



TO: Development and Infrastructure Committee
FROM: City Manager's Office
SUBJECT: Report providing recommendation on Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System Project: Progress Report and Additional Funding

Report Number: CM-21-13 Wards Affected: 1

File Numbers: 502-02-54

Date to Committee: January 13, 2014 Date to Council: January 27, 2014

Recommendation:

1. Receive the progress report about ongoing Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System activities.
2. Authorize the naming of City owned property at 1401 Old York Road as the "Eileen and John Holland Nature Sanctuary".
3. Authorize an additional 2014 financial contribution to the Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System of \$25,000 from the City Manager's budget.

Purpose:

Address goal or action in strategic plan

The successful creation of the Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System will assist in the protection and enhancement of Burlington's natural and cultural heritage.

Background:

Purpose of Ecopark System

The Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System (Ecopark) is a collaborative initiative between ten partner agencies to protect, restore and connect over 1,900 hectares (4,700 acres) of natural lands at the western end of Lake Ontario. By preserving these ecologically valuable lands, the Ecopark will create a lasting legacy for future generations in our community.

The major objectives of the Ecopark 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 system of properties through the securement of additional lands using methods such as donations, purchase, dedications, easements and stewardship agreements.

Partner Agencies

The Ecopark 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
- McMaster University
- Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan Office.

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.”

2012 Council Direction

On November 5, 2012 Council adopted the following resolution:

“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 (MOU) attached as Appendix II to Report PB-74/12

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 installments of \$15,400 over three years and funded from the Tax Rate

Stabilization Reserve Fund.”

Discussion:

Strategy/Process

Key areas of Ecopark activity in 2013 have been: governance, senior government engagement, natural heritage protection, stakeholder engagement, fundraising, and land securement. Recent initiatives and next steps are summarized below.

Governance The official Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Ecopark partner agencies was signed in June 2013.

The MOU establishes the following:

- Recognition of the Ecopark as a formal entity;
- A system for joint decision making and collaboration;
- A project work plan for 2013-2015;
- Joint partner funding for 2013-2015; and
- Exploration of special recognition or legislation for the area by the Provincial or Federal government.

A formal signing ceremony for partner agencies was held at McMaster University on June 20, 2013. A public kick off event for the Ecopark was hosted by the RBG on Saturday June 22, 13. Speeches by dignitaries were followed by guided hikes and children’s activities.

The governance model established by the MOU contains the following components:

- A Governing Council consisting of senior decision-makers from each of the participating partner agencies. This group is intended to provide oversight and strategic governance. The first meeting of the Governing Council took place on October 4, 2013. Mark Runciman, Chief Executive Officer of the RBG was appointed as Chair of the Governing Council, while Jeff Fielding agreed to be the Vice-Chair.
- A Management Committee of management-level staff from each of the

partner agencies, providing tactical level support for the Ecopark. This group meets monthly and Burlington is represented by Rosalind Minaji, from the Planning & Building Department.

- A Secretariat office of dedicated staff to lead and coordinate Ecopark activities. Deborah Herbert is the full-time Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System Coordinator.

The MOU has a term of three years, and can be renewed with agreement by the parties. It specifies that the Governing Council will direct a review of the governance system after it has been in operation for two years.

**Senior
Government
Engagement**

To maximize the likelihood of financial support from senior levels of government, the project partners are working together to request special legislation to recognize the Ecopark. This special legislation at either the Provincial or Federal level, would be enacted to do the following:

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

Now that the ground work has been laid for the Ecopark, discussions with provincial government officials have begun to explore options for this special purpose legislation. The various options will be brought back to the partners for discussion and approval.

- A meeting was held on November 4 with Minister of Community and Social Services Ted McMeekin and Minister of the Environment James Bradley. It was suggested that a working group be formed to generate ideas that will elevate the status and awareness of the Ecopark across provincial ministries.
- A meeting to discuss provincial recognition of the Ecopark was held on December 9 and included Ministers Ted McMeekin and James Bradley as well as senior staff from the Premier's Office and the Ministry of Natural Resources. The suggestion of a multi-ministry discussion group to continue developing the concept of legislative recognition was put forward and well received by all present.
- Governing Council members are raising awareness of the Ecopark System among senior community leaders. Support for the Ecopark has recently been secured from Gerry Smallegange, President and Chief Executive Officer of Burlington Hydro, and Tim Caddigan, Senior

Director, Programming & Community Relations of Cogeco

- Contacts with Federal government officials will also take place over the coming months. The Ecopark System Coordinator is researching ways that the Ecopark can implement both federal and provincial programs and policy.

