

CARLINGTON COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

presented to the membership at the Annual General Meeting,
8 May, 2007

An annual report is really an installment in a serial story, so let's start with a quick look back at where we left off last May. We had made friends with neighbouring organizations, tried a few activities, redesigned the format of meetings, re-written the by-laws and dreamed up a new web-site. Now read on....

Flash forward to our November 2006 meeting. The second Tuesday of the month (our regular meeting date) happened to be the day after the municipal election. While City Hall was recovering, we held a special brainstorming session to review our program and accomplishments, discuss ideas and projects, and (taking into consideration our volunteer people-power and limited resources) come up with a program for the next two years. Like our standard agenda, the resulting plan has three main sections: administration, activities, and issues.

Administration:

The new by-laws were approved at the last AGM and are working well. Establishing a program that is interesting but not too much for our small group to handle should make our activities run smoothly. We intend to put together a reference binder with a compendium of contact numbers and other useful information which can be up-dated and added to from year to year. This will facilitate a smooth transition from Board to Board in the future.

Very important under the administrative heading was the launching of our new web-site in October 2006. This is a major accomplishment by our web-master, Michael Sullivan, who took my general concept and built us a really splendid web-site which we are now filling with information, photos, articles..... There have been an astonishing 15,000 hits since October and 104 articles have been posted. We have 13 registered users for our discussion page. So far, Michael has also managed the facility single-handed but we need help with content management.

Although the web-site and e-mail are the easiest way to communicate with our members, we don't always reach out to those who are not on the net. We need a routine way of keeping those people equally informed.

Activities:

The sub-heading of this section is "You win some, you lose some and some are rained out".

We decided to have at least one activity or event in each season.

Winter: On a cold Saturday morning in January, several of us were at the Alexander Community Centre, setting up children's games as part of the local Winter Carnival. This is the second year we have done this and it seems to be appreciated. Watching kids play mini-putting in a snow-packed wading pool is becoming one of my favourite spectator sports.

Spring: Last May, we had our first Carlington Area Garage Sale. We weren't very well organized and perhaps it is just as well that it rained all that weekend. Learning from experience, we are now off to a better start for our second attempt. There has already been some publicity and we are preparing signs that can be re-used from year to year. This second annual Carlington Yard and Plant Sale is scheduled for Saturday, June 2 (rain date June 3) and we are planning good weather this time. So clean out your basement and line up your surplus plants. I believe the organizers will also have a table for items contributed as fund-raisers for our Association.

Summer: Our summer event is an easy one - a pot-luck picnic. On a hot Sunday afternoon in July, some of us carried dishes and lawn chairs over to Harrold Place Park for a relaxing get-together. We'll plan the same again this summer - date to be determined later. Maybe we should do it twice, once in July and once in August, to catch the people who aren't on vacation.

Fall: We left the fall event unspecified on our plan so that we could do whatever seems best at the time. Last fall, we planned to have an all-candidates meeting before the municipal election. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, we were unable to find a date that suited our busy (maybe over-worked?) Councillor MacRae as well as everyone else. This was disappointing as we are generally of the opinion that an all-candidates meeting before every election is an important part of democracy.

Perhaps next fall, a speaker or panel discussion would be a good way to attract more people to our Association. This year, we had two special speakers. In January, Jeannie Page spoke to us about the ideas for electoral reform proposed by Fair Vote Canada. In March, David Jeanes from Transport 2000 gave a most interesting presentation on options for public transport. And Riley Brockington regularly keeps us up-to-date on news from the School Board.

Special Projects: You may remember that last year we hoped to develop some sort of event or project based on the Veteran Houses that are an important part of Carlington. A renovation fair was the original idea but there are other possibilities. Reluctantly, in our planning session, we faced the fact that we cannot deal with such a major project unless and until there are sufficient members with the time, energy and enthusiasm to take it on. So that has been shelved for now.

We had also talked about compiling a history of Carlington. A retired archivist in the area is already working his way through a treasury of newspaper clippings and documents. Perhaps as and when he gets nearer the publication stage, we shall have a role as sponsor. But that, too, is far down the road. Meanwhile, on our web-site we have posted some of the local history articles that were originally published in that late lamented newspaper, the Carlington Summit. There have been some interesting old photographs on the web-site too. This is an on-going project with several members involved in different ways.

Issues:

I would like to start this section by thanking Councillor Maria MacRae and her assistants, especially Pat Murphy, who regularly report to our meetings on issues being discussed at City Hall - everything from pesticide policy to Hydro's new smart meters, from strawberry socials to crime prevention. In addition, Maria and Pat take note of issues that our members raise and respond or follow up (depending on the nature of the problem). This open communication between the community and City Hall is extremely important and very much appreciated.

We have also had the opportunity to attend City Information Sessions on such topics as Light Rail, Carling Avenue up-grades, etc.

However, there are occasionally problems that nobody seems able to deal with. This year's prime example is the case of two houses on a residential section of Carling Avenue which have clearly been converted into commercial premises without any request for re-zoning. Nobody - neither our Councillor nor the By-laws Department nor the Planning Department - has been able to give us any clear answer as to why this situation is being tolerated.

