

Rideau Canal Management Plan Comments – June 2016 Open Houses

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From: Ken W. Watson

These comments are based on the poster board information at the Management Plan open houses held in June 2016. While the Open House presentation did reflect the current management of the Rideau Canal, it did not reflect several of the legislative requirements of Parks Canada Agency Act or the requirements of managing the Rideau Canal as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It also didn't reflect the reality of a very large National Historic Site that runs through many communities where meaningful public engagement should be a cornerstone of the canal's management of the site.

The Management Plan must directly reflect the legislated requirement of the Parks Canada Agency Act, most notably, in terms of a cultural heritage site such as the Rideau Canal, *"to present that heritage through interpretive and educational programs for public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment, both for international visitors and the Canadian public, thereby enhancing pride, encouraging stewardship and giving expression to our identity as Canadians."*

It should also directly reflect the Parks Canada Charter which states that Parks Canada's mandate is: *"On behalf of the people of Canada, we protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations."*

To address these deficiencies, there are several items that should be incorporated into the draft of new management plan. These are briefly listed below. I will be happy to sit down and discuss these issues in detail:

Heritage Presentation/Interpretation

This was essentially not mentioned* – it should have been a category in itself since heritage presentation and interpretation is a key component of Parks Canada's legislated mandate. Most of the previous, very modest, heritage presentation and interpretation was eliminated in the 2012 budget cuts, little has been restored, essentially none outside of Ottawa. This must be a significant component of Parks Canada's management of the Rideau Canal and incorporated into the new 10-year management plan.

* Poster board statement: "Parks Canada relies on seasonal lock operations staff and students who interpret the Rideau Canal's cultural heritage, maintain its historical landscapes, build meaningful relationships, and facilitate the protection of species at risk".

This is a misleading statement since lock staff do not pro-actively interpret the Rideau Canal. Interpretation, which should be a key component of Parks Canada's administration of the canal, must be done by a dedicated knowledgeable unit. There are many ways in which interpretation can be delivered, but it has to start with a dedicated core of staff highly knowledgeable on the cultural heritage of the Rideau Canal. This is presently lacking in the staffing structure of the Rideau Canal.

Public Engagement

This was also essentially not mentioned – “External Relations” as done by Parks Canada is not public engagement. Public engagement is the meaningful interchange of ideas between the public and the agency on matters that affect both parties – something that is not being done today but was key in the past to Parks Canada’s successful management of the Rideau Canal (as per the 2005 Management Plan, with mechanisms such as the Rideau Canal Advisory Committee). This is a very serious shortcoming that should be addressed in the new management plan. Even some senior management at Parks Canada have recognized this as a significant problem. In 2010, Larry Ostola (then Vice-President of Heritage Conservation and Commemoration at Parks Canada), wrote:

Greater efforts will also have to be made to engage both local communities as well as communities of interest to make national historic sites focal points for community activity and community life and, ultimately, accessible community resources. Traditionally, staff at many sites have chosen both how and when to engage and involve these communities. At times, they have been largely excluded from site operations and activities and called upon only to participate in a given site initiative on the basis of meeting a particular requirement of Parks Canada’s, such as consultation related to management planning. **For meaningful engagement of these communities to take place, this must change, and the agency must be willing to engage citizens both on their terms and on the basis of their needs and interests, as well as our own.**

Education

This used to be a component of Parks Canada’s management of the Rideau Canal, such as the development of the Rideau Canal Edukit in the late 1990s. Awareness of the Rideau Canal’s place in Canadian history is extremely low, even among local residents. Educational opportunities such as resource material for teachers, school outings to lockstations (along the entire Rideau Canal) and other educational initiatives to raise the level of awareness of what the Rideau Canal means to the early development of our nation should be part of a new management plan.

UNESCO World Heritage Site Awareness

This goes hand in hand with both Heritage Presentation and Education. It was not mentioned on any of the poster boards at the Management Plan Open House yet it is a key requirement for any UNESCO World Heritage Site. The reasons why the Rideau Canal is a World Heritage site, the universal values that were part of the designation, have to be communicated to the public, something that is not being done today. That should be one of the stated goals in the new management plan. This issue is detailed below under “Reconciliation with the 2005 World Heritage Site Management Plan.”

Science & Research

Part of Parks Canada’s work in the past has been to do scientific investigations, for both its natural and cultural heritage. There used to be an ecologist on staff in the Rideau Canal Office and a cultural heritage support person (historian) in head office responsible for the Rideau Canal. There was also a terrestrial archaeologist as part of the Eastern Ontario Field Unit responsible for the Rideau Canal. Those positions do not exist today even though the need remains. In addition, support for external research

has been severely curtailed with the removal of two local Parks Canada Rideau Canal libraries. Scientific research, both direct and indirect (support), must be part of the management of the Rideau Canal.

