

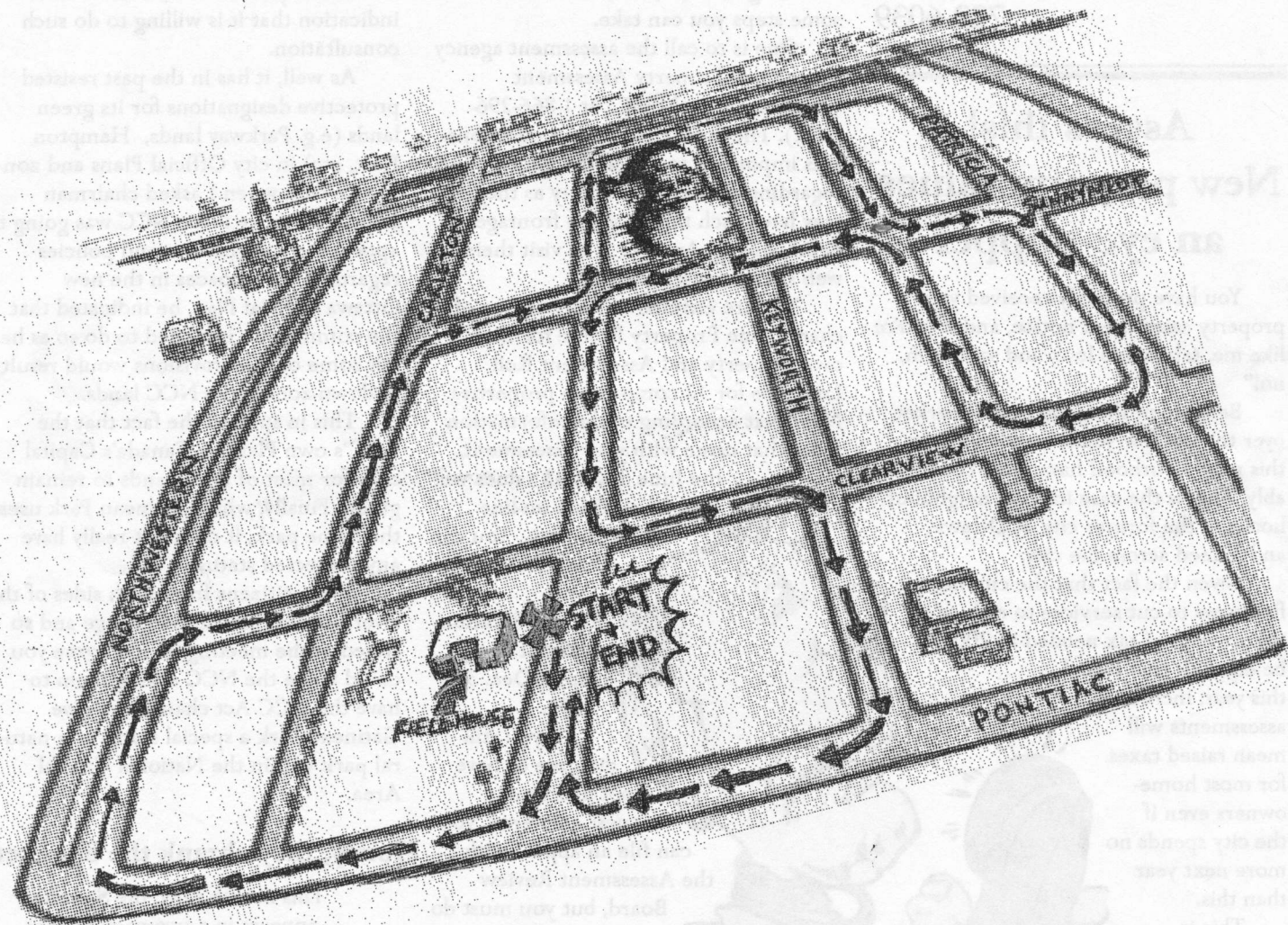
CHAMPLAIN SPEAKER



December, 2003

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Searching for Santa: Sleigh rides Dec. 23



Carols, hot chocolate, cookies; strange noises on the roof

The Ninth annual Christmas Sleigh Ride is scheduled for Dec. 23, from **6:15 to 8:00 p.m.**

The sleigh ride will weave its way through Champlain Park, leaving the fieldhouse at about 6:15. There will be stops along the way to pick up people and to decide on the next carol. We've asked for the biggest sleigh again this year. The map above, courtesy of Jim

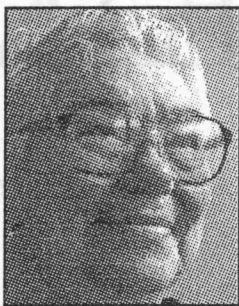
Cocks and Don Monet, shows the route.

