

Helen Kennedy's Nomination Speech  
May 23, 2006

Thank you Alice, and Don. And thank you, Olivia Chow.

As a New Democrat – I thank you both for your leadership – and all you have done for our Party – here, and on the National stage.

As a citizen of Toronto, Olivia I thank you for your vision and inspiration – and for all you have done for women, for children, for our neighbourhoods, for immigrants, for workers, for queers, for the poor – for all of us.

And as your colleague and friend, I thank you for your confidence and support – which mean more to me than I can say.

Some of you may think that the point of this nomination meeting is to replace Olivia Chow. Well I have news for you – it is not possible – it cannot be done. No one else could be Olivia Chow. She is a unique and extraordinary individual – and so is Tam Goossen, and so am I – and so are you – and everyone in this room.

The glory of this party is our diversity – and the recognition of the value and worth of every unique and extraordinary human being.

We are all different, we all have our strengths, and we all have our own role to play.

In this ward, in the heart of our city – we are so lucky to have so many people who play a leading role – so many engaged citizens and activists who fight for our communities and neighbourhoods.

In my role at City Hall for the last seven years, I have had the privilege of getting to know and work with many of you who are here tonight – and many other great citizens who have never joined the NDP, but share our vision and values – and have built our legacy here with us.

One of these great citizens helped change the very course of history in this city – she helped the world look at cities in a different way -- and it all began in this neighbourhood, in our ward.

I am speaking of course of Jane Jacobs – another woman who – like so many of us -- was born in a foreign country. She came to Toronto in the sixties, when I was still a child at school half a world away in Ireland – and Olivia Chow and Tam Goossen were still schoolgirls, half a world away in Hong Kong.

Jane Jacobs chose to live here – and while teaching the world about cities, she chose to be an active and engaged citizen who worked to make a difference in her own backyard – which is our backyard, right here.

Her first great campaign in Toronto, of course, was the Spadina Expressway. She helped the people of this community – and all of Toronto – see what a tragedy that Expressway would have been – what a destructive force.

That Expressway would have split our neighbourhoods in two – from the Annex through Chinatown, Kensington, the Grange, the Entertainment district, the Harbourfront... It would have ripped the heart and soul out of downtown Toronto.

If that expressway had been built, we probably wouldn't even be here tonight. We would not be able to celebrate the diversity of our people and our neighbourhoods – because our downtown neighbourhoods would no longer exist.

She helped us understand how to appreciate what we have. She also helped us understand how fragile it is – how we have to be vigilant – because we are threatened by things like the Spadina Expressway all the time.

Think about it – decades after the Spadina Expressway campaign – she helped us in the campaign to stop the bridge to the Island Airport. She worked with us to try and shut that airport down – she understood how destructive it is. We have to finish that campaign – Olivia proposed in the House of Commons that the Island Airport should be converted into a magnificent park – the Jane Jacobs Park. What a tribute that would be – a reminder of all that is important to us and our neighbourhoods.

Jane Jacobs genius was not just her lofty thoughts – her majestic intellect and grand vision. It was her ability to think small. She could see the big picture, but also the value of every piece of that picture.

That is how I have always seen our city and our neighbourhoods – all the small and tiny pieces that fit together, like a mosaic glimmering, changing – vibrant, dynamic – each small and brilliant fragment adds a new dimension.

In this ward and in our neighbourhoods, we have such a rich diversity of cultures and colours, ages and incomes, backgrounds and interests. And we have such a diverse streetscape, with buildings that are large and small, old and new – we have streets that are bustling -- thriving, vibrant. Brilliant and constantly changing – but the grand mosaic is always at risk of being shattered.

I think small every day – there is no magic to what I do. There are no sides to me. There is no magic to the way I get things done. I just play my role – unlocking doors at City Hall, bringing citizens together, listening and doing what I can, mobilizing and galvanizing groups of people, talking and cajoling and persuading.

It is not magic – and yet, when we work together, the results can be so magical – the little triumphs we can achieve, street corner by street corner, rooftop by rooftop, doorstep by doorstep – day by day.

Every day our streets and neighbourhoods face threats – every day, we face something that could tear the fabric apart – grand schemes and plans – monstrous towers – airports, unsuitable expansion – big box stores – demolition of heritage buildings....Massive and ugly advertising signs invading our public spaces. Booze cans. Every day, dozens of issues arise, in every part of our ward – no one could possibly be everywhere at once – but together, we are everywhere – and in each neighbourhood there are leaders and engaged citizens – all of whom keep Jane Jacobs alive.

Magic is the thousand little miracles that happen every day in our neighbourhoods – people coming together to plant community gardens or do clean up days. People coming together to demand that our public spaces be public – people coming together at community council meetings – to stop the ROM Tower, or the Tip Top Tower, or the Royal St. George expansion. Interesting... the last public meeting of Jane Jacobs life was a community council meeting we had about Royal St. George.

So we are incredibly lucky here – Jane Jacobs was a giant like a massive oak – but that oak spread acorns all through the riding – we have engaged citizens, and together we have tried to work to achieve the right balance in our neighbourhoods – the right balance of old and new, large and small, business and residential, building and park – the right dynamic – the magic formula. She herself said “Lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration.”

Engaged citizens are the key to the legacy we have built together. But it doesn't just happen – the link into city hall is critical...

And that is where I come in. Because that is what I know, that is what I do, that is who I am. That is my part of the picture – this is where I can help make the difference.

Tonight at this meeting, I am not just asking for your support for me in this race – and all the way through to November. I am also pledging MY support – to you – to use my talents and energy and experience to fight for the things we care about. To get things done. To think small, while seeing the big picture. To play my part in making this a better city – to keep up the fight at City Hall – to build on a legacy that is part Jane Jacobs, part Olivia Chow, part me – but mostly yours...all of ours. It is our legacy – and that is why it is a great one – that is why it is worth building on.

Ultimately, this meeting tonight is not about Olivia or Jane Jacobs, or even about me or Tam. Ultimately it is about You. It is about your vision, your dreams – and who you think can help achieve them. Who can help turn them into reality. It is your choice. And I am proud of this opportunity to be your candidate. Thank you – thank you all.

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world, indeed it's the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead