



CITY OF HAMILTON
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
Corporate Assets & Strategic Planning Division

TO:	Chair and Members Public Works Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	August 31, 2015
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System – Update, Provincial Engagement Strategy, and Plan for Burlington Heights Heritage Lands (PW15062) - (Wards 1, 13 and 15)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	Wards 1, 13 and 15
PREPARED BY:	Peter Wobschall (905) 546-2424, Extension 4819
SUBMITTED BY:	Gerry Davis, CPA, CMA General Manager Public Works Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the contents of the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System – Ontario Government Engagement Proposal” (the “Proposal”), attached as Appendix E to Report PW15062, be endorsed, and that staff be authorized to implement and further develop the Proposal in collaboration with other Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System partners;
- (b) That the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands, August 2014”, attached as Appendix F to Report PW15062, be approved as the guiding document regarding future management actions for these lands;
- (c) That staff from Public Works and Planning and Economic Development (as required), continue to provide in-kind resources for the development of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System initiative.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In addition to seeking approval for the recommendations above, Report PW15062 is intended to provide Council with an update on the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System initiative for 2013 and 2014.

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (EcoPark) is a collaborative initiative to protect, restore and connect more than 3,900 hectares (9,600 acres) of natural lands in West Hamilton, Dundas, Flamborough, and Burlington. This is one of the most biologically rich areas of Canada, and is home to nearly a quarter of the country’s wild plants and more than 50 species at risk. The EcoPark contains natural features that are recognized for their significant biodiversity, vistas, and long cultural history. These

natural lands are also situated in one of Canada's most vibrant and rapidly growing urban regions. This situation presents an urgent need to reconnect, restore and protect these valuable lands, and to create a lasting legacy for current and future generations.

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System is a collaboration between: the Bruce Trail Conservancy, City of Burlington, Conservation Halton, Halton Region, City of Hamilton, Hamilton Conservation Authority, Hamilton Naturalists' Club, McMaster University, Royal Botanical Gardens, and the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan Office.

Since 2007, the partners have worked together and with neighbouring landowners to protect and restore their natural lands and secure additional lands to create ecological corridors. In addition, the partners work with other local environmental groups, to deliver sustainable recreation and education opportunities.

With much of the EcoPark planning completed by 2012, the partners focus was turned to the implementation of a governance structure, developing land management plans for the contained Heritage Lands, and raising the profile of the area with the general public as well as the provincial government.

Since the EcoPark partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2013, the Governing Council and Management Committee have finalized their respective terms of reference and have been functioning effectively.

Obtaining support from all three-levels of government will be important to the success of the EcoPark and its long-term sustainability. Preliminary discussions between staff and provincial representatives, as well as recommendations obtained from a government relations consultant, provided the basis of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: Ontario Government Engagement Proposal.

The opportunities for provincial collaboration contained within the Proposal include:

- Partnership in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System
- Legislative recognition and support of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System
- Financial support

In 2012, the EcoPark partners began to concentrate on external communications and raising awareness of the EcoPark among the general public. This work began with the development of a communications plan and branding exercise, which led to the production of communication tools such as a project website, social media, print materials, and portable graphic displays. Outreach activities were also initiated and included an official public launch event, ongoing presentations and public events, various speaking engagements, interactive workshops, and volunteer-oriented restoration/enhancement activities.

The EcoPark is divided into six core areas called Heritage Lands. A primary goal of the initiative is the development of a comprehensive management plan for each of the Heritage Lands. It is important to note that management plans are not "land use" plans, but rather contain voluntary guidelines that partners and adjacent landowners can choose to adopt in their land management efforts to protect and enhance the

biodiversity and cultural history of the area. The first Heritage Land management plan to be completed was the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands”. Shortly after the Burlington Heights plan was completed in 2014, work began concurrently on two separate plans for the Waterdown-Sassafras Woods and Clappison-Grindstone Heritage Lands.

An important function of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System is to attract new funding and resources. Since 2006, over \$1,000,000 has been secured from external agencies to carry out the mandate of the collaboration. To date, EcoPark partners have also contributed a combined total of over \$260,000 to the initiative.

