



Canadian impressionists at the Gallery, 8



"Making a mockery of City Hall", 3

THE CENTRETOWN BUZZ



Two weeks after the convoy occupation finally ended, about 300 residents attended a Community Solidarity Ottawa Accountability Rally and March on March 5. Speakers called for a investigation into the "abject failure of governments to protect the community from far-right occupiers," tying it to failures in handling the pandemic. Starting at City Hall, marchers continued down Elgin and up Bank. *THE BUZZ*



Owner Jason Komendat had to keep his store on Sparks St. closed during the convoy occupation. *ALAYNE MCGREGOR/THE BUZZ*

Who will pay for the occupation?

Alayne McGregor

Small businesses forced to close by the trucker convoy were finally able to apply for government relief funding this week, more than three weeks after the trucks were towed out of downtown.

But questions still remain as to whether this funding will cover enough lost revenue, and what will be done for those workers who were laid off because of the closures.

The federal and Ontario governments announced grants of up to \$10,000 (federal) and \$5,000 (Ontario) to eligible downtown Ottawa businesses to cover non-deferrable operating costs not covered by other government programs. Invest Ottawa, which is administering the grants, opened applications March 15.

The federal government has allocated \$10 million to this program, but a preliminary estimate of losses for local businesses is much higher – \$44.5 million to \$61.3 million. The analysis, by chartered accountant Larry Andrade of Deloitte Canada, was

continued on page 4 Occupation

Free Transpo fares good, but not enough

Alayne McGregor

Free is good, but reliability is necessary, too. That was the message from more than 700 transit riders when surveyed about the free-fare month offered by OC Transpo last December.

The fare holiday was offered in recompense for the breakdowns, delays, and overcrowding on Ottawa's LRT since it opened in 2019. A further fare holiday is now being offered until March 26 on LRT Line 1 and downtown-bound bus routes in recognition of the bus detours caused by the occupation.

Ottawa Transit Riders (OTR) ran the non-random survey in the first half of January, advertising it to the advocacy group's members and on Twitter. 695 regular transit and 16 Para Transpo riders, plus 24 OC Transpo drivers, responded.

Free fares inspired 43 percent of the respondents to ride transit more. Some took more short trips and worried less about transfers expiring. Boarding was also faster since people didn't have to pay and "many reported feeling less stressed about making sure that they had their wallets or Presto card ready."

One response said, "Riding transit was a happy experience every time – it was a more positive experience. I didn't stress about cramming as much as possible into a trip, and hurt my health doing so. I didn't have to decide whether I could afford it or not."

But, at the same time, others avoided buses because they were worried about overcrowding. Several stayed off transit because of worries about the Omicron COVID-19 wave, described free transit as "extra risky," and noted that "there might have been a surge in interest if the month of free transit had not coincided with a surge in COVID."

Not knowing if a bus would appear was a

major issue. Forty percent highlighted communication about delayed or cancelled buses as affecting service quality. About 30 percent were dissatisfied with frequency and reliability. A few noted that buses were late or failed to show up so often that they were forced to use a taxi or Uber as a backup, the report said.

Unsurprisingly, respondents' three top priorities for transit were reliability (62 percent), affordability (56), and frequency (52).

Para Transpo riders benefitted less from the fare holiday, with just over 10 percent making more or longer trips. They picked reliability and affordability as their highest priorities, but were also concerned about adherence to COVID-19 protocols and ease of booking.

OTR board member Kari Glynnes Elliott said it was difficult to make firm conclusions about free transit from this trial because of its timing.

"I thought it was the worst month possible because, even in a regular year, December has the funkier transit patterns. We have some people riding transit who don't usually ride transit to do Christmas shopping. We have people who are not riding transit – students, for example, are only in school for a week or two and so they don't get a bus pass that month. December isn't representative of any other month. The other 11 months are quite different."

Glynnes Elliott said she thought this month's fare holiday was not well-advertised or thoroughly considered. Because it didn't cover a full month and didn't include routes one might transfer to outside downtown, it was less likely to be useful for regular users.

OTR will officially present the survey to the city Transit Commission on March 30.

Read more at centretownbuzz.com.

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The Lighter Side of the Pandemic, by Karen Munro-Caple



Comment: Policing won't address distrust of governments or gaps in social services

Nick Grover

Most of us assume there is a social contract between cities and police. We pay them a lot of money and they keep us safe. For three weeks, residents of downtown Ottawa got to see firsthand the folly of that assumption.

As a right-wing convoy occupied the city centre—noise at all hours, residents harassed, service workers put at risk by anti-vaxxers refusing to wear masks—it was clear the police did not have our backs. It was up to residents to take care of each other, which they did with neighbourhood walks, mutual aid, legal initiatives, counterprotests and blockading trucks to keep them from entering the downtown.

The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) excuse for inaction has been some variation of “we need more money.” But the police budget is already a whopping \$344 million. That’s about 10 percent of our total municipal budget and one of the only departments that can count on reliable year-to-year funding increases (it got a \$12 million top-up this year).

