



**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
**PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**  
**Planning Division**

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members General Issues Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	April 7, 2021
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Feasibility Report for a Biodiversity Action Plan (PED21065) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	Lauren Vraets (905) 546-2424 Ext. 2634 Joanne Hickey-Evans (905) 546-2424 Ext. 1282
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Steve Robichaud Director, Planning and Chief Planner Planning and Economic Development Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (a) That staff from the Planning and Economic Development Department and Public Works Department, partner with local conservation community organizations (lead group) to undertake a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP);
- (b) That Council authorize a one-time financial contribution of:
  - (i) \$20,000 from the Planning and Economic Development Department / Planning Division, budget (2021 Data Management for Natural Areas account (812020-54378)), and;
  - (ii) \$20,000 from the Public Works Department / Hamilton Water Division account 510360-55916.
- (c) That prior to allocating the funds to lead environmental organization, City staff be authorized to prepare an agreement between the City and the Hamilton Naturalist Club, the lead environmental organization, that will be responsible for hiring the BAP coordinator to provide for the clarification of roles and responsibilities and the regular accounting for municipal funds;

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- (d) That City staff report back to Council to present the draft Agreement between the City and the lead environmental organization;
- (e) That the City provide in-kind resources in the form of staff time, previously collected data, mapping, graphic design, online public engagement tools, and printing;
- (e) That Planning Division staff be authorized to provide any required letters of support for Provincial or Federal funding grant applications submitted by one or more of the partner environmental organizations to participate in the development of the BAP;
- (f) That City staff report back in six months to update the Committee/Council of the progress of the BAP;
- (g) That the matter respecting the Feasibility of Developing a Hamilton Biodiversity Action Plan, be considered complete and removed from the General Issues Committee's Outstanding Business List.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth. Hamilton has a unique geography that is comprised of significant natural ecosystems with varying levels of conservation and land management. Locally and globally however, it is recognized that biodiversity is in a state of decline never seen before in human history. Climate change impacts will also have a significant impact. To protect and rehabilitate Hamilton's unique biodiversity assets that have been affected by several factors, including climate change, a coordinated approach is needed between the City of Hamilton and local community environmental partners.

On February 19, 2020, the City's General Issues Committee passed a motion directing that City staff investigate the feasibility and resources required to develop a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), in collaboration with the conservation community and provide a report back with the findings.

The purpose of this Report is to outline the steps required for the completion of the Biodiversity Action Plan, to seek Council's commitment for the project and to identify City funding that may be used to support this initiative. The local conservation community groups, the lead for the BAP, have requested assistance from the City, in kind and if possible, financial contributions, for the completion of the BAP. More specifically, this report:

- provides an explanation as to why a BAP is valuable to the City and community;
- includes the anticipated vision for the BAP;

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- includes a summary of the anticipated work-plan broken down by phase,
- details on the financial resources required and the potential City funds; and,
- identifies the in-kind resources required to complete the action plan.

The BAP aligns with and is complementary to some of the City's on-going initiatives including, the Urban Forest Strategy, Design Guidelines, creek rehabilitation and restoration etc. The results of the BAP may also be of assistance to several capital projects in Public Works.

**Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 14**

**FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Financial:** The Planning and Economic Development Department, Planning Division, contribute \$20,000 from the annual 2021 Data Management for Natural Areas account (812020-54378) a to partially fund an external position for BAP coordinator at local environmental organization. In addition, there is an in-kind contribution of staff resources, use of the City's website and assistance with public engagement that will support the development of the BAP.

Hamilton Water, Public Works Department has identified a potential one-time contribution of \$20,000 from account 510360-55916.

City staff will work with the BAP working group, to identify and apply for external funding, from such agencies as the Greenbelt Fund, to leverage additional funding opportunities. A funding application to the Greenbelt Fund has recently been submitted.

**Staffing:** Staff from the Planning Division would be participating on the BAP working group and act as representatives on behalf of the City. This role would include liaising with Staff from other City departments, coordinating in-kind resources for the development of the BAP (mapping, data, public engagement communication, webpage hosting), attending working group meetings, responding to any City-related inquiries, reviewing the draft BAP when completed, and writing reports to Council.

