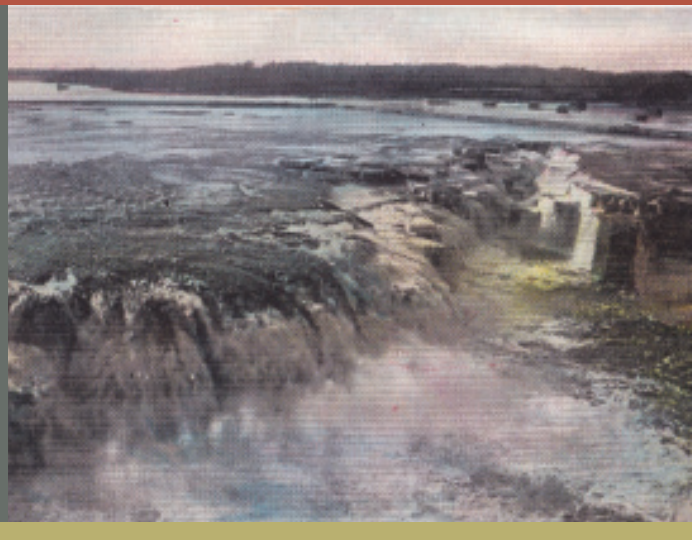


A GREEN VISION FOR CHAUDIÈRE FALLS AND ISLANDS



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Windmill Development Group, in collaboration with real-estate giant Dream Corporation, is planning to develop Ottawa's Chaudière Falls area into a "sustainable eco-neighbourhood". But why did our governments abandon the indigenous "green" plan for this area?

According to archeological evidence from 5,000 years ago, Indigenous peoples travelled from across North America to these spectacular falls that nature had carved in the shape of the bowl of a peace pipe. The Algonquin welcomed First Nations peoples to Asinabka, "the place where water flows over glare rock", where they traded and negotiated their relations while honoring the waters that sustain life.

Second only to Niagara Falls as a tourist attraction in Victorian times, the stunning beauty of the waterfall is currently hidden under a ring dam that was built in 1908. The site is on unceded Algonquin land, and considered sacred by other Indigenous peoples including Mohawk, Odawa, Cree and Anishnabeg peoples.

An indigenous "green" vision for the Chaudière site has been supported by governments and citizens of Ottawa-Gatineau since the 1980s. The late Algonquin elder William Commanda called for the three islands adjoining the Chaudière Falls to become a welcoming place for all nations, and for the sacred waters to be restored to their natural beauty. He envisioned a public central park that celebrates peace and the place of Indigenous peoples as co-founders of Canada. (www.asinabka.com/geninfo.htm).

Instead of another downtown mix of condos, offices and shops, the Asinabka vision is an ecological park on Chaudière Island, planted with native trees and plants; a place to learn from Indigenous wisdom about medicinal plants and the protection of the local ecosystem. An adjoining historical interpretation centre would showcase the area's archeological, Indigenous and industrial heritage. The Indigenous peace and cultural centre on Victoria Island would be a place to share traditional teachings and help bridge cultures.

World renowned architect Douglas Cardinal was commissioned by the National Capital Commission (NCC) to create a concept for the islands based on Elder Commanda's vision. His design flows with and enhances the natural beauty of the islands and the water, and reflects Indigenous principles like fluidity and connection to nature – unlike the glass and concrete boxes being proposed today. The NCC reiterated its support of Elder Commanda's vision as recently as 2008.

The vision for a major public park was not just an Indigenous one. Back in 1936, urban planner Jacques Gréber called the falls the most important natural feature in Ottawa and said the islands could become Ottawa's equivalent to New York's Central Park. He built this idea into the National Capital Plan approved in the 1950s. Former NCC Chair Jean Piggott called Chaudière Island "a national treasure." In 1998 the City of Ottawa endorsed the public vision and zoned the three islands for parkland and open space, reaffirming this position in 2010. For over half a century, the official plan was public use of these islands once their industrial use was over. So why the drastic change of direction?

Domtar Corporation closed its last paper mill on the

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site in 2007. William Commanda met with them at that time and asked for the land to be returned to the indigenous peoples. The NCC should have taken that opportunity to act. Instead, Windmill Development Group signed a conditional agreement in 2014 to purchase Domtar Corporation's interests in its old industrial site, subject to successful rezoning. While the City of Gatineau rezoned the Quebec side of the Domtar site with little opposition, Ottawa's rezoning of Chaudière and Albert islands is currently held up by legal challenges.

Ottawa City Council voted to rezone the islands in October 2014 despite receiving over 100 written and oral objections from citizens. Five of these citizens, including architect Douglas Cardinal, filed appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) which are currently in process. As well, a group of Algonquin people have filed a lawsuit in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice in November 2014 to affirm Indigenous rights to land.

Windmill's proposed "green" development should be carefully weighed against some basic questions: How much pressure will the massive development put on the Ottawa River and islands ecosystem? (1,200 condos, 17,000 square meters of offices, 4,800 square meters of retail space and a hotel on just 37 acres of waterfront). Who will benefit from the high-rise, pricey residences, offices and shops? How should this site, considered a "national treasure" and "an Indigenous cathedral", be used for the greatest public good? What legacy of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples do we want to leave our grandchildren's children?

We recognize and respect that there are differences of opinion about the development among the Algonquin of the Ottawa River watershed. We also acknowledge that some may benefit from access to jobs during and after construction—an important consideration given the historical injustices and divisions imposed by settler society's provincial boundaries and genocidal policies. Our motivation is to stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples on the principles of justice and fairness. In our view, whatever happens to the sacred site must be designed, constructed and managed in perpetuity by Indig-

enous peoples.

We are respectfully choosing to follow the Indigenous leaders who support the Asinabka vision: Gilbert Whiteduck, former chief of Kitigan Zibi, who said naming the project "Zibi" was an appropriation of his language

without broad permission; Blackfoot architect Douglas Cardinal who affirms the spiritual significance of Ottawa's "peace islands" to Anishnabeg peoples from the Rocky Mountains to the east coast of Canada and calls for the islands to become the "embassy" of First Peoples in the nation's capital; Algonquin elder Albert Dumont who asks us to reflect deeply on what this sacred site was and could be again; and the group of Indigenous people who have filed a Statement of Claim in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

This region's industrial era is over. It's time to reconcile with First Peoples and with our environment and leave a legacy of peace for our future generations. We invite you to find out more and take action with us.

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What can you do?

Visit freethefalls.ca to

- Donate to the legal appeals
- Sign an online petition to Free the Falls
- Subscribe to updates.

Twitter: [@falls3islands](https://twitter.com/falls3islands)

Facebook, visit Freeing Chaudière Falls and its islands.

- Write letters to the Chair of the NCC, the Premiers of Ontario and Quebec, and the mayors of Ottawa and Gatineau. Find out what the candidates in the upcoming federal election are saying about publicly funded support for an Indigenous presence in Ottawa.
- Spread the word.