If that much money isn’t enough to ensure basic safety measures, then maybe policing is not the right approach. What might we do instead?

On the logistical side, we can redesign streets to deny vehicles such easy access to the city centre. Converting Wellington Street into a tramway and remaking surrounding streets into car-free areas with wider sidewalks, segregated bike lanes, dedicated bus lanes, or where appropriate full pedestrian zones, would achieve this while making our neighbourhoods quieter, less polluted,

more accessible and nicer to live in. Many cities in Europe already do this with great effect.

We also need to get serious about tackling the root causes of the far right’s rise and ability to garner so much support. Pandemic measures may not have galvanized so many to join dangerous far-right campaigns, if the hardships of the pandemic had been addressed by upper levels of government.

Despite the ridiculous reasons cited, mistrust in government comes from believing it doesn’t have our interests at heart. Paid sick days, free mental health care and pharmacare, affordable housing, living wages, stable jobs and accessible services have been missing too long and were sorely needed during COVID-19. We can begin to champion these priorities in our own city—to foster safety and belonging rather than isolation and resentment—by reallocating money and responsibilities away from the police to public services.

The fact is, even at its best, police work largely involves managing social issues politicians don’t want to deal with: homelessness, addiction, mental illness and poverty. Through a cycle of confrontation, arrest and incarceration, cops move people in need out of view while deeper policy failures go unchanged.

This tends to make us less safe as many recent OPS scandals illustrate. These include the death of Anthony Aust during one of OPS’s many “no knock raids” into people’s homes; drawing weapons on a group of unarmed black youth; failing to read those in custody their rights; and arresting 12 black and Indigenous activists for blocking a single intersection while protesting the police budget.

Edmonton City Council seems to be coming to grips with this. That’s why they voted to decrease their 2022 police budget by \$11 million with the intent to direct money toward community services and homelessness programs. A smaller decrease was made last year as well. As one councillor put it, “We’re paying way too much for the wrong services, at the wrong time, at the wrong place” and “we cannot just keep writing a blank cheque.”

Cities cannot run deficits and must either raise taxes or reallocate existing funds. We wouldn’t need as many cops in the first place if we addressed the gaps in our social safety net to create a truly safe, healthy and livable city.

Affordable housing and supportive housing first programs like Options Bytown would provide stability to those actively, or at risk of becoming, homeless. Free counseling, treatment services and a mental health response team separate from the OPS (as Toronto is doing) would mean greatly reduced interactions between police and people experiencing mental health issues. Improving and expanding public transit would reduce car traffic and accidents and the need for police to manage either.

True freedom means a society with the social and community scaffolding to meet people’s needs: to keep them safe, nurtured and enable them to thrive.

It is vital Ottawa doesn’t take the shortsighted approach by shovelling more into police funding in the name of peace and security; it will undermine our ability to truly achieve it.

Nick Grover lives in Sandy Hill, has a Master’s degree in history, and works for a national NGO.

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Heritage at risk: sending buildings to the intensive care ward

Robert Smythe

What is the fate of the city's many heritage-designated buildings, which are being left to rot by non-compliant, uncooperative or absentee owners? It's known as demolition by neglect.

For some time, the City of Ottawa has been maintaining an official Heritage Watch List of these historic properties at risk.

Citywide, there are over 30 listed addresses, most of which are in Sandy Hill and Lowertown.

Five buildings are in Somerset Ward:

- the notorious **Somerset House** on Bank Street,
- the former **OBE administration building** on Gilmour Street,
- **Église Unie St-Marc** on Elgin Street,
- a **vacant house** on James Street, and

- the seemingly abandoned **Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic** on Cartier Street.

On March 8, Ottawa's Built Heritage Sub-Committee tabled an information update, generated by the city's Right of Way, Heritage and Urban Design Department, on the status of its Heritage Watch List and the fairly limited actions that can be taken against hostile or uncommu-

nicative owners of unoccupied heritage buildings.

The report states that the ultimate goal of the Heritage Watch List is to "ensure the conservation of important heritage resources and their adaptive reuse" if only to stabilize "interim conditions until development becomes feasible."

While the city is about to impose a one percent special vacant residential building tax, four of our endangered buildings are institutional or commercial, to which this tax does not apply.

In 2016, the city's Property Standards By-law was amended to include a section on designated buildings. The section tries to protect buildings' unique "heritage attributes" by recommending such actions as boarding up windows and doors to prevent water damage and draining the plumbing and heating pipes in winter.

Enforcement cumbersome

Enforcement against any violation is slow and cumbersome, and amounts to issuing stiffly worded notices, which can be appealed by the owner.

After a lengthy process, fines could be levied but this is rarely done. Justices of the Peace have tended to sympathize with the private citizen, especially on a first violation.

City to repair Somerset House itself?

Alayne McGregor

The City of Ottawa is considering just fixing Somerset House itself.

