



Lowertown Community Association  
Association Communautaire de la basseville

Marc Aubin,  
President,  
Lowertown Community Association,  
205-100 Boteler Street,  
Ottawa, ON K1N 8Y1

Marie Lemay,  
Chief Executive Officer,  
National Capital Commission,  
202-40 Elgin Street,  
Ottawa, ON K1P 1C7

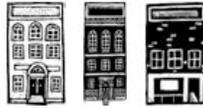
April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012

Dear Ms. Lemay,

This letter is regarding an issue of great concern to our community. It was formally submitted last week as part of the ongoing environmental assessment for the reconstruction of the 1.2 km segment of Sussex Drive between St. Patrick Street and King Edward Avenue in Ottawa. However, given the gravity of the matter, we feel that we must elevate this issue to your level at this time and hope that you can act on our behalf in helping us save Lowertown's disappearing heritage.

The NCC and City of Ottawa have both met with representatives of our association on two separate occasions regarding this project. At our first meeting on November 8<sup>th</sup>, they presented the latest project design to us. Overall, we were very happy with the project. It is a continuation of the federally themed streetscape found along the rest of Sussex Drive and Wellington Street. The current segment does require renewal and it will be welcomed by many in the community.

Despite being generally happy with the plan, we did raise a number of concerns at this first meeting. We noted that the cycling network around the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge required additional thinking to make it more logical and easier for cyclists to travel between the bridge and various other corridors on the Ottawa side. We also noted that an effort should be made to include as many trees as possible. Finally, and most importantly, we had a long discussion about the proposed demolition of two heritage buildings located at the corner of Sussex and Bolton Street.



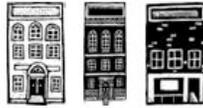
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We were astonished that the NCC and City were proposing to demolish the brick rowhouse (275-277-279) and yellow brick house (273) on Sussex Drive. Given the history of the NCC and City in having destroyed a large amount of Lowertown's built heritage over the past 40 years, we thought that times had changed. Unfortunately, we are faced with the same sad approach to our humble built heritage here in Lowertown that we have fought for over the past half century.

The two buildings threatened with demolition are located in the Lowertown West Heritage Conservation District. This designation was made after significant efforts were made by residents and the City of Ottawa in the 1990's in reaction to our disappearing heritage in this part of Lowertown. Despite these efforts, the threat to Lowertown's heritage is still very real and we are fighting it at many levels and in many cases still to this day. We had hoped that the NCC would have been more sensitive to this concern and voiced our absolute resolve against this proposal.

The main argument for removing these two heritage buildings is the desire to include dedicated bike lanes along both sides of Sussex. Cycling is a worthy mode of transportation that is strongly supported by many people in Lowertown; however, there is a serious concern that heritage buildings should not be demolished in the name of this good cause. Instead, we think that a more responsible approach would be to reallocate road space (i.e. remove a lane or use shared car/bike lanes). If cycling is the excuse today, another worthy cause might be the excuse tomorrow. What if the NCC and City decided to add dedicated transit lanes? Would it propose to demolish all the buildings on one side of Sussex to accomplish this and not to inconvenience commuters? This would certainly not be the case and we think the same logic should be applied in this case by not removing the current buildings threatened.

Another issue raised was the curvature of the road in this particular location. We understand the desire to more strictly adhere to road engineering design guidelines; however, we are also aware that these are only guidelines. There is much flexibility in the application of the guidelines and we think that this particular location does not warrant such a strict interpretation. In fact, this was confirmed by one of the officials in attendance at the meeting. In addition, we know that reducing the curve at this location will encourage additional speeding, which is already an issue on Sussex. Safety guidelines suggest that designs such as this have the effect of reducing speeding. As a result of these points raised, we do not see the curvature of the roadway as a legitimate reason to be considered further from this point on.



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A second meeting was convened between the NCC, City and representatives of our association on February 23. The purpose of this meeting was for the NCC and City to return to us with possible mitigation strategies for the concerns raised about the heritage properties on Sussex. While it was not our responsibility to find workarounds for this problem, we had provided a number of ideas at the previous meeting. At this meeting, a briefing reviewing the idea of removing lanes was shared with us. The conclusion of that document was that removing one lane in either direction would be too much of an inconvenience to either the morning or afternoon commuters using this stretch of Sussex. No compromise could be found at this meeting but the NCC and City did seem to remain open to finding a solution.

As already mentioned, a number of potentially viable options have been provided on our part. We have suggested removing a lane in one direction; creating a shared bike/sidewalk lane; a shared bike/outer car lane; taking out the sidewalk on the north side between Bruyère and Boteler streets; and, moving or building replicas of the current buildings threatened. We are also still of the opinion that the status quo or something near to it can be achieved at this location with the space already available. These are just samples of the creative ways in which we suggested the NCC and City of Ottawa should go in an effort to show their real concern for this issue.

