

COOTES TO ESCARPMENT COMMUNITY FORUM

MEETING SUMMARY

DATE: Saturday, May 10, 2008

TIME: 9:00 A.M. to 3:10 P.M.

LOCATION: Waterdown District High School
680 Parkside Drive, Waterdown, Auditorium

PARTICIPANTS:

Daryl Bender	Lloyd Griffett	Gordon Ofield
Philip Caetano	Ken Glasbergen	Rob Peachey
Don Charlong	Ken Hall	Kris Robinson
Christine Chartier	Peter Hurrel	Bill Stoddart
Zac Chartier	Neil Innes	Al Thomas
Helene Dutka	Don Johnson	Caroline Thomson
Turlough Finan	Carol Langs	Rob Thomson
Leanne Fischl	Beth Merinchuk	Peter Tigchelaar
Teresa Giangregorio	Bev Millar	Paul Toffoletti
Sue Gilpin	Rosalind Minaji	Dianne Wojcik
	Janet Nancekivell	Gary Wrathall

OBSERVERS AND RESOURCE PERSONS:

Wayne Caldwell	Project Facilitator
Rick Craven	City of Burlington
Carolyn DeLoyde	Region of Halton
Leo DeLoyde	City of Burlington
Antoin Diamond	Bruce Trail Conservancy
Bob Edmonston	Conservation Halton
Kathy Forde	Recording Secretary
David Galbraith	Royal Botanical Gardens
John Hall	Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan Office
Jess Klug	University of Guelph
Catherine Plosz	City of Hamilton
Janet Wong	Project Manager

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

David Galbraith welcomed everyone to the day and introduced Wayne Caldwell, who would be facilitating the day's event. As background, he indicated that Wayne is a Professor with the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph and has done extensive work with rural communities. Wayne Caldwell outlined the agenda for the day. The Steering Committee members, who would be facilitators during the sessions, were introduced. The session was intended to secure input from the community to assist with the development of a conservation and land management strategy to guide the future direction of about 1,550 ha of natural lands between Sydenham Road and Brant Street from the Niagara Escarpment to Cootes Paradise and Hamilton Harbour.

Janet Wong provided an overview of the project. Objectives focus on conservation, land management and development of a strategy. The project is a partnership initiative being led by the RBG with funding support from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. Efforts are underway to develop a vision and action plan for creating and protecting a system of linked natural areas and for public and educational opportunities. The outcome will be to raise awareness of issues surrounding the protection of natural lands, to develop a coordinated management plan, to balance uses with the sensitivity of natural features, to develop facilities and to identify actions for protecting and linking key natural areas. A background report has been prepared based on existing information. Public consultation will continue as the plan is formulated. Endorsement is targeted for June 2009. Growth projections to 2031 are estimated at approximately one half million people.

The study area includes unique characteristics with a rich diversity of habitats, significant environmental areas, wetlands, watercourses and numerous rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species. Key areas include Cootes Paradise (1100 ha), Borer's Falls-Rock Chapel (33 ha), Clappison Escarpment Woods (200 ha), Grindstone Creek Escarpment Valley (490 ha), Waterdown Escarpment Woods (400 ha) and Sassafras Woods (144 ha). Significant species include turtles, amphibians, birds, reptiles and butterflies. Numerous opportunities for public recreation and trail use are available to various user groups throughout 15 major parks, seven waterfalls, Bruce Trail, Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail and local trail system. Many of the natural area parks are part of the Niagara Escarpment Commission parks and open space system. Educational opportunities are available through various school, public and private programs, day camps and interpretative signage.

2. THEMES AND ISSUES

Three themes have been developed from comments provided at the Public Open House in January as follows: Theme 1 - Natural Functions; Theme 2 - Range of Activities; and, Theme 3 - Management Approaches. Issues for each theme were provided to stimulate and guide discussions. Participants concurred with the themes and issues outlined and added the following items to ensure all key issues were captured for consideration.

Theme 1: Natural Functions

- Identify any key linkages that are missing.
- Identify key gaps that exist between significant areas.
- Identify strategies to closes gaps.
- Identify who should be responsible for trail maintenance and costs.

Theme 2: Range of Activities

- Identify the variety of uses.