At the city's Built Heritage Subcommittee on March 8, Heritage Planning Branch Program Manager Lesley Collins said the city is looking at options to have existing orders to repair the building enforced. That includes "the possibility of the city undertaking the work and charging the owner through the tax roll."

The landmark heritage building at the corner of Bank and Somerset Streets suffered a partial cave-in in 2007, and has been sitting vacant and boarded up since as the owner and the city continue to debate its fate.

Somerset Ward Councillor Catherine McKenney told the meeting that Somerset House is "the most egregious example of heritage neglect in this city." They said the owner was "pulling us around by our noses, and making a mockery of City Hall in terms of the applications and the plans for this property."

Collins said the building has had an outstanding property standards order (to

conserve its heritage aspects) since 2018. The owner has been charged with non-compliance with the order, and that matter is still before the courts. The next court hearing was scheduled for March 17, after *The BUZZ* went to print.

"In the meantime the building continues to deteriorate," Collins said.

Late last year, the owner submitted engineering reports to the city's Building Code Services advising that the building was unsafe and needed to be demolished. "The city had a peer review of these reports undertaken by an engineer who specializes in heritage buildings. The peer review found that while there are several urgent items that needed to be addressed, the building did not require immediate demolition," she said.

She said that, as a result of the review, further orders were issued under the Building Code Act requiring both immediate and short-term structural stabilization measures to ensure public safety.

At this point, city staff are a) continuing to pursue legal action, b) trying to get the owner to undertake the repair orders, and c) discussing potential development



The former Ottawa Board of Education headquarters on Gilmour Street, now owned by Ashcroft Homes, has been vacant for over 20 years. Serious wall and foundation settlement is now occurring. It has recently been boarded up in an effort to prevent further water penetration.

ROBERT SMYTHE/THE BUZZ

Under the Building Code Act, in the case of an individual found guilty, on conviction a penalty of not more than \$25,000 for a first offence and not more than \$50,000 for any subsequent offence may be imposed. For corporations, these amounts can be increased to \$50,000 and \$100,000. The issuance of these fines in relation to heritage buildings is highly unusual. In the case of Som-

erset House, the case is still before the courts (see story below.)

One important step was taken when the City Of Ottawa instituted a regular interdepartmental team to monitor properties on the watch list with twice-yearly inspections and to note any precipitous changes in structural condition.

New powers from Heritage Act

As well, the new Ontario Heritage Act may give Ottawa some additional enforcement powers. A more de-

tailed report on exactly what proactive measures can be taken before these buildings collapse (think of the Magee House disaster in Hintonburg) is expected this spring.

However, the province's proposed legislation of short-cuts to issue building permits may also weaken its heritage provisions.

So far the city has preferred the positive approach through education by talking to owners and encouraging them to do the right thing, with three limited successes in Rockcliffe Park and a few

rural barn and farmhouse cases.

Whether the city is prepared to escalate through drastic legal actions such as undertaking the necessary work of building stabilization itself and billing the costs back to the heritage property owner, or in extremely urgent cases proceeding with expropriation, remains unlikely.

But there is a faint possibility that we may see some beefier enforcement measures in the future.

Somerset Ward: Post-occupation, where do we go from here?

Catherine McKenney

For 28 days our city and, in particular, our downtown was illegally occupied by people, including many extremists. They demanded everything from ending public health mandates, to the overthrow of our federal government, to the imprisonment of the prime minister.

The incessant noise, toxic fumes from idling trucks, assaults, threats and trauma generated by this occupation will impact downtown residents for a long time and, particularly, the children who were kept awake at night and who feared walk-

ing to school in the morning.

Two questions must be answered: How did this happen? How can we prevent it from happening again?

Along with some of my colleagues, I am calling for a full public inquiry to examine the role of every level of government, including our police, in allowing a protest to become a month-long occupation by large trucks in our residential neighbourhoods. We must understand the mistakes that were made if we are to learn from them.

Ottawa is Canada's capital. But it is also home to a million people, including almost 40,000 in the urban core. It's where we sleep, shop, work, go to school and play.

Sometimes, the line between the capital of Canada and our hometown gets blurred, as it does on Canada Day when thousands of people stream downtown to celebrate. It gets blurred whenever there are marches or protests. Many of us take part in those celebrations and also in some of the marches and protests. Most of us accept this as part of living in our beautiful city and as part of the free democratic process.

The illegal occupation last month was a sign that we need to look at separating the city's official role from our residential neighbourhoods. One way is to look at which level of government is responsible for Wellington Street.



Wellington Street in front of Parliament Hill is now empty except for a few pedestrians and official vehicles—a huge contrast from the recent convoy occupation. The city and the federal government are now reevaluating the role of this street. MP Yasir Naqvi has called for the Parliamentary Precinct to be expanded to include Wellington and Sparks. ALAYNE MCGREGOR/THE BUZZ

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Authorized by the CFO for the Ottawa Centre Progressive Conservative Association
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I brought a motion to Ottawa City Council for city staff to meet with federal officials to begin a consultation about the future of Wellington Street between Bank and Elgin Streets. It passed unanimously.

