

Ottawa East Revitalization

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The Ottawa East community that surrounds Main Street is set for significant changes as there are several visions for this former village (annexed in 1907). The area could be turned into an urban village which is defined as having a main street with shops and commercial outlets surrounded by residential areas along the connecting side streets. Some of the visions for Ottawa East call for the houses along the main street to be upgraded and left for residential purposes. Others call for some of the buildings to be torn down and replaced with newer buildings, a situation which has already occurred in a number of locations along Main Street. However, this type of change is more a form of urban renewal than urban revitalization. This paper will mostly look at the possibility of revitalizing Ottawa East and turning it into an urban village. It will also compare the community to others in the city where revitalization has been carried out to create several urban villages.

Study Area

The area which this paper will look at is bordered the by Rideau Canal to the west and north, Nicholas Street to the northeast, the Rideau River to the east, and Riverdale Avenue and Centennial Boulevard to the south (Figure 1). The study area is about 15.8 square kilometres. There are two census tracts located within the study area. The first is

the main tract for Ottawa East that has a population of 5,865¹. The other tract within the

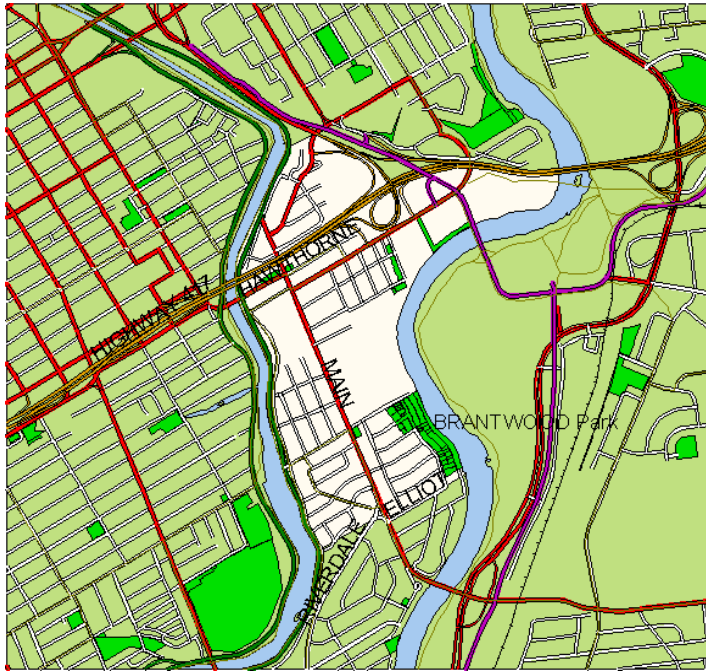


Figure 1 The area in white is the study area for this paper.

Source: The author

study area also encompasses part of Ottawa South (along Riverdale) and has a population of 4,305². Since the study area covers about one-third of this tract, it is assumed that about one third, or about 1,400 people live in the southern part of the area being covered in this paper.

Therefore, the population of the study area is about 7,300.

History of Ottawa East

As with many urban villages, the history of Ottawa East is a major selling point for promoting the community as a place to live. Ottawa East is rich in history and this could be an important part in promoting it as an urban village. This paper will briefly outline the history of Ottawa East.

Farmers originally settled Ottawa East during the mid-nineteenth century.

However, actual development of the community as a residential area did not start until

1 Statistics Canada, *GeoSearch* (2005). Map.

<<http://geodepot.statcan.ca/Diss/GeoSearch/index.cfm?lang=E>> [4 December 2005], 0015.00 (CT), Ottawa – Hull.

2 Statistics Canada, *GeoSearch* (2005). Map.

<<http://geodepot.statcan.ca/Diss/GeoSearch/index.cfm?lang=E>> [4 December 2005], 0016.00 (CT), Ottawa – Hull.

about the 1870s³. As the community grew, there were fears of annexation by the City of Ottawa, so the Village of Ottawa East was created on December 7, 1888⁴. By the early 1900s, however, for a number of reasons it became evident to many of the residents that becoming part of Ottawa would benefit the community. So in 1907 the Village of Ottawa East was annexed by the City of Ottawa.

When the railway arrived in 1888 through Ottawa East, it opened up opportunities for industries to locate in this area. The industries set up along the Rideau River and Rideau Canal in order to have access to transportation and the coming of the railway improved their transportation link to their markets. For example, the Ottawa Gas Works opened on Lees Avenue close to the railway line⁵. Due to these industries, many workers as well as wealthy businessmen moved into the village. However, some of these industries would later have an impact on revitalization of the community due to the pollution left behind in the soil once the factories were removed⁶.

The construction of the Queensway in the mid-1960s was a major blow to the appeal of the community as a place to live. Built on an elevated right-of-way, it further divided the community and resulted in the loss of a historical home (the Lees' farm house, Wildwood), a commercial building containing stores on Main Street, much of a small park and the back yards of the homes along Hawthorne Avenue (Figure 2). The commercial building could have been an important part of creating an urban village. The

³ Wallace, Rick. *A History of Ottawa East*. CD-ROM. (Ottawa: Old Ottawa East Community Association, May 2004), Chapter Three: The 1860's and 1870's.

⁴ Wallace, Rick. *A History of Ottawa East*. CD-ROM. (Ottawa: Old Ottawa East Community Association, May 2004), Chapter Four: Annexation – Yes or No?.

⁵ Ballantyne, Bruce. *A History of Ottawa East*. CD-ROM. (Ottawa: Old Ottawa East Community Association, May 2004), The Railway History of Ottawa East.

⁶ "Lees Avenue," *Wikipedia* (November 2005). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lees_Avenue> [4 December 2005], par. 3.

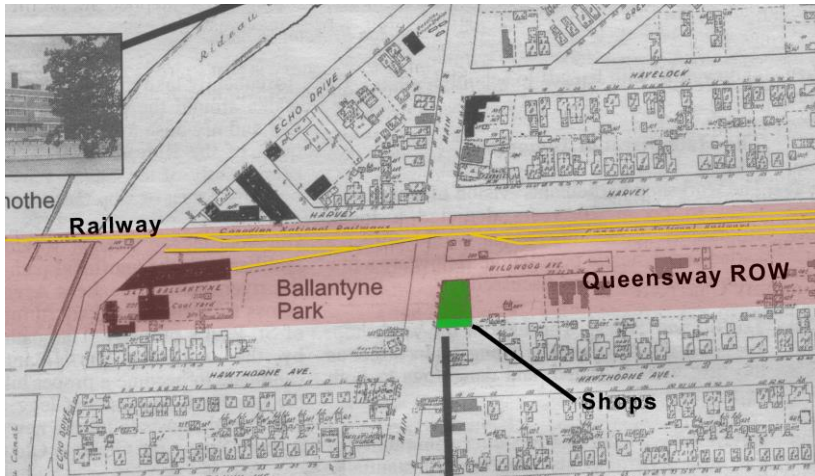


Figure 2 The area in red is the current right-of-way for the Queensway. Due to the construction of the Queensway, the railway (in yellow), the shops along Main Street (in green), and the J & T Ballantyne (dark building at left of image) coal facility were all removed.

Source: December 2005 issue of *The Mainstreeter*, adapted by author.

larger size of the park prior to the Queensway would have created a greater appeal for revitalization.

The Queensway also brought in outside traffic along Main Street when the Smyth Road Bridge was built⁷

which provided a link from Alta Vista to the Queensway. With the construction of the Queensway, the community lost much of its village identity. The Smyth Road bridge



Figure 3 The Old Town Hall as it looks today after restoration.

Source: Photo by author.

resulted in the widening of Main Street to accommodate the extra traffic.

Revitalization of the community did not really begin until about the mid-1980s. The first major revitalization project in Ottawa East was the restoration of the Old Town Hall (Figure 3). When the community was just starting to thrive in 1894, the village council voted for the building of a town hall. The building, completed in 1895, survived for nearly a century despite annexation, neglect, fire, and the building of the Queensway. The

⁷ Wallace, Rick. *A History of Ottawa East*. CD-ROM. (Ottawa: Old Ottawa East Community Association, May 2004), *The History of Ottawa East – An Introduction*.

renovation was complete on September 11, 1988⁸. The building now has a heritage designation.

Several draft plans were created during the 1980s for the revitalization of Ottawa East. These plans included improvements to Main Street, improvements to the community parks and the approval of the construction of the controversial Alta Vista Parkway (the parkway will be discussed in more detail later)⁹. However, only a few of these plans were implemented and the start of revitalization of the rest of Ottawa East did not occur until recent years.