An EcoPark Landowner Contact program began in early 2014 and three properties have been secured and added to the EcoPark. A comprehensive land securement strategy was produced and is guiding ongoing land securement efforts. External funding facilitates the ongoing engagement of landowners within the EcoPark area to support them in ecological land management efforts, and to discuss options for dedicating land to the EcoPark initiative.

Report PW15062 is intended to provide Council with an update on the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System initiative, solicit endorsement of the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System – Ontario Government Engagement Proposal” (the “Proposal”), solicit approval of the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands, August 2014”, and solicit approval for City staff to continue to provide in-kind resources for the development of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System initiative.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 14

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: There are no financial impacts of the recommendations; approval would offer continuing commitment to an initiative that the City has been supporting (through funding and in-kind services) since 2006.

Report PED08009(b) / PW12082 confirmed the City of Hamilton’s commitment through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for three years beginning in June 2013, with the City of Hamilton’s annual contribution was approved at \$15,400.

The EcoPark Management Committee, under the guidance of the Governing Council, is currently supporting EcoPark staff in developing a long-term sustainable funding plan and short-term operating budget. Results of this process are anticipated to be presented to Council in Q4 2015.

Land acquired into the EcoPark as a result of partners’ efforts as detailed within this report, is being maintained through the operating funds of the partner that owns the property. As none of the ownership of the three acquired properties was transferred to the City of Hamilton, no additional operating costs were incurred to the City of Hamilton.

Staffing: There are no additional resources needed to implement the recommendations. Staff are recommending that the City continue dedicating time to the project to fulfil the objectives of the initiative, which can be accomplished within current staffing levels and workplans.

The bulk of the City of Hamilton's contribution to the EcoPark initiative has been, and continues to be, in-kind staff services. Staff time is invested in attending on-going monthly Management Committee meetings, and quarterly Land Management Sub-Committee meetings. This time also includes associated preparatory and follow-up work required to meet the ongoing objectives of the initiative.

Legal: The recommendations do not have any associated legal implications. Public Works staff will consult Legal Services on outcomes resulting from implementing and executing the "Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System – Ontario Government Engagement Proposal" (the "Proposal").

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Overview

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System is a collaborative initiative to protect, restore and connect more than 3,900 hectares (9,600 acres) of natural lands in west Hamilton, Dundas, Flamborough, and Burlington. This is 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. It is also the last intact ecological connection between Lake Ontario wetlands and the Niagara Escarpment. The natural features of the study area include a portion of the Niagara Escarpment, and the lands and waters associated with Cootes Paradise Marsh and Grindstone Creek. These areas are recognized for their significant biodiversity, vistas, and long cultural history. A vision map of the EcoPark is attached as Appendix A to Report PW15062.

These natural lands are also situated in one of Canada's most vibrant and rapidly growing urban regions, the Hamilton-Burlington region. Economic growth and urban development have caused the natural areas to become fragmented by roads, rail lines and other features of urbanization. The result is a disconnected patchwork of smaller protected areas, each valuable but isolated and ultimately unsustainable. This situation presents an urgent need to reconnect, restore and protect these valuable lands, and to create a lasting legacy for current and future generations.

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System is a collaboration between:

- Bruce Trail Conservancy
- City of Burlington
- Conservation Halton
- Halton Region
- City of Hamilton
- Hamilton Conservation Authority
- Hamilton Naturalists' Club

- McMaster University
- Royal Botanical Gardens
- Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan Office

Since 2007, the EcoPark partners have worked together and with neighbouring landowners to protect and restore their natural lands and secure additional lands to create ecological corridors. In addition, the partners work together and with other local environmental groups to deliver sustainable recreation and education opportunities.

The EcoPark system lands include more than 1,900 hectares (4,700 acres) of lands owned by the partner organizations. These are surrounded by 2,000 hectares (4,800 acres) of privately owned lands which can contribute to the ecological health of the area through complementary stewardship activities to protect and restore natural areas and wildlife habitat. Together they form the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: a protected, permanent and connected natural lands sanctuary from the Harbour to the Escarpment that promotes ecosystem and human health within Ontario's Greenbelt. The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System vision, mission, and objectives are attached as Appendix C to Report PW15062.

Introduction

The previous update to Council regarding the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (EcoPark) initiative was provided on November 21, 2012 in Report PED08009(b) / PW12082, Cootes to Escarpment Park System - Governance. This report authorized staff to enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with project partners, and detailed the governance structure and decision making processes to be used throughout the initiative.

