

Date: October 3, 2026

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Purpose: To share practical experiences and lessons from community advocacy campaigns and identify approaches that can help community associations achieve results when dealing with municipal government, other levels of government, developers and public agencies.

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**Speaking out:
Getting results**

**weekend workshop on
advocacy for community groups**

Saturday October 3 – 10:00 – 14:00

Overbrook Community Centre, 33 Quill St.

Registration: <https://forms.gle/chYNuW3Cvntj6oc48>

- Bring insight onto your organization’s current issues;
- Learn how your group can speak out effectively;
- Learn from experiences of your colleagues;
- Round table discussions involving all, to consider case studies.

Each case presents how they decided to take a stand, and the tools employed to advance their position. Presentations on:

Reimagine Glebe	NCC Embassy Precinct
Re-defining Success	McCarthy Woods
Vacant Unit Tax	Using AI in Community Advocacy

Note: Participants from FCA member associations may register without charge; other individuals are asked to pay \$10 at the door to cover cost of the event.

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1. Opening and Introductions

The workshop opened with introductions from the facilitators and panel members, who brought experience from community advocacy, municipal planning, government, politics and the private sector.

The introductory discussion emphasized that successful community advocacy often requires a sustained effort over a considerable period of time. Even where the community, elected representatives and government broadly agree on an objective, time is still required to develop policy, obtain approvals, secure funding and implement projects.

The workshop was organized around community advocacy case studies. Each presenter was given approximately ten minutes to describe a campaign, followed by questions and discussion. Participants were subsequently invited to join breakout discussions based on the case study of greatest interest to them.

A recurring question for the workshop was:

What actually produces results when communities advocate for change?

2. Case Study – Imagine Glebe / Bank Street Secondary Plan

Issue

The Glebe Community Association was dealing with individual development applications along Bank Street and concluded that responding to developments one application at a time was consuming significant volunteer resources without addressing the larger question of what the community wanted Bank Street to become.

The community association sought a secondary plan from the City but was initially advised that there was insufficient redevelopment activity to justify one.

Community Response

Rather than accepting the City's refusal, the community initiated its own visioning exercise, referred to as **Imagine Glebe**.

The intention was not to create a formal secondary plan independently of the City, but to undertake some of the early community-engagement and visioning work that would normally contribute to one.

The association deliberately developed relationships with City planning staff and sought their advice on the proposed work plan so that the community process would produce information that could ultimately be useful to the City.

Engagement methods included:

- a visual-preference survey;
- outreach beyond regular community-association participants;
- QR-code cards distributed at schools and other community locations;
- youth involvement;
- outreach in coffee shops and along Bank Street;
- temporary use of a vacant storefront as a public consultation space;
- visual displays and models showing possible development;
- public launch events involving elected officials; and
- continued engagement with City staff and political representatives.

Approximately 975 people participated in the survey, with roughly one-third coming from outside the Glebe. This was considered important because Bank Street serves a broader population than neighbourhood residents alone.

Outcome

The community's work helped establish a credible evidence base demonstrating broader support for a vision for Bank Street.

The City ultimately proceeded with a secondary plan.

The planning process also contributed to identifying a City-owned parking lot as a potential affordable-housing site and helped establish where greater building heights could appropriately be accommodated while retaining important heritage characteristics elsewhere.

Lessons

The presenter emphasized:

Persistence matters. An initial "no" from government does not necessarily mean the issue is finished.

Do useful preparatory work. Rather than simply demanding that government act, communities can reduce uncertainty by undertaking credible research and engagement themselves.

Build relationships with both elected officials and staff. Administrative relationships can be as important as political ones.

Bring something useful to meetings. Engagement with decision-makers is more effective when the community brings information, evidence or potential solutions rather than simply asking for assistance.

Engage beyond the usual participants. Schools, youth, businesses, people using coffee shops and people from outside the immediate neighbourhood can broaden the legitimacy of the exercise.

Make engagement enjoyable and accessible. Creative and visual consultation methods helped attract participation.

Transparency builds trust. Models, visualizations and accessible information can reduce fear and misunderstanding surrounding development.

3. Case Study – Bayshore / Crystal Beach-Lakeview Development Advocacy

Issue

In 2019, Ivanhoé Cambridge proposed two residential towers near Bayshore Shopping Centre and the future Bayshore LRT station.

Residents opposed several aspects of the proposal, including the proposed heights and a large above-ground parking podium. Concerns included traffic, stormwater, impacts on nearby homes, access to the transit station and environmental impacts.

The community's original objective was essentially to prevent the towers from being constructed.

Initial Outcome

The City approved the development.

Measured against the original objective, the community campaign appeared to have failed.

Redefining Success

The presenter argued that advocacy results should sometimes be evaluated over a longer period.

