



Office of
Mayor Jim Watson



Office of
Mayor Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin

January 29, 2014

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block
Ottawa ON

Prime Minister,

We are writing to you today to express our concern about the impact of the National Capital Commission on the City of Gatineau and the City of Ottawa.

We support your government's decision to open up the meetings of the organization to public scrutiny. This decision was in keeping with the ever-increasing need for openness, transparency and accountability in government. It's also a change that both of our City Councils had supported over the years.

This step represents a good start at modernizing the NCC. We respectfully submit that there is more to do.

There is no doubt that the NCC involves itself unduly in the day-to-day affairs of each of our cities. We see this exhibited on a regular basis on both sides of the Ottawa River.

For example, there is relentless obstruction in the City of Ottawa's efforts to create a world-class transit system for the National Capital Region. The level of NCC micro-management and second guessing that is occurring in our ongoing discussions with the NCC over the City's plans to develop a sustainable LRT network across our vast city is, frankly, inconsistent with the agency's duty to assist in the long-term development of the region and to work in partnership with us.

For instance, during the first phase of negotiations between the City of Ottawa and the NCC for Stage 1 of light rail, the NCC insisted on details as minute as the type of foliage to be planted at LRT stations on federal lands.

In Gatineau, the NCC's unilateral decision to close Rue Gamelin, an important local street that provided an essential connection between communities, demonstrates a lack of consideration for Gatineau as a pivotal partner. Elected officials had to turn to the courts to contest the NCC's decision.

On another front, the NCC simply informed Gatineau of its decision to review the leases signed in its territory for various parcels of land and parking lots. Despite the fact that the initial proposal was a significant sum – over \$600,000 – and the NCC's stated objective is to establish a preferred partnership with Ottawa and Gatineau, here again the City seems to be perceived as a customer rather than a real partner. Incidents like these suggest that the very spirit of our relationship needs to be reviewed.

We know that the Government of Canada is helping, and not hindering, many other Canadian cities and provinces with their planning and major developments. We also know that you advocate respectful partnerships with municipalities.

In Montreal, the Government of Canada recently indicated that it would basically pull out all the stops to fast-track the rebuilding of the rapidly deteriorating Champlain Bridge.

In Windsor, the Government of Canada played a leadership role in brokering a deal to lend the State of Michigan \$1.5 billion dollars to facilitate the construction of a new bridge to facilitate trade between Canada and our largest trading partner.

In Toronto, you announced your government's commitment to support the next stage of mass transit planning in that community. Surprisingly, no federal agency stood in the way of that mayor's subway proposal that would impact hundreds of thousands of residents.

In these cases, and in many other Canadian cities, agencies of the Government of Canada appear to be striving to *facilitate* and *expedite* local improvements that reflect decisions made by local municipal councils.

In short, when the Government of Canada decides that it has the will, it finds the way to help.

In the cities of Gatineau and Ottawa, the operative word appears to be *intrusion*.

It is highly unlikely that this level of meddling in municipal affairs was ever intended as part of the NCC's original mandate.

To make matters worse, Prime Minister, this type of oversight occurs with no official representation for either the City of Ottawa or the City of Gatineau on the Board of Directors of the NCC. In fact, the composition of the Board ensures that a majority of its membership is not from our region. Of the fourteen non-staff members of that body, eight must come from outside our two great cities.

We believe that the time has come to correct this glaring unfairness and inequity.

We ask that you consider the National Capital Commission's first principles, as stated in the National Capital Act, with the key word being "assist": "*10. (1) The objects and purposes of the Commission are to prepare plans for and assist in the development, conservation and improvement of the National Capital Region in order that the nature and character of the seat of the Government of Canada may be in accordance with its national significance.*"

In keeping with the agency's original mandate, we respectfully ask that, at a minimum, the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau be given the ability to each name a *directly elected representative* to the NCC board of directors, to be nominated by our respective City Councils.

This would enhance the agency's accountability by ensuring that each municipality has a representative on the NCC board that would be directly accountable to each region's local population. The addition of these positions would also *begin* to redress the situation of majority control from outside our region.

It is simply not good enough to appoint individuals to the board who hail from the cities of Ottawa or Gatineau.

This concept of providing a voice to elected officials is not new to federal bodies. Port authorities, for instance, always allow for the appointment of board members by the municipality, by the province involved, and others nominated in consultation with actual users of the facility.

The Federal Government also moved to ensure that airport authorities are fully connected to the local community they serve. You are likely aware, for instance, of the composition of the Calgary International Airport Board of Directors, which involves the local chamber of commerce appointing eight members and the City of Calgary three members to a fourteen member board.

Another federal organization, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, is assisted by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Board, which has representation from each Atlantic province, while the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada has representation from every province and territory.

Prime Minister, our cities deliver the important municipal services that residents demand every day. We seek from you the opportunity to reframe our relationship with an important federal partner – the National Capital Commission.

We need the NCC to start viewing the two main cities that make up the National Capital Region as partners in the agency's success.

As a first step, we ask for your support in bringing about this simple governance change that would make the NCC more accountable, representative and effective while fostering a spirit of partnership with our cities.

As Mayors of the City of Gatineau and the City of Ottawa, we will support any effort you make to reform the NCC and to create some local democratic accountability in its governing body. Those of us elected to serve are committed to making our national capital the gemstone of the G8 – but, if the NCC is to play a relevant and constructive role in the future of the region, it must be changed.

We thank you, in advance, for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jim Watson, Mayor
City of Ottawa



Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin, Mayor
City of Gatineau

C.c. Honourable John Baird, Minister Responsible for the National Capital Commission
Wayne Wouters, Clerk of the Privy Council