Much of the EcoPark planning was completed between 2006 and 2011. In 2012, the partner's focus was turned to the implementation of the governance structure, developing land management plans for the contained Heritage Lands, and raising the profile of the area within the general public and the provincial government.

The following is a summary of activities completed since November 2012. A list of project milestones and associated Council reports and recommendations from 2007 to 2012 is attached as Appendix D to Report PW15062.

Governance

The EcoPark MOU took effect in June 2013 and formally established a Governing Council and Management Committee. Staff from Public Works represent the City of Hamilton on the Management Committee, which meets monthly to collaborate on operational matters including joint projects and programs, Heritage Lands management planning, land securement and stewardship, government engagement, communications, and fundraising. The City Manager represents the City of Hamilton on the Governing Council, which has been meeting 2-3 times per year to discuss strategic and governance matters.

Since the MOU was signed by the EcoPark partners, both the Governing Council and the Management Committee have finalized their respective terms of reference and have been functioning effectively.

In addition to establishing a Governing Council and Management Committee, the MOU established a Secretariat. The Secretariat's office is housed within the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) and is comprised of a Coordinator and other staff as required to manage the day-to-day administration and related activities of the initiative. Funding from the partners, including the 3-year annual contribution of \$15,400 from the City of Hamilton, funds a 1.0 FTE EcoPark Project Coordinator. Funding secured from external foundations enabled the addition of two EcoPark staff to the Secretariat's office in 2014. These include a 0.5 FTE Land Securement Coordinator housed within the Hamilton Naturalist Club, and a 1.0 FTE Stewardship Technician housed within the Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program (a partnership between the Halton and Hamilton Conservation Authorities). A business plan to include staffing and financial forecasts for the next 3-5 years is currently being developed by EcoPark staff under the guidance of the Management Committee and will be presented to Council at an appropriate time.

Government Engagement

Support from all three-levels of government will be important to the success of the EcoPark and its long-term sustainability. Efforts in government engagement to date have been focused on the Provincial Government largely due to the interest in the initiative by the Honourable Ted McMeekin, MPP for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale.

Pertinent excerpts of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: Ontario Engagement Proposal, including suggested contents of special purpose legislation, are attached as Appendix E to Report PW15062. There are no additional operating impacts for the City of Hamilton resulting from the Proposal at this time.

Government Engagement History

The EcoPark Coordinator and Chair of the Management Committee held two briefings in late 2013 with MPP McMeekin, the Minister of Natural Resources, members from both of their offices, and members of the Premier's office. These briefings provided an opportunity to inform the Ministers and their staff of the EcoPark initiative and explore possible points of engagement between the provincial government and the EcoPark. In addition, a site tour of the EcoPark was provided to two policy advisors from the office of the Minister of Natural Resources in February 2014.

In order to obtain advice about senior government engagement, Redbrick Communications (a government relations consulting firm) was retained in 2014 with supplementary funding from the City of Burlington. Redbrick conducted a series of telephone interviews with local community leaders to ask for their ideas on how to build support and momentum for the EcoPark. Based in part on these interviews, Redbrick recommended attracting a broader level of support to the initiative. They suggested that in addition to promoting the environmental benefits of the EcoPark, partners should

highlight additional benefits such as economic return, social benefits (tourism, recreation, enhanced quality of life, mental health, community reputation), and property values.

The experience gained through preliminary discussions with provincial representatives, in addition to Redbrick's informed recommendations, became the foundation for the development of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: Ontario Government Engagement Proposal (the "Proposal").

In early 2015, staff from the City Manager's Office continued preliminary discussions with MPP McMeekin and representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resources to further explore the framework for provincial collaboration. EcoPark staff also met with Provincial representatives on one occasion in early 2015 for similar purposes. A second site visit is being arranged by EcoPark staff for late summer 2015 to broaden the familiarity of the area and the project with provincial representatives.

In addition to providing an overview and background of the initiative and the benefits of the EcoPark (including a comprehensive list of the environmental designations within the park), the Proposal provides options that the province could collaborate with, and support the EcoPark.

