feedback from interested stakeholders. Recognizing that no single issue was isolated from any other, the participants were assigned to groups that did not necessarily reflect their primary area of professional or personal interest, but rather participants were spread across issue areas to allow for a cross-pollination of ideas. Given the limited time (4 hours), it seemed pointless to have all those interested in one issue making the same arguments to each other.

The participants were divided into [10 issue areas](#), with the task of discussing, from their perspectives, the importance of that issue to a larger vision of LeBreton Flats. All participants were provided with a list of the broad questions posed by Paul Dewar, as well as those who had responded to communications regarding the Dialogue. Participants were free to address any or none of those questions in their more focussed discussions.

Each group was asked to appoint a rapporteur to communicate the key points of the group's discussion back to the larger gathering. Everyone was then free to comment on and provide further input to the issue. This allowed for those who had specific experience or an interest in that issue to correct or add to the group's findings.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMON AREAS OF CONCERN

Each small group came up with a series of recommendations and proposals, which are listed by group below. However, there were a number of key recommendations made in the large group discussion and many repeated themes in several or all of the small groups. These include:

- **THERE MUST BE REAL, MEANINGFUL, AND ONGOING COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**
 - A consultation process, perhaps similar to this one, should be employed to engage the community in the process from the beginning. This must include residents, neighbours, community representatives, first nations, cultural and ethnic communities, decision makers, and more. Furthermore, additional measures should be employed to engage those who do not traditionally participate in formal processes, and to engage them where they are.
 - There should be a charette as part of the process
 - Consultation should begin before the bidding process is begun. The group was very supportive of the idea of developing a vision, and sending that out to tender, rather than having the bidders and developers dictate the form.
 - Community input should continue and include the bidding process, and

- On-going monitoring, perhaps through a community “ombudsman” should be employed to ensure adherence to commitments and criteria developed throughout the process
- THE REDEVELOPMENT MUST BE AN EXAMPLE FOR CANADA AND THE WORLD
 - The homes and businesses that existed here were expropriated in the name of a grand vision of what was here. Ottawa is full of imaginative, creative people, and the NCC is the steward of this land on behalf of all Canadians. We should all be proud of what is built and created here.
- IT MUST INCLUDE PERMANENT AFFORDABLE HOUSING
 - A significant proportion of the housing must be affordable to all, both to rent, and to purchase.
 - This affordability must be maintained in perpetuity.
- IT MUST DEMONSTRATE ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP
 - Building standards, design and materials should meet or exceed the leading environmental standards.
 - Planning and priorities should emphasize pedestrian, cycling, and transit options over cars
 - Green roofs, water conservation and reclamation technologies, and other environmental systems should be employed
 - A community energy system, which avoids the piecemeal development of sections of the Flats in isolation from the others, must be developed
- IT MUST RECOGNIZE AND RESPECT THE CULTURE, HISTORY, AND CURRENT CLAIMS OF FIRST NATIONS
 - The importance of aboriginal issues was stressed across the work groups – from traditional healing centres, aboriginal art and culture, thorough consultation and participation in decision making, provision of services and centres, and design elements were all highlighted
- IT MUST CONSIDER AND BE INTEGRATED WITH EXISTING NEIGHBOURHOODS
 - Not only should the redevelopment not be a drain on local services, it should consider what already exists and can either be supported or augmented.
- IT MUST INCLUDE PUBLIC TRANSIT PLANNING FROM THE OUTSET
 - Not only must the residents and those who attend events be served by good public transit, existing transit must be configured to work better
- THE BIDDING PROCESS MUST CHANGE
 - The process must be open, transparent, and participatory
 - More bidders, including smaller developers, should be encouraged
 - Clear, well designed criteria for affordability, environmental sustainability, timelines, design, and more must be developed
 - Developers must be held accountable for failing to meet agreed criteria after the fact
- THE DEVELOPMENT MUST BE ACCESSIBLE

