To Achieve Success in Your Advocacy, Redefine Success

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When Warren Waters, the Chair of the Planning and Zoning Committee, asked the committee to suggest ideas for how to achieve success with public advocacy, I flippantly answered, “Redefine success,” and the wretched guy made me do a presentation!

The more I thought about it though, the more convinced I became that it is a valid idea. What I base that conviction on is the experiences my community association and I have had. Actual boots-on-the-ground advocacy stories. Let me tell you one.

The Baseline

In December 2019, Ivanhoé Cambridge, headquartered in Montreal, the owner of the Bayshore shopping centre applied for amendments to the Official Plan and the Zoning By-law to build two residential towers with heights of 27 and 30 storeys near the west end of Bayshore shopping centre and adjacent to the Bayshore LRT station. At the time, the limit was twelve storeys, and the location was supposed to be an arterial street. (The developer called it 100 Bayshore although it would have an address on Woodridge Crescent which is not an arterial street.)

Our community association’s baseline stance was to oppose the towers on every ground we could think of. The community association took it on, but the real impetus came from the

owners of very closely situated single-family homes. The owners had invested heavily in the homes, financially, emotionally, and creatively. Some of the homes were custom-built and all are located in what can only be called a gorgeous natural setting along Graham Creek. The homeowners were convinced their lifestyles would be degraded and the value of their homes would be substantially decreased by towers looming over them. Their goal was to prevent the towers from being built. The goal was to not have towers.

The Methods

We advocated in the usual ways through written submissions and delegations to Planning and Housing Committee. We had articulate, educated people, and a secret weapon—an actual architect who knows the lingo. The team was able to research and communicate, but it was the energy and emotion of the homeowners that drove the advocacy.

- We particularly opposed the massive podium—a shared three-storey, above-ground parking garage that would wall the community off from the station. It was a monstrosity.
- We said the little residential crescent would be unable to handle all the traffic the development would generate, especially at Christmastime
- We argued that the stormwater management infrastructure in Bayshore is non-existent or at least inadequate to handle the buildings that are there now, let alone two more huge towers. The stormwater will flood into Graham Creek and the homes along it a few meters downstream

- We pointed out that Andrew Haydon Park, Bayshore's backyard, is already completely full, on summer evenings.
- We argued that Bayshore is already densely populated
- We said that that part of the Ottawa River, Lac Deschenes, is an Important Bird Area (an "IBA") and towers would block migration paths

We threw everything we could think of at them.

None of us had had experience advocating about buildings.

The Outcome

We failed. Totally. We lost. Surprise, surprise. The City approved Ivanhoe Cambridge's two nasty towers with the ugly three-storey concrete podium blocking access to the station. As I recall, neither the City nor the developer took any of our advice. Even SafeWings Ottawa was unsupportive and didn't care about keeping towers away from the Important Bird Area. Perhaps a crosswalk over Woodridge Crescent was proposed, maybe some bird-friendly glass, but those towers will be built.

Well, duh, what did our naïve little community association so inexperienced in opposing towers expect? The towers will be beside an LRT station for Pete's sake! Of course we lost!

Unless. You re-define success.

In 2022, Ferguslea Properties, the owner of all the residential part of Bayshore (now called Accora Village) applied to build another two towers next to the first pair and even taller—40 and 37 storeys. We didn't know it at the time, but this landowner **had been** listening to us and taking notes. Instead of nasty great, concrete parking garage podiums, these towers will have

retail on the ground floor and between them will be a pleasant garden walkway, absorbing rain and connecting the station to the community. All the creative ideas our clever architect provided free-of-charge to the first developer were not wasted after all. If we hadn't advocated the first time, those improvements might never have happened the second time. Redefine success and we won!

We made a point of expressing appreciation to the developer for these improvements and for amenities the company had already brought to the neighbourhood, such as a barbecue and picnic area and lovely gardens.

In February, this year, 2026, Ferguslea proposed the most overwhelming development yet—replacing the townhouses in Accora Village with a mix of new low-, medium-, and high-rise units over the next 25 years. The towers were to be just across the NCC bicycle path in front of our members' lovely homes on Graham Creek.

Ferguslea made a point of holding early meetings to consult with local residents even, in March, meeting with a few members of our community association and Councillor Kavanagh to listen to our architect's ideas about how the future village can gain more access to the NCC bike path and more connectivity to the greater community. We proposed that Accora Village could exploit one of their best assets, the NCC bicycle path instead of walling it off. Ferguslea deserves credit for their willingness to listen and we told them that.

They have engaged with Bayshore residents too, and held a big online public meeting. They have put their initial proposal on hold. My own sense is that they are very concerned not to

have the negative publicity that Timbercreek Management experienced over the Heron Gate redevelopment. We expect to hear more soon.

