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# A CANADIAN CAPITAL: 150 YEARS LATER, WHERE ARE WE?

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## A CANADIAN CAPITAL : 150 YEARS LATER, WHERE ARE WE?

After more than a century of planning and beautification, and with the marquee project of Confederation Boulevard nearly complete, what lies in store for Canada's National Capital Region? The National Capital Commission's mission remains to develop the region as the symbolic home of all Canadians, while also working to make the area as liveable as possible for its residents. Its future efforts are therefore focused on green transportation, safe and accessible public spaces, greater emphasis on biodiversity in ornamental plantings, and a larger number of monuments and memorials commemorating Canadian heroes and notables. All of these efforts are to be incorporated into a new long-term vision for the Capital Region, Horizon 2067: Charting the Future of Canada's Capital in the 21st Century, with additional guidance from the new Greenbelt Master Plan and Urban Lands Master Plan.

**WHEN QUEEN VICTORIA** named Ottawa Canada's capital in 1857, it was a frontier lumber town with no sewers or streets. Where do we stand, 150 years on? While the visions of planners such as Todd, Holt, Greber and others continue to inspire us, things are very different in the 21st century. We now need to rethink our way of envisioning the future, accounting for new realities without losing sight of key objectives such as abundant greenery, a high quality of life, and the capital's function as a symbol of Canada for all Canadians. In 1988, the National Capital Commission adopted its first official plan for the region – the Federal Land Use Plan – and updated its mandate to include public programming. The Plan for Canada's Capital followed in 1999.

At present, the capital's physical expression is reasonably well defined. What planning work remains to be done? Is it time to call it a day? Far from it! In this article we will review the main areas of activity in urban planning for the coming years.

## THE BOULEVARD AND ITS KEY NODES

A significant portion of our work continues to be related to the main visitor destination: the centre of the capital and the arteries leading to it. For more than 25 years, Confederation Boulevard has been the flagship planning project for the Capital's Core. Both grand and accessible, it connects Quebec and Ontario along with a whole range of sites and landmarks of national significance located within a large radius. There is only one incomplete segment, a section of Sussex Drive, scheduled for completion in 2012. With the main portions of the boulevard now complete, we can now redirect our efforts to enhancing its seven major intersections and nodes, of which two remain to be developed in the coming years: the Wellington–Portage and Colonel By–Rideau intersections.

## REFLECTING WHO WE ARE

The NCC has devoted much attention to the importance of symbols in the capital, particularly new monuments and memorials within the Core. Tangible and intangible

## ... the green image of the capital will be greatly enriched...

unifying symbols have taken on greater importance, as expressed through memorials, sculptures and other public art, interpretive media, events and celebrations. They are powerful representations of our values, our ties to the past, and our ambitions for the future.

To better reflect Canada's identity and diversity, the NCC is seeking to increase the number of monuments and memorials. The Canadian Navy Monument and the Canadian Firefighters Memorial are two major projects now underway.

### TOWARD A MORE HUMANIST APPROACH

In recent years, the rise in global awareness of security threats has led to more intense concern for the measures taken to ensure the safety of people and buildings. Nevertheless, security measures must improve the quality of the urban environment, not diminish it.

Despite heightened attention to security, our projects are tending toward a more humanist approach. It has become essential

to think first and foremost of people and diversity in our society, and create stimulating, liveable, and safe spaces and environments. This concern is reflected, for example, in the very strict universal-access policy designed to eliminate, wherever possible, all physical barriers limiting accessibility to urban spaces.

The concept of the cultural landscape is also important, particularly in terms of the protection of scenic views. As part of its mission, the NCC is implementing measures to preserve the visual integrity of the capital's buildings, monuments, and landscapes. Current measures designed to protect views are based on a 3-D computer model. This methodology takes into account the height of buildings and the protection of Parliament Hill's front and rear sightlines from various vantage points on both sides of the Ottawa River.

### A NEW FLORAL VISION

The NCC is currently developing a new "floral vision" that will no longer be focused on the traditional large beds of tulips and

annuals, but will encompass a broader, more varied menu of plants, including indigenous ornamental species, particularly grasses. Visually, the plantings will be more extensive, innovative, durable and environmentally responsible. We expect the capital's "green" image to be greatly enhanced and much appreciated by the public, thanks in part to additional projects that will help us achieve our environmental objectives.

