



Planning & Building Department

To: Community Development Committee

**Subject: Cootes to Escarpment Park System Project:
Progress Report, 2013-2015 Work Program and Funding**

Report Number: PB-74/12

File Number: 502-02-54

Report Date: September 24, 2012

Ward Affected: One

Date to Committee: October 22, 2012

Date to Council: November 5, 2012

Recommendations:

1. Direct staff to continue to work with partner agencies to implement the Cootes to Escarpment Park System;
2. Endorse the pursuit of provincial and/or federal legislation to recognize the Cootes to Escarpment Park System, and request the participation of senior levels of government in funding and managing the Park System;
3. Approve in principle the contents of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) attached as Appendix II to Report PB-74/12
4. Direct city staff to work with Cootes to Escarpment partner agencies to finalize the MOU wording and authorize the City Manager to sign the finalized MOU on behalf of Council;
5. Authorize a one time financial contribution to the Cootes to Escarpment Park System Project to an upset limit of \$46,200 to be paid in instalments of \$15,400 over three years and funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund.

Purpose:

- Address goal, action or initiative in strategic plan
- Establish new or revised policy or service standard
- Respond to legislation
- Respond to staff direction
- Address other area of responsibility

**Reference to
Strategic Plan:**

- Vibrant Neighbourhoods
- Prosperity
- Excellence in Government
- N/A

Our natural heritage and urban-rural boundary are protected

Background:

Purpose of Park System Project

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System Project (Park System) is a collaborative initiative between ten partner agencies to protect, restore and connect over 3,400 hectares (8,500 acres) of natural lands at the western end of Lake Ontario. By preserving these ecologically valuable lands, the Park System will create a lasting legacy for future generations in our community.

The major objectives of the Park System are:

- Long term stewardship and joint management of existing and new public lands;
- Enhanced public education and awareness of the area's cultural and environmental significance;
- Ecological restoration to maintain species diversity; and
- Creation of a connected Park System through the securement of additional lands using methods such as donations, purchase, dedications, easements and stewardship agreements.

Partner Agencies

The Park System is a collaboration between the ten government and non-profit agencies. The partner agencies are:

- 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.
- McMaster University

2010 Council Direction

On February 1, 2010 Council adopted the following resolution:

"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."

Project Steering Committee

The partner agencies are working together on plans to protect and restore their natural lands, secure additional lands to create ecological corridors, and deliver sustainable recreation and education opportunities.

Rosalind Minaji, Coordinator of Development Review with the Planning & Building Department is the current Steering Committee representative for the City of Burlington. Rob Peachey, Manager of Parks & Open Spaces, is the alternate.

Project Terms of Reference were approved by the Steering Committee in July 2010 as a working document to provide a structure for ongoing work. A full time Project Manager was retained for a two year period using funding from the Friends of the Greenbelt and Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Discussion:

Progress Report 2011 – 2012

The focus of the Park System Project over this period has been on foundation building – putting in place the elements that are necessary for creation of a sustainable park system with the support of the community, stakeholders and decision-makers. Key areas of activity have been: land securement, marketing & communications, and governance.

Land Securement Orland Conservation, a consulting firm specializing in land securement for conservation, was engaged in 2011 to prepare a Land Securement Strategy. The final version of the strategy was approved as a working document by the Steering Committee in December, 2011

The core of the Park System is the approximately 2,000 hectares of park lands and open space owned or managed by the Project partners. Another approximately 600 hectares of potential additional park lands have been identified. These are lands that are important to protect the core natural heritage system or Bruce Trail Corridor and that could be voluntarily brought into the public realm through ownership, easement or handshake agreement.

The Land Securement Strategy addresses ways in which landowner outreach and education can assist with land conservation goals. The Strategy covers:

- property evaluation procedures,
- land securement methods such as easements, bequests, leases etc.,
- potential sources of funding and partnerships,
- stewardship techniques such as trail ambassadors and private landowner agreements,
- landowner contact methodology with sample agreements, and
- recommended action plan for Park System land securement.

In December 2011, Hamilton City Council approved a commitment of \$250,000 with the Hamilton Conservation Authority “for the purpose of supporting land acquisition in the Cootes to Escarpment Eco-Park area”.

The Region of Halton has committed \$500,000 annually to its Green Fund, some of which is available for natural land securement. In July 2012, Park System lands were added to the Region’s Areas of Interest mapping which is used to assist in the review of applications to the Halton Green Fund.

The City of Burlington Strategic Lands Acquisition Policy includes a reference to the Park System in its Implementation Section as follows:

“The City will work with other levels of government and its partners to achieve mutually held goals and objectives as may be identified from time to time. Examples include the Cootes to Escarpment Plan and the Region of Halton’s Greenland Securement Strategy.”

A Land Securement Subcommittee of the Park System Steering Committee was created to oversee implementation of the Land Securement Strategy and to coordinate land securement efforts among the partners in the Park System area.

A number of short-term securement properties were identified. These include properties owned by government agencies that might be transferred to one of the partners for securement, properties that are for sale, and properties for which the owners have expressed an interest in securement. The project team and land securement staff from partner agencies continues to actively pursue these projects.

Marketing & Communications Plan

Marketing and communications will play an important role in helping make the Park System a reality. A communications consulting firm, the EcoStride Group, was engaged in April, 2011 to prepare a Communications and Marketing Plan. The final version of the plan was approved as a working document by the Steering Committee in September, 2011.

The plan outlines strategies for the following:

- Creating a brand strategy that conveys the benefits of the project;
- Raising support for the Park System within partner organizations;
- Providing social marketing and communications materials for the Park System; and
- Enhancing awareness and engagement among key user groups and stakeholder groups.

