



DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE DIVISION

Planning Department

TO: Chair and Members of the Community Development Committee
SUBJECT: Cootes to Escarpment Park System: A Conservation and Land Management Strategy

Report Number: PB-12/09 Report Date: December 17, 2008
Author: Rosalind Minaji Date to Committee: January 19, 2009
Telephone: 335-7600 Ext. 7809 Date to Council: February 2, 2009
Ward Affected: 1 File Number: 502-02-54

APPROVALS: Department Head General Manager City Manager

To be completed by the Clerks Department

Committee Disposition & Comments
Council Disposition & Comments
01- Approved 02 - Not Approved 03 - As Amended 04 - Referred 05 - Deferred 06 - Received & Filed 07 - Withdrawn

1.0 RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the draft Cootes to Escarpment Park System Report dated December 3, 2008, prepared by the Royal Botanical Gardens and a Steering Committee of partner organizations, BE RECEIVED.

AND THAT Planning & Building and Parks & Recreation staff be directed to report back to Council in the spring of 2009 with comments and results of the public consultation meeting.

File: 502-02-54

2.0 PURPOSE:

To update Council on the progress of the Cootes to Escarpment Land Management Strategy and discuss next steps in the process.

3.0 BACKGROUND:

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System: Conservation and Land Management Strategy is a project focusing on the conservation and management of approximately 1,560 hectares of publicly owned natural lands in the Aldershot and West Hamilton area. The central natural features of the study area include a portion of the Niagara Escarpment and the lands and waters associated with the Cootes Paradise Marsh and Grindstone Creek.

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.

The **Mission Statement** of the Cootes to Escarpment Park System 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.

The **Objectives** of the Cootes to Escarpment Conservation and Land Management Strategy are:

- **Natural Heritage Objective:** To protect, restore and enhance the ecological system by ensuring the health and diversity of species, habitats, and natural processes forever. This will include consideration of linkages both through the urban areas and with the natural lands beyond the boundaries of the Park System.
- **Recreation Objective:** To provide opportunities for recreational activities that are appropriate to the biological and physical condition; sensitivity of the lands; and, that support active living.
- **Cultural Heritage Objective:** To identify, protect, and conserve cultural heritage features for their reflection of the human use and occupancy of the area.
- **Interpretation Objective:** To provide educational opportunities that promote knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the natural and cultural values, sensitivities, and significance as well as the associated management needs.
- **Management Objective:** The public lands will be managed collaboratively by the many owners to ensure all Cootes to Escarpment Park System objectives are achieved. The owners of the public lands will promote responsible stewardship of their lands and of adjacent private lands through on-going community involvement in park planning and management.

4.0 DISCUSSION:

The Cootes to Escarpment Land Management Strategy has been a collaborative project involving the Royal Botanical Gardens, Conservation Halton, City of Burlington, Hamilton Conservation Authority, City of Hamilton, Halton Region, Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Bruce Trail Conservancy, and Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan Office.

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

The preparation of the Strategy has occurred in two phases. Phase One took place in 2007 and involved collecting information on the physical, social, and economic characteristics of the study area. This information was documented in the Phase 1 Background Report, which also identifies legislative and policy directions of Provincial and local governments applicable to the area.

Phase Two began in January 2008. A public consultation program was developed to assist in identifying issues as well as developing a vision, concept plans, and management recommendations for the study area.

The following summarizes the process undertaken:

- 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 28 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
- Community Forum, open to the public, 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.

A draft report on the Cootes to Escarpment Park System: Conservation and Land Management Strategy has now been released for public review and comment. A copy of the Study Executive Summary is attached as Appendix One. The draft Cootes to Escarpment Park System Report consists of the following major sections:

1. Introduction: Vision, Mission and Study Objectives
2. Background Information: 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) See Figure 7 attached to this report for an overview of the proposed Park System.

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4. Land Securement Policies: 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 and Land Management Strategy.