The opportunities for provincial collaboration contained in the Proposal include:

- Partnership in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System
- Legislative recognition and support of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System
- Financial support

Partnership in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System

The Proposal invites the Government of Ontario to consider becoming a party to the memorandum of understanding (MOU), consider choosing to designate some of its properties as Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System lands, and to collaborate on joint initiatives such as wildlife ecology and management, First Nations engagement, health promotion through outdoor recreation and access to nature, tourism promotion, and economic development.

Legislation Recognition & Support

The partners believe that legislative recognition of the EcoPark would signal its environmental and cultural significance and advance it as a priority for funding. Legislative recognition could be in the form of new special purpose legislation, or changes to existing legislation.

Financial Support

The vast majority of grant funds raised to date have been provided by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation and the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Grant programs and foundations are however, not a guaranteed source of revenue and the financial sustainability of the EcoPark requires secure and long-term funding sources.

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Table 1: Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System Long-term Financial Requirements provides an estimate of the funds required to implement the EcoPark initiative over the long-term and will serve as a starting point for discussions with the province. The estimates of the economic benefits of parks and open space in other parts of Ontario referred to in the Proposal suggest that a Provincial investment of \$55 million in the EcoPark will yield benefits of at least that magnitude on an annual basis in the form of clean air and water, healthy residents and lower health care costs, high livability, and attraction for tourism and economic development.

At the appropriate time, staff will present the details of proposed funding terms with the Province to Council for approval prior to execution.

Table 1: Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System Long-term Financial Requirements	
Capital costs:	
Land securement ^a	\$ 30,000,000
Total capital ^b	\$ 30,000,000
Ongoing costs (annual):	
Land stewardship and management <i>To support property owners with their land management efforts to protect and enhance natural lands within the EcoPark.</i>	\$ 1,000,000
Community engagement & communications <i>Raising awareness and soliciting engagement with residents. Includes website, print materials, event materials, travel, event fees, etc.</i>	\$ 80,000
Private landowner engagement <i>To fund 1.5 FTE Stewardship Coordinator and Land Securement Coordinator</i>	\$ 70,000
Administration <i>Program Coordinator, office space, computer, supplies, etc.</i>	\$ 100,000
Total annual	\$ 1,250,000
<i>Required endowment to yield \$1,250,000 per year ^c:</i>	<i>\$ 25,000,000</i>
Total Capital + Endowment (to cover ongoing annual costs)	\$ 55,000,000
a. This is the 2015 estimated cost of conserving an additional 550 hectares of greenspace through purchase by the partner agencies. These lands are considered to be critical to the ecological sustainability of existing protected areas.	

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- b. The partners anticipate additional future capital costs to create, replace and maintain built infrastructure, but the magnitude and nature of these costs are not known at this time.
- c. A fund established by the Province at the level of \$25M, would provide an annual endowment of \$1,250,000 (based on an estimated 5% rate of return).

Currently, there are no additional operating impacts for the City of Hamilton at this time.

Communications & Outreach

After completing the majority of research and planning work from 2006 to 2012, the partners turned their focus to external communications and raising awareness of the EcoPark among the general public.

This work began with an official public launch that was held at the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) in June 2014 which was well-attended by dignitaries and community members. A professionally-designed website was launched during this time and features elements of the communications plan and branding exercise that was completed in 2011 (www.cootestoescarpment.ca). Social media tools, including a dedicated Twitter account and Facebook page, were launched along with the website and have continued to be a primary means of sharing information about the EcoPark.

In October 2013, the first community stewardship day was held which involved the removal of invasive species and replanting of native species in the Nicholson Resource Management Area (RMA) in west Hamilton. A second community stewardship day was held in June 2014 where a pollinator patch was created in Kerncliff Park in Burlington. Both events were funded by a grant from the Walmart-Evergreen Green Grants program and involved volunteer participation from community members.

A series of community meetings were held in April and May of 2014 to raise awareness of the EcoPark initiative. Each of the three meetings was hosted by the respective ward Councillor and included the Ward 1 Councillor from Burlington (Aldershot), and Hamilton Councillors from Ward 1 and Ward 15. Other community events were held throughout the EcoPark area in 2014 including a guided hike, bee box building workshops, and an art exhibit and silent auction. On May 30, 2014, the City of Burlington held an invitation-only event to unveil new interpretive signage at the Eileen and John Holland Nature Sanctuary and was well-attended and reported on in the local media.

