

NECA's Committee on Beechwood Development
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The Committee on Beechwood Development has been actively monitoring potential projects on Beechwood corridor. The monitoring is an initiative with other Community Associations in the area through the Beechwood Village Alliance (BVA), which is looking to revitalization and community oriented commercial vendors in new projects, to serve local needs. The BVA has become involved because recent trends on Beechwood show that landlords are trying to exact high rents from would be tenants and rather forego income if they are unable to rent to national (bankable) brands or upmarket tenants (medical or related higher payers). The Beechwood trend is not isolated. It's experienced in parts of Ottawa such as Westboro, and has been ongoing in cities such as Toronto and New York.

With this in mind the BVA has been examining different ways to engage and to even partner with perspective developers to ensure that future projects have sufficient commercial space to rent to specialized commercial establishments and hubs to meet community needs, and at the same time build the character and dynamism of Beechwood Village. The objective is to be more positive and achieve community objectives.

In order to have more locally oriented projects in the future and to be able to have a vibrant commercial sector with innovative & creative vendors that appeal to community needs, the community should be able to directly influence the development process. This could potentially be through a community based development vehicle with local financing whose focus is to undertake projects, or be partner to developers in their ventures. The goal of such a local vehicle and undertakings would be to ensure that future Beechwood projects have tenants with specialty offerings and meet community needs. The potential vehicle, the Beechwood Community Development Corporation, (BCDC), would be a mechanism for social impact investment—meaning it would be primarily focused on meeting community needs (currently being defined) and could be predominately financed by the community and broader markets through investment instruments that have already been tried and proven elsewhere—community bonds and crowdfunding for instance. Though background paper for the possible creation BCDC is still being finalized, the BVA has had exploratory discussions on potential future projects on the Beechwood to gauge reactions and determine the parameters for possible involvement.

BVA members have also had meetings and inputs from experts on social impact investment that have experience and substantial knowledge of this growing, alternative type of investment. Social impact investment finance undertakings usually focus on community goals—the potential purchase and operation of commercial real estate in new Beechwood projects--while providing somewhat below market rates of returns to investors. This type of investment can take several forms, including community bonds. But whatever version, the goal is to have a vibrant Beechwood community corridor that in return will also tend to increase real estate prices in the very area where local investors live.

If, and when, there is more progress on the BCDC and potential projects, naturally any action to be taken will revert back to NECA and the other Associations for discussion and approval.