

Adjournment Debate

interested parties as April 30, 1978. Otherwise I have some very important questions to ask.

If April 30, 1978, is not the final date by which the Rideau Viking group must obtain all necessary clearances for their proposed development, then I have some very serious questions to put this evening to the parliamentary secretary. If the Rideau Viking group encounters objections and difficulties with permits and, to use the minister's words, other actions of other levels of government which would not be forthcoming, then it could mean that they would get an extension of this commitment until these conditions would be favourable to the agreed development proposal. If this is the case, then I strongly suspect the Rideau Viking group have obtained from the Department of Public Works an open-ended and exclusive contract for development of federal properties, and that we could in time be in some difficulties. I shall await the answer of the parliamentary secretary before making further extrapolations on this matter.

● (1802)

In its simplest terms, the Rideau Centre is a bold, imaginative, and very endearing scheme to revitalize the sector of Ottawa which for many years has been in a state of decline relative to other parts of the centre of the capital. Rideau Centre was an initiative undertaken by the National Capital Commission. Over the years it has required consultation, substantial input and commitment from all levels of government. The private sector and citizens' committees were involved.

Over the years the Rideau Centre has been the most announced project. I was not even elected in 1972 when it was first announced, and I believe it has been announced four or five times since then. I agree it is a project which has required extensive consultation and which we all hoped would be exemplary of innovative urban design and development. We hoped it would act as an example of multilevel government and private sector consultation and co-operation.

Admittedly there were problems. Readjustments were required from all levels and from all groups. I know we are still going through the process of consultation on the ways and means of implementing this most important revitalization.

In effect what all those involved in the Rideau Centre are trying to do is to reverse a North American trend toward the dying or sick city core. We want to make the centre of our capital the lively, social, cultural, and commercial place it used to be before the exodus to the suburbs began.

The suburbs are all right, but they are no great substitute for a city's heart where action and life are. A Parisian or a Londoner does not seek substance in some suburb, no matter how elegant. He looks to the Champs Élysées or Piccadilly Circus, as do the tourists who visit those great capitals. We want the centre of the national capital to become a tourist attraction, a lively and dynamic centre of activity.

What a lively core needs is people. It needs people living in it. People will gravitate to it because of its attractions. They will gravitate to it because of its theatres, restaurants, friendly

[Mr. Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier).]

and comfortable taverns, or even university lectures. Possibly people would gravitate to it because of a speech in the House of Commons. The last thing we want to do is anything which would drive people out of the core, to make life so exasperating through increased traffic, noise, pollution, and what have you, that the residents flee to the alleged peace of the far suburbs.

We must continue to emphasize the need for a lively, economically sound, and stimulated downtown area. It must become a people place, where people can live and work in peace and security. Experience has shown that downtown areas of large cities, which were neglected and poorly planned, are places which become vacated after the normal business hours and are the preferred dens of crimes and vandalism.

In 1961 the central business district of Ottawa enjoyed 65 per cent of the total departmental store type merchandise expenditures in the Ottawa-Hull area. In 1971 this dropped to 31 per cent. In 1976 the percentage dropped further to 22 per cent of DSTM—departmental store type merchandise expenditures. In the face of increased incomes, salaries, population and disposable income, this is the sign of a dying central core.

In these times of economic difficulties and changes, there is a need to act immediately to counter the effects of decentralization and relocation of the employment centres on our local economy. We must seriously study alternative economic generators. There needs to be diversity in the private employment sector to compensate for the loss of government jobs. The core of the city is uppermost in everyone's mind.

● (1807)

It is estimated that 2,000 jobs will be created in three or four years in the building of Rideau Centre, that there will be 1,500 permanent new jobs, and the tax revenue will be more than 5 million a year. It is an interesting and challenging project, and I hope the parliamentary secretary can give us the final date on this project.

Mr. Donald Wood (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is much more that can be added to what the minister has already stated in his reply to the oral question the other day. There are certain planning considerations still to be resolved, and the minister is hopeful that a decision will be reached rather quickly. The planning considerations relate primarily to traffic movements and their impact on the surrounding areas. These studies are proceeding concurrently with our negotiations with Rideau Viking Corporation for the development of a Rideau Centre on federal lands. Hopefully all planning considerations will be resolved so that when the negotiations leading to an agreement with Rideau Viking have reached the final stages, the major planning concerns will have been resolved. In the meantime, as I have stated, we are proceeding with negotiations.

At a meeting in September, 1977, with Canadian Pacific Hotels, officials of the department were assured that CP Hotels remain interested in proceeding with their plans for an hotel within the proposed Rideau Centre development.