Staff from the Environmental Services Division of Public Works Department also serves on this working group.

**Legal:** An agreement between the City and the lead environmental organization who is responsible for hiring the BAP coordinator is required to ensure there is a regular accounting for municipal funds.

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## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The City, across various departments, has developed policies and programs to protect, restore and enhance the natural environment. Hamilton, in partnership with the Hamilton Naturalists Club and local Conservation Authorities, has inventoried its plant and wildlife species since 1991 through the Natural Areas Inventory and Nature Counts. Local conservation organizations, have also been stewarding, researching, monitoring and providing public education about Hamilton's local flora and fauna and their habitats.

For the past three years, an informal working group consisting of representatives from Hamilton's conservation community (Environment Hamilton, Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Hamilton Conservation Authority, Bay Area Restoration Council, Royal Botanical Gardens, local ecologists) has been meeting to discuss the development of a biodiversity action plan to address the pressing concern of species and habitat biodiversity protection and enhancement. Since December, 2018, Natural Heritage Planning staff from Planning and Economic Development, as well as senior staff from Environmental Services in Public Works, have been discussing, on an ad hoc basis, with the biodiversity working group to determine how the City can assist in developing a BAP.

On February 19, 2020, the General Issues Committee passed a motion directing that City staff investigate the feasibility and resources required to develop a biodiversity action plan in collaboration with the conservation community and provide a report back with the findings.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

### **1.0 Provincial Plans**

#### **1.1. Provincial Policy Statement (2020)**

The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), affirms that the health, liveability and safety of communities are sustained by promoting development and land use patterns that conserve biodiversity and prepare for the impacts of a changing climate (Policy 1.1.1). Further, the City is required to protect natural heritage features for the long term (Policy 2.2.1, PPS 2020). Specifically, PPS Policy 2.1.2 directs municipalities to maintain, restore and improve the biodiversity of the natural heritage system:

*“The diversity and connectivity of natural features in an area, and the long-term ecological function and biodiversity of natural heritage systems, should be maintained, restored or, where possible, improved, recognizing linkages between and among natural heritage features and areas, surface water features and ground water features.” (PPS, 2020)*

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## **1.2 Growth Plan (2019), as amended**

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan) 2019, as amended, identifies a mapped Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan. The intent of the Growth Plan NHS is to support a comprehensive, long-term approach to protect biodiversity in an area facing intense development pressure. Of key importance is Growth plan policy 4.2.2.3 a) i), ii) and iii). Through these policies, new development in the Growth Plan NHS will need to demonstrate: no negative impacts on key natural heritage features or key hydrologic areas or their functions; that connectivity between these areas is maintained or enhanced for the movement of native plants and animals, and; that the removal of other natural features is avoided, where possible.

## **2.0 Hamilton Official Plans (UHOP and RHOP)**

The City's Urban Hamilton Official Plan (UHOP) and Rural Hamilton Official Plan (RHOP) contain the stated goal to "Protect and enhance biodiversity and ecological functions" (UHOP and RHOP, Vol 1, C.2.1.1). The City's Official Plans map out the Core Areas of the natural heritage system, and specify that the "Core Areas are the most important components of the Natural Heritage System in terms of biodiversity, productivity, and ecological and hydrological functions". The City's UHOP and RHOP contain policies to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the Core Areas including their features and functions. Development of these areas is prohibited, and development adjacent to the Core Areas is carefully reviewed to ensure no negative impacts. The Core Areas of the City's Natural Heritage System are further complimented by Linkages which act as movement corridors for plants and wildlife. The ability for wildlife and plants to move across the natural landscape through the Core Areas and Linkages is an integral part of ensuring species biodiversity. It is anticipated that the development of the BAP will inform future updates to the UHOP and RHOP development, open space, parkland, and natural heritage policies.