A final Public Open House will take place on February 10, 2009 from 3pm to 10pm at the Royal Botanical Gardens Centre. Staff will attend the Open House, review the draft study document and report back to Council with comments and recommendations later in the new year.

5.0 FINANCIAL MATTERS:

The Cootes to Escarpment Project has been 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.

6.0 ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS:

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 natural areas contain some of the botanically richest lands in Canada, as well as providing habitat for many important bird, reptile, amphibian, fish, and insect species.

7.0 COMMUNICATION MATTERS:

The February 10, 2009 Cootes to Escarpment Public Open House will be advertised through newspaper notices and letters to the study mailing list.

8.0 CONCLUSION:

A draft report on the Cootes to Escarpment Park System: Conservation and Land Management Strategy has now been released for public review and comment. A copy of the draft report's Executive Summary is attached as Appendix One.

A final Public Open House will take place on February 10, 2009 from 3pm to 10pm at the Royal Botanical Gardens Centre. Staff will report back to Committee in the spring of 2009 on the results of the public consultation process and with comments on the draft report.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalind Minaji MCIP RPP
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Reviewed by: Bianca MV Bielski, Manager of Development Services – ext. 7638
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Appendices:

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Staff / Others Consulted:

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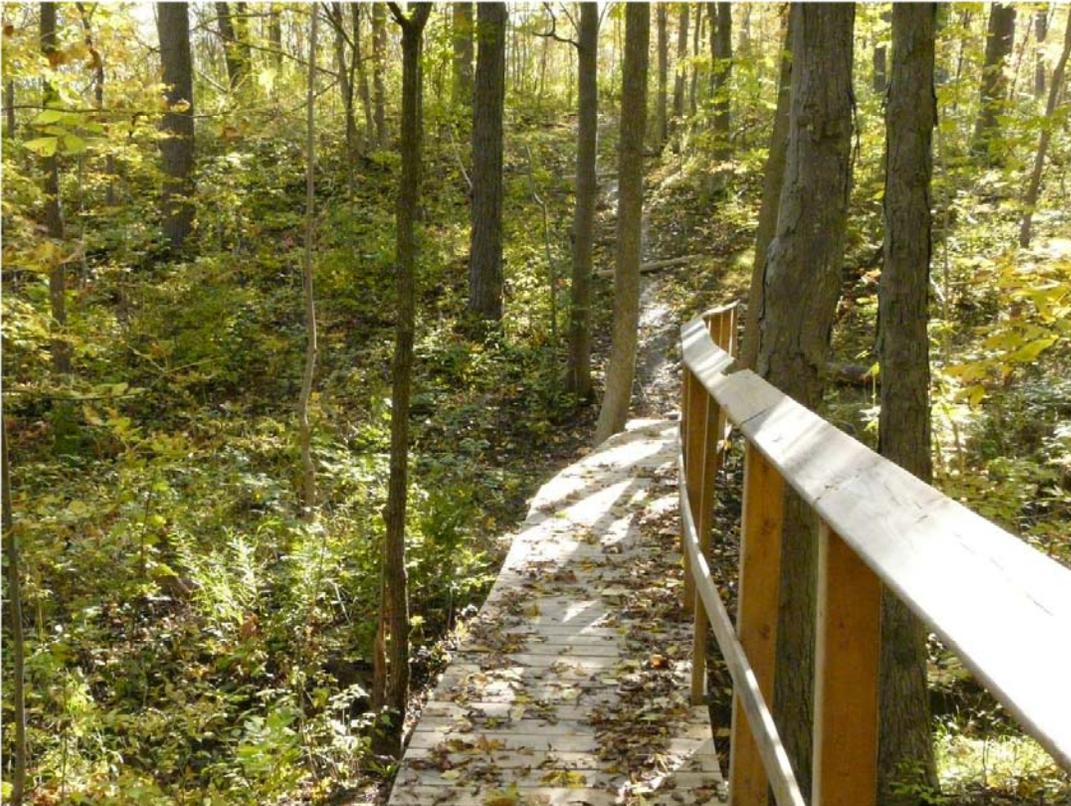
Notifications:

Name	Mailing or E-mail Address

Special Instructions:

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Cootes to Escarpment Park System
A Conservation and Land Management Strategy



December 2008

Draft for Public Review

Cootes to Escarpment Park System
A Conservation and Land Management Strategy

Executive Summary

Introduction

Royal Botanical Gardens, with Conservation Halton, Hamilton Conservation Authority, City of Burlington, City of Hamilton, Region of Halton, Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Bruce Trail Conservancy, and Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan, partnered to chart a course of action to have a physically protected and connected natural system of publicly accessible park lands within this unique part of Southern Ontario. Straddling the boundary of the cities of Hamilton and Burlington, the Cootes to Escarpment Park System is located within Ontario's Greenbelt. The Greenbelt Plan, enacted in 2005, sets the framework for permanent protection to natural heritage and water resource systems within its boundaries in order to sustain a healthy future for south-central Ontario. Cootes Paradise Marsh is an important ecological and hydrological feature in the Greenbelt that also includes the Niagara Escarpment, a World Biosphere Reserve. With funding provided by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, the Partners have developed this conservation and land management strategy to translate the policy protection into sound land management practices.

This Strategy is focused on 1,560 hectares of natural lands owned by the Partners and has two main components:

1. Conservation--protecting long term ecological functions through a natural systems approach; and
2. Land management—identifying co-operative policies and actions for recreational and ecological management of these lands as park properties abut each other and the natural systems cross property boundaries as well as municipal and watershed boundaries.

While the Greenbelt Plan has been developed to guide land-use planning in Ontario, this Strategy is not a land-use plan. It is a land management plan for public park lands that are primarily within the Greenbelt and are characterized by environmentally significant features. Good land management uses many tools, so this Strategy does identify land-use planning policies that can support the Cootes to Escarpment Park System as well as other tools such as stewardship and monitoring. Implementation of this Strategy will rely on the Partners to work co-operatively to protect and promote the Cootes to Escarpment Park System using existing legal and stewardship practices. This could include reference or inclusion of directions in this Strategy in key strategic documents of the Partners, such as strategic plans, recreation master plans, or official plans. Implementation though, will primarily be through specific actions on Park Lands.

Characteristics of the Cootes to Escarpment Area

The foundation for the Cootes to Escarpment Park System is the unique ecological corridor from Cootes Paradise Marsh to the Niagara Escarpment. The only contiguous habitat connection from Lake Ontario to the Escarpment not broken by a 400 series highway is through Cootes Paradise Marsh to Borer's Falls-Rock Chapel Environmentally Significant Area (ESA). Along the Niagara Escarpment from this ESA are five additional environmentally significant areas that together provide one of the only south-facing slopes on the Niagara Escarpment. This distinctive south-facing protected microclimate creates ideal habitat for a wide diversity of species. It brings together southern Carolinian forest zone plant species at their northern limit with more northern species at their southern limit. The natural areas contain some of the botanically richest lands in Canada, as well as providing habitat for many important bird, reptile, amphibian, fish, and insect species. This includes many species at risk, which are plants and animals at risk of disappearing from the Province or Canada, as well as the only location in Canada for one species. These environmentally significant areas include Cootes Paradise Marsh, Borer's Falls-Rock Chapel, Clappison Escarpment Woods, Bridgeview Valley, Grindstone Creek Escarpment Valley, Waterdown

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Escarpment Woods, and Sassafras Woods. The Province has recognized many parts of these natural lands as Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, or Provincially Significant Wetlands and has included the natural lands within a Provincial natural heritage system.