Factors in Revitalizing the Community

There are many factors that can help in the revitalization of a community. Examples of these can be found in the successful development of urban villages in other parts of Ottawa, such as the Glebe and Westboro. These factors can also be found in Ottawa East.

One key factor is to have a commercial street with shops and businesses. There are several streets in Ottawa that illustrate this factor. These include, for example, Richmond Road as Westboro's main street, Bank Street as the Glebe's, and Preston Street for the Italian community often called "Little Italy". For Ottawa East, Main Street would be its commercial area in an urban village. However, at present shops and businesses are limited but the street has many houses along it that could be converted into shops and restaurants. There are two small store-front type buildings at the corner of

⁸ Wallace, Rick, "The Old Town Hall," *A History of Ottawa East*. CD-ROM. Ottawa: Old Ottawa East Community Association, May 2004.

⁹ City of Ottawa, Community Department and Ottawa East Citizen's Committee, *Ottawa East 2nd Draft Development Plan*. (Ottawa: City of Ottawa, February 1980), 47.

Hazel Street & Main and several more are at Hawthorne Avenue & Main. Both could be renovated and turned into shops for people living in the area.

However, there are also stretches of open space belonging to several institutions (St. Paul's University and Immaculata High School) that could inhibit commercial development along Main Street. Also, some buildings suitable for conversion to businesses have already been replaced by townhouses and apartments that could hinder the creation of an urban village. However, these townhouses are still a part of the revitalization of Ottawa East, creating a sense of renewal and bringing in new residents.



Figure 4 North side of Hawthorne Avenue. These buildings could be used for shops.

Source: Photo by author.

There is also a stretch of Hawthorne Avenue between Main Street and the Rideau Canal (Figure 4) that could be converted into a main street. This stretch of Hawthorne has several buildings that resemble shops and restaurants and some of the houses could be converted. Due to its

proximity to the Rideau Canal, this part of Hawthorne could also be a shopping connection between the rest of Ottawa East and the Canal.

David Ley, an urban geographer at the University of British Columbia, mentions that location is also a key factor for urban revitalization. The proximity to the Central Business District (CBD) is important but the proximity to sources of leisure, culture and urban services is just as important¹⁰. Ottawa East is close to many of these amenities. The

¹⁰ Ley, David, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 105.

community is close to the downtown business district and it has some of the urban services. It also has recreational areas, specifically along the Rideau Canal and several parks in the community.

Another important factor for urban revitalization is access to nearby environmental amenities. Access to a waterfront, park or a hill is a common feature found in the successful revitalization of communities across Canada and in Ottawa¹¹. For example, The Glebe is within walking distance of the Rideau Canal and has several community parks. Westboro is within walking distance of the Ottawa River and a beach, and Little Italy is close to Dow's Lake and the parkland surrounding the lake. Ottawa East has the benefit of being bordered by two bodies of water, the Rideau River and Canal. The waterway with the main focus would most likely be the Rideau Canal due to its recreational advantages. There are two access routes from the centre of Ottawa East to the Rideau Canal. One route is Hawthorne Avenue and the other is the northern end of Main Street. Revitalization has already started north of the Queensway on Main Street with the Glassworks Loft Apartments and the "Echo on Canal" condominium apartments at Main and Echo Drive. The revitalization is gradually moving south into the central part of Ottawa East from this area of Main Street. Signs went up recently on the west side of Main at Harvey Street for a new apartment building.

As mentioned above, another crucial factor for the creation of an urban village is a community park. A park is important for revitalization since it can be used for events and can be a social place for the community. For example, the Glebe is fortunate to have two parks, Central Park and Lansdowne Park that are located within walking distance of

¹¹ Ley, David, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 105.

the Glebe. Both include access to water (Lansdowne has access to the Rideau Canal and Central Park has Patterson's Creek).

There are a few parks in Ottawa East that could be used for community events. The main park for Ottawa East could be Ballantyne Park (Figure 5). This park was donated to the city by James Ballantyne and could be used for community functions. Its location across the street from the



Figure 5 Ballantyne Park located at the corner of Hawthorne Avenue & Main Street.

Source: Photo by author.

Ottawa East Town Hall (now a community centre) would make it an ideal venue for outdoor community functions in the summer. Another park that could be used for community events is Brantwood Park located on the Rideau River. In fact, the community hopes to put in recreational facilities such as building docks so people can

have access to the river for recreational uses¹².

Another factor that can help fuel revitalization is the proximity of educational facilities, in particular a university. Ottawa East is fortunate to



Figure 6 St. Paul University located at the corner of Clegg & Main Streets.

Source: Photo by author

¹² Ottawa East Community Association, *Old Ottawa East Inventory (first draft) – Fall 2004* (November 8, 2004). <<http://www.ottawaeast.ca/OECAInventory.html>> [4 December 2005].

have a university located within the area. St. Paul University (Figure 6) is located in the heart of Ottawa East and draws students and education staff to the area. In addition, Ottawa East is within walking distance of The University of Ottawa.

The trend in Ottawa during the 1980s seemed to be the revitalization of communities with higher income levels or having adjacent communities with higher income levels, communities with elegant or historical housing, and communities close to the Rideau Canal¹³. This trend was true for the Glebe, Sandy Hill, and New Edinburgh. This could be considered the case for Ottawa East as it is in close proximity to communities now with higher income levels (the Glebe, Ottawa South), it has many older houses and it is located next to the Rideau Canal.

Another factor for the revitalization of communities is having a rich historical past. Many of these communities originated at the start of the twentieth century and have a strong history. For example, the Glebe, as a clergy reserve, started to be developed as a residential area in the early 1900s with the coming of the streetcar along Bank Street¹⁴. It saw the construction of many elegant homes of that era. In Westboro one can find several historic homes and churches.

Ottawa East has had a significant history as well (previously mentioned) and has many historical buildings such as the Old Town Hall, Saint Paul University, the Scholasticate, Immaculata High School (originally St. Patrick College) and many others. All the communities use these historical attractions to promote the history of their community as a pleasant place to live. History is also a significant draw bringing people into the community to visit the neighbourhood and use the local businesses.

13 Ley, David, "Social Upgrading in Six Canadian Inner Cities," *The Canadian Geographer* 32, no 1 (1988): 38.

14 Elliot, Bruce S., *The City Beyond* (Nepean: City of Nepean, 1991), 176.

Possible Barriers for Revitalization

There are also a number of factors in Ottawa East that could jeopardize revitalization of the community. Some of these issues have been of concern for other communities in Ottawa that have been revitalized. However, a few are unique to Ottawa East.

The major concern for Ottawa East is traffic problems. Traffic has been an important issue in the other urban villages in Ottawa. For example, in the Glebe the community created the *Glebe Traffic Plan 2002* because of traffic concerns in the early 1990s¹⁵. Residents in Ottawa East are very concerned about the traffic problems on Main Street and Hawthorne Avenue. They believe that traffic and inadequate parking will be the major barrier for future growth¹⁶. Due to the connection these two roads have with the downtown and the east side of the Rideau River, many people use these roads to commute to work. The heavy traffic is not very pedestrian friendly and could hinder future plans to create an urban village in Ottawa East.

Residents also fear that future plans could result in even more increase in traffic on these two streets and other streets in Ottawa East. One of these plans calls for the widening of the Queensway (Highway 417). The Queensway has acted as a barrier for Ottawa East since its construction back in the mid-1960s. It acts as a physical and visual barrier for access to areas north of the Queensway, including the Canal. The noise and pollution from the traffic on the expressway reduces the attractiveness of the community as a place to live. Plans now call for it to be expanded with an extra lane on each side.

¹⁵ Doucet, Clive. *Glebe Traffic Plan 2002* (February 26, 2002).

<<http://www.clivedoucet.com/sreports/gltrafficammended.htm>> [4 December 2005].

¹⁶ Fulton, E. Kaye, *Main Street Revitalization Survey* (Ottawa: Ottawa East Community Association, November 19, 2005), 6.

Original plans called for collector roads and exit lanes along the highway. This would have required the demolition of many houses along the north side of Hawthorne Avenue, the elimination of Ballantyne Park, and possibly the removal of the Old Town Hall. Much of the benefits for urban revitalization would have been eliminated if the original plan had been implemented. However, due to public concern and opposition, the plan was altered and the proposed exit lanes were dropped and with it the plans to demolish

important parts of the Ottawa East community¹⁷.

Another transportation project that would impact the community is the construction of the Alta Vista Parkway (Figure 7) to bring traffic from the Alta Vista area to the Nicholas Street interchange with the Queensway by crossing Lees Avenue. Many residents in the area are opposed to this project as well. It would most likely increase traffic on Lees



Figure 7 Future Alta Vista Parkway.