Closing the street to vehicles is not a new idea. There have been several incidents of concern about the street. Subsequent federal studies, including reports by the auditor general of Canada, have recommended that this section of the street be transferred to federal ownership and security.

More recently, the NCC, City of Ottawa, and City of Gatineau have explored the inclusion of a tramline on this section to facilitate interprovincial commuting. As the consultation goes forward, there will be many opportunities for the public to have their say. In the end, I hope we see a space that is safe and fun for everyone.

Until this issue is resolved, this section of Wellington Street will be temporarily

closed to vehicles.

Broader issues

There are broader issues to be considered. As an example, What is the role of disinformation in our society? Who creates it? Who broadcasts it? Why?

Second. Why do so many people distrust our governments and officials? Why are conspiracies so easily accepted while science is rejected out of hand?

Third. Why are hate groups on the rise in our country freely flying flags that represent racism, violence and intolerance against people of colour, the LG-BTQ2S+ community, Jews, women, and immigrants and refugees?

These aren't easy issues but they are ones we must address. I moved a motion at City Council rejecting these symbols of hatred but we must do more.

One of the answers is that people who are economically disadvantaged become fearful of losing even more.

If we balance our economy and ensure everyone has a share of the pie, we may be able to reverse these trends.

And we must look after ourselves. The occupation has been traumatic. Many times the sound of a horn makes people fearful and stressed. I've seen the look in the eyes of people who have become nervous when passing strangers on the street. I've talked to people whose children are still not sleeping well.

As individuals and as a community, we will heal. I am proud of our residents, who helped each other throughout the occupation and who stood up to the occupiers through legal action, in shouting matches and literally by standing in front of a truck. While our trust in institutions has wavered, our trust in each other has been strengthened.

See centretownbuzz.com/comm_resources for a list of community resources you can reach out to for assistance.

Occupation left worker with depleted savings

continued from page 1
commissioned as part of the Zexi Li class action.

Jason Komendat owns the Ottawa Bike Cafe/Retro-Rides.ca store on Sparks Street. He said he had to keep its doors locked during the occupation – and that \$10,000 will only be a “drop in the bucket” compared to his losses. The cafe, which had already been forced to close by Omicron COVID-19 wave, could not reopen; his customers could not get to the bike shop, meaning a loss of thousands of dollars in bike repairs and overhauls.

Komendat said he was particularly worried about long-term effects: that the occupation might have given the area “a bad rep and that people will feel uncomfortable coming down and bringing their families down.”

Many employees were laid off for most or all of the 23-day occupation. Andrade estimated they would have lost \$105.7 million to \$145.6 million in wages and employer social contributions – even more than the businesses.

Employment insurance requires a 14-day waiting period and only covers 55 percent of wages. Ottawa Centre MP Yasir Naqvi pointed workers to the Canada Worker Lockdown

Benefit which paid \$300/week.

Alex Harris is a cook at Milestones restaurant, which was completely surrounded by the occupation and forced to close. He was laid off one day into the occupation until the Monday after it finished. He ended up depleting his savings and receiving help from his family in order to pay for rent, food, student loan payments, cellphone, and Internet. “These are just basic necessities – not privileges.”

He said he did apply for government assistance, but the little he received didn't even cover his rent. He felt there was “an abdication of duty from all three levels of government,” which should have given more immediate aid, even if it was short-term.

Harris felt helpless and was constantly on edge, wondering each day if the occupation would end and he could go back to work. “That just spikes your anxiety, it's going to make the tension even worse because you don't know. You're just hoping. This was not a protest: a protest should never affect people in the way that this did.”

See centretownbuzz.com for more details on this story.

Ontario issues: The affordable housing crisis

Tamir Virani

There is a dire need for action at all levels of government to address the affordable housing crisis in Ottawa. Whether this involves curbing the loss of affordable housing, creating more affordable housing, or preserving the quality of existing affordable housing, systemic and policy changes are urgently needed to protect our most vulnerable.

As an example, there's a large federal office building right next to my apartment in the heart of Centretown. It has been vacant and lifeless for about five years. Even before the pandemic ushered in a new world of remote work, this 15-storey building was uninhabited. Every time I stare at the empty floors, which remain lighted at night, I can't help but think of how many homeless, or marginalized, low-income families could inhabit this space.

"It's frustrating to see all these empty office towers downtown and then see people outside in the cold," I told a friend a few weeks ago during dinner. "Why don't they convert these into sustainable housing or at least do something with these spaces?"

My friend responded, "Maybe because they think it's a money-losing venture. The return is to society and not an organization."

While it was a particularly disheartening and gloomy response, I knew he was right. It's no secret that homelessness is on the rise, particularly in urban cores like Centretown. Homeless, youth at risk, refugees and those vulnerably housed have all faced challenges that have been compounded since COVID-19. At the Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC), approximately eight percent of clients fall into these categories. The number of people from these groups accessing CCHC services has increased by over 85 percent in the past two years. This spike in clients accessing outreach services serves as a clear indication that lack of sustainable and affordable housing is only getting worse.

