

Vars.ca History

In the spring of 2001, Tom McMahon became interested in doing volunteer work on the Vars web site and perhaps starting an email newsletter, to be called Vars This Week. The domain name Vars.ca had already been registered, and Tom discovered that the Union des Cultivateurs Franc-Ontariens had obtained a grant from Industry Canada to create a Community Access Program for Vars, Marionville and Fournier. A Community Access Program is designed to ensure that there is free access to the Internet in as many places across Canada as possible. The local web site is a secondary objective. On March 23, 2001, Jean V. Renaud sent an email to Tom and others describing what might be needed to create a Vars committee to run the Vars Community Access Project.

Shortly afterwards, Tom approached VACA (Vars Area Community Association) to see if it would assume a lead role with respect to the web site. At that time, Tom did not have much information about what VACA was and asked for information relating to VACA's structure. It was at that time that Tom discovered that VACA has no formal, written structure, that in the past year its meetings had been infrequent with various offers to resign (and some actual resignations), and that only about 5 individuals had the right to make decisions within the informal VACA structure. In fact, only these 5 individuals were told that VACA meetings were to be held, and no formal communications of these meetings were ever dispersed outside of this small group. Apparently, VACA had begun as a way for the heads of those Vars-area service groups that chose to participate in VACA to meet to ensure there were no conflicts between each organization's activities. Tom started to look into whether other community associations were structured in this manner, and could find no other community association with such a structure, and in fact, almost all community associations, whether incorporated or not, have a constitutional document that provides for all residents to be equal members of the association, with annual public elections for the executive committee.

At a VACA meeting in the fall of 2001, Tom suggested that VACA adopt such a structure. Tom gathered constitutions from neighbouring community associations, and hosted the meeting, attended by Ernie Coumont of the Lions Club, Alex Reid of the Optimists Club, Paul Lacroix, and Bob Dore of the Scouts, to discuss this idea and to pursue the drafting of a constitution for VACA. At that meeting, Bob Dore expressed his disagreement with the idea of have a written constitution. The meeting resulted in an agreement that there should be a community meeting held to discuss these ideas. Here is the email sent on December 13, 2001 that summarized the meeting:

Schedule a town hall meeting to coincide with the next bean supper, which is January 4. The idea would be that we would convene a meeting in the library of the school at 6:30 p.m. to discuss the community association. The reason we would have it on the same night as the bean supper would be to encourage as many people as possible who attend the supper to stay for the town hall meeting. We would a few parents in the gym to supervise the kids. Phil McNeely would be invited to attend to speak about the value of a community association, and we would try to identify another person who could tell us about a positive experience with another community association - explain how their community association works, how it has made a valuable contribution to their community, and what they have put in place to make the association a success. We would then introduce a few ideas about what kinds of projects might be a good idea for a Vars community association to work on, and then try to recruit volunteers for different projects.

That meeting was held in early January 2002. A flyer announcing the meeting to be held on January 11, 2002 was mailed to every house in the Vars and RR3 Navan delivery areas. The flyer was paid for equally by the Vars Lions Club and the Vars Optimist Club.

Vars This Week (Jan. 18, 2002) reported the results of the January 11, 2002 meeting as follows:

A public meeting was held on January 11, 2001 to discuss the future of the Vars community association. At the meeting, a document was presented that set out the objectives of VACA as an organization. Among the objectives is for VACA to represent residents of Vars (not just those of the service groups that have participated in VACA to date). Another objective is to communicate with the residents of Vars through a quarterly newsletter in both French and English, listing a calendar of events for VACA, a listing of all clubs and associations in the Vars area. Click http://www.vars.ca/content/vaca_obj.htm to see the list of VACA's ideas for possible community projects, as prepared by the individuals from the service clubs that participate on VACA.

At the meeting on January 11, City Councillor Phil McNeely explained that for a community association to be formally recognized by the City of Ottawa. (document provided by Brian Tyrer, Manager, Community Funding and Development, City of Ottawa)

- A Democratically Elected Executive Body which maintains a minimum membership of four (4) (e.g. President/chair, Vice-President/Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and/or members at large).
- The executive must be residents of the City of Ottawa.
- A Constitution which clearly outlines the group's responsibility in relation to the operation of the Recreation Programmes.
- Meetings with a minimum of six (6) per year, two (2) per operating season with the exception of the summer months.
- A General Meeting and Open Elections held annually at a regular time.
- Annual Financial Statements available to the Community and presented yearly to City Staff.

Councillor McNeely also presented a document from the City of Ottawa that explains how to start a community association. The City of Ottawa document highlights a number of advantages if community organizations choose to incorporate. Perhaps most important, some funders, such as the Trillium Foundation, will not provide funds unless the group is incorporated. Another important advantage, also tied to fund-raising, is that it is necessary to be incorporated to become a registered charity.

The document lists other reasons why an organization should incorporate: to clarify roles and responsibilities of members and officers; to formalize structure required to facilitate communication; to create a new "legal person" so that individuals are no longer liable for specific legal acts (and liability); and to increase profile and credibility for the organization, both within the community and with government funders or foundation grants. In addition, if the group is incorporated, it is eligible to make presentations at an Ontario Municipal Board meeting.

