



Report to: Development Services Committee

Date Report: January 17, 2012

SUBJECT: Draft - Rouge Park Trails Master Plan
PREPARED BY: Elizabeth Wimmer, Senior Environmental Planner,
Extension 2750
REVIEWED BY: Lilli Duoba, Senior Project Coordinator, Environmental
Planning & Rouge Park, extension 7925

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the staff report entitled "Draft Rouge Park Trails Master Plan" dated January 17, 2011 be received and endorsed;
- 2) And that the report and Council resolution be forwarded to the Rouge Park and TRCA;
- 3) And that staff continue to monitor and participate in the Rouge Park Trails Master Plan process and report back to Committee upon finalization of the Plan;
- 4) And further that Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Draft Rouge Park Trails Master Plan (DRPTMP) is intended to direct future trail development and management within the Rouge Park. The DRPTMP proposes a system of interconnected trails throughout the Rouge Park from Lake Ontario through Toronto to eastern Markham. Ancillary trail infrastructure includes trail heads and associated parking areas. The trails plan identifies and incorporates natural heritage cultural and agricultural aspects into the trail design. The document summarizes the public consultation process. Detailed maps identify site specific trail locations and design. Town staff has participated throughout the process and is suggesting some modifications that will ensure that the Rouge Park Trail System will be connected to the Town's planned trail system and will provide for a safe, functional, and experiential trail network.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the report is to provide Committee with an overview of the Draft Rouge Park Trails Master Plan document as prepared by the Rouge Park Alliance (RPA). The report includes high level staff comments and recommendations relative to the proposed Trails Master Plan.

BACKGROUND:

In 2010, the Rouge Park Alliance (RPA) identified the need to prepare a Trails Master Plan for the Rouge Park under the guidance of a Trails Advisory Committee (TAC). The Town of Markham contributed a total of \$50,000 in funding in 2009/2010 for development of the Trails Master Plan and provided input throughout the process. The Trails Advisory Committee is comprised of staff representation from the Rouge Park

Alliance, City of Toronto, Town of Markham, Toronto Region Conservation Authority, York Region, Durham Region, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Transport Canada, Rouge Valley Conservation Centre, Toronto Zoo, Oak Ridge's Trail Association and trail advocate stakeholders.

Since adoption of the Rouge Park plans in 1994 and 2001, the Rouge Park has increased in size through land acquisition and through the dedication of Provincial lands, (see Figure 1). Through the planning of the park there has been a strong vision for establishing a natural heritage park stretching from Lake Ontario north to the Oak Ridges Moraine with the inclusion of a continuous trail system. A number of implementation plans have been prepared by the Rouge Park Alliance which helps inform the Trail Planning exercise including site specific management plans and a visitor experience plan. It is the intent of the Rouge Park Trails Master Plan to help link all the components together and provide direction for the long-term development of a trail system that affords opportunities for recreation and enhanced visitor experience, while at the same time providing for the protection and interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage resources contained within the park. The Trails Master Plan is to be a guideline document which will direct the process of future trail development and management within the Rouge Park regardless of future management and operations. The long term management of the Rouge Park is currently under review by Parks Canada.

The Trails Master Plan was aimed at achieving the following four principle goals:

1. Protect important natural heritage features and functions.
2. Provide a continuous north-south connection through the park and east-west linkages to trail systems within the communities adjacent to the park.
3. Respect and celebrate significant cultural and agricultural heritage resources.
4. Offer a safe and rewarding experience to visitors of Rouge Park.

The Trails Master Plan will serve as a vital tool to assist Parks Canada or any other future park manager in the process of implementing a comprehensive trail system within the Park. Parks Canada has indicated that they would utilize the recommendations of the Trails Master Plan to inform future trail planning within the Park.

Additional information on the Rouge Park Trails Master Plan including the draft Rouge Park Master Plan and the public process can be obtained at:

http://www.rougepark.com/trail_master_plan

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

Public Consultation

In 2010, the Rouge Park Trails Master Plan project was awarded to a multi-disciplinary consulting team led by Schollen & Company. The consultation process was comprehensive and was designed to engage key stakeholders and the broader public to ensure inclusive community participation in the planning process. Between the period of June 2010 and June 2011 there were three public meetings conducted, in addition to "one

on one” meetings with stakeholders and small focus group meetings with key community members and user groups.

A Draft Trail Master Plan

The draft of the Rouge Park Trails Master Plan has now been made available to all stakeholders for comment and is available on the Rouge Park website. Trail locations and configurations were derived through a process of natural, cultural and heritage review. Fundamental to the study process was the determination of “ecological sensitivity zones” designed to inform the location of trails relative to the location of significant and rare flora and fauna species in addition to the location of recorded animal populations. Site visits were undertaken to confirm the condition of existing trails and assessed views, vistas, natural features, hazards and other issues that might have an effect on the trail planning process. (Figures 9 through 12 identify the trail system in Markham and Figures 6 through 9 identify the trail system in Toronto).

Markham staff has reviewed the document in the context of the goals identified for the project and the functionality, safety and accessibility of the proposed trail system and linkages to existing and proposed Markham trails. The key areas of interest from south to north are as follows:

1) Trail Connection – Connecting Toronto and Markham at Steeles Avenue East

The primary north-south trail is proposed to cross the intersection of Steeles Avenue East and Reesor Road in the vicinity of the “Woodland Park Trail Area”. This is identified as a “challenge area” both in this study and in the trail planning work undertaken for the Bob Hunter trail system. The Rouge Park Trails Master Plan proposes that a “pedestrian bridge” be attached to the existing “vehicular bridge” over the Rouge River on the south side of Steeles Avenue as a temporary measure with the anticipation that improvements will be planned to the Steeles Avenue Bridge as part of a future capital project within the City of Toronto. This pedestrian bridge would provide access along the south side of Steeles Avenue. The route would continue on the south side of Steeles as an “asphalt multi-use trail” to a point at which a safe crossing of Steeles could occur. The Master Plan identifies an “informal” crossing from the south side of Steeles Avenue to the east side of Reesor Road (See Figure 2). An informal crossing would not include the provision of traffic lights or overhead lit pedestrian signage. Safety issues have been raised and staff recommends that further review and consideration of this option be pursued. We suggest that criteria be developed in consultation with the Town, Rouge Park Alliance, City of Toronto and the Region of York in order that a future EA or other studies can address a future pedestrian crossing when improvements to Steeles Avenue are undertaken.

2) Trail Connection – Suggested Trail Connection through Cedar Grove Community Park

The primary north-south trail is identified to proceed north of Steeles Avenue East along the east side of Reesor Road to Cedararena” where it enters the valley (See Figure 3). In order to provide options, improve the trail experience and provide an off-road trail alignment, the Town has requested that a secondary section of trail be considered for inside Cedar Grove Community Park. This trail will traverse the park to the north-east

boundary where a connection through “Christ the King Cemetery” would be required in order to connect with the Secondary Trail System north of the Cemetery lands. This trail route would require the permission of “Christ the King Cemetery” and should be identified as a long term opportunity. The primary trail will remain as proposed for the east side of Reesor Road.

3) Trail Alignment – Primary North South Trail

The primary north south trail extends along the east side of the Little Rouge River (See Figure 4). The location of this trail has been the subject of discussion through this planning process and the previous Little Rouge Creek Management Plan (LRCMP) process. The rationale for the easterly location of the main trail is as follows:

- The trail connection under highway 407 is best located on the east side of the river and also responds to the barrier of the existing railway.
- The LRCMP recommends that public access not be permitted in sensitive areas;
- The LRCMP recommends that adequate setbacks and buffers be established from existing natural areas, areas of significant habitat, and leased residences;
- The LRCMP recommends that crossings of the Little Rouge Creek be limited to “non-sensitive” areas;

The primary north-south trail is identified as conceptual and will be subject to further refinement. In several locations including the stretch from Highway 7 to the northern boundary the trail location is identified in the agricultural lands with no relationship to the river corridor. Although the location has been shown conceptually staff would recommend that the trail be shown conceptually closer to the valley to ensure that the future delineation of the trail is designed with a relationship to the valley rather than the agricultural lands.

4) Trail Connection – Trail Connection from the Box Grove Community across 9th Line and the Railway Corridor to Bob Hunter Park

Bob Hunter Memorial Park is located in the southwest portion of the Rouge Park in the Town of Markham. Park infrastructure and restoration is underway which includes a system of low-impact looped trails constructed in association with restoration areas. The Draft Rouge Park Trails Master Plan references these trails; however, the plan does not detail the nature of a potential pedestrian connection from the Box Grove Community across 9th Line and the Railway Corridor to the park (See Figure 5). The Railway Corridor and 9th Line form a significant barrier between the park and the community. Town of Markham engineering staff is currently undertaking an Environmental Assessment (EA) for a multi-use pathway system extending from Toogood Pond to Bob Hunter Park. The requirement for a pedestrian trail connection into Bob Hunter Park has been identified through the Municipal EA process. The design of this connection should be further explored in the Rouge Park Trails Master Plan document and in the Municipal EA. Suggested design solutions and the associated costing for future implementation should be included in both documents.