- Housing units, public spaces, streets, transit, and more must consider those with special needs
- PUBLIC ART, CULTURAL EVENTS AND FESTIVALS ARE IMPORTANT TO THE AREA
 - Furthermore, studios and rehearsal space should be available
- THE DEVELOPMENT MUST INCLUDE AND SUPPORT MIXED INCOMES AND USES
 - The residential community should accommodate a range of incomes, ages, and living arrangements, mixed throughout
 - Street level living and commercial uses are important
- LOCAL AND SMALL-SCALE COMMERCIAL AND LIGHT INDUSTRIAL USES ARE NEEDED
 - Businesses, shops, services, and entertainment should all be included
 - A local grocery store is sorely needed
 - Big-box, large scale commercial developments are undesirable

Small-Group Discussion Topics

1. [RESIDENTIAL USES/HOUSING](#)
2. [HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT](#)
3. [TRANSPORTATION](#)
4. [RECREATION](#)
5. [CULTURE](#)
6. [HISTORICAL CONTEXT/FIRST NATIONS/ HERITAGE](#)
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Group 1. Residential/Housing

Suggested discussion points included:

- Affordable housing
- Provision of self-contained units with a variety of unit types, including units for families, singles, and the disabled.
- Coop living
- access to shared common areas
- A mix of both market and non-market housing

The main question is this: Is the mandate to make a profit or to build a community?

Concerns include

- Gentrification
- Lack of accessibility
- Affordability
- Land ownership model, both the existing one and the propose model.

The preferred features of the redevelopment include:

- A process that attracts smaller developers, non-profits, co-ops
- More than one developer
- Mixed use – abundance of retail, commercial, and light industrial uses
- Must include LEED sustainability criteria
- Must think more broadly about accessibility – flex design, for example
- Specific affordability definitions which include rankings by income, unity type and tenure
- Should be affordable IN PERPETUITY
- Should be integrated with adjacent neighbourhoods
- Must meet Energy Star requirements – will reduce utility costs, improving affordability while conserving energy
- **Must work with public to develop indicators, targets, and a monitoring plan**

Group 2. Health and Environment

Suggested discussion points included:

- Green roofs
- Green space
- Health uses and services
 - Complementary and alternative treatment and holistic services
 - Aboriginal healing centre
 - Medical clinic

This group felt that the development should be a “green” showcase of the best and most progressive technology, design, and innovation

- We should design the Model Village, envy of the world
- An international competition could be held to design it
- We should be proud of it
- It should be integrated with the surrounding communities (Hintonburg)
- Proper access to amenities, including
 - Health
 - Food
 - Recreation
 - Transportation
- Should be pedestrian oriented and designed with walking in mind
- Wide sidewalk, benches
- Granville Island is a good example of artistic involvement in the community
- Should incorporate abundant public greenspace
- Festivals are important
- Would be great to develop a community energy system to provide for the community’s needs
- Should integrate renewable energy models, designed to minimize energy use and maximize location
- Housing should be scattered
- Must include meaningful involvement of aboriginal peoples, i.e.: a healing centre
- Youth should be involved and welcomed
- Should celebrate the significance of water in the historical context, as well as ecologically
- Must employ sustainable building techniques and design
- Locally-oriented and supported shops and food (NO BIG BOX)
- Must include schools and appropriate institutions

Group 3. Transportation

Suggested discussion points included:

- Buses
- Cycling
- Light rail
- Incentives for parking for smart cars
- Covered bike parking
- Paths/trails

This group began by outlining some of the challenges to developing a good, sustainable transportation model on the Flats.

Challenges:

- Six major transport corridors cross the flats

- Difficult to anticipate the implications of the interprovincial bridge and tunnel study

Needs:

- Must be pedestrian and cyclist-friendly
 - Linking of pathways
 - Secure, covered bike parking
 - Better accommodation of bikes on roadways and overpasses – dedicated lanes, possibly divided from vehicle traffic
 - Remove corner cut-offs
- Public Transit
 - Good linkage with OC Transpo and STO
 - Bayview is the only realistic location of a transit interchange
 - Accommodation of festivals – Shuttle buses are not public transit

VERY IMPORTANT to conduct full, thorough, meaningful public consultation

Group 4. Recreation

Suggested discussion points included:

- Recreational facilities such as a gym, a swimming pool and a bowling alley.
- Children's play areas/tot lots
- Tennis courts
- Soccer fields/baseball
- Skating rink
- Roof top gardens
- Recreation development should be continuous – linked throughout the community
- Should tie into the waterfront, and water uses
- Bicycle paths should be included on all streets – perhaps dedicated lanes
- Over/underpasses should be welcoming and accommodate pedestrians and cyclists, motorized scooters/wheelchairs strollers, roller-bladers and more
- Should incorporate basketball courts/hoops
- Fountains and water features that are for play as well as fun
- Need a tot lot
- Should include dog parks and be dog-friendly
- Multi purpose, public recreation facilities are needed
 - Must be affordable, accessible
- Should integrate national buildings like the War Museum