Hal MacPherson, President of the Navan Community Association, explained that the Navan Community Association has a constitution and conducts itself in a manner that is consistent with the City of Ottawa criteria, and that the Navan Community Association is in the process of incorporating itself.

At the meeting on January 11, it was agreed that in future all VACA meetings would be publicized in advance to the community at large, at a minimum through Vars This Week and through the Vars web site. It was also agreed that all members of the community would be welcome to attend all VACA meetings, and that all members of the community would have an equal voice in how the association operates. At the meeting, a short-term objective for VACA was adopted to develop a constitution for the community association. Councillor McNeely advised that the City of Ottawa has staff that would be able to facilitate any community meetings developing such a constitution.

On February 20, 2002, Bob Cox sent an email to Tom McMahon saying: "Tom: I've finally found time to catch up on my email and read your last Vars newsletter and found the idea of the 'incorporation' of the Vars and Area Community Association to be a very interesting concept. You must appreciate that with the limited funds that we have (not a club or charitable organization), it has been extremely difficult for us to fund this project (incorporation). Your field of expertise, I believe, is within the legal system and although I'm not sure exactly what your role within that system is, I am sure that you can or know someone who can help us to achieve incorporation at minimal cost (preferably nothing). If you are in fact working in the legal system then you would obviously be the one to deal with this issue. Let me know what assistance you can be to VACA and the Village of Vars and Area. Bob Cox"

After sending out a reply to Bob offering to provide as much assistance as possible, with no reply from Bob, on April 8, 2002, Tom sent another email to Bob saying: "Bob - I sent you a reply concerning the incorporation idea, but you did not acknowledge that. Did you get my reply, and what is the next step you would like to take?" Although Tom received other emails from Bob on other matters, there was never a reply concerning the incorporation idea. The incorporation idea was pursued through the meetings described below, but Bob Cox never attended one of those meetings, conveyed no comments on any of the draft constitutional documents, and did not attend the meeting for the election of the interim election.

In March and April, Tom discovered that the grant for the Vars web site and the Vars Community Access Program was ending and the only way to continue these two was to find a new grant. Tom began looking for other potential sources of grant money, and discovered a few, but the potential sources required an

incorporation or, in some cases, a registered charity. There did not appear to be any organization within Vars that was capable of applying for the necessary grants. Thus, it was decided to proceed with the incorporation of a Vars Community Association, preferably with registered charitable status.

A flyer was mailed to all homes in the Vars and RR3 Navan delivery areas announcing meetings on April 11 and 25 concerning the formation of a community association. The costs of incorporation will be paid by André Rollin (\$150) and by cash donations by a number of individuals.

Meeting of April 11, 2002

At this meeting, Bryan Tyrer, City of Ottawa Manager for Community Development and Funding attended to explain the various criteria recommended by the City of Ottawa for a Community Association and what kinds of clauses are needed for a constitution for a community association. Benefits and consequences of forming a formal organization, with a constitution, and possible incorporation and registered charity status, were discussed.

A good turn-out of 22 people attended on April 11 and, after having listened to Mr. Tyrer, reinforced the conclusion from the January 11 meeting that a community association meeting the criteria outlined by him would be in the best interests of Vars.

The group agreed that the Vars and Area Community Association that presently exists has historically done a lot for the community. It was suggested that VACA be approached to join with the group that came together April 11 to: a) Work together to put forward a new community association with a constitution under a name agreed upon or to b) Work side by side as two different associations with mutually supportive but non-overlapping goals and memberships.

Meeting of April 22, 2002

At this meeting, a smaller group of persons from the group that met on April 11 attended to discuss the various clauses that should go into the constitution of the new Vars Community Association. After reaching agreement on the various items that should be included in the constitution, Tom McMahon wrote up the proposed constitution so that it could be presented for discussion and ratification at the community meeting on April 25, 2002.

Meeting of April 25, 2002

Proposed constitution for the new Vars Community Association. Clause by clause review and discussion. Changes were proposed. The constitution was unanimously approved, subject to the adopted changes being made to the constitution.

Special Edition - new constitution for the Vars Community Association

Vars has a new constitution for its new community association ! You are a member and you can vote. Make this association work for you by ensuring that your concerns and desires for local improvements are communicated to the right people.

It was unanimously agreed to hold an election of the first Executive Committee in May 2002. At that meeting, suggestions for amendments to the constitution of the new Association can be put forward. The task of the first Executive Committee is to incorporate the Association, apply for grants, represent the Community Association, and organize the first Annual General Meeting in September, when new elections will be held and the Association will begin to follow the calendar set out in the constitution: fiscal year ending August 31, Annual General Meeting in September and first General Meeting of the new Executive Committee, at which they will present a proposed budget and calendar of meetings, in October. Details of the meeting in May will be communicated at a later date.

