

## Study Report on the Sense of Belonging to the Neighbourhood and to the Association

### Summary

The Champlain Park and Vicinity Residents' Association hired a consultant in fall 2016 to undertake a study on the sense of belonging to the Champlain Park neighbourhood as well as its residents' Association. More precisely, the mandate of the consultant was divided into five elements: to determine the elements which characterise the Champlain Park neighbourhood; to evaluate if the present day delimitation of the territory of the Residents' Association matches the characteristics of the neighbourhood; to highlight the elements which could favour a stronger sense of belonging to the neighbourhood; to suggest ways to augment the membership and participation; and to highlight best practices in communications among residents and between residents and their Association.

The consultant used several methods to collect data to answer the various questions posed by the Association. As a first step, she reviewed relevant documents and press clippings which helped gain a better understanding of the Association as well as other associations in Gatineau. This review notably provided relevant information on the subsidies received by other associations as well as channels of communications preferred by these associations. At a second step, an electronic survey was sent to more than 600 email addresses in Champlain Park. Responses were received from 82 members and 38 non-members of the Association. The survey focused on the mission of the Association, on the possibility of creating sub-committees, on membership and the sense of belonging. Another step was the organization of a focus group with six other residents' associations to discuss the challenges facing these associations and steps being taken to overcome them. Finally, a mini-consultation on the question of the territory of the Association took place at the annual Cocktail held on March 8, 2017. About forty residents learned more about the work of the consultant on this issue and expressed their opinion on the suggested recommendations.

The results of the study converge on three broad points: the importance of the Association for the community; the lack of volunteers and the difficulty in ensuring succession and continuity; as well as the lack of communication with and among members.

First of all, a significant number of survey respondents wanted to thank the current and past Board administrators for their work. Members of the Association recognize the involvement required by the Board administrators and are satisfied with the organised activities. While inclusive, the Association creates many occasions for the Champlain Park residents to get together over the last many years. Undeniably, the Association plays a key role in the community of the Champlain Park.

Secondly, despite all the kind words about the Association's Board administrators, few residents are ready to invest their time to ensure the Association's continued existence, as is the case in the majority of associations. In fact, many members indicated a lack of time, either due to work or family related reasons. The survey showed a large number of respondents had families with several children and/or jobs with heavy work weeks. This clearly has an impact on the time they have to dedicate to the Association or to participate in social activities.

Lastly, the need to improve the communications of the Association stands out conspicuously. Not only did members express a desire to know more about the activities of the Association, they made explicit requests to have a way to exchange with other residents to get to know each other better. Once created, this communication channel could also provide the Association the ability to publicize its events and related need for volunteers, while also allowing members to exchange among themselves and to more easily connect with each other.

Taking into consideration these three central points, the consultant proposed several recommendations related to the following themes: mission, membership, activities, involvement of members, sense of belonging, territory and communication tools. The key recommendations of this report are:

- Refocus the mission around the following mandates: represent the interest of members to relevant bodies; improve the quality of life of residents and create a communication channel for members;
- Request a subsidy for the functioning of the Association to the City's '*Cadre de soutien a l'action communautaire*' program, and if received, review the need to maintain membership dues;
- Organize activities which require less time and energy and promote residents' initiatives;
- Create sub-committees to enhance the participation of members into the Association;
- Showcase the success of the Association and its members to reinforce the sense of belonging;
- Remove certain streets from the territory of the Association while allowing residents to become auxiliary members; and
- Create a Facebook group so that residents can exchange amongst themselves and whereby the Association can publish announcements about its endeavours and events.