



## **St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association – Community Meeting**

**Held on Wednesday, May 26, 2021 from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

**Hosted on the Zoom Videoconferencing Platform**

SLNA President Stewart Linton welcomed the 75 SLNA meeting participants to the meeting and introduced our special guest Toronto's former Mayor, David Crombie to take part in a conversation about **Community Engagement in 2021**, together with Stewart and Suzanne Kavanagh, a former President of the SLNA and current Chair of its Development and Heritage Committees. In his introduction Stewart observed that David Crombie has been involved in community engagement for more than 50 years, with experience from both sides of the table, working for and with municipal, provincial and federal governments.

During David's three successive terms as Mayor of Toronto, he took a leadership role in the redevelopment of the neighbourhood that became the St. Lawrence. The focus surrounding the formation of the St. Lawrence, continues to be the focus today - a commitment to preserving the human scale and liveability of the neighbourhood.

The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood has been part of David Crombie's life for a very long time, even before the buildings were there. It has grown, gained strength, and the Association is most certainly a very helpful and strong advocate for the needs of the community.

David Combie spoke about the fundamentals and principles of community organizing, community advocacy and community success - noting that they have not changed much over the years. Effective community organization should accomplish two things: 1) be useful and 2) have a moral edge.

Communications has always been important, but more recently the communications world has been animated in a way it has not been in the past. That, of course, is due to the growth of

social media and the whole digital universe that engages so many. It is important to remember that these new communications tools, do not displace the priority of organizing initiatives that are useful and aligned to a moral imperative.

Political participation has broadened substantially as well. It is not only local government, with occasional input from the federal government, such as housing policy, etc. but on an ongoing basis the Provincial government is now, de facto, the regional government. It is what Metro Toronto used to be.

Suzanne Kavanagh asked, "How do we deal with the provincial government when they don't appear to care about downtown Toronto? What tactics and strategies should we be using?"

David Crombie responded that the provincial government is legislatively responsible for municipal government. It sets out through a series of Acts, such as the Toronto Act, the ways in which municipal governments operate. Generally speaking, their own intervention has been at higher policy levels, with some public process at the end. What has happened since the removal of the Metropolitan Toronto infrastructure is that there is no longer a regional government, so the provincial government has become, by absence of any other form, the regional government, and it could be argued that this was appropriate. What has not happened is that the regional government has developed any form or content or process that communities and community activists can depend upon. So we need to begin to include provincial government into the process of decision-making regarding the future of communities on a regular basis. The best way to start is with the community representatives, the MLAs and the MPPs. The community representatives should be brought into the process early on, not later on when you think you need them. They are as important to the ultimate success of what you are doing as the local Councillors.

Suzanne added that the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood feels like it is being disadvantaged because of geography. We do reach out every once in a while to get ideas about Ontario Place, then the Foundry, the Heritage Conservation District for the St. Lawrence area and now the First Parliament site. Should we be reaching out more broadly, to groups such as FoSTRA for example, and also reaching out province-wide to engage our MLAs right across the Province?

David's response was that just as you are keeping your conversations open with local ratepayers and homeowners associations, you should also do this regionally and provincially. The new footprint for planning by the Province is the Greater Golden Horseshoe, not the GTA. The Province has a regional responsibility, and Toronto has a regional responsibility, and therefore it is important that you work with the Province. If there are differences, you try to work with those differences, but it is important to understand that they are not the enemy. They are your co-workers, and the best way to deal with this is to make sure that the local MLAs are there at the beginning. They allow for constant ongoing advocacy at the provincial level.

Suzanne spoke about her concern regarding the Foundry campaign, which was spearheaded by the SLNA. Everybody knows that we have worked with developers for years to make sure we have contacts in place. How do we make sure that we have the ear of this particular government which is not communicating with us?

David Crombie responded that it is important to remember that we have an election coming up in a year and all politicians at all levels live in a vote economy. They want to win the next election. And part of the task of local community groups, of activism, is to explain to them that their seat might be in jeopardy. They should be given the opportunity to express their own responsibility to the community they represent, regardless of whether they are the leading party or not. We should ask for their thoughts and wisdom and how they can help us at Queen's Park. Never underestimate the importance of caucus meetings. They want to win the election and they want to carry out their responsibilities as best they can. Parties do operate at the local level, but few people run on a party label. We need to reach out to all political parties, whatever their stripes. All provincial governments will do what is in their interest and they will be helpful to the degree they can, helping you to move your cause forward.

The conversation shifted to the present situation of the First Parliament site which involves expropriation, with the Province wanting to take the land from the city. Our challenge is to articulate exactly what our position is moving forward.

David Crombie responded that the First Parliament site has a fantastic and important history both pre-settlement and as the First Parliament site. It is a matter that is important to the future of the city and the Province. He commented on the importance of being able to show what its future could look like. You are in an abstract world when you are talking about expropriation, but if you can concretely show what it might look like – such as commemorating history, preserving heritage, and at the same time building affordable housing – keeping in mind that you are not warehousing people, you are building a community. And community needs to have a variety of services and a story of its own.

This might also lead to more fundamental questions, such as why is expropriation deemed necessary by the Province. No one ever expropriated Union Station, it was built and leased originally for 99 years and it has served five generations. We live in a world where there is no real connection on an ongoing basis between the municipality, the community and the Province. There is a distinct disconnect with the Province. Representatives need to be brought in early.

Stewart mentioned that public spaces are extraordinarily important and in this neighbourhood we can always use more of them – are there any steps we can take to make the provision of those public spaces either more realistic or more affordable for the government, the developers or the communities involved?