Stopping renovations

You may have heard the term Renovation or Demoviction before but you may not be fully aware of how this has slowly and insidiously fueled the housing crisis in Ottawa. Renovictions, which take place when tenants must move out of a residence to accommodate changes or renovations to a

space, allow landlords to raise rent beyond the limit set by the province (1.2 percent in 2022). While this extra rent increase may seem marginal to some, it leaves low-income tenants and families out on the streets when they can no longer afford rent increases.

City Councillors Catherine McKenney and Jeff Leiper have already spoken out against this, urging the city to create policies to mitigate the displacement of tenants. But nothing has come to fruition yet. The CCHC is calling for municipal policies that will strengthen tenant protections against renovations, ensuring that displaced tenants are re-housed at the same rate of rent and are fully aware of their legal rights to compensation. We already know this works: in New Westminster, BC, a similar bylaw was introduced which cut down renovations from 333 to zero once it was introduced in 2019.

Creating more units

Just before the pandemic, Ottawa was the first city in Canada to officially declare a housing crisis in 2020. Current waitlists for affordable housing in Ottawa sit in the thousands and that number is steadily rising. Pair this with bone-chilling temperatures during unforgiving Ottawa winters and you can see how the term "crisis" is far from an embellishment.

Part of the CCHC's calls to action include asking for a municipal budget increase to house 1,000 households each year and committing 30 percent as part of a "For Indigenous, By Indigenous Housing Strategy." This increase alone would double the city's current commitment to house 500 households through rent subsidies and the creation of non-profit units. In theory, this could slash homelessness and the social housing registry waitlist in half by 2030.

Preserving quality

In 2019, Toronto revised its Housing Charter and the city manager was directed by City Council to establish the role of a housing commissioner. The commissioner would be mandated to ensure that the city was taking concrete action to combat systemic housing discrimination and hurdles in the housing system.

Without an actual authority to enforce accountability, any city commitments to housing protection are moot. An official and independent Ottawa housing commissioner would be able



Tenants in an affordable low rise at 142 Nepean Street are [currently facing demoviction](#). ALAYNE MCGREGOR/THE BUZZ

to identify and dismantle violations of the right to housing, provide City Council with recommendations to address the ongoing housing crisis, and monitor progress in meeting milestones and targets in city plans to combat housing inequities.

As a resident of Centretown, I love the area that I'm privileged to live in. There is a sense of community, closeness and culture. But, as great as Centretown is, it is in no way immune to the major inequities and discrimination that often run rampant in urban centres. Newcomers, low-income families, homeless, youth at risk and other marginalized groups need help.

There is a role for both the private and public sectors. There must be pressure, accountability and onus put on those in roles of responsibility to address these issues. As my friend pointed out in our conversation, the return to society is more than enough reason to act.

This is the second article in a series leading up to the Ontario election on June 2, and the city election on October 24.

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Toon Dreessen

Ottawa has ambitions to be a good place to live, a sustainable city. How do we achieve our goals if our approach is hesitant, unambitious, and lagging that of other cities and communities?

Consider: Nearly two years ago, Ottawa declared a Climate Crisis. Since then, City Council has voted to expand the urban boundary with a new sprawling subdivision with tenuous social outcomes for reconciliation, and has disregarded guidelines and professional advice to plan a new road through a protected

In a climate crisis, Ottawa's development standards should at least match Toronto's

wetland. In the past five years, we've had two terrible years of flooding, tornadoes, and other extreme weather events.

Climate change is all around us, but we don't seem to be doing anything about it.

On March 23, City Council will debate new High Performance Development Standards (HPDS), in order to advance "sustainable and resilient design" in new buildings and developments. Why are these standards important?

About 80 percent of Cana-

dians live in cities. The urban built environment is responsible for about 75 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, with buildings alone producing over 40 percent of emissions. Every car on the road today will be replaced in the next decade but every building we plan and design will be here for 50 years or more.

The economic case for investing in buildings is stronger than ever.

We need to reduce our energy demand with more

efficient buildings that use less energy. We need reusable (renewable) energy sources that reduce our need for new investment. We need to recycle, making better use of the buildings and infrastructure we already have. That means moderately dense infill and sustainable renewal of existing buildings.

After years of work, it is disappointing to see the HPDS so lackluster. It is less ambitious than the fourth version of a comparable standard adopted in Toronto a year ago. Where the Toronto standard applies to low-rise residential buildings of five units or more, Ottawa's standard won't apply to buildings of less than (about) 22,000 sq ft. That means, for example, that a three-storey apartment building with 20 apartments could be exempt, as would moderate-sized commercial buildings like grocery stores and small office buildings. While there is some value in a cut-off point to exclude very small buildings, Ottawa's

threshold is so high that the Community Associations for Environmental Sustainability assessment determined that half the new buildings in Ottawa could be exempt. If we expect our city to grow by half a million people in the next decade, they are all going to need homes, stores and places to work, learn and play. Shouldn't those buildings be sustainable?