Group 5. Culture

Suggested discussion points included:

- Art galleries, theatres and artist work studios.
- Cultural performance space
- Stage/amphitheatre area
- Festivals
- Cultural diversity
- Music

This group felt that there should be an assessment of what already exists in the area
This would avoid duplication and added competition
Should also be mindful of local cultural nodes, like Chinatown, Preston Street, etc.,
and how we can work with them

- Currently, there is
 - a seniors' centre
 - GCTC
 - War Museum
 - Festival space for open-air events
 - Firefighters' memorial
 - Interprovincial panels and historic pathway (planned)

What is needed?

- Libraries – possible virtual library?
 - Family-oriented community centre
 - Resources for children
 - Age diversity
 - Flexible spaces – modular playgrounds and structures
- Should focus on multi-purpose spaces that are specific to the area
Multi-use spaces save money in the long run

- Design should reflect the aboriginal peoples
- Public art would be included
- Festivals are important
 - Should support Bluesfest
 - Possible children's festival
 - Orchestras in the park
 - Need to have programming for all ages, incomes, and cultures
 - Residential areas should be made part of the multi-purpose space – include a public amphitheatre in courtyards in residential parts
 - Should keep noise levels in mind, particularly when locating and orienting stages
- Should consider how the river/waterfront are incorporated into the development
- Possibly reuse the designs of the old houses that were there, and those that still exist in neighbourhood
- Should have warehouse space for band jams, artists' studios, etc.
- District should encourage different cultures to live together
- Could include area for multicultural vendors, restaurants, cultural kiosks
- Should be cultural space that is useable for 4 seasons
- Should investigate similar projects in other parts of the world (Moscow, Hyderabad) to see how they have done it – consult other experts
- Housing design needs to be considered for multicultural living – should include housing that appeals to many cultures
 - Communal cooking areas
 - Multigenerational living space
 - Should incorporate cultural considerations into building designs – “What Makes You Feel At Home” contest
 - Integration of income generation space in housing – shops on ground floors for example
- LeBreton Community Centre needed
- Should allow for space on the river that can be rented out affordably to community groups
- A café-culture with people sitting out on the street (with accommodation for inclement weather) would allow for street level interaction

- Design graduated over-passes for Booth and the Parkway that continue the feeling of the space and put pedestrians first!
- Need for real public transit to encourage people to use transit to get to the festivals and events – SHUTTLE BUSES ARE NOT PUBLIC TRANSIT

Group 6. Historical Context/First Nations/ Heritage

Suggested discussion points included:

- Desire to retain and promote the history of the area
- Role of existing land claims

This group reported out their findings in a diagram

Central to all of the issues they identified was community diversity, which involved affordability, Accessibility, and meaningful consultation

The two key driving concepts for development are dignity and respect

- Cultural:
 - Need a library, café society, community hall
- Aboriginal:
 - An aboriginal centre ('embassy'), gathering spaces, affordable housing, cultural centre – perhaps incorporating the islands
 - Land claim
- Francophone
 - Were once important part of the community before expropriation – cultural recognition needed, invite the francophone community back
- Trades People
 - Workshops, affordable spaces to conduct trades, occupational diversity needed
- Growers/gardens
 - Should be space for people to work the earth
 - Community gardens
 - Communal growing spaces
 - Could incorporate different cultures in what is grown, highlight the diversity of the community as well as natural diversity
 - Perhaps allotments for the public
- Strollability
 - Need pedestrian crossings, preferably natural, with grass, wide, like Alberta wildlife overpasses
 - Benches
 - Vistas and lookouts
- Land
 - Design and use should reflect the natural setting, shape and form of area
 - River is important too
 - Permaculture
- Historical
 - War Museum is there, but a dedicated space with displays on the history and culture of the site is important
 - Library collections/archives could be located there
- Arts
 - Should encourage artists
 - Provide studios, coops

Group 7. Commercial, Retail and Small Business

Suggested discussion points included:

- Grocery store or food market.
- mix of other retail and commercial uses
- shops and services, including cafes and restaurants,
- Pharmacies?