Following the second meeting, we took some time to analyze the briefing that considered taking a lane out along Sussex. Much to our surprise, we realized that another more viable option had not yet been considered and could provide the solution that we are all seeking – to save the buildings threatened with demolition. In their analysis, the transportation planners only considered two options: 1) taking a lane out northbound or 2) taking a lane out southbound. In both cases, an outer lane would have been removed on Sussex between St. Patrick Street and King Edward Avenue. The conclusion of this analysis was that neither option was viable due to the back-ups they would cause during rush hour in the morning (southbound) or in the evening (northbound). As a result, we suggested an additional option of a partial lane removal be considered.

We proposed that the outer lane along Sussex (southbound) between King Edward Avenue and Cathcart Street be removed. This option would not include the removal of any lanes between Cathcart Street and St. Patrick Street. This is the section, during the morning commute, where the backups occur. While there might be periodic back-ups that go beyond Cathcart Street, there is enough capacity to allow for such incidents to occur in our opinion. Furthermore, this option is more consistent with the number of lanes found on the northern part of Sussex past King Edward Avenue where it is only one lane in each direction rather than two. This is a good compromise between the concern for heritage and the demands for road capacity from the transportation planners. The project manager for the Sussex reconstruction recently agreed to have this option reviewed. We are still



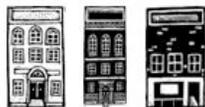
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awaiting the outcome of this analysis and hope that there will be flexibility in terms of its potential implementation.

We, in Lowertown, are faced with the growing pressures in the regional transportation system. As the City grows, so does the demand for transportation. However, the demands are during the peak hours of the day (mornings and evenings). As a result, pressure grows, especially on roads leading in and out of our community. An uninformed or reckless approach would be to incrementally add more and more road space to accommodate single-car commuters and eventually and literally drive out people who live in the downtown. The need to accommodate commuters needs to be very carefully balanced with the need to maintain a certain quality of life in Lowertown and downtown Ottawa generally.

The balance will come from an appreciation by residents, leaders and planners of the allocation of what is called “capacity.” Transportation planners refer to capacity as their challenge. As the city grows, so does the amount of people travelling. As a result, the capacity of our transportation system shrinks. The logical reaction is to add capacity, but it is the way that this capacity is added that will form what kind of a City we want. We can build freeways through the downtown and destroy much of the beautiful communities and heritage that this City has to offer or we can add a world-class transit system. At a certain point, we must also agree that adding any addition above-ground road space is going to negatively affect the quality of life in downtown Ottawa. As a result, the trade-off is to allow a certain amount of car congestion. This congestion, which is experienced in every major city in the world, encourages people to change their travel behaviours (transit, cycling, walking, eliminating unnecessary trips, and moving near where one works).

I have written the last two paragraphs to remind us all of what exactly is happening. Rather than taking away car lanes from Sussex Avenue and giving that capacity to cyclists or even transit, the NCC and City have instead suggested adding cycling capacity and protecting current car capacity. Continually adding capacity to roads is not going to solve the region’s transportation challenges. Instead, an incremental reallocation of capacity away from cars will have the effect of forcing behavioural changes among drivers and encourage the construction and use of other transportation modes. The Sussex reconstruction is a case in point and should be considered within this broader transportation context.



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Now, we would like to return to the concern of heritage in this case. We feel that Lowertown is a treasure in the national capital. How many such historic working-class districts exist in the world and in a nation's capital city? Taken as a whole, losing another one or two buildings is not going to affect this neighbourhood's heritage. However, when one considers how much has already been lost, and the amount of buildings that continue to be lost or are in serious condition, then the question becomes: are we reaching a crisis point? Are we reaching a point where it has become meaningless to call this a heritage district? We feel that greater value needs to be placed on the restoration, protection, and enhancement of this heritage district. We would hope that the City and NCC agree.

The current proposal is inconsistent with the NCC's strategic directions. One of the organization's key strategic directions is "Communicating the Capital's Value." The NCC's annual report elaborates on this point as follows: *Canadians need to be aware of and understand the value that the Capital brings, and see it as the obvious place to experience national heritage, culture and achievements.* In our view, national heritage does not only include federal institutions, but it also includes the built heritage of Ottawa, which reflects our national story. This is a story of hard-working immigrants who came to Canada over the past few hundred years and toiled and laboured to build this great nation. We spend much of our time celebrating the rich and famous in our history, but forget that the vast majority of people who built this country were ordinary working-class people. The buildings currently threatened are a part of that story.

