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ROUGE PARK

LITTLE ROUGE CORRIDOR AND BOB HUNTER MANAGEMENT PLANS

(Regional Council at its meeting on June 19, 2008 referred this Clause back to the September 3, 2008 Transportation and Works Committee.)

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, May 28, 2008, from the Commissioner of Transportation Services and the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council support the Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan dated November 2007.
2. Regional Council support the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan dated November 2007, with the exception of those portions of the Plan related to 14th Avenue alignment and design details (eg. traffic calming) where an Environmental Assessment is pending.
3. The Regional Clerk forward the Little Rouge Corridor and Bob Hunter Management Plans to the Ministries of Public Infrastructure and Renewal and Municipal Affairs and Housing with a request to comment on the Plans as they relate to Greenbelt and Places to Grow legislation and to future development of the Seaton Lands in the Regional Municipality of Durham.
4. A copy of this report be forwarded to the Rouge Park Alliance, TRCA, Durham Region and the Town of Markham for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report responds to a request from the Rouge Park Alliance to endorse the Little Rouge Corridor and Bob Hunter Management Plans.

3. BACKGROUND

In December 2007, Rouge Park circulated final draft management plans for the Little Rouge Corridor and the Bob Hunter Memorial Park and requested their endorsement by Rouge Park partners by March 31, 2008

In 2004, Rouge Park received approximately 14 square kilometres (1400 hectares) of additional land from the Province of Ontario. These newly added public lands comprise approximately 660 hectares immediately adjacent to the Little Rouge Creek in York Region. The Little Rouge Corridor Steering Committee was established early in 2005 to oversee the development of a management plan for these lands. Members of the Committee included representatives from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), Rouge Park, the Towns of Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville, York Region, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ontario Realty Corporation, the Oak Ridges Trail Association, Hydro One, City of Toronto, the Toronto Regeneration Trust and Transport Canada. York Region was represented by Sandra Malcic, Regional Greening Co-ordinator of the Natural Heritage and Forestry Services Section of Transportation Services.

In October of 2005, the Province announced the dedication of an additional 193 hectare parcel within York Region to the Rouge Park. This dedication honours the late Bob Hunter, lifelong environmentalist and co-founder of Greenpeace, and provides protection to the area's natural character and functions. In September of 2006, Rouge Park hosted a Bob Hunter *Think Tank* with the Little Rouge Corridor Steering Committee as input to a management plan for these lands. The Little Rouge Corridor Steering Committee was then used as the stakeholder group to provide input into this management plan as well.

In addition to the ecological advice provided to the consulting team, the York Region representative on the Committee brought matters of Regional interest forward to be addressed as the plan was developed. These included comments on the need to adequately address Regional infrastructure and services, and the need to consider financial management for the Park in the short and long terms.

In November of 2005, the Park hosted a Transportation stakeholders meeting to discuss how the management plans would address the demand for transportation services, both within the park and associated with the growing communities in the area, including consideration of the existing road network and future improvements. This meeting included participation from York Region's Manager of Engineering, Roads Capital Delivery.

Staff concerns regarding the way the plan includes potential alignment and design details of 14th Avenue include:

- Consistency with Donald Cousens Parkway alignment as approved through the Environmental Assessment
- Extent of curvature of 14th Avenue depicted on the plans
- Suggested traffic calming features appearing on 14th Avenue throughout the Park
- Two-lane rural cross section details

In July of 2006 and October of 2007, the York Region staff provided comprehensive Region wide written comments on the Little Rouge Corridor and Bob Hunter Management Plans (respectively). The major outstanding concern is the treatment of 14th Avenue within the plans as discussed above.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The Region has a number of areas of interest relating to the Management Plans including natural areas protection and enhancement, public use and enjoyment, infrastructure management and service delivery, and financial management

The Region has a number of areas of interest that should be addressed through these management plans. They include:

- Natural areas protection and enhancement
- Public use and appreciation
- Infrastructure management and service delivery
- Financial management

Staff supports the strong natural areas protection and enhancement, and public use and enjoyment portions of the plans. Copies of Figure 3 from the Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan and Figure 4 from the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan have been attached to this report as *Attachment 2* and *Attachment 3*, respectively. These figures show the proposed land uses (restoration areas, trails, and other amenities) for the plan areas.

The plan includes some strong recommendations on the future design, location and use of Regional infrastructure and services including roads, utility corridors and more indirectly transit services. Changes to any Regional infrastructure within the Park are subject to ongoing or future Environmental Assessment (EA) processes. It is the intent of Rouge Park to provide the Management Plans as background information to any Environmental Assessments for infrastructure projects which potentially impact the Park. Staff is concerned that Rouge Park Alliance, and Regional Council endorsement of these portions of the plans may bias these EA processes, although it is recognized that any EA would take precedent over direction provided by the management plans. It is therefore

recommended that the Region not endorse those portions of the Plans that relate to 14th Avenue.

The Region is currently undertaking a review of the Transportation Master Plan having regard not only for Council's transit and active transportation focus but also for important natural heritage features. The transportation master planning process has regard for Rouge Park, its features and the functions it provides to the Region

The Region and the Province have long histories assessing means to address transportation needs within east Markham. Specifically, the province started assessing transportation demand in the Durham-York-Toronto area in 1971 and is currently embarking on an update to this study, having regard for Rouge Park and more recent development occurring on the Seaton Lands within Durham Region. These studies, and the Region's Transportation Master Plan have identified that in addition to improvements to Steeles Avenue and Regional Road No. 7 (formerly Highway 7), the need for additional capacity along the eastern screenline, and in particular on 14th Avenue, has long been established.

The Rouge Park is much more well established now than it was when the some of the earlier transportation planning was undertaken. As the Region's Transportation Master Plan is updated, staff will continue to work with Rouge Park staff and Alliance members, and the Province, to ensure that transportation planning within and around the Rouge Park acknowledges and respects the vital role that the Park plays to the Region's residents and wildlife. It is anticipated that a draft of the Transportation Master Plan will be completed in the fall and brought back to the public for further consultation.

It is recommended that Regional Council support the Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan

The Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan includes a number of recommendations regarding protection, rehabilitation and public use of the Park. Specifically, there are recommendations regarding reforestation, the reestablishment of wetlands, the establishment of meadow and prairie habitats and the establishment of recreational and educational amenities. These recommendations are consistent with Regional objectives as articulated through the Region's Greening Strategy, sustainability initiatives, and an increase in forest cover to 25%. The plans also include sound recommendations on Cultural Heritage Conservation such as protection, restoration and promotion of heritage buildings the Carrying Place Trail. It is therefore recommended that Regional Council support the Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan.

It is recommended that Council support the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan excluding those portions of the Plan that speak to potential alignment and treatment of 14th Avenue

The Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan includes significant recommendations on the protection and rehabilitation of the areas natural heritage system. The Plan also proposed significant public amenities including trails, interpretive centres and day use (picnic) areas. Staff is supportive of these portions of the plan.

Bob Hunter Memorial Park includes the 14th Avenue transportation corridor from just west of the Little Rouge Creek Valley to the Future Donald Cousens Parkway. While the plan recognizes that any future modifications to 14th Avenue will be subject to the Environmental Assessment Act, portions of Section 5.2 and Figures 4, 5 and 6 of the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan show and/or discuss potential alignments and design details (eg. traffic calming measures) that have not yet been approved. Staff feels that these inclusions in the plan are premature until such time as an EA is undertaken.

It is recommended that Council support the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan with the exception of those portions of Section 5.2 and Figures 4,5 and 6 that relate to future alignments and design details for 14th Avenue.

York Region project managers for the South East Collector Environmental Assessment and Rouge Park staff and Alliance members have built a strong working relationship as this essential infrastructure project is advanced

York Region staff and consultants managing the South East Collector (SEC) Environmental Assessment have been working well together with the Rouge Park to ensure that the preferred alignment (*See Attachment 1*) and construction practices for the sewer to minimize short and long term impacts on Rouge Park. Regional staff continue to work cooperatively with Rouge Park staff to consider enhancement opportunities within the Rouge Park, and specifically within the Bob Hunter Memorial Park, that could be supported by York Region to advance the restoration of this significant area. Staff does not anticipate any conflicts between Rouge Park, the objectives established within the management plans, and the SEC project.

The Ministries of Public Infrastructure and Renewal and Municipal Affairs and Housing should comment on the Plans as they relate to Greenbelt and Places to Grow legislation

It is recognized that transportation demands within and in close proximity to the Little Rouge Corridor and Bob Hunter Memorial Park are driven to a large extent by Places to Grow legislation and development of the Seaton Lands in Durham. Accordingly, the Ministries of Public Infrastructure and Renewal and Municipal Affairs and Housing

should be requested by the Regional Clerk, to specifically comment on the Plans as they relate to the legislation.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan and the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan support Vision 2026 and such key goal statements as:

“In 2026, York Region residents will continue to value and embrace the Region’s unique natural heritage (land, air, water) and cultural heritage (sites and buildings important to our history, faiths and cultures).”

“In 2026, York Region will have grown at a pace that supports healthy communities, economic vitality, sustainable natural environment and effective human services.”

The Plans strengthen the Region’s commitment to focus on Vision 2026 action areas including:

- Protecting sensitive features such as forests, watersheds, the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Simcoe.
- Promoting a permanent linked Greenlands system.
- Continuing to develop and build strategies for a green region, such as the York Regional Forest Management Plan, the Greening Strategy and the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy.
- Taking a leadership role in the development and implementation of environmental strategies and conservation activities.

Implementation of these Plans will also assist in reaching the Region’s Official Plan objective to increase forest cover to 25%.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is estimated that a capital investment of approximately \$6 million dollars is required to implement each of the Plans requiring a total of over \$12 million dollars to establish these portions of Rouge Park within York Region

The Plans include a summary of capital costs for budgeting purposes. It is estimated that \$6.2 million is required to implement all aspects of the Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan including natural heritage restoration and public use components. It is estimated that implementation of the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan will require a capital investment of \$6.1 million. The plans recognize implementation will occur over

a number of years (10+) and that there are number of potential funding and revenue sources. The Rouge Park is currently assessing funding options and initiating a financial management strategy for the Rouge Park north of Steeles Avenue.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Rouge Park is a significant amenity to all residents of York Region, but most directly, the residents of the Town of Markham. Town of Markham Council has expressed support for the Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan and the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan with a request that the Park consider the comments made in the staff report. Markham Council also requested that the Rouge Park prepare and maintain a financial implementation strategy identifying public and private funding opportunities.

7. CONCLUSION

The Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan and the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan include provide direction to Park Management consistent with Regional objectives as articulated through the Greening Strategy and the Region's sustainability initiatives. The Bob Hunter Memorial Park Master Plan includes alignment and design detail information for 14th Avenue that staff feel are premature pending the outcome of an Environmental Assessment. It is recommended that Council support the plans with the exception of those portions of the Bob Hunter Plan that speak to alignment and design details for 14th Avenue.

For more information on this report, contact Paul Jankowski, General Manager, Roads, Roads Branch at extension 5901 in the Transportation Services Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)