Source: <http://www.ottawaeast.ca/NicholasSection.html>

Avenue, and other side streets, as well as increase traffic on Main Street and Hawthorne Avenue too as its junction with Lees Avenue would encourage more cars to use these streets to connect to the Pretoria Avenue Bridge and Elgin Street to reach Centre Town.

¹⁷ Coalition Against Queensway Widening, *Properties Spared* (June 2, 2004). <<http://www.ottawaeast.ca/QWsaved.html>> [4 December 2005], 1st par.

Issues with Revitalization

There are several issues that are created when a neighbourhood is revitalized. One is the displacement of residents with incomes that are not adequate to meet rising prices for rent or taxes with land values that rise as a result of revitalization. This is frequently a major concern for city governments about their communities and Ottawa East is no exception

In a survey conducted by the community association (mentioned in more detail below) already many of the residents found that there were hardly any affordable housing units in the area¹⁸. New buildings planned to be located along Main Street are intended for residents with much higher levels of income. For example, new townhouses to be built at Main Street and Lady Evelyn Place are priced between \$439,900 to \$464,900¹⁹. Units in the Glassworks (Figure 8), located at the corner of Greenfield Avenue and Main Street, are being sold for up to \$449,900²⁰. These prices are obviously not within the price range affordable by lower income residents.



Figure 8 Glassworks building located north of the Queensway on Main Street.
Source: Photo by author.

18 Fulton, E. Kaye, *Main Street Revitalization Survey* (Ottawa: Ottawa East Community Association, November 19, 2005), 11.

19 Sherbrooke Urban Developments Ltd, *Evelyn on the Main-New Town House/Floor Plans* (2005). <http://www.thesherbrookepeople.com/evelyn_on_main/plans.html> [4 December 2005].

20 Charles Sezlik Group, *Ottawa Condos: The Glassworks* (2005). <<http://www.condosottawa.com/CanalArea/29MainStreet.html>> [4 December 2005].

Much of the rental prices in Ottawa East are above the affordable housing guidelines. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) definition of Affordable Housing is that: “the cost of adequate shelter should not exceed 30% of household income”²¹. So, for example, the city of Calgary has chosen a threshold for anyone with gross income below \$37,621 as being low income²². On this basis, anyone who falls below this income should only have to spend a maximum of \$940.53 for rent per month.

There are only a few places that are available in Ottawa East that have a rent lower than this. These are mostly bachelor or one-bedroom apartments. Most of the houses in Ottawa East for rent have prices over \$1,000 per month²³. However, this is not unique to Ottawa East. As with other revitalization projects, the cost of renting apartments and houses will most likely go up in Ottawa East, as the area becomes more of an urban village. Once this occurs, residents who cannot afford the costs will have to find some other place to live.

With the relocation of residents who cannot afford to live in the revitalized community, two issues arise. The first is that the displaced residents may be worse off in their new neighbourhood. Second, the displaced residents would probably move to other neighbourhoods nearby creating a strain on services in that area²⁴. These are the hidden

21 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Frequently Asked Questions* (2005). <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/FAQs/faqs_003.cfm> [4 December 2005], #5.

22 City of Calgary, *Definition of Affordable Housing* (October 3, 2005).

<<http://content.calgary.ca/CCA/City+Hall/Business+Units/Corporate+Properties+and+Buildings/Affordable+Housing/Definition+of+Affordable+Housing+.htm>> [4 December 2005].

²³ The rental prices are taken from several real estate websites for the Ottawa area.

²⁴ Cicin-Sain, Biliana, “The Costs and Benefits of Neighbourhood Revitalization,” in *Urban Revitalization*, ed. Donald B. Rosenthal (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1980), 67.

issues normally associated with urban revitalization and need to be considered in any plans to revitalize a community.

Current Revitalization Projects in Ottawa East

In order to create an urban village, there needs to be involvement by the residents. Many of the urban villages in Ottawa have a sense of community involvement and they emphasise this when promoting their community. Each of the urban villages in Ottawa has their own community association. Each also has its own community newspaper to provide information to its residents.

The Ottawa East community is very committed to turning the area into a revitalized neighbourhood and to making Main Street its commercial centre. However, as mentioned above, the community association is concerned that proposed development along Main Street and Hawthorne Avenue could jeopardize any efforts to create an urban village.