In February 2012, the communications firm Chimpanzee was engaged by the project team to prepare a brand strategy, including name, logo and tagline. Initial work has been completed; however the selection of the final brand design has been placed on hold pending formal approval of the MOU, funding model and work plan for the Park System project.

Once the MOU and funding are in place, the branding strategy will be finalized. At that time, the project team will implement communications activities to increase knowledge of the Park System and create champions within the partner organizations and stakeholder groups. Until then, Steering Committee members continue to take advantage of opportunities to increase awareness and support in their home organizations.

Governance

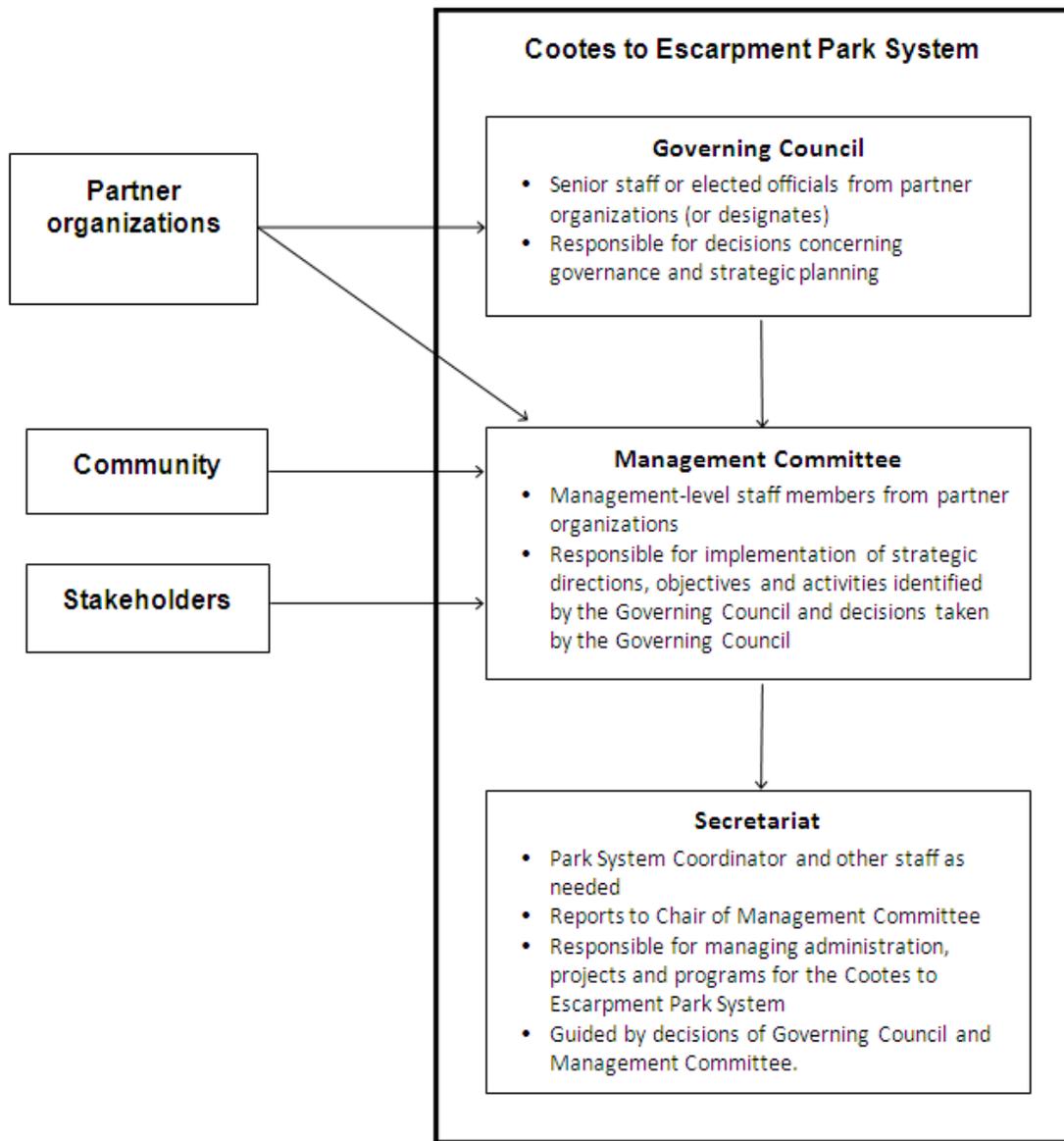
Governance model development has involved background research, expert consultation, an exploration of the functions of a fully realized Park System, discussions with staff and decision-makers from the partner agencies, and the preparation of draft memoranda of understanding and background reports.

Based upon this work, the Park System Steering Committee is proposing a governance model that will allow the formal creation of the Park System and provide a framework for joint decision-making and accountability without requiring changes to existing plans and legislation, creating a new agency, or requiring the partners to give up ownership and control of their lands.

Proposed Governance Structure:

This governance structure is proposed as a first step - the minimum level of agreement and collaboration among the partners to permit formal establishment of the Park System. It will provide a framework for the participating agencies to work together in jointly planning and managing the Park System. The governance structure is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Proposed Interim Governance Structure



Memorandum of Understanding articulates responsibilities and relationships among the Parties.