In February 2014, Burlington's Mayor hosted a talk about the EcoPark system as part of an 'Inspired Burlington' series at the Burlington Performing Arts Centre and was rebroadcast on Cogeco Cable 14. Presentations have been made by EcoPark staff at a number of conferences including Latonell and Niagara Escarpment Leading Edge (fall of 2013), and Hamilton Environmental Summit and International Association for Great Lakes Research (2014). Fifteen presentations in total were provided to various audiences throughout 2013 and 2014 (of which eight were held within the City of Hamilton). Concurrently, a custom graphic display was rotated through six locations including Mountain Equipment Coop and the Greenbelt Harvest Picnic (of which four were held within the City of Hamilton). A total of 17 print and online articles featured the EcoPark throughout 2013 and 2014.

To support the activities listed above and further raise the profile of the EcoPark among residents, the following communications materials were developed: retractable banners, hardboard display panels and easels, tri-panel brochure, informational postcard, social media cards, six infosheets (overview, natural heritage, cultural heritage, vision, get involved, and land securement options), and a PowerPoint template and standard slideshow.

Land Management

Land Management Plans

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System is divided into six core areas called Heritage Lands:

- Burlington Heights
- Waterdown-Sassafras Woods
- Clappison-Grindstone
- Lower Grindstone
- Cootes Paradise
- Borer's Fall-Rock Chapel

A primary goal of the initiative is the development of comprehensive joint management plans for these six core Heritage Lands. The first Heritage Land to be addressed was Burlington Heights, which is comprised of lands directly east of Cootes Paradise, along both sides of York Boulevard from Dundurn Castle to Plains Road West. A map of the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands boundary is attached as Appendix B to Report PW15062.

Management plans provide a consistent framework for the holistic future planning, implementation and management of lands under ownership of the partners. The plans are intended to enhance the protection and management of important natural and cultural features and improve sustainable recreation activities, education, and research opportunities.

It is important to note that management plans are not “land use” plans, but rather contain voluntary guidelines that partners and adjacent landowners can choose to adopt in their land management efforts to protect and enhance the biodiversity and cultural history of the area. The plans are not meant to supersede/replace, but rather enhance land use plans or zoning that are currently enacted within the EcoPark area; including, but not limited to, the Greenbelt Plan, the Niagara Escarpment Plan, and Hamilton Official Plans.

Completion of management plans, in all six core Heritage Lands will include:

- Identification, protection and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage resources.
- Identification and documentation of pressures and issues of concern raised by partner organizations, stakeholders, and the public.
- Infrastructure creation, maintenance, and decommissioning.

- Recreation, education and research opportunities that are compatible with preserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of the areas.
- Criteria and indicators to evaluate the implementation and ongoing monitoring program to collect relevant information to gauge success of the management plan.

Funding from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation enabled EcoPark partners to retain MHBC consultants in 2013 to complete the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands” document. MHBC conducted their work under the guidance of a dedicated Project Steering Committee composed of representatives from each of the EcoPark partners that owns land within the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands area: City of Burlington, City of Hamilton, and the Royal Botanical Gardens.

Community and stakeholder engagement is an important aspect of management plan development. Three public meetings were held at the Coach House at Dundurn Castle in different phases of the project to ensure that community members were well-informed and had opportunities to provide input as the plan developed. In addition, a stakeholder advisory group was formed of interested individuals and representatives of organizations that will be affected by, or have an interest in the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands Plan. The Stakeholder Advisory Group also met on three occasions throughout the project to provide input and feedback during the different phases of plan development.

The Executive Summary and Table of Contents from the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands” is attached in Appendix F to Report PW15062. A full copy of the document can be found on the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System website:

<http://www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca/file/download/ZhZVL2aLOHxzZsK5oHcGQw>

In 2014, the Ontario Trillium Foundation provided \$374,000 to cover the cost of developing management plans for the remaining five Heritage Lands over a 5-year period. North-South Environmental Inc. (environmental consultants) won a competitive bidding process to develop the next two land management plans for the Waterdown-Sassafras Woods and Clappison-Grindstone Heritage Lands which began concurrently in late 2014. Similar to the approach taken with the Burlington Heights plan, the consultant is working under the guidance of a dedicated Project Steering Committee composed of land-owning EcoPark partners, and ongoing stakeholder engagement has been built into the project workplan. These two management plans are scheduled to be completed by 2017.