Historically, First Nations activity appears to have primarily been associated with seasonal hunting and fishing around Cootes Paradise Marsh. Dundas and Waterdown were sites of early European settlement which resulted in the Desjardins Canal and the High-Level Bridge. The ideas and actions of early settlers threatened the ecological health and public access to Cootes Paradise Marsh, and later these spurred local and Provincial government intervention and the beginnings of the public park system we have today with the public acquisition of Cootes Paradise Marsh. Today, much of the natural lands owned by Royal Botanical Gardens, Conservation Halton, Hamilton Conservation Authority, City of Burlington, City of Hamilton, and Bruce Trail Conservancy form the backbone of a recreational system where people can experience natural environments.

It is the growth and intensification expected over the next 20-25 years in Hamilton and Burlington that potentially threatens the health of these natural areas. By 2031 the regional population is expected to grow to 1.4 million, a 37% increase in people. This increase in population will place greater demand for use of natural areas for respite, recreation, and education. At the same time ecological integrity will become even more tenuous without large connected habitat areas to protect the biodiversity of Ontario.

Cootes to Escarpment Park System

The Partners, with the advice of a Stakeholder Advisory Group and local citizens, propose this Strategy to both conserve and manage the natural lands for the long term.

Our 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.

Our mission will be 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 the vision.

The current parks system includes 26 existing Park Lands used for recreation as well as other natural areas owned by the Partners. This covers 1,560 hectares and includes parts of the core natural areas of Cootes Paradise Marsh, Borer's Falls-Rock Chapel, Clappison Escarpment Woods, Grindstone Creek Escarpment Valley, Waterdown Escarpment Woods, and Sassafras Woods environmentally significant areas. To achieve the vision, a future park system is identified that builds on these core Heritage Lands. An additional 640-750 hectares of private and Ontario Realty Corporation property are considered important to protecting and connecting the natural areas in the current park system. Bringing additional lands into the public realm could occur through various ways, but this Strategy does not intend that lands would be expropriated for park purposes. Two main ways would be by voluntary agreement to sell or donate property; or through land dedication requirements with a subdivision development. While, the Cootes to Escarpment Park System focuses on protecting the core environmentally significant areas this Strategy recognizes that there are other connected significant natural features, so supports the protection of those natural heritage systems through land-use planning, watershed planning, and stewardship actions.

The land management component of this Strategy includes policies and actions to guide the collective management of the current Park Lands. These include policies and actions for natural and cultural heritage as well as operations, which includes recreation, education, and facilities that are directed to implementing the Park System overall as opposed to individual parks. A classification for park properties

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is identified using the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System classifications as most of these properties will be required to conform with the Niagara Escarpment Plan. Park properties outside the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area and Greenbelt Plan are not classified. This classification identifies the main management objective the properties will fulfill within the Park System and together with the policies and actions will guide future area specific management plans. The classification, policies, and actions identify common directions the Partners can implement through specific management plans to protect the natural system and provide a variety of recreational opportunities at a broad scale. It is envisaged that a Cootes to Escarpment Park System Management Network will be formed to implement this Strategy. The Management Network would include not only the Partners, but also Provincial government, institutional, and local interest groups with a stake in seeing the Cootes to Escarpment Park System managed for the long term health of the community.

Once the Park System is complete, it will include an inter-regional trail system that connects the Park Lands with the Bruce Trail and Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail. Through the Cootes to Escarpment Park System, those parts of the inter-regional trail that are not part of the Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail will be primarily designed for hiking. Main access and facilities for recreation and nature education will be centered on South Shore Cootes Paradise, North Shore Cootes Paradise, King City Quarry, City Park, Bayview Park, and Kerncliff Park. Other Park Lands will provide primarily hiking and interpretive opportunities.

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation and Land Management Strategy identifies a vision to protect locally, Provincially, and Nationally environmentally significant natural areas that shape our landscape. It provides guidance on co-operative actions to realize this vision that supports each Partner organizations' interest in providing permanent protection of significant natural lands and provide public recreation and education opportunities.