Visual Values

The Cultural Resource poster board reference to the issue of the visual values of the Rideau Canal (the 2006 ICOMOS recommendation to identify and protect the visual values of the Rideau Canal), stated that “This resulted in the Rideau Corridor Landscape Strategy which identified key features and values of the site.” That statement is incorrect; the key visual features (such as sight lines to and from each lockstation) have not been properly identified. In June 2013, Parks Canada was given an expert critique of the consultant’s (Dillon Consulting) report, detailing the many problems with the report (such as gross errors in mapping), which make it essentially unusable. Public information released from the all-government Rideau Corridor Landscape Strategy Committee has not indicated any additional work to identify the visual values or to provide legislated protection for those values. The new management plan should have a clearly stated goal of meeting the ICOMOS recommendation to identify and protect the visual values of the Rideau Canal. The public should also be directly involved in the process since it affects thousands of residents along the canal (there is presently no public involvement in the process).

Reconciliation with the 2005 World Heritage Site Management Plan

A new management plan for the Rideau Canal will impact on the World Heritage Site Management Plan since the latter was based on the 2005 Rideau Canal National Historic Site Management Plan. In the current WHS Management Plan it states that *“The world heritage site management plan will be implemented through the current management planning system and subsequent planning levels and processes.”* The poster boards at the open house did not deal with this issue. The new Rideau Canal National Historic Site management plan and the World Heritage Site Management Plan must reflect each other. All elements in any current WHS Management Plan must also be in the Rideau Canal National Historic Site Management Plan.

A condition of the WHS Management plan is that *“The Government of Canada will review and update the plan after each year reporting cycle.”* The first Periodic Report for the Rideau Canal was done in July 2013. There has been no public information that the WHS Management Plan was updated at that time. Given that the management of the Rideau Canal was radically altered in 2012, a revised WHS Management Plan is clearly overdue.

Items that are in the current WHS Management Plan, that must therefore be part of any new Rideau Canal NHS management plan include:

Section 9.0 – Presentation of the World Heritage Site

“As national historic sites, the elements of the nominated property have developed a wide array of programs and they will be the means of communicating messages about the outstanding universal value of the world heritage site.” Several of the listed programs, such as *“build understanding of the importance of the conservation and protection of the world heritage values to ... adjacent property owners, visitors and other interested parties”* and *“establish an outreach and education program to inform communities adjacent to the property of the site’s world heritage values”* have never been done. The need remains and should be addressed in the new management plan. These tie in with the notes about Heritage Presentation and Education listed above.

Section 10.0 – Protection of the World Heritage Site

“The policies of the Parks Canada Agency recognize the need for the agency to work with all interested parties to protect the setting of the elements of the nominated property from inappropriate development adjacent to them.” As noted in the Visual Values comments, much more work is required here – there is still no legislated protection for the buffer zone (a municipal council can, at any time, change the buffer zone conditions, including the setback distance). No work is being done with waterfront landowners.

Section 11.0 – The Involvement of Partners and Stakeholders in Managing the World Heritage Site and its Setting

This section lists the need to work with outside groups including individual waterfront landowners and NGOs such as the Rideau Waterway Land Trust, Friends of the Rideau, MHACs, Lake Associations and others. It also specifically mentions the Rideau Canal Advisory Committee which Parks Canada terminated in 2011. Meaningful public engagement with all these groups must be incorporated in the new management plan, to strengthen it and increase the prospects for support by all interested parties in the implementation of the plan.

Section 13.0 – Sustainable Tourism

This section notes the need to *“Keep accurate records of visitation to specific locations within the property to identify trends in visitation and any potential threats to conservation”* and *“Develop appropriate visitor management strategies and action plans where threats are identified”*. These types of metrics and analysis must be incorporated into the new management plan.

Bottom Line

A new Rideau Canal NHS Management Plan necessitates a new WHS Management Plan. If not, then all the elements in the current WHS Management Plan must be incorporated into the new RC NHS Management Plan.

Summary & Conclusions

It is understood that the presentation at the Open Houses was simply on the current management structure of the Rideau Canal, it was not on all the elements that should appear in a draft of the management plan.

There is an expectation that all the above will appear in the first draft of the new management plan, since they are part of the legislative requirements for Parks Canada and are also elements that will help to make the Rideau Canal a more dynamic and relevant National Historic Site in 21st century Canada.

Yours truly,

Ken W. Watson