You may be aware that the City of Ottawa has an Official Plan which establishes the zoning requirements (residential, commercial, etc.) of every area. In this document, our stretch of Merivale Road (Carling to Caldwell) is designated "traditional main street" which means (among other criteria) that it ought to be a mix of residential and commercial uses in buildings of not more than three or four stories. (Think Bank Street in the Glebe or Richmond Road in Westboro). This designation was up-held by the Ontario Municipal Board in an appeal hearing last summer.

From our attendance at meetings of the Federation of Citizens' Associations (FCA) we learned that Planning Department has been working with groups in some other areas on what the City calls a Community Design Plan. This seems a good idea as it involves a comprehensive look at all aspects of an area - layout of streets and buildings, businesses, traffic patterns, etc. - and how they fit together. We have been told that Planning Department only has resources to work with areas in crisis. However, we decided that we should take a pro-active approach to issues by starting to develop our own position on community design, in the hopes of discussing this with City staff later. We propose to set up a committee to work on this. Although its terms of reference have not yet been defined, I believe the intent is to review the physical aspects of our community, determine what we would like to preserve and protect (such as the residential nature of our area and the green spaces) and what we would like to change (better types of business on Merivale Road for example) and what, if anything, might be negotiable. This is important (and I fear time-consuming) work. However, as Ottawa grows and changes, we are becoming almost "inner city", potentially under attack from developers. If we can agree on our position, we would be better able to work with City Planners to protect what is important to Carlington.

In this context, I suggested we might want to look into the possibility of a heritage designation for our enclave of Veteran Houses. We need to be careful as there would be implications for what home owners can and can't do in the way of renovations. However, the first step is to be

informed. A heritage designation could be tied in to other projects to commemorate the many veterans returning from World War II who rebuilt their lives in little houses such as ours. Here in the Nation's Capital, it would be fitting to preserve an example of such a district and desirable to have some kind of memorial to those who served in Canadian forces and survived. (The triangle at the corner of Carling and Merivale might be a good spot for such a memorial). There are stories to tell about the postwar experiences of the veterans too. Another long-term project would be some publications. In January, I had the opportunity to discuss these ideas with the new Mayor's Community Liaison Officer, Mr. David Gibbons, who thinks that something might ensue. We'll see.

Meanwhile, back in the present.... One of our most important neighbours, at least at the north end of Carlington, is the Royal Ottawa Hospital, which has lately been totally rebuilt. The ROH management has been generous in their efforts to keep on good terms with the community. Last June, four of us were able to tour the new premises while they were still under construction. This was a wonderful opportunity and I think we were all impressed with the design and features of the new complex. We have photo evidence that, from the top of the ROH tower, Carlington looks like a forest. Months later, some of us were invited to the gala opening party. More recently, at our April meeting, Mr. Graham Bird, the ROH project manager, took the time to give us a short presentation and respond to comments and questions. Of course, we have had complaints, from saying goodbye to those lovely maple trees to objecting to the glare from the lighted sign at the top of the tower. However, I think we all appreciate the efforts made by the ROH to keep us informed and to respond to our concerns.

Conclusion:

All in all, it has been a pretty good year for the Carlington Community Association. One indicator of this is that we achieved quorum (at least ten members present) at every one of our ten general meetings. We have done quite a lot, spent very little money and slowly increased our membership. We have a route to follow for the immediate future. There is so much more we could do but it all takes time and energy.

As well as following our established plan, though, we can also take on or sponsor projects started by individual members who have an idea and the time and enthusiasm to carry it out. One example is the initiative taken by Grace McClelland-Crout to start Neighbourhood Watch teams in our area. She began with the west end of Viscount Avenue and is catching the interest of residents on Anna, Stevenson and Harrold Place. Neighbourhood Watch is encouraged and supported by the Ottawa Police and I would like to thank Constable Chris Niblett for his help in this way.

Later on tonight's agenda (under "Other Business"), our Web-Master, Michael Sullivan, will request our sponsorship for a project he has developed. It's an interesting initiative which I, for one, would be inclined to support.

What's your pet project? My own interest for the coming year is to work more closely with Jan Davis, Director of the Alexander Community Centre, to see how we can collaborate to the mutual benefit of our organizations.

Volunteering, just as much as donating, is a gift to the community. Yesterday evening, I attended an event at City Hall where Civic Appreciation Awards were presented by the Mayor and Councillors. I was one of about two hundred nominees. The range of activities by volunteers - individuals and groups - was simply marvellous and I felt both humble and honoured to be included among this elite of ordinary people who have done great things for their fellow- citizens.

On behalf of the Carlington Community Association, I would like to thank every one who contributed time, work, ideas, good will or even just that ten dollar membership fee that is a token of support for what we do. In particular, I would like to thank my Board - Wendy, Jerry, Linda, Mike and Glenn - and Web-Master Michael for their support and friendship as well as for all they have done. It has been a pleasure to work with them for your benefit.

Thank you.

Jeanne Burgess
President (2005-2007)
Carlington Community Association