

January 28, 2019 via Email

Mayor Jim Watson, Office of the Mayor City of Ottawa

Dear Mayor Watson:

I am writing on behalf of the Lowertown Community Association to express our considerable concern over the lack of meaningful representation on key city committees by councilors who represent Ottawa's downtown wards. While, as you point out, there is representation on many of these committees from within the Greenbelt, the interests and concerns of the city core are distinct in many ways from the suburban wards which are also located in the Greenbelt. Our concerns remain and we hope, sincerely, for some changes soon.

We recognize that the work of all Standing Committees matters. Yet we are particularly concerned that Finance and Economic Development Committee (FEDCO) lacks downtown ward representation, and we are all keenly aware that important budget decisions define everything for our city – from health care and social services, affordable housing for all, planning, heritage, transportation, environment and action on climate change to revitalizing our neighbourhoods. Of course for Rideau Vanier, some committees deal with more salient issues than others. As you well know, our Ward and other adjacent wards are under considerable development pressure and being able to discuss these matters at Planning Committee would be more democratic and facilitate a smoother discussion for all residents. It would also ensure that residents that are most directly impacted are represented earlier and more thoroughly in the process. The geographically-oriented structure of the Committee of Adjustment Panels is conducive to this, as the panels get familiar with impacts of incremental development in these different geographic areas. The Planning Committee would benefit from a similar structure.

We recognize that standing committees are just one way for Councillors to engage in issues prior to their vote at Council. As volunteers continually trying to interact with committee members, we appreciate the work they do, but are confident our expertise as community members uniquely familiar with the concerns of our community would be better served by a representation from downtown wards on key committees. Given that there is already an overrepresentation at Council from the rural area, we feel that giving no meaningful voice on standing committees to downtown councilors negates in effect representation to residents living in central Ottawa, with greater populations, and we urge

you to rectify this situation immediately.

While we understand that all councillors are free to go to whichever committee meetings they wish to, their voice would then be the same as any other concerned citizen, and they are unable to devote their limited staff capacity to following issues of the committee for informed participation. Nor are they to ask questions, engage in dialogue or, most importantly, vote on committee recommendations. We must acknowledge that they are observers, like residents, without any influence.

While we know several weeks have passed and committee assignments are indeed a complex undertaking, we are still confident that it is not too late: there is room to improve representation and to correct the imbalance that exists on FEDCO and the Planning Committee in particular.

Although we acknowledge that, as you have suggested, urban communities may benefit from having you as a resident and a committee member familiar with their concerns, as Mayor your representation is necessarily city-wide. We believe residents of the urban core merit Standing Committee representation by Councillors whose focus primarily reflects those specific concerns, just as the many suburban and rural Councillors already sitting on those committees are privileged to reflect their local concerns.

We ask that you demonstrate your appreciation of Ottawa's diversity and strengthen the perceived unfairness of Council's decision making by ensuring your Standing Committee appointments adequately reflect Ottawa communities' diversity including its downtown population and this Term of Council benefits from their experience.

Thank you for your re-consideration of this vital issue, Mayor Watson.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liz Bernstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Liz Bernstein
President

CC: Councillor Mathieu Fleury