

WILDLIFE STRATEGY REVIEW

ADOPTING 'BEST PRACTICES'

The City of Ottawa has remained too insulated in the past. It must reach out to others, both residents and other cities to consult and adopt 'best practices'.

For example, the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has developed working relationships, over the past 35 years, with other organizations, not only in Ottawa but in cities across Canada and the United States. We have learned a lot, accepting, and altering course where we were wrong, while using the lessons learned from those who have developed successful practices to solve problems in their cities. Here is what we found from those cities that have established progressive policies to coexist with wildlife:

These cities are innovative and leaders with respect to municipal practices; they are responsive to their citizens' views and promote community engagement; they quickly move from planning to 'action' by implementing projects; they enlist multiple partners in a project; and they are proactive in sharing results with other cities and organizations.

Don't Aspire to Be Last

The Greater Ottawa Home Builders Association was able to get Ottawa's Protocol for the Protection of Wildlife during Construction downgraded to a Guideline only. It said it had conducted a survey showing that no other municipality had a Protocol as the reason why Ottawa shouldn't adopt one either.

'Best Practices' are not established by those wanting to be last. Cities like London and Edmonton are not afraid to be first in line when it comes to protecting wildlife and the environment and in developing innovative and cost-saving solutions. Edmonton has won national and international awards for incorporating wildlife passage design into its transportation and drainage planning.

Oakville, Ontario took the initiative in saving many of its Ash trees from Emerald Ash Borer by adopting a proactive treatment program. It offset costs by forming a Canopy Club and getting residents involved to share costs.

These cities didn't say 'no one else is doing this, so why should we'? They saw a need and a cost-effective way to address the need and did the right thing.

Importance of Staff

In each case, although directed and strongly supported by Council, it was staff that supplied the skill and leadership in implementing the project. Some examples:

London, Ontario: Public meeting that included a flow device expert were quickly followed by a Protocol to Coexist with Beavers and the installation of flow devices in stormwater ponds. The staff person selected to lead the project has a degree in Environmental (Civil) Engineering and a Masters in Public Administration with a focus on local government. Coupled with his time as Manager of Development Finance at the City added to the appreciation for the cost benefit of prevention and innovation.

London and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority are responding to a growing number of requests from municipalities in Ontario, sharing the benefits of this project.

Edmonton, Alberta: A public opinion survey that showed the majority of Edmonton residents wanted natural areas and wildlife protected led the City, in 2007, to bring together planners, ecologists, transportation and

drainage engineers, developers and environmental professionals to develop 'Wildlife Passage Engineering Design Guidelines'. This unique initiative, after 9 years of implementation, had 27 wildlife passage structures and a reduction of wildlife collisions by 51% as well as reducing conflicts in adjacent communities. Community engagement continues to be a key component along with the support of the development industry in Edmonton.

The project was led by the Director of Parks + Biodiversity who has a background in Civil Engineering combined with a degree in Environmental Studies and a Masters degree in Urban Planning. He was able to get staff excited and committed to the goal of moving from environmental assessment to ecological design, integrating wildlife passage requirements into planning.

Gibson's, British Columbia: Pioneered a Municipal Natural Capital Assets Initiative (MNAI) that counts natural assets like wetlands and forests and assigns a dollar value equal to the cost of services of engineered assets. It recognized that municipal infrastructure was aging while replacement costs were rising and, with the challenge presented by climate change, cities are having to look beyond engineered solutions.

The project was led by Emanuel Machado, Gibson's CAO who has several decades of experience in sustainability planning. He partnered with others to share and scale up Gibson's experience and there are now many regions across Canada in New Brunswick, Ontario and British Columbia that have adopted the MNAI strategy.

Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), Carling Campus, Ottawa, Canada:

PSPC was receptive and supportive when the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, which is located on the Campus, formed a Natural Environment Stewardship Committee to bring together PSPC, the NCC, the RVCA and community associations to assist in restoring the large Campus Wetland Complex, while ensuring that wildlife-sensitive planning was the focus of the project.

The federal government, with a much larger and more stratified bureaucracy, was able to work with community members and the Wildlife Centre in successfully completing this multi-year, complex project. The public, therefore, has a rightful expectation that so should the City of Ottawa be able to work with the community on behalf of important environmental initiatives.

Recommendations:

- 1) Ottawa needs to reach out to other cities to engage in and share 'best practices'. Whenever our Centre has recommended the work being done on behalf of progressive wildlife and environmental initiatives in other cities, we have been rebuffed by city staff saying, "*Ottawa is different*" or "*the other city's initiative is not what it seems*".
- 2) We are not suggesting that Ottawa should be first in line as those cities in this Paper. However, Ottawa needs to consult with other cities and adopt the proven, successful, and cost-saving solutions to what are pretty much universal municipal challenges in Canada.
- 3) Community and environmental groups in Ottawa, at a recent meeting on the Wildlife Strategy, expressed the number one priority is for the City to collaborate with and engage residents in a committed and consistent manner, rather than solely in a reactive fashion after a controversy.