- Oversight and strategic governance will be provided by a Governing Council consisting of senior decision-makers or elected officials from each of the participating partner agencies.
- Tactical level management will be provided by a Management Committee of management-level staff from each of the partner agencies, playing a role similar to that of the current Steering Committee.
- A small Secretariat office of dedicated staff will lead and coordinate Park System activities. The secretariat is proposed based on the successful experience of the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan, in which a

small secretariat office coordinates and supports a large and complex collaborative program involving numerous partners. This model uses a modest investment to attract new resources and generate activities that could not be undertaken by the partners on their own.

The proposed governance structure will not involve the creation of a new stand-alone agency. This means that any funds obtained for the Park System will be held and managed by individual partners on behalf of the others. Similarly, Park System staff, contracts and resources will be hired/held and managed by individual partners on behalf of the others. This will be undertaken on a voluntary basis, and with the approval of the Governing Council.

Over time, the partners may find that this governance structure is suitable for long-term management of the Park System, or they may decide that an alternative model, such as a stand-alone agency, is needed. In the latter case, the initial governance structure will provide a framework to allow the partners to collectively develop and implement a new governance structure for the long-term.

Memorandum of Understanding:

MOU Contents

The Steering Committee is proposing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the partners to serve as a founding agreement to formally establish the Park System.

The MOU is intended to accomplish the following:

- recognize the Park System as a formal entity;
- approve a system for joint decision making and collaboration;
- approve a project work plan for 2013-2015;
- approve joint partner funding for 2013-2015; and
- approve the exploration of special recognition or legislation for the area by the Provincial or Federal government.

The contents of this MOU are attached in Appendix 1. Once the partner boards and councils have approved the contents of the MOU, the appropriate staff from the partner agencies will work together to develop an MOU document with detailed wording acceptable to all the partners.

Special Legislation

The Steering Committee requests the approval of the partners to pursue discussions with provincial and federal government officials, to explore options for special purpose legislation to implement the vision for the Park System and assist in securing long term funding. Options will be brought back to the partners for discussion and approval.

Recommendation

Staff is recommending that Council endorse the pursuit of provincial and/or federal legislation to recognize the Park System, endorse the contents of the MOU, direct staff to work with the partner agencies to finalize the MOU wording and authorize the City Manager to sign the final MOU document.

Financial Matters:

Current Project Funding

Funding to support the Park System Project has previously been secured from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation (\$50,000 grant is now complete) and the Ontario Trillium Foundation (\$149,800 grant from 2010, will be complete in January 2013).

Partner agencies are currently providing in-kind contributions, largely in the form of staff time. Projects and activities are undertaken by a core project team consisting of the Cootes to Escarpment Park System Steering Committee (with members from each of the partner organizations) and a Project Manager (Park System Coordinator).

Role of Park System Coordinator 2013-2015

Much of the Park System budget applies to the position of Park System Coordinator. The responsibilities of this position are as follows:

- Lead and coordinate Park System initiatives, including the development of policies, rules, standards, strategies and plans
- Provide executive support to Governing Council and Management Committee and other sub-committees including scheduling meetings, agendas, meeting summaries and following up on action items.
- Prepare business and strategic plans, annual work plan, annual report
- Prepare and monitor budgets; approve and track expenses
- Undertake procurement and prepare contracts, subject to the policies and approval of the funding partner
- Identify potential sources of funding and prepare funding applications and cases of support for potential donors
- Liaise with funding agencies, manage grants, prepare reports to funding agencies
- Recruit and supervise staff, consultants, contractors and students
- Manage and implement communications and marketing plan, including website, printed materials and social media
- Engage with elected officials, decision-makers, stakeholders, user groups, community groups and residents, the media, and staff from other parks and protected areas
- Represent the Park System at conferences and other meetings
- Manage and support the identification and implementation of a permanent governance structure for the Park System
- Facilitate/oversee preparation of collaborative management plans for each of the six Heritage Lands areas
- Coordinate and support land securement activities
- Develop and implement a landowner contact program (In conjunction with the Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program).

2013-2015 Project Funding

The conclusion of the Trillium Grant will mean that a Park System Coordinator position can no longer be funded. In order to support the further development of the Park System, annual financial contributions are being requested from the ten partner agencies. These contributions will cover the costs of the Park System Coordinator and associated activities for the years 2013-2015.

A budget for the Park System project is contained in Table 1 attached to the MOU. Contributions are equal among most of the partners, at \$15,400 per year, for a total contribution of \$46,200 (see Table 2 attached to the MOU).

The exception is that much smaller contributions are being requested from the Bruce Trail Conservancy and the Hamilton Naturalists' Club. These smaller contributions are in recognition of the relatively limited financial resources of the two organizations and the significant non-financial contributions they make to the Park System initiative.

Future Project Funding

The current funding request is being made on a one-time basis to ensure that implementation of the Park System can continue while long term funding and governance issues are resolved. During the next three years, the Park System Coordinator and Management Committee will work to secure alternative funding sources, including grants and donations from agencies and senior levels of government.

Recommendation

Staff recommend that Council authorize the three year funding request for a total of \$46,200 toward the Park System project. The three years of committed support will enable the partners to begin to implement the Park System and achieve its objectives, and in so doing, be better able to define the long-term requirements of implementation.

2013 - 2015 Project Work Plan:

A project work plan has been prepared for 2013-2015 and is attached as Appendix II. In this period, efforts will focus on securing new funds, pursuing special purpose legislation, engaging community members and stakeholders, fostering land securement and stewardship, and preparing joint management plans for core areas of the Park System.

Fundraising

Fundraising will be an important focus of the Park System Coordinator who will identify potential sources, develop cases for support and funding applications, and liaise with funding agencies. Relationships will be cultivated with potential donors and government agencies. The Coordinator will also provide regular reporting to the Management Committee on park system funds and expenses.