Land Management Forums

Management forums offer EcoPark partner organizations with an opportunity to further collaborate on issues that advance EcoPark objectives. Management forums are well attended by partner staff and are an excellent way to tackle issues of joint concern. Two management forums were held within the past two years; the first concerning trails and the second concerning community stewardship opportunities. Discussions about trails within the EcoPark led to the creation of a spin-off initiative: the Hamilton Burlington

Trails Council (HBTC). The HBTC's objective is to develop accurate and user-friendly on-line trail maps (www.hamiltonburlingtontrails.ca).

Fundraising

An important function of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark initiative is to attract new funding and resources. Since 2006, over \$1,000,000 has been secured from external foundations to carry out the mandate of the collaborative. A business plan for the next 3-5 years is currently being developed by EcoPark staff under the guidance of the Management Committee and includes the following priorities for funding:

- Land securement
- Stewardship and restoration on partner lands
- Enumeration of economic benefits of EcoPark lands
- Inventories of natural and cultural heritage
- Community engagement and communication.

The Hamilton Conservation Foundation has an active campaign to raise \$5 million for land acquisition in the Pleasant View area of Dundas and restoration of the former Veldhuis greenhouse site adjacent to the Desjardins Canal (both areas are within the boundaries of the EcoPark). In addition, McMaster University made fundraising efforts in 2013-2014 by coordinating a charity dinner, art exhibition, and auction.

Land Securement

An EcoPark Landowner Contact program began in early 2014 with targeted mailings to landowners with property within the EcoPark area. Thirty-two (32) landowners attended a subsequent invitation-only landowner breakfast and three attendees expressed interest in securing their properties within the EcoPark system.

Since 2013, three properties have been secured and added to the EcoPark:

- A 51-acre property in the Pleasant View neighbourhood of Dundas, purchased by the Hamilton Conservation Authority.
- A 37-acre property in the North Aldershot neighbourhood of Burlington, donated by the Holland family to the City of Burlington.
- A half-acre in Dundas secured via conservation easement held by the Hamilton Naturalists' Club.

A comprehensive land securement strategy was produced by EcoPark partners and is guiding ongoing land securement efforts. A grant from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation provided funding to bring the part-time land securement coordinator of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club to full-time; facilitating greater outreach and effort to secure private land within the EcoPark.

Stewardship

Funding from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation also facilitated a dedicated Watershed Stewardship Technician position with the Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program. This funding facilitates the ongoing engagement of landowners

within the EcoPark area to support them in ecological land management efforts, and to discuss options for dedicating land to the initiative.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

Proposed new or revised Provincial and/or Municipal legislation may result from the implementation of the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: Ontario Government Engagement Proposal”. Any such proposed legislation resulting from discussions between Provincial and EcoPark representatives will be presented for Council’s consideration at an appropriate time in the future.

Innovate Now

This report aligns with the Public Works Business Plan "Innovate Now" through action supporting the Public Works Department as a “Leader on the ‘greening’ and stewardship of the city”.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (EcoPark) is a partnership between 10 organizations that work collaboratively as members of the EcoPark Governing Council, Management Committee, and Land Management Steering Committees. All action related to the initiative is developed by the partners in a collaborative manner as per the memorandum of understanding signed by partners in June 2013.

Redbrick Communications (a government relations consulting firm) was retained by EcoPark partners in 2014 with supplementary funding from the City of Burlington to obtain advice about senior government engagement.

The following City of Hamilton Departments/Divisions have been consulted in the development of Report PW15062:

- Legal Services
- Planning and Economic Development (Community Planning and Design, Development Planning, Heritage & Design, Policy Planning, Real Estate)
- City Manager’s Office
- Public Works (Parks & Cemeteries, Landscape Architectural Services)
- Councillors from Wards 1, 13, and 15 have been consulted and are supportive of the contents of this report.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONAL FOR RECOMMENDATION

The City of Hamilton is one of 10 partners within the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System initiative; nine of which own lands within the geographical boundaries of the EcoPark and signed a memorandum of understanding in 2013.