## **RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

### *Internal*

The following Departments have been consulted:

- Public Works – Hamilton Water, Environmental Services Divisions

### *External*

An ad hoc working group has been meeting over the past three years to discuss the development of a locally specific BAP. The working group is comprised of representatives from local conservation community organizations and City staff representatives:

- Environment Hamilton
- Hamilton Naturalists' Club

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- Hamilton Conservation Authority
- Bay Area Restoration Council
- Royal Botanical Gardens
- Local ecologists
- City of Hamilton Planning staff – Natural Heritage, Policy Planning
- City of Hamilton Public Works staff – Environmental Services

As the BAP develops, the working group will play an integral role in developing the objectives and action items for area of focus. Additional members of City staff may be included on the working group, as the plan's actions are developed. Participants from the working group may have more or less responsibility for the development of certain phases of the BAP.

## **ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

### **Why is a Biodiversity Action Plan needed?**

Biodiversity refers to the variety of living organisms in the natural environment. It includes all living things, such as bacteria, fungi, insects, plants, fish and wildlife, and humans. Biodiversity is the variety of living organisms that form an interconnected web of life that make a healthy and resilient environment.

Biodiversity is part of a healthy and liveable community. Plants, fungi, insects, and wildlife provide many important resources and ecological functions that humans depend on, such as:

- food (pollination and nutrient cycling);
- raw materials;
- medicine;
- disease, parasite, and pest control;
- pollutant removal; and,
- seed dispersal.

Cities depend on healthy, functioning ecosystems to provide the necessities of life, including clean water and air, food, energy, and raw materials. If an ecosystem is diverse, it is more resilient to changes in species composition (e.g. extinction events or invasive species) or to environmental conditions (e.g. climate change).

Due to human activities resulting in natural habitat fragmentation and destruction, introduction of invasive species, and climate change impacts, global biodiversity is in a state of decline. The United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity found that biodiversity is declining at rates never seen before in human history. This decline is noted in songbird species, which in North America have declined

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by 30% since 1970. In a local context, all of Ontario's eight species of turtles are now listed on the Species at Risk in Ontario (SARO) list.

The City of Hamilton is uniquely situated in a biodiverse 'hotspot' regionally, with natural features such as mature Carolinian Forest, the Niagara Escarpment, Dundas Valley, the Cootes Paradise wetland, and Lake Ontario. The rural landscape also includes extensive swamps, watercourses, and unique woodlands, among many other natural features. For these reasons, Hamilton has rich biodiversity - there are over 1,000 plant species, 96 bird species, 43 mammals, 100 butterflies, and 87 fish species that have been identified in the City.

Hamilton is a growing city. The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe forecasts that Hamilton's population will grow to 820,000 people by the year 2051. Urban growth puts pressure on existing natural areas, through habitat loss and fragmentation, introduction of invasive species, and increased use of city parks and local trails. Further, human activities, such as the deforestation, further impacts our ecosystems.

Effects of climate change have significant environmental impacts, including on biodiversity. This threat is manifested in several ways including wetter and warmer seasons, which impact the life cycle of many species and increases the risk of invasive species.

The City's diverse natural areas need to be protected to ensure the long-term stability of species populations and to provide essential ecosystem services to the community for future generations. In recent years, Hamilton has developed policies and programs to protect, restore, and enhance the natural environment. More specifically, the City's long-standing natural areas inventory can be supported through specific actions identified in the BAP to provide for their long term protection and enhancement.

The BAP will build on work that the City of Hamilton and the local community partner organizations are already doing to support the environment. Related City projects and programs include the Climate Change Action Plan, Urban Forest Strategy, Stormwater Pond Rehabilitation Study, Bee City designation 2019, Invasive and Noxious Weed Control, Creek rehabilitations and maintenance, natural environment protection and enhancement for municipal infrastructure projects, City-Wide Park Master Plan, and, among many others. The development of a BAP can build upon Community-led and cooperative initiatives by local environmental organizations, including the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark, the Pollinator Paradise Project, Hamilton Trees Please, de-paving projects throughout the community, and the many educational outreach activities undertaken.