5) Multi-Use Trails

There are 3 categories of “multi-use trails” denoted in the Trail Master Plan. All categories of trail are designed to support hiking, running, rollerblading and cycling. Two of the categories designate either existing or proposed “on-road” multi-use routes as per the Towns’ Cycling Master Plan. The detailed design for these trails indicates these activities occurring on either a “marked” or a “signed” route which is directly adjacent to vehicular travel lanes. The 3rd category of “multi-use trail” is externally aligned with roads and is separated from traffic by a landscaped swale. Staff recommends that this category of trail (where adjacent to Rouge Park lands) be relocated further into Park lands outside of municipal road allowances. The relocation of the trail internally into adjacent lands will support a safer, higher quality trail experience.

6) Primary and Secondary Trails – The Provision of “Looped” Trail Systems

The Town of Markham segments of the Trails Master Plan was prepared as a conceptual framework and as a result smaller “looped trail” systems are not identified. Town staff suggests that the Trails Master Plan identify criteria for the placement of future looped trails. This criterion then may be applied at a future date when plans for multi-use parkland areas are finalized. Looped trails would generally be located close to the valley and in a number of locations which would include Town owned properties.

7) Trail Implementation

The implementation of the DRPTMP is anticipated to be completed in a sequence of stages over time. The availability of funding and Park management will also determine the rate at which the trails may be implemented. The DRPTMP document identifies the entire cost of trails in the Rouge Park to be estimated at a value of \$30,659,337. The cost of trails in Markham alone is estimated at a value of \$11,795,305. Further clarification is required in the document as to the itemized costs of bridges, boardwalks, trail heads and parking facilities. The document does not address partnership implementation given the governance review currently underway by Parks Canada.

8) Detailed Comments

The Rouge Park Alliance has requested that detailed comments be provided in January 2012 for review and consideration. Staff will continue to review the DRPTMP and consolidate other Town comments and address any other Markham specific trail issues.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TEMPLATE: (external link)

There are no direct financial implications to the Town at this time. The implementation of the Rouge Park Trails Master Plan in Markham will require a significant capital expenditure; however, discussions regarding who will manage the Rouge Park and ultimately pay for the capital investments are under review by Parks Canada. There is no funding identified by the Rouge Park for implementation of the Trails other than in Bob Hunter Park. The Town has not made any accommodation for the funding of trails in the Markham portion of the Park. It is the intent of the Trails Master Plan document to provide guidance to the Rouge Park and its stakeholders on the implementation of trails over a 15 to 25 year timeframe.

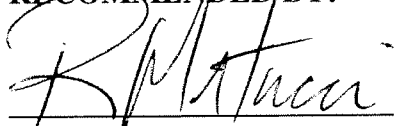
BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

The Draft Trails Master Plan has been circulated to Engineering, Operations and Parks and Open Space Planning for comment. Where comments have been received they have been incorporated into the report and will also be provided under separate cover as technical staff comments.

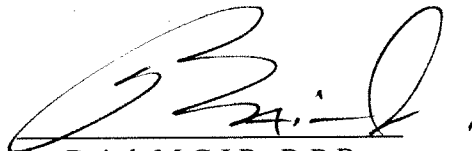
CONCLUSION:

The Rouge Park Trails Master Plan represents an extensive body of research and analysis and Town of Markham staff supports the overall vision for trails identified. Staff will continue to monitor and participate in future discussions regarding the Rouge Park Trails Master Plan and staff will report back to Committee/Council on the progress of the Trails Master Plan. Staff is recommending that the Town receive the document and forward the report to the Rouge Park Alliance and TRCA as further Town input.

RECOMMENDED BY:



Rino Mostacci, M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Director of Planning and Urban Design



Jim Baird, M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Commissioner of Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- Figure 1 – Rouge Park Land Ownership Map
- Figure 2- Rouge Park Map – Steeles and Reesor Road
- Figure 3- Rouge Park Map – Reesor Road and Cedararena
- Figure 4 – Rouge Park Map – Primary Trail Configuration
- Figure 5 – Rouge Park Map – Bob Hunter Park
- Figure 6 – Rouge Park Map – 1 of 7
- Figure 7 – Rouge Park Map – 2 of 7
- Figure 8 – Rouge Park Map – 3 of 7
- Figure 9 – Rouge Park Map – 4 of 7
- Figure 10 – Rouge Park Map – 5 of 7
- Figure 11 – Rouge Park Map – 6 of 7
- Figure 12 – Rouge Park Map – 7 of 7

Rouge Park Trails Master Plan Document:
(http://www.rougepark.com/trail_master_plan)