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Give gateway plan a go: councillors NCC's proposal for monuments given support

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The National Capital Commission's plan to transform two major downtown intersections into grand gateways into the capital is getting fulsome praise from two influential councillors who say it is the kind of vision the capital needs to thrive.

Planning committee chair Peter Hume said the NCC appears "to be doing something good," because the proposed plan is the kind of urban design that makes a better and more attractive national capital.

"The concept of improving intersections, improving the urban design with gateway features, whether they are flowers or monuments, is a good thing," said Mr. Hume, who is eager to see the detailed plan.

"Symbols that make you think and reflect are fast becoming part of capitals and great capitals around the world have done it quite successfully. If that's what the NCC's goal is, it's certainly worthwhile."

Councillor Georges Bédard, whose ward includes the key Rideau-Sussex-Colonel By intersection, agrees. He said what is being proposed at the intersection will not only bring a sense of community to the area, but improve traffic in the part of city used most by dignitaries and foreign visitors. He believes the plan will get the full backing of city council.

"It is important to get the problem at that particular intersection resolved because it is in the heart of the city," Mr. Bédard said.

"When there is a cavalcade of cars, whether it is the prime minister or foreign dignitaries, going down Sussex for ceremonial reasons, it is a mess. You almost have to close it down to make it work properly."

"The redevelopment has to be some sort of traffic circle and, as the nation's capital, it makes sense to have monuments. But I would prefer a fountain with a monument, maybe the same concept as Trafalgar Square in London, but not as big," Mr. Bédard said.

The Citizen reported yesterday that the NCC plans to remake the downtown by first transforming the Rideau-Sussex-Colonel By intersection into a grand entrance into the capital. The pedestrian tunnel and the ramp near the Government Conference Centre would be knocked down to make way for, most likely, a traffic circle. A significant national monument would be built at the centre of the circle.

On the western edge of Confederation Boulevard, the Wellington-Portage intersection will also undergo a major facelift to create, more likely, another traffic circle, complete with another national monument.

The plan, which is in the early stages, is part of the NCC's long-range plan to make the capital reflect not just more of its history and heritage through national symbols, but celebrate the achievements of Canadians from all walks of life. A draft plan would be

presented to the NCC board this fall for approval, after which it would be made public. Project design will then follow. It is envisaged that the project would take 10 to 20 years to complete.

Mr. Bédard said with a new Congress Centre along Colonel By Drive slated for construction, and the city studying the redevelopment of Rideau Street, the time is right to pull everything

together and get a new plan in place for the entire the Rideau-Sussex intersection.

"This would be complex and not an easy thing to do but with some ingenuity, it could be done," he said.

"The cost would be in the millions of dollars, but how many millions I don't know. It is all part of the building of the nation's capital and we can't simply stand still because things cost too much."

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