Further, the BAP will assist in ensuring a resilient natural environment in light of climate change.

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### **What will a Hamilton Biodiversity Action Plan accomplish?**

The BAP is intended to be a collaborative, multi-stakeholder strategy to guide city-wide biodiversity conservation actions. The BAP is intended to have four main project goals:

1. Protect – protect Hamilton’s unique ecosystems and biodiversity assets
2. Enhance – enhance habitats for species biodiversity to regenerate
3. Restore – restore damaged habitats to promote biodiversity rehabilitation
4. Educate – educate the public and local leaders about the importance of safeguarding the City’s biodiversity assets for future generations

#### *Project Scope:*

- Provide an overview of the current state of biodiversity in Hamilton;
- Detail existing work that has been done to protect local biodiversity by the City, Conservation Authorities, and local community environmental organizations;
- Identify the current major threats to Hamilton’s natural areas and local species;
- Under take a SWOT analysis as one of the basis for future actions;
- Recommend a series of actions for various City departments to incorporate biodiversity considerations into existing and future projects/workplans in alignment with the four project goals (protect, enhance, restore, educate);
- Clearly establish priority projects for the City, local community environmental organizations and Conservation Authorities to plan for future budgets and funding opportunities;
- Development of a series of indicators to help monitor progress; and,
- Determine a plan to report back on the implementation of the BAP.

(See Appendix “A” to Report PED21065 that details the project tasks)

The City’s involvement in the BAP has the potential to yield both City and community-wide benefits, as outlined below:

#### *City (Corporate) Benefits:*

- Actionable plan to protect, enhance and manage biodiversity assets on City-owned lands;
- Identification of priority areas for biodiversity enhancement and protection and clear direction for future workplans;
- Information will assist in the review of Urban and Rural Official Plan policies and to identify if any additional policies are required;
- Identification of ‘quick-wins’ for biodiversity that can be done without major workplan or budget implications;
- Multi-departmental co-operation on a common initiative that will align with existing initiatives such as the Design Guidelines, Climate Plan Action Plan and the Urban Forest Strategy; and,

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- Support and guidance for setting priorities and programs for City of Hamilton's natural open space areas, including budget considerations.

*Community Benefits:*

- Multi-stakeholder cooperation to set city-wide priorities for species and natural spaces;
- Actionable plan to lead future programs and initiatives to protect and manage biodiversity on private lands;
- Improved climate change resiliency through enhancement and protection of natural areas;
- Protection of high-quality natural spaces for current residents and future generations;
- Distinguish Hamilton as a leading city in the protection of biodiversity assets;
- Develop a community awareness of the importance of biodiversity; and,
- Opportunities for the public to participate in stewardship activities to protect and restore biodiversity

**How will the BAP be developed?**

*Project Leadership*

The BAP will be developed through a partnership between local conservation community partners and the City and with input from the broader community. The conservation community partners will be the BAP lead. Staff from one of the local non-profit environmental organizations that have participated in the working group will be used for the day-to-day activities/tasks relating to the BAP.

Funding will be needed to hire a temporary staff person at one of the organizations to lead the research, stakeholder meetings and final development of the BAP. This report recommends that the City make a financial contribution towards paying for this temporary staff person to complete the BAP.

The role of the City will be to review of current City policies, programs, and initiatives and recommend actions for improvement through the BAP. The City would also take the lead on organizing and managing the public consultation and cross-departmental communications regarding the project. Due to the high level of collaboration needed to effectively develop the BAP with all partners, it is also recommended that a staff project lead be identified at the City.