A joint fundraising strategy to support land securement, stewardship and Park System operations will be formally approved by the project partners. This document will contain "best practices" or "guiding principles" for joint fundraising, and will contain a statement of support to present to potential funders and donors. Financial support could be provided for land acquisition, land stewardship, capital funding (trails), operational funding and planning.

Pursuing Special Legislation

To maximize the likelihood of financial support from senior levels of government, the project partners will work together to request special legislation to recognize the Park System.

Special legislation could be enacted at the Provincial or Federal level to do one or more of the following:

- Formally recognize the Park System;

- Designate the lands within the Park System;
- Create a non-profit agency to manage the Park System; and/or
- Convey new powers to partners (such as the ability to enforce management regulations, fine offenders, restrict access from significant areas).

A detailed plan for creating special purpose legislation will be developed and implemented, including required approvals, timelines and involvement of key decision makers.

Community Engagement

The Park System Coordinator will engage with the wider community to gather support for the Park System and involve residents and stakeholders in its implementation. The brand strategy will be completed and an effective brand image used on all Park System communication materials. The Communication and Marketing Plan will be implemented with regular information conveyed to community members, stakeholders, potential donors and decision makers.

The goal of the communication strategy is for community members and stakeholders to gain a sense of ownership and pride in the Park System. Communication beyond the region will also be undertaken to raise the profile of the Park System and gain support at the provincial, national and international levels.

Stewardship and Land Securement

The Management Committee will continue to support efforts among the partners to secure natural lands and work with private landowners to encourage stewardship on their properties.

The Park System Coordinator will work with the Hamilton Halton Watershed Stewardship Program to intensify their efforts in the Cootes to Escarpment Park System area. Regular landowner contact will be made to explain the environmental significance of the Park System and how to care for and enhance these natural lands. Owners of complementary stewardship lands can make voluntary positive contributions to the overall health and integrity of the surrounding system through stewardship or positive management activities on their lands.

Joint Management Plans

A grant of \$65,000 has been received from the Friends of the Greenbelt to undertake work on the Burlington Heights Land Management Plan. Burlington Heights is one of six core natural areas within the Park System identified for further study.

This project involves development of a single, coherent management plan for lands within the Burlington Heights area that are owned or managed by the City of Burlington, the City of Hamilton and Royal Botanical Gardens. The study area contains an Environmentally Significant Area, a National Historic Site, and a major transportation corridor. The land is a post glacial barrier beach; this beach ridge serves to divide Hamilton Harbour and Cootes Paradise Marsh.

A consultant will be retained to complete the Burlington Heights Management Plan over the next year. This Plan will enhance protection of important natural

and cultural features, improve sustainable recreation opportunities, and serve as a pilot for cross-jurisdictional management planning in the other five core natural areas identified in the Cootes to Escarpment Plan.

A Steering Committee of staff representatives from RBG and the cities of Burlington and Hamilton will guide development of the management plan. Robert Peachey will represent Burlington in this process. Community engagement in the management plan will occur through four public meetings, to be held at different stages of plan development, and will also include a Stakeholder Advisory Committee of interested individuals and representatives of organizations that have an interest in the management plan. The management plans will not bind any of the organizations to specific commitments, but will make recommendations as to best approaches to future management of the lands.

Other Management Plans will be completed as funds become available. Through completion of these Plans, progress will be made towards harmonization of policies, regulations and land classification on park system lands and creation of new joint initiatives to enhance existing programs and fill gaps related to habitat restoration, invasive species control, ecological inventories, environmental monitoring, education and interpretation, and cultural heritage protection

Environmental Matters:

Ecological Importance of Park System

The Park System contains one of the most biologically rich areas of Canada, home to nearly a quarter of the country's wild plants and more than 50 species at risk. Five of Burlington's eleven Environmentally Sensitive Areas are located in the North Aldershot portion of the Park System. It is also the last intact ecological connection between Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment. The environmental and cultural importance of the natural lands have been widely recognized, including as a UNESCO world heritage site (Niagara Escarpment) and important migratory bird sanctuary (Cootes Paradise).

Conclusion:

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.

Staff are recommending the following actions by Council in order to ensure that work continues on the Park System project:

- Direct staff to continue to work with partner agencies to implement the Cootes to Escarpment Park System;
 - Endorse the pursuit of provincial and/or federal legislation to recognize the Cootes to Escarpment Park System, and request the participation
-

of senior levels of government in funding and managing the Park System;

- Approve in principle the contents of the Memorandum of Understanding attached as Appendix II of Report PB**/12
- Direct city staff to work with Cootes to Escarpment partner agencies to finalize the MOU wording and authorize the City Manager to sign the finalized MOU on behalf of Council;
- Authorize a one time financial contribution to the Cootes to Escarpment Park System Project to an upset limit of \$46,200 to be paid in instalments of \$15,400 over three years and funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalind Minaji MCIP RPP
 Coordinator of Development Review
 905-335-7600 ext. 7809

Reviewed by Bianca Bielski, Manager of Development Services

Approvals:

*required

 *Department

 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

Appendix I Cootes to Escarpment Memorandum of Understanding - Contents

This document provides the substantive content (but not the specific wording) of a Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Cootes to Escarpment Park System.

