May 23, 2025

To: **The National Capital Commission**

Attention: **Tobi Nussbaum, Chief Executive Officer**

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Subject: Comments by the New Edinburgh Community Alliance (NECA) on the National Capital Commission's update to the Core Area Plan with respect to the proposed Sussex Blocks development

1. **Introduction – Community awareness and views**
2. **Ceremonial route**
3. **Public interest**
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1. Introduction – Community awareness and views

Since the New Edinburgh Community Alliance (NECA) submitted its preliminary comments to the National Capital Commission (NCC) in February 2025, several steps have taken place to increase the limited awareness of the Sussex Blocks proposal and have assisted in further informing the comments of community members and NECA on the proposal. We thank the NCC for granting us an extension to the comment deadline to provide this collective response.

As a result, NECA is pleased to provide these additional **comments specifically regarding the Sussex Blocks development proposal in the Core Area Plan.** You already have the community's input from the workshop hosted by the NCC in New Edinburgh on March 6. More recently, we heard more views and concerns exchanged at a very well-attended public meeting of the NECA board on May 20. The community is deeply concerned with the proposal.

Overall, this submission serves to convey the **prevailing concerns from the community regarding the wisdom of the NCC's proposed plan to build major apartment buildings along Sussex Drive**, across from the Prime Minister's official residence and very close to Rideau Hall, at the tail-end of the ceremonial route connecting to Parliament Hill.

The Sussex Blocks development would possibly be the largest residential project in New Edinburgh, and within its historic conservation district. In the new Core Area Plan under review, the Sussex Blocks project is described as "mid-rise, mixed-use buildings in traditional architectural style faithful to the New Edinburgh style, and a new urban park…."

Many comments focussed on the inappropriateness of building an apartment complex on that portion of the ceremonial route known as Confederation Boulevard.

2. Ceremonial route

"Confederation Boulevard is the NCC's flagship ceremonial boulevard," states the NCC on its website. "It is a key feature of the National Capital Region's core area."

The significance of the Sussex Drive portion of the ceremonial boulevard is elaborated in the NCC's **Confederation Boulevard Guidelines - Management and Stewardship of our Capital Legacy** (currently under review):

> Sussex Drive north from the Peacekeeping Monument to Rideau Hall is a broad, large-scaled avenue with buildings usually set back from the road…
>
> ***Sussex Drive is renowned for the number of civic and diplomatic institutions*** along its length, and for Rideau Hall in particular, which terminates Confederation Boulevard at the north end gateway. Sussex Avenue (sic) is ***famous for the ceremonial procession*** that occurs between Rideau Hall and Parliament Hill during both the opening of Parliament and its dissolution.
>
> The Boulevard streetscape along Sussex is ***simple, clean and dignified***…The large scale and geometry of Sussex Drive offer ***a special kind of experience*** not found elsewhere on Confederation Boulevard. *[emphasis added]*

The existing simplicity and grandeur of the three blocks under consideration was noted by community members as a rationale for not pursuing a residential or commercial development on the lands.

There appears to be a contradiction between historical symbolism of the ceremonial route and now the NCC's proposal for a high-end apartment building complex at a key portion of that route.

3. Public interest

The public interest perspective is especially germane to a proposed development that would be located in a significant location in a historic district of the nation's capital – namely steps from Rideau Hall and the Prime Minister's official residence.

When viewing the Sussex Blocks proposal in the context of our capital city, and considering it on behalf of all Canadians, the question is whether apartment buildings are the most inspired and appropriate use of these lands in this location.

Some residents expressed the opinion that, in Canadians' best interests, the wiser choice for this special area of the nation's capital would be to maintain the current landscape and use of these blocks in its context.

4. Housing rationale

Similar to Canadians across the country, residents in the community are aware and concerned about the lack of affordable housing and the need for additions to the housing supply. Equally, however, there is a prevailing awareness that the NCC is the custodian of many other federal lands which are suitable for housing developments, and indeed may be more suitable for the kind of affordable housing that is sorely lacking in the city.

Several community members expressed concern that the NCC may be **misguided in considering adding to housing supply at the high-end of the market**, rather than supporting the addition of affordable housing elsewhere in keeping with the City's and the country's needs in this critical period. (In this regard, we note the NCC's collaboration on the Federal Lands Initiative for the goal of stimulating housing developments on federal lands.)

It is also disquieting and disappointing that the **NCC is admittedly seeking the rezoning of the blocks** for residential and/or commercial development **in an effort to generate revenues from new buildings** on these lands. This motivation does not seem in keeping with the capital stewardship role imparted to the NCC – particularly when one considers the ceremonial importance of the proposed Sussex Blocks.

4. Other concerns

Other concerns we heard, and which seemed to be widely shared, were regarding the process that would be followed. It was not clear whether the normal municipal rezoning process would be followed. Concerns were also expressed around the possibility that the NCC would contract with a private developer and in so doing lose control over what is built.

5. Previous comments are still pertinent

NECA's preliminary comments on the Core Area Plan in February 2025 regarding the Sussex Blocks proposal are still pertinent for the NCC's consideration. In particular, the community continues to raise concerns about these topics, among others (as they appear in the February comments):

- **Heritage**
- **Parking and traffic congestion**
- **Flood plain**
- **Trees and parkland**

NECA appreciates this opportunity to provide these comments with the extension of the NCC's deadline to accommodate our public meeting.

Please note that these views are shared both in the current context and while contemplating the future impacts of the NCC's decisions on the urban environment that constitutes the nation's capital region.

Yours truly,

Sarah Anson-Cartwright

On behalf of the NECA board

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