Toronto's Green Roof Bylaw has been in place since 2009; Ottawa is just coming on board. The HPDS has a goal of self-reporting on embodied carbon during construction, while Toronto's standard sets aggressive targets for lifecycle building assessments in line with the Canada Green Building Zero Carbon Standard.

Maintenance is a major shortcoming of the City of Ottawa. In November 2020, the city's auditor general released a report documenting that city-owned buildings are poorly maintained, with thousands of projects deferred

each year, increasing costs to future generations. These projects are examples where the city can apply the HPDS to showcase not only local talent and skill in tackling climate change, but in investing in buildings to create better places for people. Council could choose, for example, to spend hundreds of millions of dollars fixing the billions in assets we already own before spending hundreds of millions more on new roads. Leadership through a City Architect could be the impetus we need.

While the HPDS is welcome news, it doesn't go far enough. It needs to consider overall approaches as part of broader city policies. The city can create incentives for sustainable infill development, speeding up planning approval for as-of-right or desirable social goals; development charges could be deferred to provide added capital for sustainable investment.

Climate change isn't waiting. The time is now. Time to get this right, set ambitious goals, and be the city we aspire to be.

CCA report

Jack Hanna

Stop idling vehicles

CCA's new Climate Change Working Group will tackle the issue of idling vehicles.

"We thought the experience with the hundreds of idling trucks [during the occupation] gives us a political opening to update the bylaw," said Chair Darlene Pearson. "Ottawa's existing bylaw is ridiculously slack compared to other cities." The group also hopes to work with other community associations interested in dealing with this issue.

New heritage rules coming

Residents can learn about and comment on revamped rules for heritage buildings in Centretown at the city's public meeting to be held on Tuesday, March 22, at 6:30 p.m.

The updated rules will apply to heritage buildings within the two existing Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) in Centretown. The Centretown HCD is huge, stretching from Elgin to Kent. The smaller Minto Park HCD comprises the buildings facing the park.

CCA was closely involved in creating the new draft heritage regulations, holding discussions with city staff from the earliest days and providing written input.

In the years ahead, there will be enormous pressure to erect big new buildings in



Centretown. From the CCA's experience, heritage regulations are one of the most powerful tools for getting the sensitive development we want and avoiding big inappropriate buildings.

To register for the city's public meeting, go to: ottawa.ca/centretownheritage

Big Earth Day celebration

CCA's annual Earth Day celebration will be held in Dundonald Park on Saturday, April 23, with activities for all ages.

Knowledgeable folks will offer advice on gardening and plant care, how to move toward a plant-based diet and how to turn waste into food by growing avocados and basil. There will also be displays about trees, bees and more.

Kids will have the opportunity to get their hands dirty and work with the CCA's volunteer gardeners to plant seeds and annuals, and an indigenous elder will lead a spiritual ceremony.

For more info, see: www.centretowncitizens.ca

Gov't in the housing business

The message from speakers at a recent CCA panel discussion is that federal and provincial governments dramatically abandoned rent-

geared-to-income housing programs in the 1990s. If the housing crisis is ever to abate, governments must return with funds and construction cranes.

"When upper levels of government don't invest in housing," said Councillor Catherine McKenney, "we have ever-expanding waiting lists, people falling into homelessness at alarming rates and people sleeping outside. That's the reality."

"Housing is a human right," said Katie Burkholder Harris, executive director of Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa. "You cannot leave it to the private market. The private market will never meet human needs."

Ishbel Solvason-Wiebe, executive director of the Social Housing Registry of Ottawa, said that about 12,000 Ottawa households are on the waiting list for affordable housing. To cut that list, she recommends two approaches. First, there should be an affordable housing benefit, so people can afford existing rents. Second, governments need to build about 6,000 affordable housing units in Ottawa.

For a video of the workshop, search on YouTube for: From Homelessness to Housing: CCA Community Workshop.

DCA report: when will our city be returned?

Ed McKenna

Cornerstone on Eccles

Sarah Davis of Cornerstone Housing Association for Women and Kyla Tanner of the Centretown Affordable Housing Development Corporation gave a special presentation to the DCA meeting on March 2. The subject was the redevelopment of the former École St. Dominique at 44 Eccles Street.

Most recently, this building has provided office space for multiple organizations. There is a proposal now for the former francophone girls' school to be converted into supportive housing for women. The redevelopment will include 46 studio apartments, as well as office space and amenity areas.

The discussion that followed supported the redevelopment proposal. However, several members expressed concern that the site plan still includes 20 parking spaces and that an opportunity to add greenspace has been overlooked. It was suggested that a portion of the old asphalt parking lot behind the building be replaced with grass and trees.

The DCA will write to the city requesting that the

building site plan be amended to include landscaping, with trees, in the southwest corner of the property.

Has the city been returned to us?

The occupation has become a protest and the semi-permanent encampment on the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway is now an occasional peaceful demonstration—except for the guy with the bullhorn at Fleck Fountain Plaza.

The truckers' convoy was still on the agenda at the March meeting. DCA President Catherine Boucher reviewed the letter sent to the mayor and the police chief on February 8: "When will our city be returned to us?" the letter asks. "And when that happens, we expect a fulsome report on how this came to be. We also deserve an apology for having to live under siege for so long."

The mayor's response will be on the agenda for next month's regular meeting.

Vacant Buildings in Dalhousie

Members of the DCA's Peaceable Neighbourhood Committee met with the city's Emergency and Protective Services Department on Feb-

ruary 23 to discuss the Vacant Building Strategy Review.

Vacant buildings in Dalhousie impact the health of the community. Abandoned buildings and empty lots depress property values, look bad and can be places where bad things happen.

The committee pointed out some vacant properties where it is suspected illegal drugs are used and sold. Squatters are a public safety concern and have been linked to building fires. Other properties are hosts to rodents and accumulate waste. And many of these properties were once homes and now stand unused with housing urgently needed.

City policymakers are preparing a draft report and will be seeking further comment from the DCA next month.

Community Garden

Some DCA members met with the coordinators of the local community garden last month to prepare for another busy season at the raised beds at Somerset and Preston. There may be a handful of plots still available. Hopeful gardeners should contact: dcacommunitygarden@gmail.com

Annual General Meeting

The DCA will hold its annual general meeting in May and is hoping it can be in person. It will feature guest panelists who will discuss: How tall is tall, how green is green, how affordable is affordable? Intrigued? For more news, contact: president@ottawadalhousie.ca

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MPP report: time to rally for peace

Joel Harden

A text message from a Russian soldier to his mother was intercepted earlier this week. The mother was worried that she hadn't heard from her son and wanted to know where she could send a care package. She asked if he was still out for "military drills". His response was stark.

"The only thing I want right now is to kill myself," the soldier confessed. The terrified mother asked where her son was and he replied, "Mama, I'm in Ukraine. There is a real war raging here. I'm afraid. We are bombing all of the cities together, even targeting civilians. We were told that they would welcome us, and they are falling under our armoured vehicles, throwing themselves under the wheels, and not allowing us to pass. They call us fascists. Mama, this is so hard."

Minutes after sending those last words, her son was killed, fighting a war he didn't understand – a war he knew was wrong.

This is the inhumanity of a war that is taking lives as I write these words.

This war was started by

a maniac determined to fight to the last drop of someone else's blood.

Vladimir Putin wants us to believe an invasion is necessary for a free Ukraine, that somehow Russian bombs and rifles are tools of liberation. This is the colonial mindset of a politician intent on conquest.

Lest we forget, we have seen such politicians in Canadian history. We've seen leaders insist our democracy be established at the expense of others, notably Indigenous peoples.

That's why Canadians have a unique responsibility to oppose wars of aggression and appeals to bring freedom through the barrel of a gun. We have seen such madness before, and it is our duty to stand steadfast in our opposition.

Here, in Ontario, we are not powerless. We can and must take action.

I'm reminded of "Bomb the World", a song written by the great Michael Franti, who says, "You can bomb the world to pieces, but you can't bomb it into peace."

We must be part of a global peace movement that challenges those who would tear us apart.

So let's stand with Ukraine

and with anyone else condemned by the dehumanization efforts of demagogues. We can and must build a better world.

On March 6, I joined a rally on Parliament Hill to stand with Ukraine and call for peace.

The stories that were shared of death and suffering were gutting. But amidst the horrors of violence, humanity exists. A mom and daughter had put their time and love into making sunflower kits to "grow peace" which they handed out to rally attendees.

And I was also heartened by the group of Russian expats, who were there, speaking out against the violence being perpetrated by the Russian government.

This is a local face of a global peace movement. I ask folks to continue to show up to rallies and marches, because your voice matters, it can make a difference. Nineteen years ago, the world said no to a looming war in Iraq.

Tens of thousands of Canadians took to the streets, and our government refused to send troops. We saved lives then, and we can do that again. It's time to rally for peace.

The Good, the Bad, and the Bumpy: fearing the end of COVID mandates

Ryan Lythall

Before the pandemic happened, I had a very busy life. I was always out with friends or active in the community.

When the pandemic hit, this changed. Suddenly, my world became scary and my anxiety level was at an all-time high. I've been on high alert for the past two years. Now it seems my anxiety is about to get worse, for me as well as others who are deemed vulnerable.

Recently, the restrictions imposed for the last two years are being lifted. Almost all places (e.g., restaurants, grocery stores, other businesses) have increased their capacity. Vaccine passports are no longer mandatory, although some businesses are still requesting them. Soon (March 21) masks will no longer be required.

For me and others like me, this news is borderline terrifying. While I agree that we need to move forward, for those of us who are vulnerable, this will be a step back, perhaps, more than one. The more I think about removing COVID-19 restrictions, the more questions I have and the more anxious I become.