PURPOSE OF MOU

- Establish the Cootes to Escarpment Park System
- Establish a framework for joint decision-making among the parties
- Affirm the intention of the parties to seek special recognition provincially, federally and internationally as may be appropriate and to seek outside funding for projects and programs supportive of the park system as a collaborative of the partner agencies
- Affirm commitments of financial and in-kind support from each party

COOTES TO ESCARPMENT PARK SYSTEM

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System is a collaborative initiative amongst the parties to protect, connect and restore natural lands between the Niagara Escarpment and Cootes Paradise/Hamilton Harbour, and to provide ecologically compatible recreation, education and research opportunities on lands within park system.

The parties acknowledge the definition of park system lands set out in the *Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation and Land Management Strategy* and acknowledge that new lands will be added to the park system from time to time.

Each party commits to participate as a partner in the Cootes to Escarpment Park System, which involves participating in the Governing Council and the Management Committee, making cash and in-kind contributions, and participating in Cootes to Escarpment Park System initiatives.

FRAMEWORK FOR JOINT DECISION-MAKING

Cootes to Escarpment Park System will inform but not replace or supersede the land management and other responsibilities of the parties and will not supersede the legal rights and responsibilities of private and public land owners.

Each party determines how park system matters and decisions link to its internal organizational and decision structure, including consultation with and approvals from its board or council.

Park system governed by two bodies: Governing Council and Management Committee. Each party has one representative on each of the two bodies, respectively.

Governing Council:

- One senior decision-maker or elected official from each of the parties, with authority to make significant decisions and secure commitments on behalf of partner organization
- Responsible for governance and strategic planning, significant legal or financial matters

- Meets 2-3 times per year

Management Committee:

- One management-level representative from each of the parties, with authority to make operational decisions and commitments on behalf of partner organization
- Responsible for implementation of strategic directions, objectives and activities set by the Governing Council and decisions taken by the Governing Council
- Meets regularly (e.g., monthly)

FRAMEWORK FOR JOINT DECISION-MAKING, CONTINUED

Secretariat consisting of Park System Coordinator (and other staff as needed) coordinates and undertakes administration, projects and programs. Reports to Chair of Management Committee

Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan Coordinator while not a party to MOU is invited to be nonvoting resource member of both the Governing Council and Management Committee.

SPECIAL LEGISLATION

Parties agree to seek special legislation from the Ontario and federal governments for one or more of the following:

- Officially create/recognize park system
- Recognize significance of natural and cultural heritage
- Designate particular geographic area as the Cootes to Escarpment Park System
- Confer particular powers on parties for application on park system lands through specific park/protection area legislation (e.g., powers under the Ontario *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*)

CONTRIBUTIONS

Parties agree to commit cash and in-kind resources as needed. Cash contributions specified in schedule to agreement (see schedule 1 below).

Cash contributions will be held by one of the parties on behalf of the others. Funds will be managed by Park System Coordinator subject to policies and procedures of party holding the funds. Park System Coordinator will produce detailed financial report annually.

WORK PLANS

Work plans will be prepared by the Management Committee and Park System Coordinator to achieve the vision, mission and objectives articulated in the *Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation and Land Management Strategy*.

REPORTING AND REVIEW

There will be regular reporting and review of progress.

TERM OF AGREEMENT

3 years, renewable with written consent of parties

TERMINATION

90 written notice for party to leave agreement; immediate if party becomes insolvent or ceases operations

Schedule 1

Financial contributions from Parties: 2013 - 2015				
	2013	2014	2015	Total
Bruce Trail Conservancy	1,100	1,100	1,100	3,300
City of Burlington	15,400	15,400	15,400	46,200
City of Hamilton	15,400	15,400	15,400	46,200
Halton Conservation Authority	15,400	15,400	15,400	46,200
Halton Region	15,400	15,400	15,400	46,200
Hamilton Conservation Authority	15,400	15,400	15,400	46,200
Hamilton Naturalists' Club	1,100	1,100	1,100	3,300
McMaster University	15,400	15,400	15,400	46,200
Royal Botanical Gardens	15,400	15,400	15,400	46,200
TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS	110,000	110,000	110,000	330,000

Operating Budget 2013 – 2015				
	2013	2014	2015	Total
Staff salaries and benefits				
Park System Coordinator	81,250	82,000	82,800	246,050
Land Stewardship and Securement	10,000	10,000	10,000	30,000
Operating supplies & expenses				
Office space leasing cost (in-kind contribution)	0	0	0	0
Office supplies, postage	1,050	1,000	1,000	3,050
Communications materials	5,000	7,000	6,500	18,500
Telephone and Internet	3,000	3,000	3,000	9,000
Computer costs	4,000	1,000	1,000	6,000
Meeting expenses	2,000	2,000	2,000	6,000
Travel	1,000	1,300	1,000	3,300
Finance and administration	2,700	2,700	2,700	8,100
<i>Total: Operating supplies & expenses</i>	<i>18,750</i>	<i>18,000</i>	<i>17,200</i>	<i>53,950</i>
TOTAL OPERATING COSTS	110,000	110,000	110,000	330,000

Appendix II Cootes to Escarpment Project Work Plan 2013 – 2015



Cootes to Escarpment Park System... A CONSERVATION VISION

PROGRAM PLAN OVERVIEW

by Deborah Herbert, Project Manager

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System is a collaborative initiative to protect, restore and connect over 2,000 hectares of publicly-owned natural lands at the western end of Lake Ontario. Since 2006, ten local government and non-government partner organizations have worked together to define and realize a vision for a new park system between the Niagara Escarpment and Cootes Paradise/Hamilton Harbour: the Cootes to Escarpment Park System.

