

Speech by RAIC President Allan Teramura, FRAIC

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Celebration of Advocacy concerning the Victims of Communism Monument

Ottawa

The coordinated efforts of individuals and civil society organizations to oppose the construction of the National Memorial to the Victims of Communism was a rare success at a time when short-term political interests often over-rule thoughtful and responsible design.

It's true that had the election gone another way, the outcome of this project may have turned out differently. But even so, our intervention stimulated a public discussion of urban design and national symbols that lasted for months, which is in itself a remarkable achievement.

I recall the competition happening in 2014, but it wasn't until Barry Padolsky's letter to the Prime Minister was covered in an article by Don Butler of the *Citizen* in August of that year that I became aware of the proposed location. I forwarded a link to the article in an email to our Communications Manager, Maria Cook that said "Barry's nailed it. This design undermines the current urban design plan and 100 years of thinking." And so began the campaign.

Taking on the federal government on a planning decision was unfamiliar ground for the RAIC. Our preferred form of public outreach is to recognize outstanding achievement, not to publicly condemn bad decisions. So, a couple of months' of strategizing and letter drafting started, as we attempted to find an approach that would balance a clear expression of our grave concerns with the need to maintain a positive working relationship with the government. We began consulting with people we knew with experience working in the Parliamentary Precinct, as well as other areas of government.

At the outset, we hoped to find a way for the government to step down from this position with dignity.

On December 13, 2014, Shirley Blumberg went public with her criticism of the location of the memorial. As a member of the jury for the competition and a respected member of the architectural profession, this was an extraordinary moment. Shortly after that, Barry approached the RAIC to find out if we had plans to intervene.

Having obtained unanimous Board approval, on February 5, 2015, the RAIC issued its public statement on the monument, which was picked up by the media. The *National Post* published an opinion piece by *Canadian Architect* editor Elsa Lam a few days later, and the Ontario Association of Architects added its voice. Within a month, Heritage Ottawa, the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects, and the Canadian Institute of Planners also issued statements of opposition. A coalition of civil society organizations had by now consolidated and weekly conference calls began.

Still in a conciliatory mode, we sent meeting requests to many Ministers, including those for Heritage, Public Works Government Services Canada, and the National Capital Commission, but received no takers.

Barry, meanwhile, was working with opposition members Mauril Bélanger and Paul Dewar, who offered their support.

By this time, Shirley had been exploring the idea of a legal injunction, and this became part of the coalition's developing plans.

Linda Dicaire, a former Chief of Development Review for the NCC, supplied the coalition with her deep knowledge of the inner workings of the NCC and pursued Access to Information requests to attempt to bring to light what exactly was going on within the NCC.

The coalition members all had considerable depth of experience with planning in the capital region and had access to master plans, and guiding documents that have formed the basis of planning the Parliamentary and Judicial Precincts for years. Some had even been involved in their preparation.

Robert Allsopp and Lyette Fortin, two people responsible for the form of the current plan, gave two public presentations on the history of the planning of the capital.

Discussions began with Paul Champ, our legal counsel, on the possibility of obtaining an injunction from the Federal Court.

The coalition sent a letter to the chair of the NCC, Russell Mills, urging him to defend the integrity of the Long Term Vision and Plan, and this was copied to the NCC Board and the NCC's Advisory Committee on Planning, Design, and Realty.

Another letter was sent to the NCC Board asking it to refuse Federal Design Approval.

Two days later, on June 25, 2015, the NCC approved proceeding with site decontamination, and the next day, June 26, stakes appeared on the site.

The same day as the stakes appeared, the RAIC, Heritage Ottawa, Shirley Blumberg, and Barry Padolsky sign affidavits for the injunction, which was filed in Federal Court. The application claimed that the NCC acted improperly by initiating construction without an approved design. A media release was issued and picked up by national media.

In early August 2015, NCC legal counsel advised Paul Champ that the next NCC meeting dealing with the monument would not happen until after the election. This, it would turn out, would effectively kill the project. The monument was now an election issue, and Barry wrote to the opposition parties asking them to commit to relocating the memorial if elected.

As you know, the Liberals won a majority and in less than a month after the election, Heritage Minister Melanie Joly said she would decide 'promptly' on the scale and location of the monument, which she said is a priority in her portfolio.

In December 2015, Minister Joly announced the government will move the monument to the Garden of the Provinces. This coming Friday (April 22, 2016), members of the coalition will be meeting with the minister to discuss plans for the new location.

In a way, ideal conditions for the successful resistance of this project were found in the Victims of Communism proposal itself:

- A project almost no-one aside from hard-core ideologues could find merit in;
- A violation of elementary urban design principles so egregious a child could understand it;
- Its setting is in a city heavily populated with knowledgeable design professionals invested in maintaining the coherence of the plan.

Nonetheless, had we not resisted it, it would not have been on the radar of the opposition parties, who subsequently campaigned against it. If not for the injunction, construction would have started and would be well underway today.

It began with Barry's open letter, which should remind us of the potential for a single voice to initiate change; it took form and direction with the creation of an interdisciplinary coalition speaking with a single voice; it finally succeeded because of the generous financial and moral support of concerned citizens such as yourselves.