It has come to our attention that former governor general, Adrienne Clarkson, once lived in the rowhouse currently threatened. Her family immigrated to Canada in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and her story is a common one shared by many Canadians. What is extraordinary is that her life is an example of both the common story of immigrants, but also one of incredible achievement. The rowhouse, though humble, is a national example of working class residential architecture. We have had the opportunity to inspect one of the units and were pleasantly surprised by the craftsmanship of the interior and the potential for restoration of the porch in front of the building. We have also attached more information about Ms. Clarkson's connection with this property in the annex of this letter. We feel this is a very important story affecting this site on Sussex Drive. How many other governor generals can boast that they went from humble beginnings on Sussex Drive – a rowhouse in this case – and ended up in the highest office in the land and residing at the Governor General's mansion on Sussex Drive?

The value of people should also be considered here. One of the NCC's strategic directions is "Putting People First." There are a number of residents that have lived in these buildings for many years. What value does the NCC place on their lives, whether or not they are owners? These are long-time members of our community who have contributed to its collective strength. I have had the personal opportunity of knowing two of them and have been touched by their unique and special lives. One is a successful



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public servant and the other is a documentary film director, mother and foster mother. How does one measure the value that these people have in calling these two buildings their homes? How do we replace that? Additionally, how do we replace the hole in our community created by the removal of these buildings – both physically and people-wise? There is no plan to replace these units at this location and so fewer people can live in Lowertown.

Finally, we would like to say that this incident does not bode well for the NCC's reputation. It already has a rocky public reputation in our community and in Ottawa. It is an organization that has done both great good and great harm to Ottawa. The question is: has the NCC progressed enough to be sensitive to issues such as the one before use now? Has enough insight been gained from past failures to realize that there must be another way and that a win-win situation can arise out of this unfortunate proposal to demolish these buildings? We remain hopeful.

The purpose of this letter was to provide an official position of our community association in writing for the environmental assessment. We are aware that this is a multi-staged process and that we will have several more opportunities to comment and debate this issue publicly. We will remain vigilant.

In closing, we would like to thank the NCC and City for their outreach to our community thus far. Their representatives have been professional, respectful and have tried to listen to our concerns. We hope that this relationship will continue and that we can find an ultimate compromise to this challenging situation. In addition, perhaps we will also find some more long-term ways in which to address the broader transportation and heritage issues raised in this letter from a national capital planning perspective.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marc Aubin". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Marc Aubin,  
President,  
Lowertown Community Association

cc.  
NCC Board of Directors  
Mauril Bélanger, MP  
Madeleine Meilleur, MPP

## **Annex – Adrienne Clarkson, Lowertown’s Governor General**

“During my life in Canada, I have moved from a triplex at 277 Sussex, opposite the Canadian Mint, to One Sussex Drive, Rideau Hall.” (*Heart Matters: A Memoir*, 2006)

Adrienne Clarkson remembered her first home in Canada as having a terrifying coal furnace, a backyard Victory Garden growing Swiss chard and tomatoes, and links to French-Canadian families who spontaneously helped the newly arrived refugees. In late 1942, Adrienne Clarkson, then a three year old Adrienne Poy, and her family arrived in Lowertown as refugees fleeing the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong.

This first Canadian home of Canada’s 26<sup>th</sup> Governor-General was 277 Sussex Street, still located across from the Mint. Now owned by the National Capital Commission, this triplex unit is currently empty and one of several residences under threat of demolition for road widening.

In any other country, this woman’s extraordinary move along the road now called Confederation Boulevard - from refugee to head of state, from brick rowhouse to official residence - would have merited a commemoration. What better celebration of Canada’s Confederation and its characteristic diversity than a designation for the Adrienne Clarkson house at 277 Sussex?

What was life like for the Poy family on Sussex Street? William Poy secured work with the federal Department of Trade and Commerce. Ethel Poy learned to shop and cook in a Canadian way with the help of French-Canadian families, the Marcottes and the Proulx. Although Adrienne wanted to learn French, instruction at the St. Joan of Arc convent, just down Sussex Street, was only for Catholics.

Later, when Adrienne was old enough for kindergarten, she set off across King Edward Avenue to York Street Public School to join her older brother, Neville. To her regret, she was enrolled too late in the year to participate in the renowned Rhythm Band directed by her teacher, Miss Kathleen Eardley. On family outings to Rockcliffe Park, this little girl looked out of the streetcar at the solid gates and ornate fence of Rideau Hall and thought it one of the places that the Poy family would never be invited to visit.

Inside 277 Sussex Street, the Poy family would sit with friends to discuss the war and to recount their own traumatic encounters during the Japanese invasion and occupation of Hong Kong. Other times the family would invite people for an evening filled with singing and piano music and games of Chinese checkers and gin rummy. For birthday parties, food would be served to the children wearing paper hats from a mahogany tea trolley bought at Johnson’s used furniture store.

In 1999, as a newly appointed Governor-General, Adrienne Clarkson passed this modest 3-unit Lowertown brick rowhouse on her journey to live in the grandiose stone house situated in a magnificent landscaped garden tended by an array of staff. Let us take this opportunity to make this amazing Canadian story known more widely and put this family home at 277 Sussex ahead of cars and a wider road.