

January 23, 2026

Mr. Tobi Nussbaum
Chief Executive Officer
National Capital Commission

Re: NCC's Greenspaces - Development Reserve Zones

Dear Mr. Nussbaum,

We are writing to request the National Capital Commission to reconsider its position on the “Development Reserve” zoning of the NCC’s urban greenspace corridors.

The two properties in question are the greenspaces between the Rideau River and the Airport Parkway (known as the “*McCarthy Woods corridor*”) and those between Woodroffe Avenue and Merivale Road (known by the NCC as the “*Southern Corridor*”).

These properties were purchased by the NCC in the 1950s for a ring road around Ottawa. Over time, they have become informal linear parks. McCarthy Woods, in particular, is a unique urban forest and will retain its Environmental Protection zoning. Nevertheless, the latest draft of the new Zoning By-law proposes “Development Reserve” zoning for most of the surrounding greenspaces – including riverfront lands, meadows, woodlands, and wetlands.

The community groups and stakeholders which have co-signed this letter believe that the proposed “Development Reserve” zoning for these lands is not in the best interests of the NCC or the City of Ottawa.

- 1. These lands have significant ecological, recreational, and cultural value for thousands of residents of the Nation’s Capital.** If Mooney’s Bay is the most important greenspace in south Ottawa, the McCarthy Woods corridor is a close second. It is an important amenity for local residents and provides an outstanding example of urban biodiversity (see *attached backgrounder*).
- 2. The proposed “Development Reserve” zoning is the result of lobbying by the NCC rather than public engagement and consultation.** The NCC has declined to meet with the local City Councillor and community associations. It has, in effect, used the new Zoning By-law to short-circuit the normal planning process. Changes of this magnitude require more public scrutiny than is possible in a comprehensive zoning by-law review.

3. **We fail to see a reason for the NCC to over-ride the City's zoning decisions.** The NCC has stated that, if City Council were to withhold Development Reserve zoning, "*it would be in non-conformity with its own Official Plan and have the unfortunate consequence of forcing the NCC to consider proceeding with housing development options outside of the municipal approval process*". We find this response to be an over-reaction to legitimate concerns expressed by City Councillors and community groups.
4. **In fact, the proposed “Development Reserve” zoning is not the only – let alone the best – zoning option for these lands.** The new Greenspace, Open Space Facility, Recreational, and Neighbourhood Mixed Use zones for the McCarthy Woods corridor are also fully consistent with a Neighbourhood designation in the Official Plan.
5. **The proposed zoning is also not consistent with the NCC’s own strategic plan and urban land designations.** Since 2015, the NCC has considered the Southern Corridor to be vacant land (“Non-Designated NCC Property”) and has placed this land in the Canada Public Land Bank for residential development. The McCarthy Woods corridor, by contrast, consists of land that the NCC continues to designate as Valued Natural Habitat, Capital Urban Greenspace, and Regional Interest Land Mass. According to the “*Plan for the Capital, 2017-2067*” (the NCC’s equivalent to an Official Plan), these RILM lands perform an “essential regional function” and are worthy of the NCC’s stewardship “in perpetuity” or until the land can be transferred to a conservation trust.
6. **As a result, the NCC should respect the City of Ottawa’s standard planning process.** In the case of the Southern Corridor, it should await the results of the current consultations on the Baseline-Merivale Secondary Plan and then initiate zoning amendments to implement the intent of the plan. In the case of the McCarthy Woods corridor, should the NCC wish to develop portions of this land in the future, it should (a) amend its Capital Urban Lands Plan designations and (b) submit zoning amendments for specific parcels at that time.
7. **Councillor Riley Brockington’s motion is a reasonable compromise.** It was carried by a vote of 11-4 at the committee stage. This motion will not harm the NCC’s interests or “downzone” its properties. With respect to the McCarthy Woods corridor, it will preserve the current zoning for lands near the river and existing housing, while converting the NCC’s current Light Industrial zones to Neighbourhood Mixed Use subzones. Moreover, If Councillor Brockington’s motion is carried at City Council on January 28, the NCC will retain the ability to seek zoning amendments for these lands in the future.

8. **We remain open to constructive engagement with the NCC.** We recognize that the NCC's clear priority is the development of the Southern Corridor as part of the Build Canada Homes initiative. We do not seek to delay or obstruct this development – we are only asking the NCC to respect the public consultations on the Baseline-Merivale Secondary Plan.

With respect to the McCarthy Woods corridor, however, the NCC has acknowledged that there are no current plans for development. As a result, we would invite the NCC to provide a response to Councillor Brockington's compromise motion and to identify any areas of agreement. In addition, we would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you and your team as soon as possible to discuss the way forward.

Please see the attached backgrounder for further information. In light of the urgency of this matter, we would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you and your team as soon as possible to discuss the way forward.

Sincerely,

Paul Johanis, Chair
Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital

William van Geest, Executive Director
Ecology Ottawa

Angela Keller-Herzog, Executive Director
Community Action for Environmental Sustainability (CAFES)

Christine Johnson, President
Hunt Club Community Association

Dave Coyle, President
Riverside Park Community Association

Greg Elliott, President
Crestview-Meadowlands Community Association

Mireille Trent
Ottawa South Eco-Action Network

Jane Moore, Chair
Poets' Pathway