2014 will be a critical year for these lobbying efforts, as elections are on the horizon for both the provincial and federal government. The review of the provincial Greenbelt Plan in 2015 also provides an excellent opportunity to tie the Ecopark to Provincial goals and legislation.

A detailed plan for creating special purpose legislation will be developed and implemented in 2014. The plan will include required approvals and timelines and how to involve key decision makers. Additional resources will be required to retain a professional communications advisor and develop tools such as a promotional video to raise the profile of the Ecopark during this pivotal time.

In recognition of the need for additional communication resources during this crucial time period, staff is recommending that Council authorize the expenditure of an additional contribution to the Ecopark of \$25,000 from the City Manager's budget.

**Natural
Heritage
Protection**

Collaboration on Ecopark land management will be facilitated by the preparation of management plans for the six core Heritage Lands areas. A grant of \$65,000 was received from the Friends of the Greenbelt to undertake work on the Burlington Heights Management Plan. This project involves lands in the York Boulevard/ Valley Inn area owned by the City of Burlington, City of Hamilton and Royal Botanical Gardens. Rob Peachey from the Parks & Recreation Department is the City's representative on the project Steering Committee.

MHBC Planning has been retained to complete the management plan. An inventory and issues report was released in June, and initial land classifications and management policies were developed and presented to the public and stakeholders in November. The project will wrap up in the spring of 2014.

Over the coming winter, the Ecopark System Coordinator will be working to secure funding and retain consultants to complete management plans for the Clappison-Grindstone and Waterdown Sassafras Woods core natural areas. Through completion of these Management Plans, progress will be made towards:

- harmonization of policies, regulations and land classification on Ecopark system lands; and
- the creation of new joint initiatives to enhance existing programs and fill gaps related to ecological restoration and protection.

Ecopark partner staff has also held a series of Forums to work together on management issues, such as invasive species control and trail maintenance. The Forum held on October 30 discussed moving toward a harmonized, linked interregional trail system. Burlington representatives included Ingrid Vanderbrug and Marion Rabeau from the Parks and Recreation Department.

**Stakeholder
Engagement**

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

The following engagement initiatives have been undertaken in 2013:

- Adoption of a new Cootes to Escarpment brand and tag line:



- Launch of a new website: cootestoescarpmentpark.ca
- A Community Stewardship Day held on October 26 to remove invasive species and plant native materials at Nicholson Resource Management Area. This event was funded by the Walmart-Evergreen Fund.
- Terms of reference have been drafted for a Friends of Cootes to Escarpment community group, with recruitment to commence in 2014. This group is intended to become the focal point for public involvement in Ecopark projects and activities.

In 2014, the following engagement activities are planned:

- Web design work will continue on a partner portal, photo uploads, and social media
- In partnership with the Hamilton Burlington Trails Council work will

- begin on the development of an interactive trails map
- The Mayor's Inspire Burlington series will feature a Cootes to Escarpment session early in 2014
 - A series of community open houses will be held over the winter. Councillor Craven will be hosting the Aldershot Open House on March 27, 2014
 - Guided hikes in the Ecopark led by members of the Bruce Trail Club and Hamilton Naturalists' Club
 - Recruitment of the Friends of Cootes to Escarpment group during Community Stewardship Days and other events
 - Preparation of a documentary program about the Ecopark by Cogeco, with sponsorship from Burlington Hydro.

Staff is recommending that Council authorize the expenditure of an additional contribution to the Ecopark of \$25,000 from the City Manager's budget. The funds will be used to retain a communications consultant as discussed above, but the additional resources are also being requested to develop a professional video as well as print materials to promote the Ecopark to the public and senior levels of government. This funding will enhance public support for the Ecopark through video and social media, a signage program and the creation of high quality community events.

Fundraising

A joint fundraising strategy is being developed to support land securement, stewardship and Ecopark operations. This document will contain "best practices" or "guiding principles" for joint fundraising, as well as a statement of support to present to potential funders and donors.

A Fundraising Working Group has been created to discuss best practices and protocols and to ensure that duplication between partner agencies does not occur. The Management Committee and Ecopark System Coordinator will synchronize joint efforts among the partners to secure funding and land donations from major donors, engage with the provincial and federal governments to secure additional support from existing programs, and pursue grant opportunities from foundations and government agencies.

The Ecopark System Coordinator has developed a list of funding grant sources to approach for specific projects. Several submissions, including a Trillium Grant application will be made by the spring of 2014. Cases of support, brochures and other fundraising support materials will also be produced over the coming year.

Land Securement Land securement for the Ecopark received a major boost in early 2013 with the generous donation of 15 hectares of land by Mr. John Holland.