This group identified a vision for the area including:

- Neighbourhood stores, not big box stores
- Corner stores (i.e. shops that don't close up at 6pm) are vital
- Walk to shop
- Vibrant night life - but not another Preston (all restaurants/bars)
- Emphasis on small business and "necessities" - groceries, video, hardware, dry cleaners, services, etc
- Some kind of main street - possibly Booth - like Queen St West in Toronto - quirky stores,
- Emphasis on Arts and Culture
- Businesses need to respect the demographics of the area - i.e. affordable, not all boutiques
- Sparks street is the big failure to avoid
- Don't want to be like a suburb, where you have to drive to get anything. It can't be just housing. It has to be a place where people shop where they live. Ground-floor commercial space makes sense.
- We want the community to be family-friendly - this should include the kinds of businesses that locate there

However, there are also challenges

- Is the commerce going to be dispersed or concentrated? Will there be a main street?
- Traffic volume makes it difficult for main street/stopping - also we will want to mitigate the commuter routes on the parkway and Scott
- How do you make the retail aspect conducive to lower-profit services? How to make it affordable to small business?
- How can we avoid the "big box"?
- How can we ensure the necessities (i.e. a grocery store) are there

We must avoid the "donut" effect - make sure there are pedestrian, cycling routes through the community, that it's not all closed off so people have to go around

Recommendations:

- Relocate NCC head office to LeBreton - maybe then they would have an investment in making it a great space
- parkway side can be integrated into War Museum/Festival Plaza - a commercial strip and space attractive to tourists AND residents, pedestrian-friendly, lots of outdoor cafes and restaurants and places to sit
- Make sure that there are ways to integrate development with surrounding communities, as well as River pathway. Suggest a grassed-in overpass over the parkway for bikes and pedestrians. Sightlines are also important.

- School and other larger institutions (rec centre, library or multipurpose facility) can also help attract small business. A larger employer will also create traffic in the daytime
- Recognize future developments in surrounding areas, especially when planning services, recreation, social services, etc - Bayview Yards, City Centre - more density means more services are needed for the area.
- Festival Plaza - the route to it is not pleasant. Also we have to mitigate the impact of events on the community, as well as integrate local business with events being planned there
- Can zoning/tax incentives help encourage small business over business? Essential services over boutiques? How?

Group 8. Social Context

Suggested discussion points included:

- Community Centre
- Library
- Daycare
- Meeting rooms and space available for public use
- Space for non-profit offices.
- General resource centre
- Access to telephones and computers for community residents
- Youth services
- Seniors' issues

This group included 2 former residents of LeBreton who had been expropriated
This was a negative experience, and should not be repeated

- The site should commemorate those who were moved, including by collecting and telling the stories of those who lived there

The development should tie into and involve existing services in the community, but not pose a drain on them - should incorporate existing programs, perhaps support them with more space or volunteer base

- How will the aboriginal land claim affect how the process moves forward?
- Existing community resources should be supported in anticipation of new population, such as schools and seniors centres.
- Condos are not a good model – they tend to be over-priced, not family-friendly
- Condos out of reach for families, seniors or young singles
- There must be affordable housing – and it is important that it is affordable to everyone, not just to 20th percentile and above
- Housing must also be affordable for rent as well as to purchase
- The high-end housing of Phase 1 is exclusive and must not be repeated – it needs to be compensated for, ie. **no more** high-end condos.
- Because of provincial control of the purse-strings, we have to look to developers to support affordable options – and it can and has been done
- It must be a mixed community, not homogenous

A number of key needs were identified:

- Youth drop in centre
- Seniors activity centre
- Aboriginal centre
- Include multicultural needs

- Community Health Centre
- Soccer fields – universal sport fields, indoor, but accessible to all
- Child care
- City centre

This should be a real community

- Walkable
- No more high-end condos
- Not isolating
- Living at ground level
- Should be able to connect with neighbours
- Few cars
- Local merchants
- Accessible
- Need public transportation
- Grocery store
- Affordable to lowest 10%
- Recognize and respect history
- Reflect the aboriginal perspective
- Should work WITH developers, not have an adversarial relationship.

