

Background:

Geographic Scope of Study

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System: A Conservation and Land Management Strategy (Cootes to Escarpment Report) is the culmination of a study focusing on the conservation and management of approximately 1,500 hectares of publicly owned natural lands in the Aldershot and West Hamilton area. (See attached Sketch One)

The central natural features of the study area include a 10 kilometre portion of the Niagara Escarpment and the lands and waters associated with the Cootes Paradise Marsh and Grindstone Creek.

Provincial Greenbelt Plan

Funded by the Ontario Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, the Cootes to Escarpment Report is intended to contribute to the implementation of the Provincial *Greenbelt* Plan. The Greenbelt Foundation is dedicated to promoting and sustaining the *Greenbelt* as a beneficial, valuable and permanent feature, enhancing the quality of life for Ontario residents.

Environmental Significance of Study Area

Many parts of the study area are recognized as Provincial Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, Regional Environmentally Significant Areas and Provincial Wetlands. The natural areas within the Cootes to Escarpment Park System contain some of the most botanically rich lands in Canada and provide habitat for many important bird, reptile and amphibian, fish and insect species, including many species at risk.

Study Vision

The Vision for the Cootes to Escarpment Park System is that it will be known internationally as a protected, permanent and connected natural lands sanctuary from the Harbour to the Escarpment that promotes ecosystem and human health within Ontario's Greenbelt.

Study Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Cootes to Escarpment Report is to collaboratively continue preserving and enhancing the natural lands using a sustainable approach that balances natural ecosystem health with responsible human appreciation and activities to achieve this vision.

Partner Agencies

The Cootes to Escarpment Project has been a collaborative process involving:

- Royal Botanical Gardens
- Conservation Halton
- City of Burlington
- Hamilton Conservation Authority
- City of Hamilton

- Halton Region
- Hamilton Naturalists' Club
- Bruce Trail Conservancy
- Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan Office.

Project Steering Committee

The Cootes to Escarpment Steering Committee, which includes the nine project partners, has guided the development of the Final Report. Leo DeLoyde has been the City of Burlington representative on the Project Steering Committee.

Organization of Report

The Cootes to Escarpment Report consists of the following major sections:

1. Introduction: Vision, Mission and Study Objectives
2. Context and Background: natural systems, cultural history, recreational and future growth.
3. Park System: consisting of Secured Park Lands (properties owned by the partner agencies and organizations) and Future Park System (lands which can build upon and strengthen protection of core natural areas).
4. Land Securement: planning policy, monitoring of activities, stewardship and public acquisition through donation, purchase or dedication.
5. Land Management: Recommended actions for conservation and stewardship organized into six geographic sub-areas. Recommended policies for natural heritage, cultural heritage, operations, recreation, interpretation, facilities and park management plans.
6. Park System Management Governance: establishment of a committee to guide the actions identified in the Park Plan.
7. Implementation Actions: A chronological summary of action items with proposed timelines in order to implement the Conservation Vision.

Council Updates:

Updates to Council on the Cootes to Escarpment Parks System project have occurred as follows:

January 2008

- January 17, 2008 memo to Council members outlining the study purpose and terms of reference.

February 2009

- February 2, 2009 report to Council receiving the draft Cootes to Escarpment Park System Report and directing staff to report back on the public consultation process.
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Discussion:

Strategy/Process:

Public Consultation

Public consultation was used during the Cootes to Escarpment Project to assist in identifying issues as well as developing a vision, concept plans, and management recommendations for the study area.

The following summarizes the public consultation process undertaken by the Project Steering Committee:

- Public Open House held in January 2008 to introduce the project and seek potential residents to participate on the Stakeholder Advisory Group. This meeting was attended by about 180 people.
- Stakeholder Advisory Group formed, consisting of over 30 members from local and provincial agencies, special interest organizations, and citizen landowners. Rob Peachy and Rosalind Minaji represented the City of Burlington on the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. This group met seven times through the course of the project and participated in a bus tour of the study area
- Day long Community Forum, open to the public, held on Saturday May 10, 2008 to identify potential actions to key themes garnered through the public open house
- Sessions organized for project partner staff to provide their knowledge and feedback on management of the natural lands. Ingrid Vanderbrug represented the City during this process.
- Second Public Open House held February 10, 2009 to discuss the draft Cootes to Escarpment document. This meeting was attended by about 170 people.
- Cootes to Escarpment website maintained at:
www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca

Staff Comments to Project Steering Committee

Burlington staff submitted written comments to the Project Steering Committee during the public consultation process.

Staff agree with the Vision and Mission of the Cootes to Escarpment Report. The study area contains a unique biological landscape of significant ecological importance.

There are however three topics in the Final Cootes to Escarpment Report which staff would like to draw to Council's attention:

King Road Closure

Section 5 of the Cootes to Escarpment Report makes reference to the potential closure of King Road along the Escarpment brow:

Reference in Final Report

“At the Park System’s western edge, the growth of South Waterdown and increased traffic along on King Road will further disrupt wildlife movement and environmental health along the Niagara Escarpment which is already fragmented by heavily used parallel arterial roads (Waterdown Road and Brant Street).” (p. 26)

“The councils of the cities of Hamilton and Burlington may wish to consider closing or restricting through traffic on ... King Road at the top of the Escarpment face to provide a safe recreational route and to reconnect Waterdown Woods ESA. Vehicle access to existing properties along King Road would continue.” (p. 26)

Section 7 of the Final Report sets out Implementation Actions including: “Close or restrict King Road... to through traffic and develop for trail use,” in the 2016-2021 time frame with Burlington and Hamilton as the lead agencies. (p. 45)

Staff Comment

The Engineering Department is currently evaluating design options for King Road, with a preferred option to be brought to Council early in 2010. The Aldershot Master Transportation Plan will be finalized as the result of this Council determination, which also has an impact on road improvements for Waterdown Road and cost sharing with the City of Hamilton.