First, we are all aware

that many people haven't been vaccinated or haven't worn masks either by choice or due to medical reasons.

Second, when this all started, I intended to just "put up" with wearing a mask for a few months, thinking it would be over soon. I was wrong. When the mask mandate ends, I'll probably still wear a mask at least in indoor spaces.

As time goes on, fewer and fewer people will wear masks. Eventually, only the elderly, the immunocompromised and certain people with disabilities will continue to wear them, that is, those deemed frail and often frowned upon by society. This means we will be stared at even more often and it will add even more to our mental stress.

I should also mention that I have a much harder time speaking and being understood whenever I wear a mask. Not being able to

communicate well affects me socially but it could also quickly become dangerous.

I'm hoping that events like Bluesfest and other festivals will have some type of safety measures in place. What will they be? Will they consider others like myself?

What will Para Transpo and OC Transpo do to make riders like me feel safe? How will rules change from place to place, or will they?

I have missed my old life. I have missed my connection with the city and regular interactions with my friends and strangers—seeing smiles and laughing freely. But getting back to that place, I will need to feel safe and not on edge when I go out.

The struggle for persons with disabilities, and possibly for others, in returning to life without COVID restrictions is going to be difficult.

Follow Ryan on Twitter: @rolling_enigma

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What's on in Ottawa and beyond

Tony Wohlfarth

National Gallery of Canada

The NGC opened a fascinating exhibition of more than 100 pieces of Canadian Impressionist art on February 26. It is on display until July 3 on a tour that began in Germany and has been seen in both France and Switzerland.

There are 108 works by 36 men and women Impressionists in this exhibition, including several paintings by Group of Seven artists (A.Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris) and by Emily Carr. Senior curator Katerina Atanassova explained that these artists also trained in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

To prepare for your visit, I would suggest downloading the [online audio guide](#). It provides valuable information about the artists with 14 stops in the two rooms of original art. The NGC boutique also has an illustrated guidebook to the collection.

Canadian Museum of Nature

The BUZZ previewed a new installation—the Pacific Discovery Tank—at the museum just in time for March Break. The tank is a 1,000-litre saltwater aquarium on the second floor of the Victoria Museum. It's a child friendly display of anemones, sea cu-

cumbers, and spiky urchins, illustrating tide pools in the Pacific Ocean.

The museum is also honouring Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee this year with a special display of how her reign has been celebrated in Canadian coins, banknotes and postage stamps. Adding a scientific angle, the exhibit also includes samples of refined platinum and different minerals containing platinum.

I also recommend *Shad-owl-land*, 15 sketches of skeletal remains of polar bears, bison, and narwhals, by Montreal artist Lorraine Simms, on display until April 18.

2022 Berlinale

The 72nd Berlin International Film Festival was the first in-person film festival since the pandemic and *The BUZZ* was there.

Against the Ice

In 1906, Denmark supported two Arctic expeditions to the far north. The first was a failure and support for another expedition waned. The second in 1909 was a two-person expedition to explore Greenland via dog sled and is the subject of a compelling feature-length film (filmed in 2019) which had its world premiere in Berlin and is now streaming via Netflix.

The geopolitical significance of the expedition was legendary. The United States was making territorial claims over the Arctic and Denmark needed to confirm that Greenland was a single land mass.

The cinematography in *Against the Ice* is stunning and the re-creation of the two-year journey is riveting and compelling. To survive, the explorers faced polar bears, starvation and extreme weather. The producer formed an early partnership with Netflix to make a highly entertaining film. Running time: 1h42m.

IFFO

The International Film Festival of Ottawa (IFFO) is currently underway until March 20, offering 27 feature-length and short films. See www.iffoc.ca/2022/schedule

Live Music

The [National Arts Centre](#) (1 Elgin) has returned to live music performances. The *Women in Music and the Arts Conference* on March 23-24 will offer both panels and concerts. See nac-cna.ca

[Queen Street Fare](#) (170 Queen near Bank) has reopened with live music. See queenstfare.ca/happening.

Check out jazz vocalist [Martine Courage on March 30](#). [Live on Elgin](#) (220 Elgin)

will feature local musicians Angelique Francis on March 19 and soul band The Com-motions on March 27.

On March 25, the [Montgomery Scotch Lounge's](#) jazz night with Peter Hum, David Smith, Chris Pond, and Valeriy Nehovora will donate at least half the ticket sales to UNHCR for Ukrainian refugees (750 Gladstone).

And the Oscar Goes to . . .

You can watch the 2022 Academy Awards live at the [Mayfair Theatre](#) (1074 Bank) on March 27. Admission is free with an annual membership (\$14).

Tony Wohlfarth is an Ottawa-based freelance film and entertainment writer.



"In the Tent" (1914) by Helen McNicoll is in the new National Gallery exhibit of Canadian Impressionist art. NGC

Sign up for our weekly MPP email updates at joelhardenmpp.ca!

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City Councillor
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