*Project Phasing*

It is anticipated the development of the BAP will take approximately one-year to 18 months to develop once funding is secured. The project is anticipated to be developed

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in four phases related to the preparation of the BAP (a more detailed summary of the draft project phases is provided in Appendix “A” to Report PED21065):

- Phase 1 – Background Review (2 months)
  - Key Deliverables - Background summary of existing City and local initiatives. Summary of existing natural heritage data that can serve as a benchmark for future monitoring.
- Phase 2 – Develop Draft Action Plan (6 months)
  - Key Deliverables - Draft of BAP, including clear actions to be undertaken by the City and local community organizations. Presentation of draft BAP to various community organization Boards, City Council prior to public consultation to receive endorsement of proposed actions.
- Phase 3 – Public Consultation (2 months)
  - Key Deliverables – Engage in public consultation to educate public on the importance of the BAP and gather feedback about proposed actions. Provide summary of public consultation and incorporate public feedback into final draft of the BAP.
- Phase 4 – Complete final BAP (2 months)
  - Key Deliverables – Completed BAP with actions/responsibilities of City departments and partner organizations clearly defined. Final BAP approved by Council.
- Phase 5 – Initiate actions recommended through BAP (ongoing)
  - Key Deliverable – provide update/report back to GIC every 2 years on initiatives undertaken as a result of the BAP

**What resources are needed to complete the Biodiversity Action Plan?**

*Budget (not including in kind resources)*

The following table provides a high-level overview of the anticipated budget for the completion of the BAP guiding document, with development of the BAP led by a staff person at an external environmental NGO:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Part-time project coordinator at local community partner agency (12-18 months, including supplies)	\$61,000
Public engagement - online (advertising across several mediums – newspaper, web ads, social media)	\$10,500

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<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>
One-time in-person public engagement event (space rental, additional staffing, etc.)	\$10,000
Graphic design assistance (report and public engagement)	\$5,000
Printing (reports, posters)	\$5,000
<b>Estimated Total Cost of BAP</b>	<b>\$91,500</b>

*Resources*

The development of the BAP is envisioned as a partnership between the local conservation community organizations and the City. For this reason, it is anticipated that funding for the development of the action plan will be collaborative, with a combination of financial and in-kind contributions from the partnering organizations.

There are a number of agencies that may fund the BAP. The working group will be required to seek additional external funding opportunities. The City contributions (in kind and financial commitment) can be used as leverage for these applications.

**In-kind Resources – Community Partners**

It is recognized there are limitations to the funding that may be available through the local community organizations who would partner on the BAP. The funding for their operations is typically obtained through project specific grants and not available for other initiatives. While it is anticipated that there will be opportunity to seek partial grant funding for the development of the BAP, the in-kind resources that the conservation community partners can contribute are listed below:

**Hamilton Naturalists' Club:**

- Supervision and supporting costs for part-time project coordinator (office space, computer, human resources, insurance) = approx. value of \$4,500
- Organization of BAP working group meetings and meetings with conservation partners, assistance with public consultation (advertising, outreach) = approx. value of \$7,900.

**Environment Hamilton:**

- Time to assist/support Project Coordinator with development of BAP, and communications support to community and stakeholders for public consultation = approx. value \$3,600.

**Bay Area Restoration Council:**

- Time to assist/support Project Coordinator with development of BAP, and communications support to community and stakeholders for public consultation = approx. value \$3,000.

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Conservation partners (Conservation Authority, RBG):

- Sharing data, participating in BAP working group, reviewing report, communications support = approx. value \$3,000 - \$6,000

The total in-kind support from the conservation community partners for the development of the BAP is valued at approximately \$25,000.

**Financial Resources – City of Hamilton**

The PED Planning Division is a key project stakeholder for the development of the BAP. It is likely that recommended actions from the BAP will result in updates to the City's Official Plan policies and spur the initiation of other biodiversity projects related to land use and development. For this reason, PED is proposing to use financial resources from the Natural Areas Inventory fund (annual 'operating' budget item) to a maximum of \$20,000 and Hamilton Water is proposing to contribute \$20,000 for the development of the BAP. This funding would match any external funding that would be applied for by the BAP working group prior to initiating the workplan.

