

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON  
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT  
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.  
 Your File/V/Réf. RC

DATE 15 March 2000

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator, Community Service Committee

FROM/EXP. Medical Officer of Health

SUBJECT/OBJET **RESPONSE TO INQUIRY NO. 29(00) RE POSSIBILITY OF FUNDING FOR THE OWL'S NEST**

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**DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Community Services Committee receive this report for information.**

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to respond to the following inquiry raised by Councillor W. Byrne made at the Community Service Committee meeting of 3 February 2000.

“That the Health Department report back on whether funds are available to help the Owl’s Nest seniors’ program rent alternate accommodation. In addition, the Department should co-ordinate with the Finance Department to see whether the Owl’s Nest is eligible for any kind of tax break.”

**BACKGROUND**

The Owl’s Nest is one of three Health Information and Activity Centres run by the Region and located in local shopping malls - Lincoln Fields (The Owl’s Nest), Billings Bridge (The Pacesetters) and St. Laurent Centre (The Friendly Corner). Each centre offers programs to the public which promote healthy living. Activities include mall walking, chair exercises, health talks, the distribution of health information, support groups, social activities and “drop in” hours. The centres are managed by Health Department staff and 120 volunteers who donated 7000 hours in 1999. The Region gives each centre a \$1,000 honorarium annually for the space provided.

The centres were all established by the Health Department during the mid 1990’s at the invitation of mall management during the period when the economy was weaker and malls had store front vacancies. It was a benefit to the malls to have spaces occupied, professionally co-ordinated activity evident and shoppers attracted to the mall. As the economy improved each centre has had to relocate at least once due to renovations and merchants willing to pay market value for the spaces.

## DISCUSSION

The Owl's Nest in Lincoln Heights has been in operation since 1994. The population served is mostly seniors since over 30% of the population in census tracts closest to the mall is aged 55 and older. In 1998 there were 6961 visits to the centre. With a move to less desirable space in 1999 this dropped by more than half.

The Owl's Nest closed in early March, 2000. The closure was a result of the decision of RDH, the property management group for Patriot Equities Corporation, to lease space to merchants. The property management group offered the Owl's Nest a small space away from the shopping area that is not suitable for programming.

Community expectation was strong, based on comments made publicly by Patriot Equities, that the Owl's Nest would be offered space appropriate for programming. Community papers, The News and The West End Chronicle featured articles about the imminent closure. Volunteers and participants called politicians for support. Chair Chiarelli, Councillor Wendy Byrne and City of Ottawa Councillor Ron Kolbus all visited the Owl's Nest, affirmed their support to the volunteers and attempted to influence the decision of Patriot Equities.

## FINANCE

Unfortunately, the Health Department does not have funds in its current budget to pay for program space in malls. The costs are considerable to lease adequate program space given the office use rates of \$25.00-\$35.00 per square foot (\$25,000-\$35,000 annually) and retail rent rates of \$35.00-\$50.00 per square foot (\$35,000-\$50,000 annually). These costs include base rent, operating costs and taxes. The property tax system provides tax rebates of 40% to registered charities who occupy property classed as commercial or industrial. Theoretically, if they obtained a Registered Charity Number from Revenue Canada, then the Owl's nest would be eligible for such a rebate if it leased commercial space.

## CONCLUSION

Currently, the Health Department is in the process of assisting participants and volunteers to find other resources to meet their needs and interests. The Olde Forge Community Resource Centre, Pinecrest Queensway Health and Community Services, and the City of Ottawa, Lakeside Gardens have all offered to accept activities formerly offered by the Owl's Nest. Although some of these activities may continue in new locations, the community has lost the unique service and environment provided by Owl's Nest. The blend of activities in a dedicated space, open to the public and maintained by dedicated volunteers supported by the Health Department will no longer be available in the Region's west end.

*Approved by  
Robert Cushman, MD, FRCPC*