

Summary of Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System: A Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands – August 2014

Executive Summary

The purpose of this Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands is to develop a set of structured guidelines for the management of lands owned by the City of Burlington, City of Hamilton and Royal Botanical Gardens within the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands area. This Plan will inform the protection, enhancement, and communication of the important natural and historic features within the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands, one of the six core natural areas within the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System.

Development of this Plan for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands involved community consultation to identify priorities and concerns as well as compilation of information on the history and resources of the area (detailed in the Inventory and Issues report in Appendix B of this document). The Plan was developed using the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System (NEPOSS) planning framework.

The significance of the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands area is categorized by natural heritage features, cultural heritage features, and transportation corridors. The lands contain a high concentration of natural heritage features that provide important habitat for many plant and animal species, including species that are provincially and federally considered rare, threatened, and/or of special concern. Historic significance is also abundant as evidenced by the existing three National Historic Sites, five provincial heritage plaques, and several local commemorations. This Plan recognizes that transportation corridors characterize the historic and current use of the site and aims to respect and improve historic transportation routes.

The overall vision for the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands is a space in which the significant natural and cultural resources of the site are protected, conserved, and appropriately managed. It reflects the vision for the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System, which 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."

Ontario's Greenbelt is almost 2 million acres of protected land. It extends as far north as Tobermory and stretches 325 kilometres from Rice Lake in Northumberland County to the Niagara River. The Greenbelt also wraps around the Greater Golden Horseshoe — the area that surrounds the western end of Lake Ontario. One of the fastest growing regions in North America, by 2031 the population of the Greater Golden Horseshoe is expected to increase to more than 11 million.

Niagara Escarpment Planning and Open Space System (NEPOSS) Zone categories have been applied to the partner-owned properties within the Burlington Heights

Heritage Lands area as a means of categorizing and defining appropriate management actions for the various areas of the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands.

Although it is the smallest of the heritage lands areas in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System, Burlington Heights contains a diverse range of natural and cultural environments. This diversity should be maintained and future management actions should be balanced to minimize impacts of competing needs. The long-term vision recognizes that Burlington Heights is the most urban of the six heritage land areas. Major local and regional transportation routes and infrastructure are located within and adjacent to the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands area. Changes within the surrounding urban areas and within the adjacent transportation corridors should be managed to minimize any impacts on the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands.

This report recommends several actions for consideration for future management of the Burlington Heights Heritage Lands. The recommendations are organized into three categories:

- Recommendations related to the management of land use;
- Recommendations related to transportation and access; and
- Recommendations related to communication and interpretation of natural resources (including terrestrial and wetland habitats) and the cultural resources which include archaeology, built heritage and cultural heritage landscapes.

Summary of Recommendations for the Management of Land Use

Nature Reserve Zone

- Primary activity limited to conservation, habitat restoration and research related activities
- Undertake a complete inventory of all plant and animal species
- Restore habitat and control invasive species
- Discourage access and creation of informal trails
- Reduce impact of recreational activities
- Limit physical access but increase access to information
- Restore marsh vegetation through invasive species control and water quality improvements
- Re-establish prairie habitat
- Create restoration plan for historic refuse dumping areas

Natural Zone

- Encourage landowner stewardship to maintain as natural landscape
- Maintain and extend tall grass prairie ecosystem
- Permit trails constructed in an economical and sensitive manner

- Relocate maintenance yard
- Discourage high-powered motorized watercraft

Access Zone

- Enhance parkway nature of York Boulevard through detailed design
- Clearly demarcate parking and allow during daytime hours
- Relocate the parking lot entrance at Dundurn National Historic Site to align with Hamilton Cemetery entrance
- Construct additional landscaping and pedestrian connections for parking pull off areas along York Boulevard
- Consider a new transit stop in the York Boulevard northbound lane
- Improve interpretative and way finding signage
- Consider low impact development techniques
- Ensure appropriate levels of security through visibility, safe access, and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles
- Extend sidewalk or multi-use trail along East side of York Boulevard

Historic Zone

- Conserve cultural resources consistent with Provincial and Federal standards
- A complete inventory of cultural heritage resources should be undertaken
- Maintain lands primarily as a designed landscape
- Restore tallgrass prairie habitat
- Maintain significant views
- Consider pedestrian crossing points on York Boulevard to allow for access to sites
- Ensure new facilities provide visitor amenities, are small in scale and have heritage character
- Create initiatives to communicate heritage resources

Development Zone

- Develop interpretive and wayfinding signage in the new Rock Garden visitor centre
- Connect new Rock Garden visitor centre to pedestrian and cycling network

Infrastructure and Services

- Consider impacts of new or planned infrastructure on resources within Burlington Heights Heritage Lands
- Ensure partner agency participation in the review process for infrastructure projects
- Address stormwater management

Adjacent Lands

- Provide copies of this Plan to all adjacent landowners
- Develop working relationship with owners of major transportation corridors
- Participate in processes initiated by adjacent landowners to monitor impact on Burlington Heights Heritage Lands

Summary of Recommendations for Transportation and Accessibility

- Consider redesigning York Boulevard to be a grand boulevard or parkway linking Hamilton and Burlington
- Enhance landscape design of new and existing parking areas and connect to pedestrian network
- Design all cycling and multi-use trails to City of Hamilton and City of Burlington Trail Standards
- Maintain or improve cycling facilities on both sides of York Boulevard
- Extended the pedestrian network for the entire length of York Boulevard with crossing points
- Ensure all new pedestrian facilities are consistent with A.O.D.A. standards for accessibility
- Prioritize physical accessibility for trails and interpretive facilities
- Develop a plan for the parking area at Valley Inn Road
- Develop an overall parking strategy
- When bridges are upgraded or replaced, consider railing styles that permit views from Bridges

Summary of Recommendations for Communication and Interpretation

- Develop a comprehensive interpretive program including information and interpretive signage
- Install entrance signs for the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System at each end of the York Boulevard transportation corridor
- Install interpretive nodes at Dundurn parking lot, the planned new Rock Garden visitor centre and along the Harbourfront Trail at the Desjardins Canal
- Use this Plan as an input to infrastructure development plans

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