**In-kind Resources – City of Hamilton**

To date, three staff from PED (two Natural Heritage Planners, one Policy Planner) have been assisting the BAP working group to bring the project to this point. Public Works - Environmental Services staff have also been assisting with scoping the goals of the BAP with the working group. Staff in these groups have been assisting with the BAP working group as part of their day-to-day workplan. The following is a list of the in-kind resources that the City is able to provide towards the development of the BAP:

- Providing existing background research of other municipal Biodiversity initiatives to BAP project coordinator;
- Existing data and GIS Mapping services;
- Staff consultation (email, attendance at working group meetings);
- Online public engagement portal set-up on Engage Hamilton;
- Social media advertising for public engagement;
- Creative design services related report, social media, Engage Hamilton graphics; and,
- Project update reports to GIC on behalf of working group.

The BAP development will be collaborative between conservation community partners and the City, and it is anticipated that there will need to be a point-person in PED to act as a City liaison to the working group. This City staff person would be responsible for connecting the working group with staff from other City departments, organizing advertising and online public engagement, communicating with staff in mapping and graphic design services, and reporting back to Committee on the progress of the BAP. PED staff are already at a maximum workload capacity in the respective roles, and

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therefore any work done on the BAP may have the effect of delaying other City initiatives and priorities, such as revisions to the tree protection guidelines and the identification of natural areas that may benefit from additional field work. The following list outlines the additional work required and the expected time commitment from a PED staff resource over the course of the BAP's development.

- Liaison between other City departments regarding draft actions (40 hrs)
- BAP working group meeting attendance and preparation (20 hrs)
- Coordinating advertising for public engagement (10 hours)
- Facilitating and monitoring online public engagement through Engage Hamilton (25 hrs)
- Coordinating report graphics with Creative Design services team (10 hrs)
- Review of draft BAP report (50 hrs)
- Reporting back to GIC with project updates (25 hrs)

### **BAP Feasibility**

The development of the BAP is anticipated to cost approximately \$91,500, with a project coordinator housed at a local community partner organization (e.g. Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Environment Hamilton). City funding could assist with this work is limited to \$20,000 (Planning Division) and \$20,000 (Hamilton Water Division), which would assist in matching any additional external funding grants obtained or to hire a BAP coordinator. In-kind supports from the City towards the BAP can offset the project cost by an additional \$25,500 (online public engagement facilitation, graphic design services, printing).

Since the BAP budget exceeds the current resources available, a staged approach to the project delivery is recommended:

- Stage 1 – Initiate 'Phase 1 – Background Review' of BAP
  - Resources: In-kind resources from working group partners and City
- Stage 2 – Working group partners to secure additional funding sources to match earmarked \$40,000 City contribution. If funding is not available, delay additional work of BAP to request funding in the City's 2022 budget.
  - Resources: in-kind resources from working group partners and City staff to secure future project funding.
- Stage 3 – Initiate 'Phase 2 – Develop Draft Action Plan' with Project Coordinator position established at local community partner organization.
  - Resources: Financial resources to pay for project coordinator. In-kind contributions from working group partners and City for plan development.

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- Stage 4 – Initiate ‘Phase 3 - Public Consultation’
  - Resources: In-kind resources from the City for public engagement facilitation. Financial resources dedicated project coordinator for planning engagement, analysing results and incorporating into recommendations.
- Stage 5 – Finalize BAP recommendations and complete final plan.
  - Resources: Financial resources dedicated to project coordinator finalizing the BAP. In-kind resources from City to assist with final plan review, graphic design, printing.

**ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

1. Do not support the development of the BAP by the conservation community partners. Due to the need to initiate this work to protect Hamilton’s biodiversity assets and preserve local ecosystem services, this alternative is not recommended.
2. Develop the BAP as a City-initiated guiding document, incurring all costs associated with its development. Work would be completed either by hiring a contract FTE or by funding a consultant to complete the plan. Due to time and budget constraints, this alternative is not recommended.

**ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN**

**Healthy and Safe Communities**

Hamilton is a safe and supportive City where people are active, healthy, and have a high quality of life.

**Clean and Green**

Hamilton is environmentally sustainable with a healthy balance of natural and urban spaces.

**Community Engagement and Participation**

Hamilton has an open, transparent and accessible approach to City government that engages with and empowers all citizens to be involved in their community.

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Appendix “A” - Draft Project Workplan