When Ferguslea Properties subsequently proposed additional towers in the area, later designs incorporated features resembling ideas the community had advocated during the earlier campaign, including improved pedestrian connections, retail at grade, landscaping and better integration with the surrounding community.

The developer subsequently engaged more directly with residents regarding the long-term redevelopment of Accora Village.

The community's relationship with the development process therefore evolved from opposition toward greater dialogue and collaboration.

Lessons

The central message was:

Redefine success.

An advocacy campaign may influence later projects even if it does not stop or significantly alter the immediate proposal.

Additional lessons included:

- constructive ideas may survive even when an individual campaign is unsuccessful;
- acknowledge developers when they make improvements;
- relationships developed through one campaign can influence subsequent developments;
- advocacy can increase community knowledge and capacity;
- collaboration may ultimately achieve more than perpetual confrontation; and
- communities should document their work so that knowledge is not lost when volunteers leave.

Volunteer Succession

A significant concern was the sustainability of long-term advocacy.

Major redevelopment plans may extend over decades, while community-association volunteers change, retire or become unavailable.

The presenter stressed the importance of documenting:

- submissions;
- research;
- correspondence;
- decisions;
- development proposals;
- lessons learned; and
- relationships and contacts.

Institutional memory should belong to the community association rather than individual volunteers.

4. Case Study – Hintonburg and the Vacant Unit Tax

Issue

Hintonburg had a significant number of vacant residential properties while simultaneously experiencing homelessness, encampments and the loss of affordable housing.

The contrast between people living outdoors and residential buildings remaining vacant for extended periods became the basis of an advocacy campaign.

Strategy

The Hintonburg Community Association researched approaches being considered or implemented in other Canadian cities, including Vancouver, Winnipeg and Toronto.

The association used the City's budget process to raise the issue because budget delegations provide an opportunity to introduce an issue rather than merely respond to an existing staff report.

A short video was prepared showing vacant buildings and explaining the problem.

The video was presented at committee together with written supporting material.

Impact

The visual presentation attracted the attention of councillors and subsequently generated media coverage.

Council directed staff to examine the feasibility of a vacant-unit tax.

The policy subsequently progressed through further study, provincial authorization and implementation.

The presenter reported that the program generated significant funding for affordable housing and contributed to previously vacant units being returned to use.

Lessons

Use visuals. A concise video can be considerably more effective than a conventional verbal delegation.

Understand the decision-making process. Knowing when and where an issue can be introduced is important.

Make the issue easy for media to communicate. Strong images and a simple story helped extend the campaign beyond the committee room.

Use existing material. Much of the imagery had already been collected through previous neighbourhood property complaints.

Research precedents. Showing that similar policies had been considered or implemented elsewhere made the proposal more credible.

Community expertise matters. Volunteers brought different professional and technical skills to the campaign.

The case demonstrated that a relatively low-cost community campaign can lead to substantial policy and financial outcomes.

5. Case Study – Mechanicsville and the NCC Embassy Precinct

Issue

The Mechanicsville Community Association opposed aspects of an NCC proposal to establish an embassy precinct on federal lands adjacent to the community.

The community was particularly concerned about the loss of green space in a neighbourhood already experiencing development pressure, limited tree canopy and significant heat-island effects.

Other concerns included contaminated fill beneath portions of the property, building heights, parking orientation, pedestrian connections and the relationship between the proposed development and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Community Objective

The association sought to maximize retained green space and improve the relationship between the proposed embassy development and Mechanicsville.

Advocacy Strategy

The community concluded that conventional consultation alone would not achieve its objectives and therefore pursued multiple avenues simultaneously.

These included:

- the municipal zoning process;
- participation before the Ontario Land Tribunal;
- fundraising to obtain legal assistance;
- engagement with City staff and elected representatives;
- engagement with provincial and federal political representatives;
- examination of NCC policies and planning documents;
- engagement with Global Affairs Canada;
- communication with diplomatic representatives;
- media and public advocacy;
- environmental arguments;
- public events and demonstrations; and
- coalition building.

The community raised approximately \$40,000 despite initially having very limited financial resources. Early crowdfunding allowed the association to retain legal assistance and substantially increase its ability to participate in the planning and tribunal processes.

Outcome

The community did not achieve its preferred outcome of retaining the entire area as green space.

However, approximately one-quarter of the site was retained as green space, building heights were limited, pedestrian connections were secured and design requirements improved the relationship between future embassy buildings and the community.

Parking was to be placed behind buildings or underground rather than dominating the community-facing frontage.

Lessons

The presenter described the relationship with the NCC during this campaign as highly adversarial and expressed frustration with the difficulty of obtaining meaningful community access to NCC decision-making.

The broader advocacy lessons were:

Identify every decision-maker. The organization presenting the proposal may not be the only body capable of influencing it.

