



OTTAWA ABORIGINAL COALITION
100-1155 Lola Street, Ottawa, ON K1K4C1

The Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition acknowledges that we are unceded Algonquin-Anishinaabe territory

February 14th, 2022

Re: The February 10th Planning Committee decision to approve the parking lot for the new hospital

Dear Mayor Jim Watson and Ottawa City Council,

The Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition (OAC) respectfully requests that you reconsider your decision to build a 4-storey parking lot at the corner of Prescott and Carling, across from Dow's Lake and where some of the 700 mature trees are intended to be cut down for the new hospital. We also request a moratorium on the decision in order to have a full and meaningful engagement with the urban Indigenous citizens in Ottawa about the removal of 700 mature trees at a time where our responsibilities around climate change has never been more clear and immediate.

The OAC is made up of 10 Indigenous Service organizations that, each year, serve up to 20,000 of the 40,000 Indigenous people in Ottawa. Our member organizations include a health clinic, two Indigenous housing providers that house 550 Indigenous community members, two children and youth focused organizations that include daycare programs, and two 24/7 residential services, one for Indigenous women who have experienced violence.

We have been working with the City of Ottawa on many initiatives including on securing land in the City of Ottawa to support:

1. Land based programming that all 10 organizations can access;
2. Space for Ceremony; and
3. Education and training space where Indigenous people can come together to learn about each other.

The OAC is requesting that this piece of land instead be used as a Reconciliation Space for Indigenous people in the City of Ottawa and remain an open public space for all citizens of Ottawa. It can be a symbol of the City's ongoing commitment to the urban Indigenous people who make Ottawa their home and to true reconciliation with Indigenous people.

We are not naïve nor against the need for the new hospital but do not believe that a hospital that is intended to restore health should be part of a process that would destroy something else that restores health. The trees and the land are an essential public space that needs to be maintained to support the health and well-being of our community and the planet.

During COVID we heard from community members, including through our COVID research, about the urgent need for urban Indigenous people to have land-based programming in the City to restore balance and health. When the burial grounds of the children were found in Kamloops in May of 2021 and one

month later the National Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was released, it became clear that it is essential that there be spaces, on the land in Ottawa, for ceremony and for a sacred fire to honour the spirits; and for ongoing land based programs to restore people's health and well-being.

We understand that part of the hospital plan means the destruction of 700 mature trees. We do not support that direction. Trees are significant to the health and wellbeing of all people and for Indigenous people, trees are referred to as the standing people, and are acknowledged as our relations. They are our teachers and healers, givers and providers. The protection of the trees would meet many City commitments around reconciliation, the tree canopy obligations, to climate change and for the overall health and well-being of all its citizens.

“Many people feel protected and at peace in the presence of trees. For Charlie Nelson, an Elder of Bigaawinashkoziibiing, the Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation, trees are more than comforting: they are essential. Trees give fruit and shade and shelter. They offer habitat for animals... Trees share medicines for illnesses, and provide teachings and spiritual guidance. “We need people to understand how important access to these things is to everyday life,” Charlie says. “We get wellness from knowing these things.” (Million Tree project)

In many Indigenous cultures, trees are important symbols of values, spiritual beliefs, traditions and hope for the future. For example:

- a cedar tree can represent cleansing
- a birch can represent truth
- an elm can represent wisdom
- a white pine can represent unity and peace among leaders, peoples and nations



It is recommended that cities have a 40% tree canopy to maintain key health and environmental benefits to its residences. In some of the areas nearest to the new hospital site the canopy is at 19% in Westboro and in Little Italy it is lower. In Ottawa we fare well because the National Capital Commission sites are included in our tree canopy (including the trees proposed for destruction). We cannot underscore enough the importance of trees to all of our well-being.

Trees “clean the air, pull particulates from the air, store water and gas, and literally cool the city. They provide us these services that we can actually measure,” said Joanna Dean, environmental history professor at Carleton University. (From Capital Current)

When looking at living conditions and their proximity to nature, there is a direct correlation between general happiness and satisfaction with natural landscapes, according to research supervised by Lenore Fahrig, a biology professor at Carleton University. (From Capital Current)

We realize that we are approaching you later in the planning despite having a strong relationship with the City. We only recently heard that the Planning committee was meeting to make this decision last week and we heard through the media. We have been rather busy responding to the Truck Occupancy and the impact it is having on the health and well-being of Indigenous community members in Ottawa. We are doing this, all while we are still responding to the COVID Pandemic, and supporting staff who are exhausted by serving our community members through the ups and downs of the Pandemic.

We also want to express our concern around the entire decision-making process around the hospital. Like the Salvation Army approval process for the 500-bed space on Montreal Road, it is still unclear why decisions that will have such a significant change to the Ottawa Indigenous community, and the broader community, are not as transparent and well understood as required. We did not realize that in the midst of the Occupancy, the City committee still needed to proceed with this decision, in fact, “while councillors were going in and out because of responding to the crisis.” (CBC, February 10th)

We ask that the City pause and reflect on your decision and how you got to this place. Some voices, including those of urban Indigenous people have not yet been heard. We urge you to reconsider the decision to build a parking lot and replace it with a Reconciliation Space that retains the trees and land as natural spaces, and is a gathering place for all people in Ottawa. We close with the words of Senator Murray Sinclair when asked what is reconciliation?, “Reconciliation is about forging and maintaining respectful relationships.” These relationships must be built between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, but also between people and the natural world.

With respect



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CC:

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