



President's Report 2007-2008

As the year draws to a close, it is appropriate to reflect on our accomplishments over the past year and our challenges for the year to come.

A year ago we were holding consultations about new lighting in Central Park. The Mayor's task force on transportation, led by former federal Minister Collette had just delivered its report. Various groups were arguing about the merits of proportional representation in the lead-up to the provincial referendum on electoral reform. We were wondering when reconstruction of Bank Street would begin and how it would affect our community.

In unexpected ways all those issues did advance. The new lighting in the park was well received and did not shine in everyone's bedroom. The transport study was superseded by another plan involving a tunnel under downtown. The provincial election came and went leaving the electoral system unchanged. Bank Street redevelopment slipped away in time.

But in all those changes, community engagement was the central theme for the GCA. Your association sought ways in which the voices of our neighbourhood could be heard, either by arranging meetings or encouraging attendance at events organized by others.

It was a pleasure to see the new faces who demonstrated interest in reconstruction of Bank Street. That committee has become less active in the past year, but the delay for work in our neighbourhood gives us additional time to work on the goal of burying the wires. Our fundraising and publicity-generating initiative on Bank Street, Underground Sound, was temporarily suspended, but addressing the issue of wires along the street is by no means dead. This is a challenge for next year – stimulating the city to proceed with its study on mainstreet design and examining critically the cost estimates for the project.

The issue which seized our attention was the prospect of redevelopment of Lansdowne Park. Part of the stadium had deteriorated to the point of becoming dangerous. Out of nowhere a rough design for development of the park appeared. Rumours of return of professional football circulated. There was call for a design competition.

Suddenly another group of volunteers emerged. We managed to hold a community "dialogue" on Lansdowne, getting the jump on the city and showing that the public wanted a say in the future of Lansdowne. Our committee came up with the idea of a survey on the internet – a device that brought into the discussion people from all across the city.

The Lansdowne issue brought to your association an enhanced voice in the print and broadcast media. Our message has been consistent – that Lansdowne is an asset of all the people of Ottawa and that we all should have a say in its future. There is reason to think that the GCA has influenced the city's actions on Lansdowne. We will need to keep delivering our message to ensure that decisions about Lansdowne are taken in an open and transparent fashion.

On the environmental front, our association has taken an active role in seeking elimination of the cosmetic use of pesticides. Our educational activities and our symbolic declaration of a pesticide-free zone is about to be emulated by the provincial government.

But your association does not restrict itself to talk; hands-on tasks are part of the GCA role as well. Clean-up teams have worked on Bank Street as part of our joint “adopt-a-street” commitment to the city. It has been particularly gratifying to see children join their parents as volunteers on clean-up days.

To be frank, our environment committee continues to face problems. The issue of graffiti is far from resolved. Volunteers try to erase the vandalism but it keeps reappearing. We need support for maintenance of flower boxes along Bank Street – without an arrangement for watering the plants, our volunteers are fighting a losing battle. Our project of conducting an inventory of trees in the neighbourhood is undergoing redefinition and it will need trained volunteers to get moving.

Traffic and related safety issues have traditionally attracted considerable attention in the Glebe. There are still aspects of the Glebe Traffic Plan which have not been implemented. Proposals for redevelopment of the Queensway have the potential of creating safety issues for students and other pedestrians. The Traffic Committee has adopted the practice of the “walk-about” in which committee members meet at a street corner and survey the flow of traffic. The dedication of these bands of problem-solvers who pace the streets in inclement weather is inspiring.

We should also acknowledge the members of the planning committee who try to bring neighbours together to resolve issues in land-use and development. They also struggle to keep abreast of the city’s voluminous documentation on planning issues and make recommendations to the GCA Board on zoning and like matters.

All of this illustrates that the over-riding theme of our activity this past year has been community engagement. Our most celebrated activity, the Great Glebe Garage Sale, involves virtually everyone in the neighbourhood in a day of fun in aiding a good cause – the Food Bank.

We are always looking for more volunteers, particularly those with good ideas and a willingness to take on responsibility. Slowly we are discovering ways to involve adolescents as volunteers. We must look for opportunities to connect with young families, not only addressing their concerns but also fitting with their busy schedules. We wish to reach out more effectively to tenants who make up about half of our community.

A heightened attention to communications is one way we are striving to reach out in the community. In addition to coverage in the Glebe Report, we now offer a brief electronic bulletin on GCA activity. Our website now attracts a growing level of interest and has developed a reputation as a good source of information.

This brief report cannot do justice to all the various activities in which your association has been involved. But note that the words that crop up frequently in this report are “people”, “neighbours” and “volunteers”. Everything we do has that common aspect.

People are what make a community great. We have a pool of talented people in our community and the Association is a means of bringing forth that talent to improve our community. The greater that band of volunteers becomes, the more improvement is possible. We can take satisfaction in our accomplishments and look confidently to the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Brocklebank