Sunday, January 31, 2016

Founding Meeting of the Elmvale Acres Community Association (EACA)

Meeting opened at 2:00 pm with a call to order – 20 community members were in attendance.

Host A.J. Blauer welcomed the assembly and made opening remarks about the necessity to form an association of residents of Elmvale Acres in view of the proposal from RioCan corporation to redevelop land currently known as Elmvale Acres Shopping Centre.

The first order of business was to formulate a founding constitution - which was debated and with some minor amendments unanimously adopted by the assembly.

There was discussion concerning the defining physical boundaries of Elmvale Acres insofar as the area the EACA would represent. The inclusion of neighbouring community association members having common interests at EACA meetings was also debated. Their inclusion in meetings was deemed to be desirable but residents outside of Elmvale Acres proper would only be recognized to have observer status with no vote on EACA business.

Elections were held for the EACA board of directors:

* Kevin Kit was duly elected as President of the EACA
* Catherine Power was duly elected as Secretary Treasurer of the EACA
* The position of EACA Vice President was not filled and remains vacant. This item was tabled as unfinished business to be dealt with at the next meeting of the EACA.

As a point of information, A.J.  Blauer clarified in general terms the roles and responsibilities of elected officials of the EACA, the length of their term of office (1yr) and the procedure by which business will normally be conducted (via scheduled monthly meetings or ad hoc meetings should the need arise). The assembly approved an Annual General Meeting forum at the end of each month of January, the next being in January 2017.

Assembled members agreed that all members of the EACA must declare any and all conflicts of interests when dealing with EACA business or addressing the EACA membership.

President-elect Kevin Kit spoke about the need to form the EACA in order to give Elmvale Acres residents a unified voice to formulate a strategy to deal with the impact RioCan's development will have on the community. Organizing residents is the key to stopping the adverse effects of these proposed changes which are currently before planning committee.

Kevin Kit also spoke about the creation of an online community survey regarding the RioCan development. The purpose of the survey would be to gain feedback from residents and to present the results to council, planning committee, media etc. in order to focus the EACA's arguments in the most effective manner possible. There was further discussion about producing a hard copy handout which could be given to residents who do not have access to the internet and/or the formation of door-to-door canvassers (streeters) to knock on doors to speak to residents and encourage them to participate in the survey. There was general discussion about the ideal number of questions and content of these questions. It was generally agreed it would desirable to keep the survey concise and focused for best results. A request was made by A.J. Blauer to present a draft version of the survey questions at the next EACA meeting on February 7th.

Catherine Power suggested it would be beneficial for the EACA to contact other community association which have had experience dealing with major developments such as the Glebe and Old Ottawa South Community Associations. Dan Tippins said the EACA should partner to share knowledge and information with the four (?) other communities in Ottawa which currently have developments proposed by RioCan which coincide with Elmvale Acres (Silver City, Westgate, Lincoln Fields & ?)

Kevin Kit provided some facts regarding the number of residences within Elmvale Acres and stated it was comprised of approximately 5,000 homes.

There was discussion about the city's request for feedback. Concern was raised about the timeline and how it appears to be an unreasonably short timeline to deal with the zoning change even though residents have only just begun to understand the scope of these changes. Concern was also raised about the EACA not having sufficient time, resources, organization or expertise to formulate an effective response due to the strict timeline being imposed by the city. One assembled member characterized it as "an ambush".

It was agreed that Kevin Kit would attempt to meet with the city's planning representative Melissa Jort-Conway in order to present the EACA's concerns and to request an extension to the March 8 vote. It remains unclear if the vote on March 8th is a final vote for approval or disapproval of RioCan's application for a zoning change and it was agreed that Kevin Kit would seek clarification on this matter.

Kevin Kit informed members about the timeline and what steps have been taken so far in accordance with the planning process. He indicated that the RioCan proposal is already at stage seven and there remains only two other stages for the application to go through.

Further points were made by Catherine Power regarding Councillor Cloutier's innadequate notice of the November 25th open house. Catherine Power also provided facts regarding the current vacancy rate in Ottawa being at 6.9 per cent which conflicts with the premise being given by Councillor Cloutier and RioCan that the region is in urgent and dire need of even more rental units.

Dan Tippins provided facts that there are currently a total of seven apartment high rise towers surrounding the immediate area bordering Elmvale Acres shopping centre. There are a total of more than 2,000 rental units in those buildings. In addition, Ottawa Community housing has a projects on Russell Road North and Russell Road South. This is simply to illustrate that Elmvale Acres is not and has never been opposed to having rental units in the neighbourhood. In fact, they have already been here for many years and in large numbers. But the addition of 800 more units places the overall balance of the existing neighbourhood in serious jeopardy as a result of RioCan's proposal.

The meeting adjorned at 3:50pm with an agreement to meet again on Sunday, February 7th. The precise time and location will depend on availability of venue.