Group 9. General Design/Architecture/Planning

Suggested discussion points included:

- Central atriums or public courtyards
- Pedestrian friendly
- Emphasis on green transit, including bus transportation and biking.
- Infrastructure needs
- Impact on larger community

This group emphasized that architecture is not just how the buildings look; it is also the space between buildings, their relationship to each other and to their location. What opportunities exist to influence the design parameters? Will there be citizen or NGO input into an NCC-led process? How meaningful will participation be?

- There should be a charette as part of the process
- When planning, we should avoid using the developer/architect model – the SOCIAL element gets lost
- Both the process and the vision need to be people-friendly, not car-centric.
 - Should support public transit, including bikes, buses, rapid transit, local rail, “people movers”
- Need a commercial component to service the community – for example, grocery shopping
- The NCC is perceived as STILL too closed, secretive
 - There must be more accountability
 - Must include MEANINGFUL consultations, encourage participation, input welcome and taken seriously
 - Consultations should have entry points for the very small organizations
- Affordability has gotten lost in Phase One – Claridge has not followed through on promised units, and there is no way to hold them accountable - what consequences will the developer face?
- Future developments should be phased in manageable chunks – smaller bidders could participate

- More effective
- Context-based outcomes suitable to residents and community
- Modify selection process for developer to ensure (as much as possible) 2 eligible finalists, at least
- Allow for public input into selection of winning bidder
- Incorporate GREEN building standards and affordability into criteria, and write it into the contracts before they are awarded
- Must consider surrounding community which is already there
- All levels of government need to better coordinate – development will have impact on City services, for example
- In the design – Greenspace is very important
 - quality and quantity are both important – not simply small tracts of land between buildings
- Would it be possible to leverage any federal funding for innovative design or affordability?
 - Could help meet the City of Ottawa target for special needs/low income
- GREEN
 - Use up-to date standards, built into contracts
 - Recycle heat, secondary treated or tertiary water and wastewater
 - Avoid large buildings that obscure natural scenery
 - Use natural landscaping, local plants, grasses, and trees – incorporate natural heritage
- Are building codes “climate proofed”?
 - Must consider the increased effects of climate change when designing and locating buildings – consider flooding, extreme weather
 - Should be designed to take advantage of natural air flow and weather patterns
 - Should incorporate green roofs and other design elements to moderate the micro-climate
- We would like to have specific input from the Algonquin people, and reflect their heritage in the community
- Height and density restrictions should continue to be observed – what is the zoning? Do we need to amend it?
- Sight-lines to prominent public sites (Parliament Buildings) should be considered
- An aesthetic that ages well is needed for this prominent area
- **Assisted housing is key**
- Housing should be for all ages – don’t exclude seniors!

Group 10. Process – Bidding, Public Consultation, and More

Suggested discussion points included:

- Community consultation
- Bidding process
- Transparency
- Environmental Assessment

This group felt the NCC has traditionally done a cursory job on public consultations on LeBreton Flats redevelopment, and focussed its efforts on making recommendations to improve the process

- First Nations groups should be integral to the process from the beginning, and should have a strong role in the development – this may avoid a lengthy and costly court process later on
- The NCC process must be done before the Request for proposals is issued, so that the consultation process and what comes out of it will shape the request.
- The process should be reversed – the public should work with architects, the NCC and planners to come up with a wish list and design, which should then be bid upon by developers, not the other way around
- The NCC public consultation process should employ the workshop model, similar to the design of this community dialogue
- Consultations should also be designed to reach people who do not tend to participate in this kind of forum for cultural or other reasons – efforts should be made to reach people in their own contexts, i.e. develop a strategy for intentional engagement
- Care must be given to defining who are the stakeholders in a consultation process
- As a non-elected body, the onus is on the NCC to be even more transparent
- A citizen group needs to be developed to audit and participate in the RFP development
- A suggestion was made that a Citizen's Ombudsman be appointed to track the process from the beginning of consultation through the RFP, bidding, building, and on, to act as an institutional memory and ensure accountability
- The consultation should not just focus on phase 2, but should also touch on the bigger picture – the larger context and the future should also be considered.
- Should focus on what must be located there, then flesh out the details
- The community should have input into ranking the bids as they come in – should be a public competition, not a closed process