



The Ottawa Social Housing Network

P.O. Box 2787 Station D Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5W8

Presentation to Rockcliffe Affordable Housing Workshop: Sept. 14, 2006

Re: Canada Lands Company

Debbie Barton, Chair Ottawa Social Housing Network/CCOC

I am here representing the Ottawa Social Housing Network. We are a network of social housing providers and advocates that represent over 20,000 social housing units. Several of our members have well over 30 years experience in administering and managing social housing and we believe affordable housing is a cornerstone of a healthy city and good neighbourhoods.

My part of the presentation provides the context of neighbourhood planning within which we develop affordable housing. My colleague Dennis Carr from CCOC will focus on developments that we have been involved in and telling you what has worked.

I believe the really crucial questions are: What kind of neighbourhood do we want to be creating on the former site of the Rockcliffe base and who do we want to live there? I am encouraged to see that investment in human capital has been identified in the Planning Context section of the Community Design Plan Terms of Reference. I hope that this goal means more than getting the right people to do the development here. I hope it also includes a vision of who will eventually live there. In the end we all know that it's the people who make up neighbourhoods.

If we are committed to building healthy sustainable communities we need to ensure that these communities are inclusive of different household types, people of all ages and ethnicities, and of many levels of income and abilities. (Refer to data in Housing is the Issue handout) We also want communities that have a vibrant residential, employment and retail sectors. We need to commit to true neighbourhood planning based on community development and community building principles.

Communities developed under such principles are integral to a vision of sustainable urban development.

- Mixed income housing makes economic sense. Businesses can't attract employees without affordable housing for them to live in. Affordable housing keeps wages competitive and reduces employee absences. Both the Toronto Board of Trade and Toronto Dominion Bank have come out with reports stating that the economic competitiveness is being damaged by the lack of affordable housing in communities.

- Mixed income housing creates diverse communities which foster tolerance and understanding by facilitating opportunities of social integration as opposed to social isolation.
- We need to provide people with opportunities for engagement in their community; giving people reason to care about and be committed to their community. Give them a reason to stay. What makes people have true investment in their community? They need to have local job opportunities, families need to have good schools and child care facilities close by, health and recreational facilities, welcoming places for youth, neighbourhood serving stores and restaurants and other neighbourhood businesses within walking distance. (give examples)
- As an example, in the community where I live, we are blessed with a new recreation facility, the wonderful Plant Bath, which has the highest participation rates of all swimming pools in the City. It is truly a neighbourhood serving facility. It works not only because it is a very good facility, but also because the community recognizes that many of our kids can't afford the programs. We have created and sponsored programs to increase participation by low income families. This is what happens when there is a truly integrated residential community; people help each other because they are neighbours.
- In closing I want to caution the Advisory Committees that have been tasked with overseeing this development: please don't let this be yet another LeBreton Flats! My assessment is the planners placed so much emphasis on making this a world class development exercise and they forgot about the people planning and the elements of good community building. There are many lessons to be learned from that process and not enough time to review them here. What I will highlight is that with respect to the affordable housing provisions, all that is being provided a number of studio units that will rent for \$950 a month. This is incongruent with the developer's commitment to be providing a daycare facility on their site. Who is going to be living there? I predict childless couples, high income earners, very few families with children who require daycare facilities. LeBreton Flats represented a tremendous community building opportunity and has turned into a major disappointment for those of us who have been sitting at many different consultation tables over the course of 30 years.

So stay true to your investment in human capital principles. Begin with defining who will live there and what neighbourhood serving facilities will be required to meet the goals of sustainable urban development. Only after these are defined should you begin to address innovative infrastructure and building design. People should come first in the planning process.