At the request of the Holland family, staff is recommending that the donated property at 1401 Old York Road be named the “Eileen and John Holland Nature Sanctuary”. This naming is in accordance with policy 1.3.7 *“Naming of City of Burlington Corporate Assets”* in recognition of the Holland family’s contribution to the environmental preservation of this property.

A celebration of this wonderful donation will be held on May 30, 2014 in the form of a sign unveiling and guided hike. The event will be held at the site and include members of the Holland family, as well as representatives from the Ecopark partner agencies and senior levels of government.

Ecopark partner agency staff continue to follow up with other potential land securement opportunities as they arise. A land securement outreach event is being planned for early 2014 to promote the various securement and stewardship options available to major private landowners in the Ecopark. Initial mailings to homeowners in the area will include Ecopark information brochures as well as an invitation to this event. The purpose of this outreach is to build positive relationships with area property owners and help them understand the various options available for conserving and stewardship of their lands.

The Ecopark System Coordinator is also continuing to pursue other land securement opportunities such as the transfer of lands owned by senior government agencies to ownership by one of the partner agencies.

Financial Matters:

Total Financial Impact

In order to support the further development of the Ecopark System, annual financial contributions were approved by the partner agencies. These contributions will cover basic costs of the Ecopark System Coordinator and associated activities from July 2013 to June 2016.

Staff is recommending that the City of Burlington’s 2014 contribution be augmented with an additional \$25,000 of funding toward an enhanced communication effort. The proposed funding would be used toward the following activities:

- Preparation of professional video material tailored toward the community, as well as toward senior levels of government

- Communication consultant advice on strategies and techniques to work toward provincial or federal legislation for the Ecopark
- Supplementary printed communication material and signage to create name recognition and excitement around the Ecopark

It is hoped that the new funding can also be used to leverage additional contributions from Ecopark partner agencies as well as other community organizations. This growing interest has already been demonstrated by Burlington Hydro and Cogeco.

Source of Funding

The financial contribution of \$25,000 will be within the City Manager's budget.

Other Resource Impacts

As the project MOU was signed in June 2013, the three year commitment from the partner agencies will continue to fund the Ecopark system work program until mid-2016. The expected work plan outcomes by summer 2016 are attached as Appendix A. City staff will continue to provide assistance with Ecopark projects and initiatives as well as represent the City on the Governing Council and Management Committee.

Environmental Matters:

The Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark 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 Ecopark 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 in the Ecopark have been widely recognized, including as a UNESCO world heritage site (Niagara Escarpment) and important migratory bird sanctuary (Cootes Paradise).

Public Engagement Matters:

Stakeholder engagement is essential to the successful implementation of the Ecopark. The ecological importance of this area gains even more significance in light of its proximity to surrounding urban populations and its role in enhancing our quality of life. Additional funding is being requested to improve public engagement and stakeholder support for the Ecopark.

Conclusion:

The vision for the Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark 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.

Work on the Ecopark System is proceeding at an encouraging pace. The next year will involve a significant push for senior government legislation. In recognition of this critical opportunity, staff is recommending that Council authorize the expenditure of an additional 2014 financial contribution to the Ecopark from the City Manager’s budget.

Council is also requested to authorize the naming of City owned property at 1401 Old York Road as the “Eileen and John Holland Nature Sanctuary” in recognition of the generous donation by the Holland family to the Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeff Fielding, City Manager
335-7600 ext. 7608

Appendices:

- A. Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System Workplan
- Expected Outcomes by July 2016

Notifications: (after Council decision)

Name:	Mailing or E-mail Address:

Approved by:

Reviewed by:

Appendix A

Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System Workplan Expected Outcomes by July 2016

Governance

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

Government Engagement

- Elected officials and staff in all three levels of government know about and support the Ecopark
- Elected officials endorse special purpose legislation, funding and other support

Land Securement

- Positive relationships developed with land owners, who understand the various options available to them for conserving their lands.
- Ecologically-important properties are brought into public ownership or protected by conservation easements.

Heritage Lands Management Plans

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

Partner Collaboration

- Common vision of the role and functions of the Ecopark
- Policies and regulations are harmonized on partner lands in Ecopark
- Series of staff workshops on management topics (Management Forums)
- New joint programs created to enhance existing programs and fill in gaps:
 - habitat restoration and invasive species control H
 - education and interpretation E
 - recreation infrastructure and programs R
 - cultural heritage protection C
 - long-term environmental monitoring L

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

- Residents of Hamilton and Burlington are well-informed and enthusiastic about the Ecopark and active in the Friends of the Ecopark organization
- Community members, user groups and other stakeholders are supportive of the Ecopark and engaged in its implementation
- Effective website and social networking tools are used to support engagement

- Display panels, brochures, postcards and other print materials are available

Fundraising

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