

**Re: Citizen Article – Developers to get city ‘ambassadors’**

Dear Editor,

We were outraged to read this morning about the City's new initiative to give the developers their own ambassadors. This speaks to the current attitude in the planning department at City Hall – that they work for the developers. Already developers are on a first name basis with City planners; they meet regularly and have informal chats about how different proposals should be crafted. Meanwhile, residents are left in the dark until the last minute, their voices are largely ignored and the City repeatedly shows its preference for development, whether good or bad, at the expense of the community. This culture needs to change.

The argument that Councillors are ambassadors for their communities depends on the Councillor and the issue, but if so they are the only ones who are acting on behalf of residents. Meanwhile, developers who have vested and limited interests in a particular community, already have the attention of the city's planning staff and they engage lawyers, planners, architects, engineers and others to promote and justify their applications; and these justifications are the salient planning documents used by the city's planning department, planning committee and Council. Even the procedure at the City's planning committee meetings is structured in favour of the proponent. The proposal is presented with all the bells and whistles, the community representatives have no more than five minutes each to speak, and finally the developer has the last word – generally refuting what the community has said and justifying the application.

In other words, the balance is already heavily weighted in favour of development when there is conflict with community. To pay, at taxpayer's expense, city employees for even more assistance with developers' applications only adds insult to injury.

Community organizations and residents are not opposed to all development, but surely it is reasonable to expect and hope for that opposition when development is significantly different than the zoning by-laws and official plans so laboriously worked out by city planners with input from countless hours of volunteer community effort.

The fact is that the planning department should be working for the residents of this City, not for the developers. We should be seen as their clients, not the developers. Community concerns and considerations should be given more weight than the financial interests of the few.

Is municipal planning in Ottawa now so short sighted and self-interested that community values are so easily dismissed?

Indeed, it is the beleaguered volunteer communities across this city who are in need of ambassadors.

Sincerely,



Chad Rollins, President,  
Action Sandy Hill



Liz Bernstein, President,  
Lowertown Community  
Association



John Dance, President,  
Ottawa East Community  
Association

Cc: Jim Watson, Mayor – City of Ottawa  
Jan Harder, Councillor – Ward 3 & Chair, Planning Committee  
Mathieu Fleury, Councillor – Ward 12  
David Chernushenko, Councillor – Ward 17