

February 27, 2010

Synthesis of Discussion: Table 2

General comment

The table grouped over 15 participants and was billed as a bilingual table although all speakers chose to speak in English. A good mix of areas and interests was represented at the table and the facilitator insured that all those wishing to speak had an opportunity. Those who had additional information to contribute were encouraged to do so at the charrette.

Themes

1. Character

Paradox of the rural village designation was highlighted by the fact that there are no more active farms in Chelsea and it is no longer permitted to build a building the height of a barn or to keep chickens on one's property. Generally people thought that the two villages had different roles and characters: Old Chelsea as a more historic village with some historic properties and landmarks (church steeple) which acts as the gateway to the Gatineau Park and a tourist venue, while New Chelsea provides services to residents such as food shopping, hardware and auto repair.

A village is really an area within which we can walk to do our errands and meet our neighbours. The book "A Pattern Language", outlining how European villages strive to maintain their character, was recommended to Chelsea citizens as a source of ideas.

Old Chelsea must accommodate the large number of visitors that come to the Gatineau Park. The needs of these visitors vary by season.

Given there are two village clusters with complementary roles, it is very important to consider the linkages between the two villages and better ways to tie them together (signage, paths, traffic management). Paths should also link parts of greater Chelsea as well as the study zone and the metropolitan areas to the south.

Preservation of the heritage quality requires creative thinking for new uses for old buildings, an appropriate scale for new infill that respects the built environment, and possibly a municipal budget line item for heritage preservation. Developers could be required to put aside a percentage of their project cost to be used for heritage preservation. Commercial development should be in keeping with character of the villages (no strip malls, proper landscaping and meandering, rather than grid roads).

Piped water and sanitation for villages does not mean the loss of village character but rather better environmental quality and possible new uses for existing buildings and infill, with smaller residential units that can contribute to feeling of village.

As citizens of Chelsea, we need to change our habits and actively strive to become less car-dependent and consciously encourage measures (private and public) that will preserve the character of the village and reduce the impact of the automobile (see section 2 mobility).

2. Mobility

Strong consensus that traffic management and reduction of auto traffic through the study zone area are essential and this to be achieved without sacrificing a vibrant commercial life for the village. Traffic engineers should be engaged to work on this problem as a high priority. (A traffic study preliminary report as mentioned in the background presentation by Stéphane Doré in the introductory slides. The report is to be posted on the Municipal website during the first week of March).

Traffic has a seasonal aspect to it with increases of about 80% during the ski season. Fall colour weekends area also peak traffic times. Improvement of other park access points and possibility of buses from Gatineau to the village for tourists would also help mitigate the traffic congestion. There may be an advantage to banning through traffic in the Old Chelsea Village in peak times (say 11:00am to 4:00pm) on certain weekends so that full pedestrian and street life can be encouraged. Residents in the core area could still have access.

NCC plans for the Gatineau Park gateway should be coordinated with Chelsea Municipality and Old Chelsea residents and merchants.

Chelsea residents need more ways to move themselves into and around the villages by the systematic development of an integrated all season trail system (walking, cycling, skiing.) Some thought should be given to developing linkages for Hollow Glen residents. (The historical link was down Lauriault's Hill and the Kingsmere Rd.)

Direct bus to Gatineau/Ottawa without so many stops would be very popular.

Signage should be organized to facilitate easy pedestrian visits and also to orient newcomers to the two villages, the Gatineau Park and the other interest points.

Old Chelsea Road is a MTQ highway and this presents challenges for developing a more pedestrian and village-friendly main street. Some ideas included: wider sidewalks, a trolley along the road side, electric bus circulating throughout Chelsea and perhaps a linkage to an eventual train at the New Chelsea Station. One participant mentioned that the steam train could reach the Bayview O Train station and theoretically the O Train

could reach Wakefield. Ideas should be considered for inclusion in the rebuilding of Old Chelsea Road while the road is being dug up for the sewer installation.

Most advised against large scale parking lots and considered that optimal size was about six cars in any one place. Could Chelsea consider a mobility-handicapped accessible area as part of its appeal for tourists? Could there be a small commercial infill behind the coffee shop if the municipality considered purchasing some land there to make it feasible as a walkable area?

3. Uses

Everyone was surprised at the high level of owner-occupied dwellings in Chelsea (96%). A housing mix that will allow seniors to remain in the study zone, and allow for smaller units for young people is necessary.

All agreed on a need for a public gathering space where neighbours could meet neighbours or visitors could hang out and observe the village, without necessarily buying anything. Several locations were suggested:

- Beside the former La Cigale (a big deck over the ravine) although this is a sensitive habitat for flora and fauna
- In front of St Stephane's (plans for the old rectory to become an arts centre were mentioned)
- Paddon Lane area
- Old community centre
- New Meredith Centre
- NCC lands around old and new visitors' centres.
- An outdoor square could have fountain, benches and flowers and encourage people to stop and meet and enjoy the outdoors.

Need to have a child-friendly space in Old Chelsea.

It is important to remember that money will drive these changes and that the main sources of funds are the tax base which is heavily residential, with a relatively small number of businesses. Development and our ideals have to co-exist and we need to articulate as clearly as possible how we can keep the aspects we value, while allowing for the changes we need to manage the pressure of visitors, as well as the new residents and businesses who wish to settle in our municipality.