This program plan outlines proposed work over the next three years that builds on and continues the momentum gained over the last six years. The focus will be on formally establishing the park system by putting in place critical foundation elements, including:

- create an effective governance structure;
- create an effective and distinctive identity for the park system;
- foster engaged and supportive residents and stakeholders;
- receive support from the provincial and federal governments, including financial support and enabling legislation;
- begin securing resources to support land securement, stewardship, administration and programs;
- begin engagement of private landowners in stewardship and land securement
- begin management planning for the six Heritage Lands areas identified in the *Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation and Land Management Strategy*;
- begin harmonization of policies and regulations on park system lands.

Progress towards achieving each of these elements will be the basis of evaluating the success of this program plan.

Following discussion of the proposed work to be undertaken in 2013-15 (the Action Plan below), the remainder of this document provides information on expected outcomes, organization and decision-making, financial management, communications and the secretariat.

ACTION PLAN

Since the partners began working together on this project, much has been achieved but work is still needed to establish the park system on a solid foundation. Considerable progress has already been made in identifying a governance model for the park system, but continued refinement and consultation with partners is required. Additionally, the provincial and federal governments should be further engaged in helping to develop the park system, through the creation of special legislation and other support.

Once the details of a governance model for the park system have been agreed among the partners, the Steering Committee (or Management Committee, if it is in place) and Park System Coordinator will engage with the regional community and with stakeholders to garner their support for the park system and to involve them in its implementation. The goal is that community members and stakeholders will have a sense of ownership and pride in the park system. Communications beyond the region will also be undertaken, to raise the profile of the park system and gain support at the provincial, national and international levels.

Land securement and stewardship is a primary driver of the park system vision, and the Steering Committee and Park System Coordinator will continue to coordinate and support efforts among the partners to secure natural lands and to work with private landowners to encourage stewardship on their properties. The Steering Committee and Park System Coordinator will work with the Hamilton Halton Watershed Stewardship Program to intensify their efforts in the Cootes to Escarpment Park System area. In addition, they will identify and develop opportunities for joint land management, education and recreation projects and programs among the partners.

The Steering Committee and Park System Coordinator will work with partner staff to conduct ecological inventories that build on Natural Areas Inventories and fill in gaps. This information will feed into development of strategies for protection of natural heritage, including protection and creation of wildlife corridors, protection of habitat for species at risk, and control of invasive species. It will also be used to form a baseline for a long-term environmental program on park system lands.

The Steering Committee has served as an excellent vehicle for promoting collaboration among the partners, and will continue to do so. With support from the Park System Coordinator, they will hold a series of workshops for partner staff to work together on management issues, such as invasive species control and trail maintenance. More ambitiously, they will coordinate harmonization of rules and land use designations among the partner agencies on lands within the park system, to facilitate land management and provide more clarity to visitors.

Collaboration on land management among the partners will be facilitated by the preparation of management plans for each of the six core Heritage Lands areas in the park system. The plans will define specific actions, activities and zones on park lands and provide guidance for management of cultural and natural heritage features and for providing ecologically-compatible recreation and education opportunities. The plans will be consistent with the planning and policy context of the area and will reflect input from community members and stakeholders. A schedule for preparing these management plans will be developed.

An important premise of the park system concept is the ability to attract new resources – to support securement of new natural lands, management and restoration of existing lands, and specific projects and programs. The Steering Committee and Park System Coordinator will continue to pursue

opportunities from granting agencies such as foundations. Perhaps more importantly, they will coordinate joint efforts among the partners to secure funding and land donations from major donors and to engage with the provincial and federal governments to secure support in addition to what is available from existing programs.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It is expected that by the end of 2015, the following outcomes will be achieved:

Governance

- Founding agreement(s) among the partners are in place
- Enabling (federal and/or provincial) legislation is in place or well-advanced
- Governing and management bodies are established and functioning effectively

Communications and engagement

- Elected officials and staff in all three levels of government know about and support the park system
- Elected officials support enabling legislation
- Residents of Hamilton and Burlington are well-informed and enthusiastic about the park system
- User groups and other stakeholders are supportive of the park system and engaged in its implementation
- A brand, logo and tagline for the park system are in place
- Effective website and social networking tools are in place and used to support engagement
- Brochures and other print materials about the park system are available

Fundraising

- Joint fundraising strategy in place for land securement, stewardship and operations
- Formal agreement among partners on joint fundraising
- Relationships cultivated with potential donors and government agencies
- Grant funding sources identified and applications submitted

Management planning

- Management plans for the six Heritage Lands areas are complete or under way, with specific timelines for their completion

Coordination among partners

- Common vision of the role and functions of the park system
- Significant progress towards classification system for partner lands in park system
- Significant progress towards harmonized policies and regulations
- Series of staff workshops on management topics
- New joint programs created to enhance existing programs and fill in gaps
 - Ecological inventories and environmental monitoring
 - Habitat restoration
 - Invasive species control
 - Education and interpretation
 - Culture heritage inventories
 - Cultural heritage protection

ORGANIZATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Activities will be led and coordinated by a Steering Committee composed of staff representatives of each of the ten partner organizations, with support from a dedicated Park System Coordinator. Staff from the partner agencies will participate in specific initiatives and provide their expertise as needed.

A core secretariat office staffed by the Park System Coordinator will advance and coordinate park system initiatives, with guidance and participation from the Steering Committee. The secretariat office will serve as hub and point of contact for park system activities, similar to the role of the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan office.

Until a new governance structure is in place, decision-making and accountability concerning park system initiatives will continue to rest with the individual partner agencies, with the Steering Committee providing a coordinating and communications function. The Park System Coordinator will report to the Executive of the Steering Committee, which acts on behalf of the Steering Committee and the partner agencies.