Feel free to either come to the fieldhouse at the start or join in along the way. Song sheets will be provided. A special request has been made again this year for Santa to join us, so there will be a special stop half-way to try and find him. **Ho, Ho, Ho!** The sleigh and carolling will then continue through the community and back to the fieldhouse

for some Christmas cheer and hot chocolate about 8 p.m. We are looking for donations of cookies and goodies as well as a coordinator for the hot drinks and baked goods. Please call **Jim Cocks at 728-7881** if you can help.

So plan to join your neighbours for a festive couple of hours, or even just a song or two, on the night before the night before Christmas!

AMY'S CORNER



by Amy Kempster
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Assess this! New property values an eye-popper

You have probably received your property assessment notice, and if you're like me, taken one look and said: "Oh, no!"

Because of the good resale market over the last few years, assessments in this neighbourhood have risen considerably. That is the case in most neighbourhoods in the former city of Ottawa, and indeed across the city.

Given the fact that the city has to find ways to cut services to reduce the amount of tax needed in 2004 to be equal to that raised this year, increased assessments will mean raised taxes for most homeowners even if the city spends no more next year than this.

This is because the assessments of the non-residential (commercial and industrial) tax classes have not increased as much, and as well the province has a cap on how much the tax rates for these classes can be increased. Thus more of the financing of city services will fall on the residential sector.

The question of how the tax burden should be divided between businesses

and residents is not an easy one as businesses benefit in some ways from what may seem to be strictly people-oriented services through the ability to attract good staff, the health of their employees, etc, etc.

Anyway, back to your own assessment. Talk to neighbours you trust about their assessment. That will help you decide if yours seems to be incorrect. If you feel your assessment seems out of line with what you might have expected to pay for your house if you had bought it last June, then there are some steps you can take.

One is to call the assessment agency (Municipal Property Assessment Corporation or MPAC) at 1-866-296-6722). They will answer your questions. It is important to check the information regarding your own property as they may have such things as the frontage or depth wrong. Another is to visit their web site at www.mpac.ca.

You are entitled to receive, free of charge, one Property Profile for their own property and Assessment Roll Look-ups for 12 comparable properties. Note that according to the information sheet that came with your assessment, the June 30, 2003 values will not be available on-line

until January. You can file a Request for Reconsideration without charge up to Dec. 31, 2004.

If you still disagree or have not had your request answered, you can file an appeal with the Assessment Review Board, but you must do so prior to March 31, 2004 and there are fees associated with that process. Note that sometimes there

may be a situation where a group of homeowners may want to appeal together, if there has been a change in the neighbourhood which has affected the value of their homes. Examples are such

things as the closing of a local school or significantly increased traffic which has decreased the relative value of an area.

At the NCC, It's not easy being green

The National Capital Commission had a public meeting recently. One of the problems with the NCC is that, while it is becoming somewhat more open, it has not yet developed set procedures for consulting on land it wishes to declare surplus. In fact, there is little indication that it is willing to do such consultation.

As well, it has in the past resisted protective designations for its green lands (e.g. Parkway lands, Hampton Park, etc) in city Official Plans and zoning. In fact, when I asked chairman Marcel Beaudry if the NCC was going to appeal the designations and policies regarding greenspaces in the new Ottawa Official Plan, he indicated that the commission intended to do so as he felt some of the provisions would result in down-zoning the NCC lands.

This in spite of the fact that the NCC's own Plan for Canada's Capital calls for most of these lands to remain green. Finally, while Gatineau Park uses the name park, it does not really have any protected status.

Some citizens from both sides of the river believe this should change and so stated at the meeting. If you agree you could write the NCC asking them to have the NCC Act changed to give Gatineau Park a special status as a natural park within the National Capital Area.

Honey, they shrank the Speaker!

This month only, the **Speaker** appears in a two-page format. Apologies to those who will miss the calendar. We return to the usual size in January.

— The editor

CHAMPLAIN SPEAKER

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