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CITY LOOKS TO GIVE AWAY FULL CONTROL OF LANSDOWNE PARK TO FOR-PROFIT PARTNERS

OTTAWA—In a staff report coming to the Finance and Economic Development Committee (FEDCO) on November 5th, 2019, the city is seeking to direct staff to strike a deal with the Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group (OSEG) to transfer operations, programming and city control of half of the site over to OSEG. This would mean Aberdeen Pavilion, Aberdeen Square, the Horticulture Building, the Great Lawn and other areas of Lansdowne would be transferred in a commercialization of the remaining public space at Lansdowne. No business plan has been presented for such a move. No vendors who rent the space have been informed and zero public consultation has taken place.

“The city programming has been quite good on the site,” notes Capital Ward Shawn Menard. “We have good programming that is free and family-friendly, like the Farmers’ Market and 613Flea. There are nearly 100 free events we offer in a public park right now. The city is also under budget and returns funds back to city coffers every year.”

The report does not articulate a real public policy concern that would be addressed by ceding control of the public park. It speaks of the need to avoid scheduling conflicts, but the coordination of programming has not been a big issue, argues Menard.

In fact, the report raises the question of whom Lansdowne Park should be benefiting. This report was initiated by a letter from OSEG to the city on September 24th, 2019. One month later, a city report has been released echoing this position.

“If anything,” says the Councillor, “keeping the city involved in programming helps ensure that Lansdowne is run for the benefit of the city, as a whole—for the benefit of all residents. That is the city’s job, to look out for residents. I would be more than happy to find some middle ground on this, but the report is black and white”.

The report will go to FEDCO on November 5 and then to City Council the next day on November 6, giving the public and city councillors very little time to deliberate on this



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important issue. Community Associations in the area have organized a hastily-called public meeting to discuss the issue on Monday, October 28th, 2019, from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm at the Horticulture Building at Lansdowne Park.

“It’s very disappointing,” laments Menard. “Lansdowne is a tremendous public asset, and yet the city seems eager to turn it all over to a private entity, whose primary objective is to make profit, with little public oversight or scrutiny.”