Theme 3: Management Approaches

- Identify any development proposals.
- Although boundaries of the study are confirmed, it will be important to understand how this initiative fits into the broader scope to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Actions and activities often happen by default. Public engagement will be important to maintain positive momentum.

Comments

From 44 years of experience as a landowner with property between Hwy. 5 and the front of Notre Dame, vandalism and misuse of the natural lands is a concern that must seriously be considered. Erosion is an issue with bikers. Trespassing, litter and fires are a problem. Fencing and private signs have been torn down. Irresponsible people take advantage of the property, party and misuse the natural lands. Police have been involved.

Protection and barriers must be considered to minimize vandalism and misuse of the natural lands and trail systems.

Some type of authority or point of contact should be responsible for policing.

3. GROUP DISCUSSION: FIRST THEME

Participants rotated between two themes of choice throughout the morning to discuss issues and interests, share information and develop directions for pursuing the strategy. They were encouraged to participate in the theme of greatest personal interest for the first session. Facilitators were assigned to each theme group. Discussion points were noted and directions from each theme group were recorded on flipcharts and posted.

4. GROUP DISCUSSION: SECOND THEME

Participants rotated into their second theme of choice to discuss issues and interests, share information and develop directions for pursuing the strategy. Discussion points were again noted and directions from each theme group were recorded on flipcharts and posted.

5. WORKING LUNCH

During lunch, participants circulated among breakout rooms to view flipcharts and allocate “dots” to preferred directions for each of three themes. The number of dots placed would indicate priorities within the top five directions for each theme. Post-it notes were also available to identify individual likes and dislikes.

6. RECONVENE INTO GROUPS

Following lunch, participants reconvened into their original groups to reflect on the top five directions. Based on input and distribution of dots, each group had an opportunity to define directions and priorities. Participants were comfortable with this approach. The final top-five directions were presented as recommendations.

Theme 1: Natural Functions (Recommendations)

- a) Develop a hierarchy of protection (32 dots)**
 - Long-term securement of public lands
 - Acquisition of key lands/gaps
 - Planning, policy, protection of heritage lands
 - Stewardship for private lands
 - Secure federal and provincial funding for land acquisitions from Lake Ontario to the escarpment

- b) Promotion of tax incentive programs (25 dots)**
 - CLTIP, MFFIP, FLTIP, Ecogifts
 - Other tax incentive options
 - Innovative solutions to manage natural areas (private landowners)
- c) Education (22 dots)**
 - Landowners, policy makers, children, public
 - Importance, value and culture of this natural area to quality of life
- d) Separate and segregate a range of recreational activities (17 dots)**
 - Create dedicated areas to separate intensive activities such as ATVs and mountain biking from hiking
 - Identify and protect “no-go” zones (limited use zones for walking or hiking only with some areas completely restricted to human activity)
- e) Develop a higher-level plan to ensure protection (16 dots)**
 - Provincial legislation
 - Municipal green visions

Additional Directions for information

- Identify key linkages necessary to link core areas and expand existing areas (16 dots)
- Regular landowner updates through websites and emails (8 dots)
- Develop a grand vision for our jewel (6 dots)

Comments

When property owners donate land, they can still live on it. Agreements can be made if property titles change hands.

Leasing land is an option to ownership. Leasing land from the owner would be considered a partnership. Leasing spreads the agreement out over a period of time.

Protective measures can be developed to protect the natural lands.

Cultural values are important.

As the strategy is developed, it will be important to be mindful of the City of Hamilton’s Trails Master Plan and Cycling Master Plan, which is currently being written.

Theme 2: Range of Activities (Recommendations)

This group consolidated their discussion points generated in the morning sessions and ‘dotted’ over the lunch period into the following recommendations.