The recommended action in the Cootes to Escarpment Report may or may not be entirely consistent with the final Environmental Assessment recommendation on the future of King Road.

North Aldershot East Sector

Section 4 of the Cootes to Escarpment Report makes reference to additional lands in the East Sector of North Aldershot which could be added to the Park System:

Reference in Final Report

Lands “in East North Aldershot between Bayview Park and the closed Burlington Landfill could be considered under planning policy for inclusion in the Park System since they are currently urban areas that have not been identified as potential future parks. They are partially designated Urban Infill Residential and North Aldershot Special Study Area and offer a special opportunity to provide a strong recreational and natural area to help build a robust Park System through this section of the study area.” (p. 22) The map of the Cootes to Escarpment Park System identifies these lands as part of the “Potential Additional Park Lands” designation.

Staff Comment

While there may be potential for additional public land acquisition in the East Sector of North Aldershot, Council should be aware that there are areas along King Road identified in the Official Plan for future residential development.

The “Infill Residential” and “North Aldershot Special Study Area” designations were arrived at through a comprehensive secondary plan process (the North Aldershot Inter-Agency Review) and have been implemented through amendments to Provincial, Regional and Local plans and zoning.

Should portions of these residential lands be acquired by public agencies in the future, they will be added to the “Park Lands” designation in the Cootes to Escarpment Park System Map.

Land Acquisition Strategy

Section 4 of the Cootes to Escarpment Report deals with land securement to protect ecosystem features and functions within the Cootes to Escarpment Park System:

Reference in Final Report

“While all lands are important to the Cootes to Escarpment Park System, some current high-priority acquisitions include:

- Large tracts of vacant land relevant to the connectivity and hydrological function of the Park System,
- Lands necessary to secure the Bruce Trail corridor,
- Lands with ecologically significant features (eg: ANSI, PSWI)
- Lands with habitat for species at risk (as defined under the provincial Endangered Species Act).” (p. 23)

Land acquisition could take place through the development process, purchase by senior levels of government and conservation authorities, donation or conservation easement. The key Implementation Actions for 2010-2015 include the need for the Park System Management Committee to develop a land securement strategy. (p. 44)

Staff Comment

As a partner agency in the Cootes to Escarpment process and a future participant in the Cootes to Escarpment Management Committee, the City of Burlington will need to assess future city funding decisions about strategic land parcels in light of the City’s Strategic Land Acquisition Funding Strategy.

There are a number of city capital projects, corporate initiatives and outstanding Council directions elsewhere in the municipality that may take priority for land purchase and dedication.

Next Steps

Over the coming months, members of the Steering Committee will be working with their partner agencies to ensure that all of the organizations involved in the Cootes to Escarpment process are sharing information, working toward common management plans, and engaging appropriate sources of support.

Key actions for the next five years are to develop a land securement strategy, communication plan and more detailed management plans for the six core areas of the Park System. The Cootes to Escarpment management network will report annually to the partner agencies on the progress of the park system.

Financial Matters:

Project Funding

The Cootes to Escarpment Project was funded through a \$185,000 grant from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation awarded to the Royal Botanical Gardens in May 2007 to promote the protection and enhancement of the natural lands present within the study area.

Future Costs

Any City of Burlington financial commitments (other than staff time), required for the implementation of the Cootes to Escarpment Park System will be subject to future Council approval.

Environmental Matters:

Ecological Importance of Park System

The foundation for the proposed Cootes to Escarpment Park System is the unique ecological corridor from Cootes Paradise marsh to the Niagara Escarpment. This south-facing protected microclimate contains six environmentally significant areas and creates ideal habitat for a wide diversity of species.

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System is characterized by the variety and combination of outstanding natural features, historical resources and landscapes. Overall, 1,582 species of flora and fauna have been documented through biological inventories of the study area (p. 12).

The Parks System contains large connected areas of habitat which should be permanently protected and recognized at the community level and beyond.

Conclusion:

**Endorse
Cootes to
Escarpment
Report**

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System will link together 1,500 hectares of natural areas owned by eight different agencies and organizations. By endorsing the Cootes to Escarpment Report, Council is committing to a shared vision for the stewardship of this important and unique natural system.

It is recommended that Council endorse the “Cootes to Escarpment Parks System: A Conservation and Land Management Strategy” Final Report; and direct staff to collaborate with partner agencies and landowners to complete the implementation actions required to secure the foundation of a Cootes to Escarpment Park System.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalind Minaji MCIP RPP
Coordinator of Development Review
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Appendices:

Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation Vision Summary Document (circulated under separate cover)
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Approvals:

*required

*Department Head City Treasurer General Manager City Manager

To be completed by the Clerks Department

Committee
Disposition &
Comments

01-Approved 02-Not Approved 03-Amended 04-Referred 06-Received & Filed 07-Withdrawn

Council
Disposition &
Comments

01-Approved 02-Not Approved 03-Amended 04-Referred 06-Received & Filed 07-Withdrawn

Sketch One Cootes to Escarpment Parks System



- POTENTIAL PARK SYSTEM BOUNDARY
- HYDRO CORRIDOR
- CURRENT PARK LANDS
- POTENTIAL ADDITIONAL PARK LANDS
- COMPLIMENTARY STEWARDSHIP LANDS
- COMPLIMENTARY LINK

