

Dear Sir/Madam:

The following brief is submitted by the Association of Residents of Cook, Aylmer-North (ARCAN).

La Ville de Gatineau and its Commission consultative sur l'environnement et développement durable must be commended for conducting an open process for its citizens and organizations to provide input into this very important Policy. As we all are aware, recent polling results continue to show that the Environment continues to rank as the top 1 or 2 priority issue for Quebecers and all Canadians. The undersigned welcome the City's commitment to take actions that make a difference on the environment as the time has come for important and brave decisions to protect the environment and our health - delay is not an option. We need a new, courageous approach to preserving our environment so we therefore urge the City of Gatineau to develop a strong Environmental Policy that will act as the vision to direct future decisions, with clear timelines for implementation - while respecting development that is truly sustainable. Gatineau's new Environmental Policy can positively influence future decisions on transport, the economy, housing and planning, protection of nature - along with private and public investments in clean, green solutions that would make the City an environmental leader.

Presented below is a set of recommendations outlining our key expectations for the City's soon-to-be released Environment Policy. We will be happy to provide additional, more detailed elaborations for our recommendations and other aspects of the policy at your request. We are certain that with the commitment of Gatineau and its citizens, the decline in the City's environmental health can be slowed and even reversed.

Environmental Policy's ORIENTATIONS:

a. From the consultation process, the citizens favoured a systemic approach! We agree and strongly support this orientation. Yet, the 7 main themes in the draft Policy focused on individual components of the environment or key environmental issues in the traditional manner. This has not worked in the past! The City needs to focus holistically on how one action will affect the other themes. For example, protecting the urban forest and having a climate change friendly public transportation policy will greatly improve air quality and the number of smog days we have to endure. Another example would be the protection of our wetlands would improve our water quality and also increase the biodiversity associated with this milieu. The Policy needs to acknowledge this in the final version.

b. While we agree with Orientation 2 (focus on sustainable development), there is an urgent need to develop a City-wide sustainable land use plan which clearly protects what little remains of natural spaces and provide planners and developers with a map which they can have certainty. The current ambiguity is not helping any of the interested parties and is leading to unwanted conflict. We recommend that Gatineau adopt the international goal of 12% of fully protected areas within the City boundaries and protect its provincial Species at Risk. Gatineau's green space is currently in catastrophic decline, with some of

its most precious wildlife habitat at risk of disappearing forever. This is not sustainable development so we encourage the City to create a defined green belt that connects existing wildlife habitat that allows for their protection while providing connectivity to other green spaces such as the Gatineau Park. The Policy needs to acknowledge this in the final version.

c.. We fully agree with Orientation 3 of increasing public awareness of the environment in the City. For this orientation, we ask the City to commit to the publication of a State of Gatineau's Environment report every 5 years to document the declines and improvements in the City's forests, agricultural lands, protected wildlife habitat, biodiversity (native flora and fauna), water quality, air quality and use of toxic chemicals, etc... Currently we are not able to make informed decisions based on the paucity of information on the status of these important elements of the environment. The Policy should consider this in the final version.

d.. We agree with Orientation 4. While more enforcement is required to ensure compliance, Orientation 4 would also greatly benefit from an increased effort on public awareness and outreach. The Policy needs to acknowledge this in the final version.

Environmental Policy's OBJECTIVES:

a.. While we agree with the objectives for **Preserving the Water Resources**, there needs to be a proactive objective to protect the current and future groundwater sources in the City. Further, the City needs to improve the use of public funds to conserve the water environment. These can include the cessation of the construction of deep ditches to further drain the City's remaining wetlands. Agricultural and urban development practices have drained the soil in many areas of the City leaving the land too dry for native plants and wildlife to survive. However, by preventing further drainage and less expenditure of City dollars, and reinstating raised water levels, we can continue to have sustainable development in agricultural and urban development sectors along with protected wetlands. This will also safeguard the City's water from the future uncertainties of drought due to climate change.

b.. The City currently considers wetlands as wastelands, and are often drained or filled in so that they could be built upon. Yet, most municipalities now recognize the benefits of wetlands and efforts have been made to protect and restore these ecosystems. Other governments have stopped the practice of draining wetlands in rural areas.

http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/envision/water/greatlakes/coa/Wetlands_FR.pdf

They recognized the remaining wetlands as particularly useful because:

- a.. they absorb the impact of hydrologic events such as floods;
- b.. they filter sediments and toxic substances;
- c.. they supply food and essential habitat for many species of fish, shorebirds, waterfowl, and other wildlife;
- d.. they are valuable recreational areas for activities such as hunting, fishing, and bird watching.

The Policy needs to propose a Wetlands Protection and Restoration By-law, to conduct an inventory of Gatineau's remaining wetlands with the purpose of protecting and restoring them, along with enforcement resources, to ensure these outcomes are achieved.

c.. The City of Gatineau still has some excellent natural groundwater sources and the Policy needs to indicate specific actions to protect them. The first step to prevent contamination of water is to protect it. The protection of groundwater as a source of drinking water for the 16,000 plus citizens who rely on it, and future citizens in the rural areas, is still absent in the draft Policy. Drinking water sources can be easily contaminated, even by a drop of oil. Long terms problems can develop that are costly or even impossible to correct, as witnessed by the Cook Road dump situation. Effective by-laws and enforcement, along with public awareness programs, are needed to protect these clean water sources from agricultural runoff, toxic chemicals, and other sources of contamination as well as employing a broader watershed protection scheme. Groundwater protection will also greatly reduce future reliance on the City's aging infrastructure and water treatment facilities.

d.. The objectives **for Improving Air Quality** are very weak. The number of smog days are increasing annually, along with incidents of kids' asthma and allergies. The City urgently requires a new, innovative approach to revamp our existing transit system which will improve our pedestrian-cycling-bus-car networks, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The City should put forward clear, measurable short-term and long-term targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions for 2020 to protect the health of its citizens and improve the quality of life in the City.

e.. To **Preserve Soil Resources**, the City needs to put forth a land use plan that protects farm land, water resources, sensitive natural areas, wetlands, urban forests, and biodiversity "hotspots".

f.. The Policy needs to take steps to ban cosmetic pesticide use and implement the successful efforts of other municipalities.

<http://www.pest.ca/main/ns/16/doc/31/archive/municipal.archive.0304>. The Policy must respond to citizens' concerns about the use of toxic chemical pesticides in the City, starting with municipal properties, parks and schools. More than 6,000 cases of pesticide poisonings are reported in Canada each year and nearly half involve children under age six. We know that children are very susceptible to pesticides and that repeated exposures to pesticides can increase the incidence of brain cancer, leukemia, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. With this information, the Canadian Cancer Society and many municipalities are recommending steps to get rid of pesticide use with great success. In addition, the City should work with partners to raise public awareness that pesticide exposure is associated with a frightening list of health effects, such as increased risks of cancer, Alzheimer's disease, birth defects and organ damage. A major campaign to eliminate their use and to find other methods to reduce weeds and insect pests should be launched. Over 70 municipalities across Canada have already banned pesticide use and Gatineau can join these leaders!

g.. The objective for **Preserving Biodiversity** requires concrete actions. It is with certainty that one can state that the existing by-laws are not sufficient for preserving biodiversity in Gatineau as the number of species at risk increases or disappears from our landscape! Therefore, new pioneering programs for preserving biodiversity and its habitat

and new laws along with enforcement and public awareness resources, to ensure these outcomes are achieved, are necessary and must be included in the Policy.

h.. The City of Gatineau must embrace the protection of its remaining urban forest. The Policy needs to develop an urban forest strategy which recognizes that large trees in the urban landscape are a vital part of our municipal infrastructure and their protection, care and replacement is as important as our other community assets.

http://www.hat.bc.ca/projects/ufsi/ufsi_q5.htm

i.. Further, **Reducing the Environmental Footprint and Energy Consumption** objective can be strengthened to allow the City to take a leadership role. An example of corporate leadership in achieving sustainability is attached. <http://www.stratos-sts.com/page.php?page=27&subpage=48> which the City should consider.

j.. **Providing a Better Quality of Life** is a broad objective that requires some focus. There is no doubt Climate Change adaptation and increasing public appreciation and access to parks, waterways will be priorities for the City in the future. The Policy needs to strengthen these areas.

k.. Continuing to **Manage Residual Materials** will need to be changed in the draft Policy, given the City's history. The Policy needs to learn from the lessons of the Cook Road dump and to provide original and inventive approaches for waste management which involves the municipality, businesses, and individual citizens - turning the City into a leader in the province and the country, rather than a follower of outdated methods.

Environmental Policy's ACTION PLAN:

Our response to the **draft Action Plan** was one of great disappointment. This is the weakest part of the current document - while it highlighted that some "new" ideas are being considered, the majority of these proposed actions are existing or traditional approaches which have not produced the desired outcomes that they were set out to do. The City heard these views quite loudly from the citizens of Gatineau during the consultation process. The draft Action Plan will NOT meet the expectations called for by the voices heard during the consultation and listed on page 5 of the document. The call for LEADERSHIP AND COURAGE, A SYSTEMIC APPROACH, CONCERNS ABOUT URBAN DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORTATION and IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENT AWARENESS requires a bold visionary plan.

We recommend that the Action Plan be revised to accommodate our input. A final Environment Policy, along with an innovative Action Plan - which we are trying to contribute to with these recommendations - will produce tangible improvements in the health of Gatineau's environment. We look forward to working with the City to implement an original and creative Policy and Action Plan enabling all citizens of Gatineau to benefit from a cleaner environment and improved quality of life.

The City of Gatineau must make certain that the Environmental Policy is meaningful by ensuring that it is considered as a first priority in all municipal decisions. The aim is not to stop or slow down decision making nor to halt development, but to promote smart

growth for the City for the current and future generations. Thank you for seriously taking our views in the revision of this very important policy.

Yours sincerely,

Antony Southam
President
Association of Residents Cook, Aylmer-North