Map the decision-making system. Communities should identify who approves, funds, regulates, influences or can stop a proposal.

Use multiple channels simultaneously. Municipal, provincial, federal, legal, political, administrative and public-pressure strategies can reinforce each other.

Legal participation can change the balance of power. Fundraising for professional and legal expertise increased the community's capacity.

Political relationships matter. Intervention by elected representatives can change the institutional calculation even when they do not formally control the process.

Coalitions strengthen advocacy. Environmental organizations, neighbouring communities and other allies can provide credibility and additional expertise.

Partial victories matter. Retaining approximately 24% of the site as green space and obtaining design improvements was considered meaningful even though the community did not achieve its original preferred outcome.

6. Discussion Themes Across the Case Studies

Although the campaigns involved very different issues, several common themes emerged.

6.1 Define Success Carefully

Success is not always winning everything originally requested.

Results may include:

- changing a policy;
- changing a future development;
- establishing a precedent;
- obtaining better design;
- preserving part of a valued asset;
- creating relationships;
- improving government understanding;
- building community capacity; or
- creating evidence that can be used later.

6.2 Relationships Are Infrastructure

Repeatedly, presenters emphasized relationships with:

- municipal staff;
- councillors;
- MPs and MPPs;
- developers;
- journalists;
- neighbouring community associations;
- environmental organizations; and
- subject-matter experts.

Relationships developed before a crisis can be particularly valuable when an urgent issue arises.

6.3 Understand Where Decisions Are Actually Made

Communities need to distinguish between consultation and decision-making.

Before beginning a campaign, associations should ask:

Who actually has the authority to say yes or no?

This may include staff, committees, council, tribunals, provincial ministries, federal agencies, ministers or other institutions.

6.4 Evidence Creates Credibility

Effective campaigns combined community experience with credible evidence, including:

- surveys;
- planning research;
- maps;
- photographs;
- videos;
- models;
- environmental information;
- precedents from other jurisdictions; and
- professional expertise.

A community association is more difficult to dismiss when it can demonstrate that its position reflects broader community input and evidence.

6.5 Communicate Visually

Several campaigns demonstrated the value of:

- short videos;
- maps;
- photographs;
- physical models;
- renderings; and
- clear graphics.

Visual information can help residents understand complicated proposals and can also make an advocacy story easier for elected representatives and the media to understand.

6.6 Persistence Is Essential

Many results took several years.

Participants emphasized that government processes can remain slow even when there is broad agreement on the desired outcome.

Successful advocacy therefore requires both persistence and realistic expectations.

6.7 Offer Solutions, Not Only Opposition

A repeated theme was the value of arriving with constructive alternatives.

Community associations gain credibility when they can say:

"Here is what we think should happen instead."

This can move the relationship from confrontation toward problem solving.

6.8 Build and Preserve Community Capacity

Advocacy depends heavily on volunteers, but volunteer capacity is finite.

Associations should therefore preserve institutional knowledge by documenting:

- contacts;
- strategies;
- submissions;
- evidence;
- commitments;
- decisions;
- outcomes; and
- lessons learned.

Succession planning should be considered part of advocacy rather than something addressed only after experienced volunteers leave.

7. Practical Advocacy Framework Emerging from the Workshop

The case studies collectively suggested the following approach for community associations:

- 1. Define the issue clearly.**
- 2. Determine what outcome the community actually wants.**
- 3. Identify who has the authority to make or influence the decision.**
- 4. Research the policy, legal and planning framework.**
- 5. Gather credible evidence.**
- 6. Engage the broader community, not only regular association participants.**
- 7. Develop constructive alternatives.**
- 8. Build relationships with staff and elected officials.**
- 9. Identify potential allies and coalition partners.**
- 10. Use clear and visual communications.**
- 11. Use media strategically where appropriate.**
- 12. Escalate through political, administrative or legal channels when necessary.**
- 13. Document commitments and preserve records.**
- 14. Evaluate partial as well as complete victories.**
- 15. Maintain the relationships and knowledge created through the campaign.**

8. Overall Workshop Conclusions

The workshop demonstrated that there is no single formula for successful community advocacy.

Some campaigns succeed through collaboration and relationship building. Others require political pressure, media attention, legal intervention or sustained opposition. Often several approaches are required simultaneously.

The strongest recurring message was that community associations should not measure success only by whether the original demand was accepted.

Successful advocacy can also change the conversation, influence future decisions, improve a development, preserve community assets, establish relationships and increase the community's ability to influence the next issue.

Community advocacy is therefore both **an effort to achieve a particular result and an investment in the community's long-term capacity to participate effectively in public decision-making.**

Key Takeaway

Effective advocacy combines persistence, evidence, relationships, strategic understanding of decision-making, constructive alternatives and the ability to mobilize the community at the right time.