David responded that it is worthwhile remembering that the largest landowner in the city is the City. The second largest landowner are the schoolboards, and probably the third one is the Province. It is not that we don't have agencies responsible for lots of public space. It is a question of utilizing the public space. There needs to be sophisticated understanding by planners and economists. The public schoolboard has a body looking after all of its land, the Toronto Lands Corporation (the Separate schoolboard has a similar body). There should be constant ongoing discussion between the TLC, the schoolboard, the City and the Province. There is an opportunity to serve both public needs and private needs in the use of public space.

Crombie remembered that when the neighbourhood was first built the biggest issue was lack of land to accommodate the 12,000 people they had in mind. One of the things they did do was put the two schoolboards together in the same building and four stories of apartments above. Public land should be used for whatever is necessary, to build a community and community services. To bring this point across very clearly there should be a mock-up to show people that it can be done. That will capture the public's understanding. You have to show in a physical way exactly what you are talking about. There is work to be done. But the Province as well as the City can assist with getting this done. If it is not possible to find pro bono people to get this done there is no reason not to ask the City to see what they can do to make this happen. They should share with us what they have in mind and what they can do. We have to make sure that we bring across the message "this is in the public interest". We need to contact all of the MLAs across the Province, starting with the City, and then start a campaign stressing that this is in the public interest.

Stewart thanked David Crombie for his insights and his guidance, and invited David to continue this conversation at a later time.

### **Update on the St. Lawrence Market Precinct Advisory Committee (SLMPAC) - Suzanne Kavanagh**

Suzanne reported that she is the Chair and rep of this Committee and SLMPAC is in charge of the South Market (which is open now), the Tent (which is the North Market – new building under construction), and St. Lawrence Hall, along with the Market Lane Park. Once the North Market building is complete and the Tent comes down, the current Tent location will become parkland.

The revitalization of Market Lane Park is moving into the planning phase, to reimagine what the Park will look like once the North Market goes up. The North Market is behind schedule; occupancy now anticipated by June 2022, and the goal is for the farmers to be back in the North Market by approx. October 2022.

SLMPAC is entering into strategic planning for a new 5 year plan.

A few years ago St. Lawrence Market won the international award for The Best Market in the World.

The new market hours will include opening on Sundays.

### **Development Committee – Suzanne Kavanagh**

- The King-Parliament Secondary Plan is going to City Council and will probably go to LPAT.
- 110 Adelaide on the North Site has not progressed.
- 234 King Street – we are working with that developer, the base of the building is too large.
- Market Street was originally slated to become a pedestrian street, which did not materialize. Suzanne is urging individuals to write a letter to Kristyn Wong-Tam in this

regard who is asking for more consultation. We will include some suggestions in our next newsletter. This would provide us with more needed public space and there would be provision for the market vendors to have more seating area on the East side of Market Street, and extending the patios on the West side.

### **SLNA Goals for 2021/22**

We want these goals to be achievable, time-limited and measurable. All of these ideas and initiatives speak to the issues of participation and engagement with and in the Association – in meetings, in the issues we engage and the events that we host.

Areas of focus include:

- Delegate involvement and engagement;
- broadening the interest amongst the next generation of community engagement leaders;
- adding more membership from Co-Ops and TCHC buildings in our neighbourhood;
- part of engagement is also accessibility. Most of our face-to-face meetings have been close to the extreme South-West boundary of our neighbourhood, convenient for some, not so much for others and we are looking into a more balanced approach;
- improved Web functionality is another focus: we have a web presence but we learned from the Foundry experience that there are many other ways to get engagement, with some of them providing a richer experience for the Association.

Sandra Fishleigh expanded on our efforts to include increased Delegate Engagement in the organization, including an orientation to be held at the next meeting. This will include a review of the roles and responsibilities of the Delegates. We want to encourage communication, foster more engagement with our Delegate Boards and residents of member buildings, and offer opportunities for regular Delegate reporting at community meetings.

Please contact us at [slna@slna.ca](mailto:slna@slna.ca) to make further suggestions as to how you feel you can contribute to this process and make your involvement and working experience with the organization more enjoyable and productive. Any questions and any concerns you may have, drop us a note and we will include it in the next meeting.

### **Community Updates**

Stewart gave a short update on vaccination progress, including an update of VaxTO.

Also, STEPS Public Art is encouraging participation from the SLNA residents in a short survey: <https://stepspublicart.org/st-lawrence-boarding-exhibit-call-for-participation/> (feedback time for this survey has now expired).

Suzanne reported that Underpass Park Farmers Market at 29 Lower River Street (right across the street from the Foundry) will be open on Thursdays from 4 pm to 7 pm, starting on June 3.

It is a small farmers' market, and comes highly recommended. Its theme this season is "make it, bake it or grow it".

**Tom Davidson, Ward 13**

Metrolinx will be re-setting the rail beds on the tracks from Cherry to Jarvis Streets, beginning next month. Construction noise and some overnight work is anticipated.

Also next month Metrolinx will begin replacing the lighting in the Yonge Street underpass area which will be upgraded to LED technology, increasing brightness and safety. There will be upcoming work on the extension of the underpasses at Lower Jarvis and Lower Sherbourne (2 new tracks on the South side). Timelines will be set as soon as the Construction Liaison Committee meets again, it is planned for early 2022. Cherry St. & Lakeshore – a number of traffic studies are in the works, there will be an update in the fall which will include a visual mapping tool.

**The next SLNA Community Meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 30, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.**