The Community Association is trying to implement plans that would turn Main Street and Hawthorne Avenue into the commercial centre of an urban village. The association is concerned that some of the recent developments for residential buildings could jeopardize these plans²⁵. The association carried out several initiatives. First, the community created a list of possible rehabilitation projects that could be done (see Appendix A). Some of these include improvements to Main Street and Hawthorne Avenue, creating a streetscape along Lees Avenue, improving the parks in the area. It

²⁵ Ottawa East Community Association, *Main Street Revitalization* (December 2, 2005). <<http://www.ottawaeast.ca/MainStreetVision.html>> [4 December 2005], par. 1.

also calls for building docks in Brantwood Park along the Rideau River so people could use the waterfront for recreational purposes²⁶.

However, even in recent years, there has not been much support from the rest of the City of Ottawa for the creation of an urban village. For example, when townhouses were going to be built along Main Street, the community asked that commercial space be included as part of the townhouse complex that will face Main Street. The city Council rejected this proposal based on their perception that Main Street is “a dump” and that “local residents deliberately ran stores out of business” as two councillors were reported to have said²⁷. Clive Doucet, councillor for the ward, mentioned that most city officials believe that the Old Ottawa East community does not exist²⁸. Many residents hope to change this point of view.

Revitalization seems to come gradually for Ottawa East. Projects are small and are being implemented one at a time. However, within the next year, there are plans to open a coffee shop and a farmers' organic market along Main Street²⁹.

Ottawa East Community Survey

Recently, the Ottawa East Community Association conducted a survey on what the community wanted to see for the revitalization of Ottawa East. The results illustrate that residents want to see revitalization that would mirror what has been done in other communities to create an urban village. The community would like to see more shops

26 Ottawa East Community Association, *Old Ottawa East Inventory (first draft) – Fall 2004* (November 8, 2004). <<http://www.ottawaeast.ca/OECAinventory.html>> [4 December 2005].

27 Fulton, E. Kaye, “A Story About a Street,” *The Mainstreeter* (Ottawa East), December 2005, 1.

28 Ibid.

29 E. Kaye Fulton <ekf@magma.ca>, *Re: Ottawa East Essay* (November 30, 2005). E-mail to Kevin Ballantyne <kballant8@hotmail.com>.



Figure 9 Traffic volume and lack of parking spots on Main Street are major concerns with area residents.

Source: Photo by author.

along Main Street, better traffic measures put in place and improvements to Main Street and other side streets as well as to community parks.

Ninety-five percent of the community use shops along Main Street. The reasons that some of the people did not use

Main Street were parking problems, limited variety, and close proximity to other areas such as the Glebe and downtown Ottawa. Some of the residents also found Main Street to be unattractive and littered. Others saw it as a feeder for the rest of Ottawa and not as a street for the community³⁰. These issues reflect similar concerns that other areas in Ottawa have had about their communities.

Two-thirds of the community thought that the addition of more shops and services was of high importance³¹. When asked what they most preferred as a commercial operation, respondents in Ottawa East chose a coffee shop³². They also wanted some cultural services such as an art gallery, arts centre, a family-friendly park, a rink or pool, and other community programs³³. These results seem to reflect what other urban villages have such as shops along the main street as wells as community, recreational and art facilities.

30 Fulton, E. Kaye, *Main Street Revitalization Survey* (Ottawa: Ottawa East Community Association, November 19, 2005), 3.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 4.

33 Ibid.

From the survey, it was apparent that the community also prefers to have a mix of different land uses. Seventy-one percent of the community wants a mix of both commercial and residential development along Main Street³⁴. Similar to other communities in Ottawa, a mix of both types of land uses is a popular concept.

Many of the visions of the Ottawa East community as an urban village reflect the ideas that were expressed by residents of other communities where revitalization has occurred and an urban village has been created. These visions of people not having to drive, being able to walk down a main street and visit shops or having access to recreation and the waterfronts are ones shared by many of the residents of Ottawa East.

Conclusion

Ottawa East has strong potential for urban revitalization. Its history, location, and community involvement are assets that can help Ottawa East achieve its plans for an urban village. However, there are barriers to overcome before this can happen. Traffic concerns along Main Street and Hawthorne Avenue, the Queensway Expansion and Alta Vista Parkway Projects, improvements to Main Street and other community facilities all need to be addressed during the revitalization process. By minimizing the impact of these things, Ottawa East can become a unique and important urban village for the Nation's Capital.

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

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