This initiative is an excellent example of engaged collaboration between partners. The “Ontario Government Engagement Proposal” and “A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands” document were developed through collective efforts and utilized expertise from all partners. Additionally, feedback from community members, including

landowners from within the EcoPark boundaries, was also incorporated into the Burlington Heights land management plan.

The Royal Botanical Gardens and the City of Burlington have both formally approved “A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands”; the City of Hamilton is the remaining approval required before implementation can begin. Similarly, the Boards and Councils of other EcoPark partners have formally endorsed the Government Engagement Proposal; the City of Hamilton is the remaining consent required before implementation can begin.

Endorsement for “A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands” will demonstrate Hamilton’s support for 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.

The “Ontario Government Engagement Proposal” provides an opportunity to further the vision and mission of the EcoPark System through active Provincial-level involvement.

These documents have been well-vetted and endorsed/approved by partner organizations and City of Hamilton staff recommends continuing to work with the EcoPark partners to implement them.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

Alternatives to the recommendations include:

1. *Not endorse the contents of the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: Ontario Government Engagement Proposal”*

The long-term financial sustainability of the EcoPark will rely on a substantial amount of funding to fulfil its mandate; primarily for land acquisition and secondarily for the ongoing administration of the initiative by the EcoPark Secretariat. Establishing a guiding document to conduct discussions with provincial representatives may lead to securing a significant funding partner. Staff does not recommend this option as it may jeopardize provincial funding and partnership options. In addition, this alternative does not support the goal of working towards the preservation of lands within the EcoPark.

2. *Not approve the “Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands” document*

The management plan provides a comprehensive and coherent framework for development activities within the EcoPark land boundary. Staff does not recommend this alternative as the plan provides voluntary guidelines to further enhance and protect the unique and significant lands within the EcoPark and aligns with its vision and objectives. In addition, the remaining partners have already approved the management plan and will likely implement it with or without the participation of the City of Hamilton.

3. Discontinue providing staff support to the EcoPark initiative

This alternative is not recommended by staff as the City of Hamilton is a key partner in the implementation of the EcoPark initiative. A substantial portion of the EcoPark area is within the City of Hamilton and many of the planned actions require City participation. It is anticipated that the remaining partners would continue with the EcoPark initiative with or without the participation of the City of Hamilton. Staff believes that it is in the best interest of the City of Hamilton to continue to collaborate with partners on the EcoPark initiative.

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2012 – 2015 STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic Priority #1

A Prosperous & Healthy Community

WE enhance our image, economy and well-being by demonstrating that Hamilton is a great place to live, work, play and learn.

Strategic Objective

- 1.4 Improve the City's transportation system to support multi-modal mobility and encourage inter-regional connections.
- 1.5 Support the development and implementation of neighbourhood and City wide strategies that will improve the health and well-being of residents.
- 1.6 Enhance Overall Sustainability (financial, economic, social and environmental).

Strategic Priority #2

Valued & Sustainable Services

WE deliver high quality services that meet citizen needs and expectations, in a cost effective and responsible manner.

Strategic Objective

- 2.2 Improve the City's approach to engaging and informing citizens and stakeholders.

Strategic Priority #3

Leadership & Governance

WE work together to ensure we are a government that is respectful towards each other and that the community has confidence and trust in.

Strategic Objective

- 3.1 Engage in a range of inter-governmental relations (IGR) work that will advance partnerships and projects that benefit the City of Hamilton.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A - Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System Vision Map

Appendix B - Burlington Heights Heritage Lands Boundary

**SUBJECT: Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System – Update, Provincial
Engagement Strategy, and Plan for Burlington Heights Heritage Lands
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Appendix C - Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: Vision, Mission, and Objectives
Appendix D - Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System Milestones & Associated Council
Resolutions
Appendix E - Pertinent Excerpts from the Ontario Government Engagement Proposal
Appendix F - Summary of Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: A Plan for the
Burlington Heights Heritage Lands – August 2014

A full copy of the Summary of Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: A Plan for the
Burlington Heights Heritage Lands – August 2014 can be found on the Cootes to
Escarpment EcoPark System website:
<http://www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca/file/download/ZhZVL2aLOHxzZsK5oHcGQw>