

1. "THE OWL'S NEST" - POSSIBILITY OF FUNDING

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AS AMENDED

That Council approve:

- 1. That operational funding for rental accommodation for the Owl's Nest in the amount of \$25,000 be included in the draft estimates for 2001; and**
- 2. That the Transition Board be advised of the need for space for this very valuable program.**

DOCUMENTATION

1. Medical Officer of Health report dated 15 Mar 00 is immediately attached.
2. Extract of Draft Minute, Community Services Committee meeting of 6 Apr 00, follows the report and includes a record of all votes.

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**

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*

Extract of Draft Minute
Community Services Committee
6 April 2000

“THE OWL’S NEST” - POSSIBILITY OF FUNDING

- Medical Officer of Health report dated 15 March 00
- Response to Inquiry CS 29(00)

The Committee received a briefing from Maryann O’Hagan, Manager, Heart Health Branch, regional Health Department, and the staff person responsible for Urban Community Health. She began by thanking all the volunteers involved in the many programs available under Urban Community Health and more specifically the forty volunteers who have been active in The Owl’s Nest. Ms. O’Hagan said the program evolved into a health information and activity centre serving mainly seniors. Its strength came from the volunteers who gave their time and skills to the community particularly in the Drop In program which offered information about regional services. The new owners of the Lincoln Heights shopping centre had promised there would be continuing space available but this has not materialized. In early January 2000, the Health Department was informed that all the space would be used for retail purposes and was offered a small space which is not acceptable for programming. Ms. O’Hagan indicated that the rental costs for space in the area would be approximately \$50,000 and, with no money in the 2000 budget, the department will have to close The Owl’s Nest at the beginning of March.

In response to questions from Councillor W. Byrne, Ms. O’Hagan indicated the new owners have not been very responsive, and she expressed the view there is nothing in their community philosophy that would support offering a space. Services are now being provided by community partners in the west end, with the Olde Forge and the Pinecrest-Queensway Community Resource Centre expressing an interest in some of the programs. Councillor Byrne wanted to know whether it is possible to move all the programs into the expanded Pinecrest-Queensway centre. Ms. O’Hagan reiterated that the centre is very open and interested in continuing with some of the components but there are few details about how things would develop at this point. The target date for completion of the work at the Pinecrest-Queensway centre is October 2000.

Mr. John Edwards, said he has been a volunteer at the Owl’s Nest for six years. He called the service provided therein to seniors second to none. Because there are so many seniors in that area, the services are essential, and a space should be provided to carry out this function. The Drop In has provided good support to seniors; many come there with problems and the volunteers are able to help them by referring them to the proper authorities and helping them personally. Mr. Edwards expressed the hope this would not be the end of the Owl’s Nest. He was hopeful that the Committee would be able to provide a space or help secure corporate

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sponsorships, and he stressed the importance of the service being in an area that is visible and open to the public.

The Committee Chair, A. Munter, read a Motion presented by Councillor W. Byrne. She began by acknowledging the value of the Owl's Nest to the community, saying it has been a magnet for seniors, providing a space where they can access health programs to remain vital, healthy members of the community. It has also provided a social component, important to the health of seniors who live alone and who are unable to get out and be active in the community. Councillor Byrne provided a brief history of the Owl's Nest, from its beginnings in the former Lincoln Heights Galleria to the current situation under the shopping centre's new ownership. After renovations to the centre were completed, the Owl's Nest was offered 200 square feet of space when it needs 1200 square feet to operate effectively. Councillor Byrne said the 200 feet offered is only enough space for a table and effectively constitutes an eviction. The mall management said that the space in question would capture approximately \$50,000 in retail rent, and the Owl's Nest is unable to come up with these funds. Councillor Byrne said her Motion calls for \$25,000 which may be enough money to entice a community-spirited organization to rent space. Other possibilities being explored include the Bayshore Shopping Centre and the Pinecrest-Queensway Community Resource Centre: there are problems with bus access at the former and the renovations at the latter will not be completed before October 2000. Councillor Byrne thought that Pinecrest-Queensway could provide all the programs in one locale, thereby reviving the social component which was an integral element of the program.

Councillor M. McGoldrick-Larsen asked how the seniors' centre at Carlingwood is funded from an operational perspective. Ms. O'Hagan advised it is supported mainly through fundraising and through grants received from the city of Ottawa and from the province. Councillor McGoldrick-Larsen spoke in support of keeping the Owl's Nest open and for other services to be provided in the community and in shopping centres. She expressed the view there should be "storefront" operations for other Health Department programs in a number of venues across the Region. The Councillor said it is really important to be proactive in trying to meet seniors' needs, and in making the larger community aware of how it can provide assistance to seniors that need it.

Councillor D. Holmes said she would support the item, mainly to ensure it gets on the list of items that need to be examined for 2001. When the new Council has completed the review of its requirements, there may be space available in a satellite office or in a fire station, eliminating the need to rent space in a shopping centre. Councillor Holmes posited that a lot more space is needed in the community where people can meet and where programming can be carried out, and the Owl's Nest program should be on the list with others requiring community space.

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Councillor A. Loney felt it was timely to consider this matter, since the Transition Board is reviewing all the building requirements and something may turn up before the end of this year. He said he liked the idea of negotiating for space up-front with a developer, as was done at the Carlingwood Shopping Centre. He suggested this approach be tried with

the Loblaw development in Westboro to see whether an arrangement can be arrived at for the community. Councillor Loney spoke about the need for similar services being provided for seniors in Nepean. He suggested that the seed be sown at the time of development proposals, to ascertain whether a developer would consider a community facility as part of the building. Councillor Loney said he was not convinced the Region should be paying commercial rates to rent space in shopping centres.

Moved by W. Byrne

That Community Services Committee recommend that Council approve:

- 1. That operational funding for rental accommodation for the Owl's Nest in the amount of \$25,000 be included in the draft estimates for 2001; and**
- 2. That the Transition Board be advised of the need for space for this very valuable program.**

CARRIED, as amended