### VELO CITY

National Capital Region residents and visitors currently enjoy a very good transportation system. Nevertheless, the NCC, with the support of its municipal partners, is proposing a transition from an automobile-oriented transportation system to a more balanced system with lower GHG emissions, favouring public transportation and innovative car substitutes, particular greater use of bicycles. In 2006, the NCC and its municipal partners completed the Capital Pathways Strategic Plan. While the region certainly boasts an excellent network of bicycle paths, expanded considerably in recent decades, cycling connections and

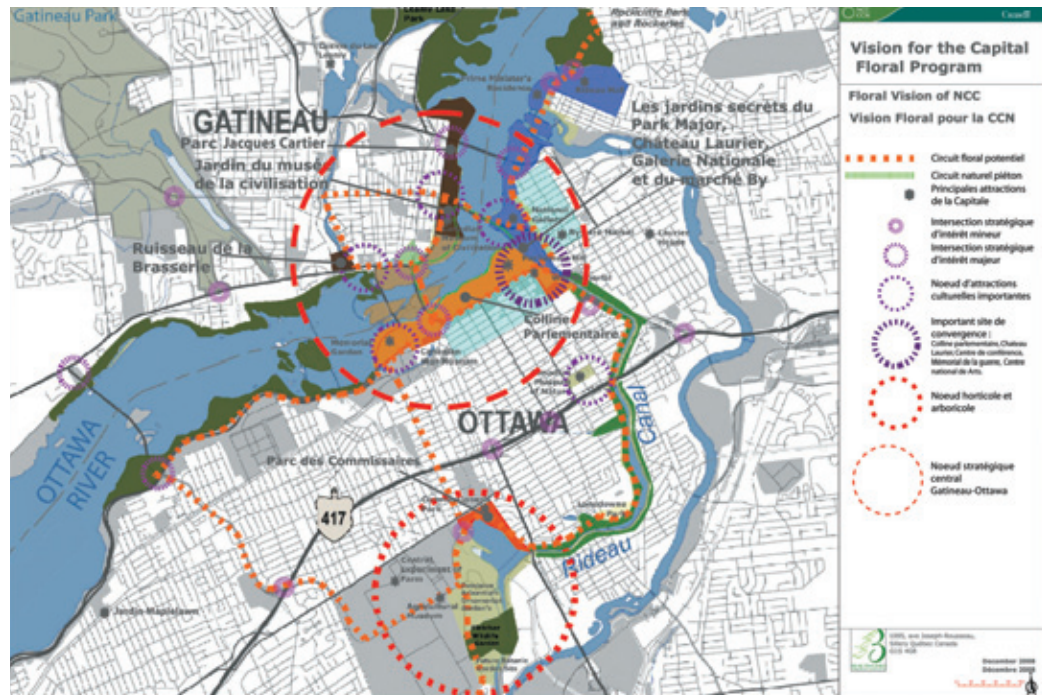


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infrastructure remain inadequate in the urban core.

In June 2010, representatives of the NCC and the two cities participated in the Velo City conference in Copenhagen and visited several “bikeable” cities in northern Europe. Since then, the NCC, in collaboration with municipal authorities, has pursued measures aimed at improving downtown cycling infrastructure, particularly through the addition of bike lanes to major downtown arteries and planning for a future self-serve bicycle rental service.

#### SEEING FURTHER

As the last millennium drew to a close, the NCC submitted a number of landscaping ideas for the capital's core. This Vision for the Core Area of Canada's Capital Region led to several projects being completed on

either side of the Ottawa River, including the Des Allumettières – Maisonneuve corridor, Le Breton Flats and the War Museum, while others will likely have to wait until more favourable conditions exist.

The NCC is currently working on a new future vision for the greater National Capital Region. Horizon 2067: Charting the Future of Canada's Capital in the 21st Century will allow the NCC to develop a vision and key elements for long-term planning, with input from every Canadian. In addition, the NCC is currently updating the Greenbelt Master Plan in order to incorporate the most innovative planning principles. It is also preparing the Urban Lands Master Plan, the final piece of the planning puzzle, completing the full set of planning tools needed in the face of the many challenges facing a 21st century capital.

**1** ALLUMETTIÈRES BOULEVARD **2**. CANADIAN NAVY MONUMENT **3** CONFEDERATION BOULEVARD **4** CONFEDERATION PARK **5** CANADIAN NAVY MONUMENT **6** PRESERVING THE VIEWS: RIDEAU CANAL **7** CONCEPT DIAGRAM: FLORAL VISION **8** MAJOR PARK: SPRING BLOOMS  
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