

Friends of the Central Experimental Farm (2018-08-09)

Comments on the revised Cultural Heritage Impact planning document of The Ottawa Hospital – Section 4.2.5 The Central Experimental Farm

The Friends of the Farm are providing these comments in addition to broader comments on the original TOH application submitted to the City of Ottawa on June 18.

The amended Cultural Heritage document shows a lack of understanding of the CEF and its significance to the city and to Canada; in particular, the section about “Current Conditions” is not only full of factual errors, it demonstrates a lack of respect for a National Historic Site. This is important because the CEF is not just a neighbouring property, it is the setting for the new hospital. Although 3.2.2 recites relevant parts of the NHSC Management Plan and Commemorative Intent Statement, these elements are not carried forward into the “context” for the hospital design. There should be direct correspondence between sections 3 and 4 of this report.

There is nothing about maintaining and protecting the current and ongoing significance and value of the CEF to Canadian agriculture, about its goals and successes in helping Canadian farmers adjust to the challenges of climate, soils, weeds, insects, crop selection.

Chapter 6.0 “Statements of Significance” refers to the designation in 1999 of the Farm as a National Historic Site, and the reasons for the decision at the time. The continuing significance of the Farm is not acknowledged.

Section 6.2 “Adjacent Federal Heritage Buildings” mentions those in the Dominion Observatory Complex, but fails to discuss the William Saunders Building, the Genetics Building, the Heritage House on Birch Drive, and other classified heritage buildings adjacent to the site. (FHBRO statements for these are included in an appendix.)

There is no mention of the need to protect and maintain the landscape features and style of the Farm, recognizing that these will be diminished by the new hospital campus. For example, the experimental set of hedges that was begun in 1889, and that by 1900 had 100 species and varieties growing side by side in hedges fifty feet in length and ten feet apart, a valuable source of Canadian horticultural information. Thirty-two hedges remain in this unique historic collection and will have to be removed, along with many other trees that were selected for reasons of cultivar or landscape interest and planted in the same style and purpose as in the Arboretum. (Also, it could be noted that the current tennis courts are at the site that was the personal research garden of Director William Saunders behind his residence.)

“Administrative complex”

Perhaps the most egregious error results from an effort to categorize the site as the administrative centre of the CEF since the 1960s. On page 33, the report states:

“...by the 1960s the CEF was clearly divided into two areas: the research station complex in the south and west, and in the north the administrative complex formed by the Neatby Building, ...”

The Sir John Carling Building was indeed built in the mid-'60s (albeit amidst considerable opposition) as the new administrative centre for the CEF. It was officially opened in May 1967. After it was vacated in 2009 (demolished in 2014), the administrative centre moved to the Skyline office complex on Baseline at Merivale. Thus, the hospital site housed the administrative centre for just 42 of the 135 years of the Farm's existence.

Even while the Carling Building existed, the statement makes no sense. The Carling Avenue portion of the Neatby building was built in the late 1950s to house the newly centralized Research Division, and next to it the Laboratory Services Building was purpose-built for scientific research in the mid-'50s. These are in the north of the Farm. Neatby remains the research centre for the CEF. And research continued in other buildings in the north, such as the Forage Crops Building (12) and the ARC Biotech Building (34).

Other errors

p.32

- "Sir Charles Saunders played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Farm." It was William Saunders, not his son Charles.

- "Originally the research work only had three divisions: entomology and botany, horticulture, and chemistry." There was an agriculture division as well, later divided into field and animal husbandry.

- "Between 1912 and 1936, a number of original buildings were demolished." This occurred in the 1930s, when three residences and the original Administration building were removed.

- "...scenic driveway building ... resulted in the loss of the forest belt along the north and west sides of the CEF property" The forest belt along the northern boundary (now Carling) was not lost until Carling Ave was widened in the 1960s. The west side forest belt was unaffected, a portion remaining on Fisher.

p.33

- "In the 1970s several buildings no longer required for research purposes were removed from the site." What were these? It is not apparent in Bouse's illustrations for 1946, 1972, and 1992. What is the source for the statement?

- "...the Site's transition from surveyed lot during the second half of the 19th century, to experimental farm and observatory, and finally to the 'headquarters zone' for the AAFC within the CEF NHSC." This should be changed to "... finally to park-like green space as well as, for 42 years, the 'headquarters zone' for AAFC..."

Error in Section 5.1.2 on p.42

- "The CEF ... bound by Fisher Ave to the west..." It should be Fisher and Merivale.

Error in Section 6.1.2 on p.54

- "... in 1886. The Department of Agriculture selected ... over 400 hectares in area, approximately 3 km from Parliament Hill." The initial acquisition was 465 acres. And it's approximately 5 kms from the Hill.