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## Knowledge mobilization expands and informs Oblate Lands public: A report on the Deep Green Experts Forum

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This past Saturday, March 22, the Deep Green Experts Forum on the Oblate Lands development was held with great success. Despite heavy snowfall, Carleton University's River Building spacious conference room was packed with an audience that listened to various expert panelists address sustainability options for the future development of the Oblate properties, along which runs the Rideau River. Thanks to the efforts of [Sustainable Living Ottawa East \(SLOE\)](#) and its [Experts Forum](#), there is now much greater public awareness about the sustainability challenges and opportunities that await the future development of this ecologically sensitive 12-hectare area. SLOE's Expert Forum was sponsored by [Carleton University](#), the development firms [Regional Group](#) and [Domicile](#), Councillor [David Chernushenko's](#) office, and other not-for-profit groups: [Sandy Hill Community Health Centre](#), [Ottawa Community Loan Fund](#), the [OOECA](#) and the [Community Activities Group](#).

*1931 aerial photograph of Oblate Lands (bottom right)*

Source: Wallace, R. (2003). [A History of Ottawa East](#). Image available at:

<http://history.ottawaeast.ca/imagelibrary/picture.php?/37/category/airphotos>



An impromptu but illuminating conclusion to the Experts Forum saw one member of this emergent public, a Glebe resident, express her sincere hope that the project would obtain a result far different from the [re-development of Lansdowne Park](#), wherein developers and local residents clashed from the start. As owner of the stadium and adjacent public land, the City of Ottawa committed itself to a public-private partnership with the [Ottawa Sports & Entertainment Group \(OSEG\)](#), much to the dismay of the [Glebe Community Association](#) and [Friends of Lansdowne Park](#). In the case of the Oblate Lands, however, the City will never have to “choose sides” as members of SLOE and

the [Ottawa East Community Association](#) are proactively and constructively engaging developers early in the planning process—developers who, notably, self-identified as planners. Needless to say, many want the Oblate Lands development to be, not only a profitable enterprise for the development industry but, in the main, a notable *achievement* worthy of a long-established community. The Experts Forum was an important exercise in collaborative planning and will hopefully go a long way to ensuring that the final result is sustainable and beneficial for the existing community.

Expert panelists included Carleton faculty, professional consultants, City of Ottawa and National Capital Commission (NCC) staff. They collectively explored sustainable development options ranging from public transit, pathway and trail design, to shoreline protection, water management, and district energy. Both federal and city governments are intent on improving public participation in their planning and decision-making processes. SLOE's concerted efforts have yielded an instructive case of public engagement aimed at influencing the course of a development project, one that will forever transform Old Ottawa East. For their part, development planners and local residents are, of course, directly affected by the project's outcome. But, as shown by the Glebe resident's comments, there are people who are indirectly affected by this development as well, a growing Oblate Lands public. The sustainability options researched by SLOE might influence the final plan and design of the Oblate Lands development, such that the interests of residents and this emergent public have been taken into account, *alongside* those of the development industry.



Source: Infrastructure Services and Community Sustainability Planning (Aug. 2011). *Old Ottawa East Community Design Plan*. Ottawa: City of Ottawa, p. 48.

Though there is still a long way to go in the planning of the Oblate Lands development, the process initiated by SLOE, where it is trying “to develop and test sustainability options against the needs and realities of business,” could provide a benchmark for what can be achieved through public participation in development planning. This is important given that the work of developers almost invariably alters neighborhoods, livelihoods, and lifestyles. ‘Business-as-usual’ in the development industry, where the bottom line will always reign supreme, might be undergoing its own transformation, as local residents and other community stakeholders become increasingly involved in planning and design processes. As evinced by SLOE: community and developer interests need not be opposed.

In advance of the Experts Forum, SLOE circulated a [research report](#) covering four main themes: Community Amenities and Connectivity, Stormwater Management/Shoreline Restoration, Affordable and Seniors Housing, and Energy. Building from the report, experts then provided recommendations and their lessons learned from past experience. In addition to the knowledge exchanged through the panelists’ discussion, several development concepts by students the [Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism](#), under the supervision of Professor [Ben Gianni](#) were on display. The inclusivity of the Forum was broad, not only offering SLOE’s analysis, expert opinion, and development concepts, but also received input and recommendations via a [Twitter-feed](#) and post-it boards that were quickly dotted by additional suggestions and ideas on the four themes. Finally, and to further exemplify the creativity behind the organization of the Experts Forum, animator Jennifer Shepherd from [Living Tapestries](#) captured the contents of the panelists’ wide-ranging discussion.

Section of Shepherd’s tapestry  
Photo credit: Patricia Ballamingie



As a ‘research assistant’ (a role that defies definition if there ever was one!) for the [Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement](#) (CFICE) action research project, Magda Goemans is to be congratulated for helping organize this remarkable and engaging event. She has made a valuable contribution to SLOE on behalf of CFICE, demonstrating the impact research assistants can have in terms of enhancing the capacities of local organizations. Having attended the Experts Forum, I share in the sense of optimism held by SLOE members, that development planners are ‘on-board’ with their initiative, much to the benefit of Ottawa East.

### **Further references**

Aird, Rebecca (2013). 'SLOE studying options for sustainable development of Oblate lands'. *Mainstreeter*. Available at <http://www.mainstreeter.ca/?p=2557>

Infrastructure Services and Community Sustainability Planning and Growth Management Department, Policy Development and Urban Design (Aug. 2011). *Old Ottawa East Community Design Plan*. Ottawa: City of Ottawa. Available at: <http://app06.ottawa.ca/cs/groups/content/@webottawa/documents/pdf/mdaw/mdc3/~edisp/cap078007.pdf>

Sustainable Living Ottawa East (2014). Deep Green: Options for Sustainable Development of the Oblate Lands. Available at: <http://sustainablelivingottawaeast.ca/current-projects/deep-green-options-for-sustainable-development-of-the-oblate-lands-in-old-ottawa-east/>