- a) Ecosystem based approach**
 - Matching appropriate uses with appropriate land (ecologically driven)
- b) Identify which uses may be appropriate and which may not**
 - The landscape is not conducive to all activities

- Screen out activities that are intrusive and may damage wildlife (i.e. hunting, snowmobiles, motorized activities)
 - Activities that are considered not acceptable may be contentious (final list should be prepared as a group)
 - Existing uses considered appropriate include hiking, mountain biking, fishing, kayaking and canoeing
- c) Protection areas**
- Some areas may not be appropriate for any use
- d) Ecological restoration program**
- As a legitimate family-based activity for day use in various areas (i.e. quarries and former landfills)
 - Education and volunteer opportunities
- e) Trail and facility upgrades and maintenance**
- Major trails for principal uses/activities (limit number of side trails)
 - Hierarchy of trails and uses needs to be established
 - Provide access for people with disabilities

Theme 3: Management Approach (Recommendations)

- a) Securement and stewardship (32 dots)**
- Tax incentives (encourage people to cooperate)
 - Stewardship incentives (promote buy-in to encourage ownership)
 - Public
 - Acquisition and Education (educating public and policy makers)
 - Environmental easements/leases (to protect natural lands and corridors)
 - Identify gaps (secure key areas)
 - Rewards/Recognition program (recognize riparian efforts, etc.)
- b) Create an authority or consortium (28 dots)**
- RBG, municipal/provincial/federal governments, Conservation Authorities, Niagara Escarpment Commission
 - To oversee the many aspects of conserving the area
 - Short-term goal is to get this authority in place (urgency)
 - Long-term goal is a vision around something like a provincial or federal park similar to Banff National Park where park and urban settings are combined
- c) Agency coordination (16 dots)**
- Shared vision and agreement on priorities (essential)
 - Agency coordination/clearing house
 - Coordinate land procurement programs
 - Coordinate securement strategies
- d) Public/private landowner role (11 dots)**
- Educate and guide landowners and policy makers
 - Stewardship incentives
 - Banff model (coexistence)
 - Harness and use volunteers

e) Communications (7 dots)

- Share knowledge and vision with the public
- Use Internet, pamphlets and staff to disseminate environmental values, research and shared vision
- Direct delivery of materials to owners and media

Comments

Long-term perspective will be essential.

Increasing public awareness will be critical.

7. WRAP-UP

Final thoughts and comments were shared. Common interests expressed throughout the day focused on aspects of education, appropriate uses and allocations, linkages, gaps, cultural/societal values (keeping natural lands open and untouched with guided cultivation i.e. controlled burns), quality of life, protection, stewardship, maintenance, communication, coordination and provincial legislation.

Final Comments

Participants provided these thoughts on the day to the group:

- Great job. The session was good. It generated enthusiasm and provided an opportunity to learn more about the project and the area.
- The project is very encouraging.
- The project provides an opportunity to volunteer.
- Few people appreciate the area. The general public does not realize how beautiful the natural area is. International visitors are astounded but locals do not seem to acknowledge the jewel that surrounds us.
- Many people think the Bruce Trail is the same size in all areas with similar surfaces but parts of the trail are very rocky and some areas are narrow with large crevices. Funding is a huge factor for reducing risk.
- Volunteering and education overlap. It will be important to connect with high schools to get young people excited about trail building and maintenance.
- The idea of a federal or provincial park designation is intriguing especially in an urban area. Bronte Creek Provincial Park should be considered as a local model.

John Hall reiterated that lands in the study area are incredibly special and are a botanical hot spot within Canada. Uses that are occurring and the significance of these lands were the catalyst for this project. A grand plan is necessary to obtain funding. Public input is appreciated and highly valued.

Wayne Caldwell thanked participants for their contributions, input, engagement and involvement. Expression of concern is valuable.

Janet Wong expressed thanks to everyone for attending. Many ideas have evolved. Comments provided will be helpful in defining a vision. The physical characteristics of the area must be considered along with comments to formulate the strategy. Work has evolved through intense consultation. The strategy will continue to be developed and will be presented to the public in

January 2009. Complementary visitor passes and pedometers were handed out to everyone as an expression of thanks for attending. Comment cards were circulated to solicit individual likes and dislikes of the community forum.

David Galbraith provided closing remarks. Progress achieved through the community forum is encouraging and is a milestone in the project. The project represents a unique effort between government agencies and partners working towards a common cause. Defining the most appropriate uses, balancing uses, management of uses and retention of the natural areas will be essential. Cootes Paradise is recognized as a valuable area and was recently designated as Canada's fourth IMPARA (Important Amphibian and Reptile Area) by CARCNET (Canadian Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Network). Input on preservation, conservation and human use is an important part of the process.

8. ADJOURNMENT

The forum adjourned at 3:10 P.M.