So far, it appears that no secondary plan will be required for this complicated area where two bus rapid transit lines, highways 416 and 417, Richmond Road, the Trans Canada cycling trail, and the LRT will converge, and the Carling main street will join the Bayshore hub. The potential increase in population density is from an estimated 8,500 to an estimated 26,000 people The process being used is a master plan—in this case, just an application by one landowner for amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw for multiple buildings at the same time.

The re-development of Accora Village is a phased, 25-year project projected out to 2050. It's an opportunity to make a pretty cool place with connectivity, trees, outdoor cafes, fewer cars, better daily shopping, and nice heathy affordable places to live. In short, it's an opportunity for Crystal Beach Lakeview as well to have an improved 15-minute neighbourhood. For that to happen there must be negotiation, listening, education, and "give" on both sides. There must be re-definition of success.

What we are seeing comes closer to collaboration as opposed to consultation than in any other advocacy on any other community advocacy project I've seen. Advocacy is worth doing. I am not saying there isn't tension and concern on both sides, but I am saying a community may be successful by redefining "success".

The Ledger

When I reflect on the last five years of advocacy and do a cost benefit analysis, we gained so much and it cost us so little. I actually did a table of it—evaluating all the learning, the time, the relationships all of it, and we came out way ahead.

See Appendix A. Redefine Success—the Ledger

The Tipping Point

I continue to evaluate the advocacy story, and it doesn't feel like there's been a climax to it, a tipping point. There was no big moment of realization and denouement. It's been an ongoing process whereby we can learn and maybe the City and the developers can learn to collaborate, to bring all the ideas to the table and reach solutions, plans, and designs that will be far more successful than if only one point of view were considered.

I guess if there is a tipping point, it's happening now, as I do this presentation and I realize that my team and I can't sustain what we're doing. Ferguslea's plan goes to 2050. Even I may be nearing my prime by then! Most of us are old people and we don't have a succession plan. Community Association volunteers don't grow on trees. They get old or sick or die or have grandkids or develop different interests, or their basements flood and they get distracted. So, what's our plan?

My background is history, archaeology, archives, museums, and 30 years of technical writing, mostly in high tech. So, the only tool I know is to write things down and keep them. My second CEO at Nortel, Jean Monty, brought in a quality management system, ISO 9000 and Continuous Improvement. Basically, we just wrote down what we were doing and reviewed it regularly. The

difference was stunning. Our productivity shot up. I could see it in my team. Our customer satisfaction and our employee satisfaction shot up. Our sales shot up. Jean Monty was a god in telephony circles. I don't know that it matters what quality system you use—LEAN, TQM, Six Sigma—so much as just being conscious and keeping track—writing things down. I'm not Nortel though. My resources are limited. If any other community association has advice on how to preserve and share the experience and knowledge you've gained, I would be very glad to hear it.

Appendix A. Redefine Success—the Ledger

What was the actual cost in time, money, and relationship capital? What kept your team motivated to see it through?

Table 1. The Ledger

Costs	Benefits
Time	
Huge Most of us are retired. The time commitments were huge, but if you believe in the cause, or you're doing it for "fun" or to stay active, there is no cost. One person who is still working has devoted enormous effort, but it is by choice; he's a volunteer.	0 Time was not gained, though it's possible the team will be more efficient in the future.
Money	
Minimal • None of the labour was paid. We did not pay for lawyers or other expert help • Volunteers must have computers and internet access, but they all do anyway. • Maybe parking or transit costs, lunches, snacks or coffee that the volunteers paid for. Some food costs if the team socializes • Community association may pay photocopying costs. • Maybe the retired volunteers could have gotten jobs instead, but that cost is hard to measure.	0 Nobody made money. Perhaps the houses haven't declined in value yet.

Costs	Benefits
• The architect gave up time he might have spent on paid work	
Energy	
Could be lost. Advocacy can exhaust a community. Continued effort by the same old people may just not be sustainable. With enough demands, a community association might just give up.	Could be gained. Advocacy can energize a community. The community could be energized by threats or by the benefits of working together.
Relationship capital	
0 On these projects, no loss of relationship capital was observed—quite the opposite.	Big, but hard to measure. Collaborating and communicating brought the ream together and relationship was built. Advocacy has been more like a teambuilding exercise. We have in the past, lost teammates because of personality clashes, but we can't blame that on advocacy. • Relationship has been built with the local councillor • Relationship has been built with another Community (Bayshore) • Remarkably, relationship and respect have even been built between one of the developers and our community.
Learning	
How could there not be learning?	Incalculable value in countless ways
Retention of documents	
Retention of documents is more important than you might think. On earlier transportation advocacy we didn't always keep the resource documents, and they have either disappeared from the public record or would require effort to track down in public archives. It can be frustrating and makes preparation for advocacy difficult	We have copies of documents from the 2019 application on our computers. The City removes documents from Dev Apps very quickly, but now we have the 2019 documents if the first two towers are ever built and there is a chance to revisit the project it will be handy to have them. For example, we can prepare to go to Site Plan and ask for another look at the stormwater requirements in light of the 2026 floods.

For us the benefits have dramatically outweighed the costs.