Meeting of May 23, 2002

Proposed amendments to the constitution reviewed one by one and adopted (moved by Tom McMahon and seconded by Dennis Baribeau, all amendments adopted unanimously). (Amendments sent on May 24, 2002 by Tom McMahon to Bryan Tyrer, City of Ottawa Manager for Community Development and Funding for translation by the City of Ottawa translation staff.)

Vars Community Association first ever election was held. Bryan Tyrer served as the Chief Election Officer.

President: John Tossounian
Vice-President: Carole Roy
Secretary: Tom McMahon
Treasurer: Alex Reid
Directors at large: Barb Lavictoire, Anne Sabourin, Carl Roth
All positions filled by acclamation.

The executive is "interim" because the constitution calls for an Annual General Meeting each September, so the first full-term Executive Committee will be elected in September. All members have an equal vote. The constitution of the new Community Association can be found on the Vars community web site www.vars.ca. The interim Executive Committee will apply for incorporation and will decide whether to apply for charitable status.

The Vars Community Association will hold a general community meeting on June 26 at 8:00 p.m. at St. Guillaume School. On the agenda will be three important issues for the Vars area: (1) If Vars succeeds in receiving some of the funds from the Cumberland Legacy Fund, what are the priorities of the community for how that money should be spent? (2) What is OC Transpo's proposal for bus service in the Vars area (to start in September), and is that what the community wants? (3) Should the Vars Community Association take a formal position on the question of the factory farm in Sarsfield, and if so, what should that position be? If you have an interest in any of these subjects, you should attend this important meeting.

Meeting of June 26, 2002

At the meeting of June 26, 2002, the remaining changes to the constitution were approved. In addition, the following agenda items were dealt with as follows:

OC Transpo proposal for Vars, presented by Pat Scrimgeour of OC Transpo. The new OC Transpo bus will begin on Sept. 3, with a route that will take it to Carlsbad Springs, to Anderson Road and to Blair transitway. The route from Vars to Ottawa downtown will be approximately an hour. The fare will be approximately \$3.40 for one-way fare (based on tickets purchased) and \$108 per month pass. This compares with the Bergeron bus service which leaves Vars park-and-ride and arrives downtown Ottawa in 30 minutes, for a fare of \$4.20 (based on tickets) and \$115 for monthly pass. The OC Transpo bus will leave later than the Bergeron, 417 and Lalonde bus services.

After considerable discussion, a motion was made that the Vars Community Association oppose the OC Transpo proposal. The members present voted 11-11 on this motion. As a result, the motion did not pass. It was agreed that the Association would convey to our City councillor and to OC Transpo our views on the OC Transpo proposal, and in particular that the OC Transpo, subsidized by tax dollars, are not much lower than the private bus fares, which have no tax subsidies; that most people in the Vars area will not benefit directly from the new tax levy; that the route is too slow; and that the overall planning appears to be poor. The Association did support a motion to express to our City councillor and to OC Transpo that in our view, "fare reciprocity" between the OC Transpo service and the existing private bus services is essential for the success of the OC Transpo service. "Fare reciprocity" would allow anyone with an OC Transpo monthly pass to board the private bus services, and vice-versa, and would allow anyone with private bus pass to board any OC Transpo bus anywhere in the City. The Association also supported a motion that the bus route should not go down Alcide, Vars and Horizon Drives but should include a stop at the Trailer Park, if possible.

The meeting then heard a presentation by Marc Lafleur concerning the factory hog farm in Sarsfield and the City's and Province's responses. The Association voted to support a motion that the City should have the power to determine for itself what it considers an appropriate distance between a factory hog farm operation and neighbouring homes and villages, and that the Province's proposed law that would see the Provincial rules override the City's views is not supported by the Vars Community Association.

The meeting then heard an update on the Cumberland Legacy Funds by Tom McMahon. Tom asked for and received the support of the Association for an approach that would focus on using any funds received for Vars from the Cumberland Legacy Funds for (1) a new soccer field and posts; (2) paving the hockey rink and installing a single tennis court and basketball court; (3) installing two bocce courts (like the Brookfield bocce courts in Ottawa); (4) installing two permanent, outdoor checkerboard tables.

The meeting then considered a proposal by Tom McMahon to request that the Association vote that it is a priority to replace the existing Vars signs, to put the Vars.ca web address on the new signs, and to change the location of the signs to the approximate outer boundaries of the Vars Community Association area. The Association voted to support this proposal.

The meeting then considered the funds for a Day in the Park 2002, to be held in early September, 2002. The Association voted to accept the proposal that the grant of \$950 received from the City be spent to coincide with the Vars CA Annual General Meeting and the Optimists community ball tournament, to pay for the liquor and park permits, to pay for a flyer for the event, to pay for DJ music and for any costs relating to providing games in the park, and possibly for some signage.

The Association also voted in support of a proposal that the Association request the City to provide lighting for the playground, both to promote safety and to prevent vandalism. The Association also agreed to investigate water testing and how to ensure the community has the appropriate tests and is notified of the results of the testing in a timely manner.

The meeting also discussed the desirability of high speed Internet in the Vars area. It was agreed that a request for persons interested in receiving high speed Internet would be communicated via Vars This Week.