The Park System Coordinator will provide support to the Steering Committee to enable its effective functioning. This includes organizing meetings, maintaining records, preparing briefings and other supporting materials, undertaking projects as needed, and preparing annual workplans and reports and periodic progress reports. This support would continue for the new governing bodies (Governing Council and Management Committee) once they are in place.

In the third year of implementation, an evaluation will be undertaken by the Park System Coordinator under the guidance of the Steering Committee (or Management Committee if it is in place). This evaluation will use a format and criteria to be established and approved by the partners in the first year of park system operation. The evaluation will determine the extent to which goals and objectives have been met and suggest changes that should be made to governance and operations to ensure future success.

This evaluation will be presented to the partners for their approval, following which it will be released to the public. The evaluation will inform the decision of how to continue the park system beyond year three, including a permanent/longer-term governance structure and next steps for joint implementation.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Currently there is no stand-alone agency to support the Cootes to Escarpment Park System, nor is the creation of one contemplated in the near future. Because there is no stand-alone agency with the ability to receive and manage funds, hire staff or enter into contracts, these functions will need to be undertaken by individual partner agencies (on a voluntary basis) on behalf of the others. While each agency has its own administrative infrastructure and procedures, the Park System Coordinator can support administration and management of park system funds, staff and contracts. Additionally, the Park System Coordinator will monitor and report on park system funds and expenses by source of funding and at an aggregate level.

One benefit of the Cootes to Escarpment Park System is the potential to secure new resources. Fundraising will be an important focus of the Park System Coordinator, who will identify funding needs and potential sources, develop cases for support and funding applications, and liaise with

donors and funding agencies. S/he will work with development staff in the partner agencies to coordinate fundraising activities, ensuring that opportunities and synergies are maximized and that park system fundraising complements and does not compete with partner fundraising initiatives and plans.

COMMUNICATIONS

Clear, effective and timely communication is essential, both internally among the partner agencies and externally with community members, stakeholders, potential donors, and public- and private-sector decision-makers. The Park System Coordinator will act as a focal point for both internal and external communication related to the park system. S/he will work with the Steering Community and partner communications staff to implement the communications and marketing plan developed for the park system in 2011, and to organize and implement community, stakeholder, and government engagement activities.

An identifiable brand has significant value for the park system. An effective brand identity helps attract potential supporters and increase recognition locally and beyond. Over the longer term, it provides a common reference for signage on park system lands, supporting efforts to provide an inter-linked regional trail and harmonize rules on park system lands. Work has already begun on creating an effective name, logo and tagline(s) for the park system; this work will be completed with community and stakeholder engagement once the future governance structure has been agreed upon by the partners.

Internal communications will be achieved through regular reports to the partner agencies and their boards and councils and through ad hoc communication with partner staff. The Steering Committee members will continue to be the primary liaison between the park system project and their home organizations, and the Park System Coordinator will assist them with timely communications with their organizations. To facilitate collaboration among staff from the partner agencies, a series of management forums will be held to provide opportunities for staff to discuss issues of concern.

Information technologies provide useful tools to achieve timely and effective communication at low cost, but require initial investment and ongoing staff time. Therefore, communications programming will be a target for fundraising, including support for communications staff and/or consultants, development and maintenance of a website and social networking tools, and creation of print communications materials.

SECRETARIAT OFFICE AND INITIAL BUDGET

The secretariat office is proposed based on the successful experience of the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan, in which a small secretariat office coordinates and supports a large and complex collaborative program involving numerous partners. This model leverages a modest investment to attract new resources and generate activities for the benefit of all partners in the collaborative.

A budget for the first three years of park system implementation has been developed, involving \$110,000 annually to support the secretariat office and park system activities, funded through contributions from the partner agencies. It is assumed that significant in-kind contributions will also be provided by the partners, in the form of staff time, meeting space, materials, equipment use (e.g., printer and photocopier), and office space for the secretariat.

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System Action Plan for the period 2013-2015 builds on work to date in developing and realizing the vision for a new park system. The work and outcomes achieved between 2013 and 2015 will in turn contribute to future activities. This is shown in Table 3 below, which lists specific activities, with associated timelines and participants, that will be undertaken in 2011-2020. The period covered by this program plan (2013-2015) is highlighted in the table.

COOTES TO ESCARPMENT PARK SYSTEM ACTION PLAN FOR 2011-2020											
OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	LEAD/PARTICIPANTS
Establish a founding agreement among the partners											
Explore governance options	←→										Park System Coordinator
Consult with partners on governance options		←→									Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Create founding agreement			←→								Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Founding agreement signed by all partners				♦							Partner boards and councils
Enact special legislation to create park system											
Explore options and requirements for legislation	←→										Park System Coordinator
Consult with partners on elements of legislation		←→									Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Create legislation in collaboration with government officials			←→								Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Special legislation enacted in Ontario Legislative Assembly				♦							MPPs
Special legislation enacted in Parliament of Canada				♦							MPs
Provide support to governing bodies			←→								Park System Coordinator
Secure funding											
Consult partners on core funding needs and partner contributions	←→										Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Explore and pursue grant funding possibilities	←→										Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Develop agreement among partners on joint fundraising			←→								Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Develop fundraising strategy			←→								Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff

COOTES TO ESCARPMENT PARK SYSTEM ACTION PLAN FOR 2011-2020											
OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	LEAD/PARTICIPANTS
Develop one or more cases for support			↔								Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Cultivate relationships with donors				←	→	→	→	→	→	→	Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Implement community fundraising campaign				←	→	→	→	→	→	→	Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Provide ongoing coordination of fundraising efforts among partners				←	→	→	→	→	→	→	Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee
Engage with elected officials and staff from provincial and federal governments to explore possibilities for financial & other support		↔	↔								Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Develop funding applications and agreements			↔	↔							Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Communications											
Develop communications and marketing plan	↔										EcoStride , Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Undertake presentations and other activities to increase knowledge and support of park system initiative within partner organizations	↔		↔								Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee
Prepare annual and progress reports for partners and the public	←	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	Park System Coordinator
Develop brand identity		↔	↔								Chimpanzee , Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Develop website and social networking tools			↔	↔							Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Develop communications materials (electronic and print)	←	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Organize and implement community engagement activities	←	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Organize and implement stakeholder engagement activities	←	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Organize and implement management forums with partner staff	←	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff

COOTES TO ESCARPMENT PARK SYSTEM ACTION PLAN FOR 2011-2020											
OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	LEAD/PARTICIPANTS
Protect natural heritage and wildlife corridors											
Develop strategies to protect corridors in collaborative process with partners, stakeholders and senior levels of government; informed by Land Securement Strategy				←→							Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Fundraise for implementation of strategy to protect natural heritage and wildlife corridors				←→							Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Develop partnerships for implementation of specific projects				←→							Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Implement specific initiatives to protect corridors				←	→						Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee, partner staff
Protect and restore habitat for species at risk											
Lead/coordinate development of methodology and protocols for inventory and monitoring				←→							Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee
Coordinate, oversee and provide support for actual inventories (to be undertaken by partner agencies)				←→							Park System Coordinator
Lead/coordinate development of recovery strategies specific to the Cootes to Escarpment Park System, including habitat restoration				←→							Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee
Coordinate and support implementation of recovery strategies					←	→					Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee
Coordinate monitoring					←	→					Park System Coordinator
Inventory and develop plans for control of invasive species											
Lead/coordinate development of methodology and protocols for invasive species inventory and monitoring				←→							Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee
Coordinate, oversee and provide support for actual inventories (to be undertaken by partner agencies)				←→							Park System Coordinator
Lead/coordinate development of plans to control invasive species				←→							Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee
Coordinate and support implementation of invasive species control					←	→					Park System Coordinator , Steering Committee

COOTES TO ESCARPMENT PARK SYSTEM ACTION PLAN FOR 2011-2020												
OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	LEAD/PARTICIPANTS	
Coordinate monitoring					←————→						Park System Coordinator	
Undertake a long term environmental monitoring program												
Lead/coordinate development of methodology and protocols for establishing baseline and for long-term monitoring program					↔						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee	
Coordinate, oversee and provide support for establishing baseline						↔					Park System Coordinator	
Coordinate, oversee and provide support for environmental monitoring program							←————→				Park System Coordinator	
Land securement												
Develop Land Securement Strategy	↔										Orland Conservation, Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee	
Develop landowner outreach program (in conjunction with HHWSP)						↔					Park System Coordinator	
Implement landowner outreach program (in conjunction with HHWSP)							←————→				Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff	
Pursue opportunities for land dedications through municipal planning processes		←————→									Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff	
Pursue opportunities for land protection through planning processes		←————→									Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff	
Pursue opportunities for transfer of lands owned by government agencies		←————→									Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff	
Pursue opportunities for donation of privately-owned lands		←————→									Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff	
Fundraise for purchase/protection of specific properties			←————→									Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Stewardship												
Establish groups of stewards and friends					←————→						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff	
Develop network and tools for communications					←————→						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff	

COOTES TO ESCARPMENT PARK SYSTEM ACTION PLAN FOR 2011-2020											
OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	LEAD/PARTICIPANTS
Trail Management Strategy											
Lead/coordinate inventory and classification of existing trails				↔							Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Lead/coordinate development of trail management strategy in collaboration with partners and stakeholders				↔							Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Coordinate, oversee and provide support for implementation of trail management strategy						↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	Park System Coordinator
Lead/coordinate development of plan/strategy for roadside bike lanes in park system areas, in collaboration with municipalities and stakeholders						↔	↔				Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Coordinate and provide support for implementation of plan/strategy								↔	↔	↔	Park System Coordinator
Cultural Heritage Protection Strategy and Programs											
Establish and provide support to Working Group to develop a strategy and implementation actions to protect cultural resources						↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Coordinate and provide support for implementation of strategy						↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	Park System Coordinator
Develop an education and awareness program for students						↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Develop and implement interpretative signage on features						↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Create and implement a walking tour						↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Cultural Heritage Inventory											
Engage experts to undertake a comprehensive inventory of cultural heritage						↔	↔				Park System Coordinator
Secure funding to pay experts						↔	↔				Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff

COOTES TO ESCARPMENT PARK SYSTEM ACTION PLAN FOR 2011-2020											
OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	LEAD/PARTICIPANTS
Education and Interpretation Programs											
Establish and provide support to Working Group to identify and coordinate education and interpretive programming					←————→						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Identify and secure funding to implement education and interpretive programming					←————→						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Develop and implement education and interpretive programming and specific tools					←————→						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Research, where appropriate, on Cootes to Escarpment Park System lands											
Identify and meet with relevant researchers to provide information on Cootes to Escarpment Park System and explore possible research projects/partnerships					←————→						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Develop research projects/programs in conjunction with research partners					←————→						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee
Apply for funding in conjunction with research partners					←————→						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee, partner staff
Coordinate/oversee research projects/programs					←————→						Park System Coordinator, Steering Committee