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Planner: L. MCDUGALL

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE ON NOVEMBER 4, 2014
FROM:	J. M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER
SUBJECT:	CONSERVATION MASTER PLAN for THE COVES ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREA

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Planning and City Planner regarding the Coves Environmentally Significant Area Conservation Master Plan, the following actions **BE TAKEN**:

- a) the Conservation Master Plan for the Coves Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) attached as Appendix 'A', **BE APPROVED** and **ADOPTED** as a Conservation Master Plan in accordance with Section 15.3.8. of the Official Plan and as a Guideline Document under section 19.2.2. (ii) h) of the Official Plan;
- b) Planning staff **BE DIRECTED** to initiate an Official Plan amendment and related Zoning By-law amendment to implement the recommended changes to the ESA boundary, including amendments to Schedule A – Land Use, and Schedule B-1 - Natural Heritage Features; and,
- c) The volunteer members of the Coves ESA Local Advisory Committee (LAC) **BE THANKED** for their work in the preparation of the document.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
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None

PURPOSE

Under Section 15.3.8 of the Official Plan, “*Council may request the preparation of Conservation Master Plans for Environmentally Significant Areas and other natural heritage areas. Conservation Master Plans may be adopted by Council, and will function as guideline documents for the purposes of defining the boundaries and providing direction on the management of these areas.*”

The Conservation Master Plan (CMP) for the Coves Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) responds to a strong community vision and desire to protect and enhance the Coves ESA while permitting sustainable public access to nature in an established, urban neighbourhood in accordance with 15.4.1.4 of the Official Plan.

BACKGROUND

The Coves ESA is an important natural area within the City of London for which a CMP has been developed. Protecting a significant natural area like the Coves is challenged by the urban context of this ESA. The CMP includes a careful assessment of the significance and sensitivity the natural features and functions present together with an analysis of impacts arising from surrounding land uses and public use within the ESA. The Coves CMP identifies issues and provides management priorities to ensure protection of the long term ecological integrity of the Coves ESA to sustain the diversity of native plants, animals and habitats present and it

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identifies ongoing monitoring to support adaptive management.

The CMP was developed through a two year consultative process and provides the framework for ongoing adaptive ecological management of the Coves. The Friends of the Coves Subwatershed Incorporated (FOTCSI) is a community-based organization with the following mission statement: *We believe that the quality of life in our community is enhanced through the protection, conservation and wise stewardship of the Coves Subwatershed.* The Friends of the Coves initiated the completion of the Coves Subwatershed Plan (PEIL, 2004) and were key stakeholders in the CMP process.

The Council adopted Planning and Design Standards for Trails in ESAs guideline document was followed in the delineation of management zones and for trail system planning and the Coves ESA CMP is consistent with the trail standards document and process.

Key Elements of a Conservation Master Plan (CMP)

- Information on the natural heritage features and functions and their ecological significance;
- Refinement of the ESA boundary;
- Proposed management zones and activities to restore and enhance ecological functions;
- Identification of appropriate uses, including access areas and formalized trail system;
- Opportunities for community engagement and stewardship;
- Identification of priority areas for acquisition, where appropriate;
- Monitoring framework to inform adaptive management, and;
- Commitment to work with key partners.

The CMP process is undertaken in two phases. Phase I of the CMP provided a detailed life science inventory sufficient to formalize and refine the ESA boundaries, and define management zones consistent with the Planning and Design Standards for Trails in ESAs.

Phase II of the CMP included a substantial public engagement process and formation of a Local Advisory Committee (LAC) to obtain input on goals, objectives, recommendations and a long term implementation plan based on the priorities identified. One of the most important components of the CMP is how public use will be managed through careful trail design, signage, education and stewardship. Trail planning and design must address physical sustainability (trails that will retain their form over years of use and natural forces acting on them); ecological sustainability (managing the impacts of trail location and use to ensure no loss of ecological features and functions) and stewardship (fostering of individual and collective responsibility for protection of natural areas).

The LAC consisted of interested members of the local community, the larger London public, other organized groups including FOTCSI, Nature London, Old South Community Organization, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA), and Advisory Committees of Council (EEPAC, LACH). The LAC met several times to work with staff and consultants on the Conservation Master Plan.

In Phase II, the LAC:

1. Helped to identify existing management issues;
2. Attended ESA site visits to help to resolve Plan issues;
3. Helped to develop the trail plan, restoration plan and recommendations; and
4. Reviewed the draft Phase I and Phase II Conservation Master Plan Reports

Key Meeting Dates for Phase II of the CMP Process:

Public Engagement was a key part of the CMP process for the Coves ESA and extra effort and time was spent on this given the strong public interest in the Coves ESA. The LAC met 6 times on the following dates: November 27, 2013, January 23, 2014, March 5, 2014, April 23, 2014, May 21, 2014, July 7, 2014. A Public Meeting and visit to Euston Park was held on June 4, 2014. Public Meetings were held on January 28, 2014 and May 14, 2014.

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STUDY

ESA Boundary Delineation

Lands that are now being incorporated inside the ESA boundary consistent with the recommendations of the CMP include the Southcrest Ravine, Euston Meadows, successional habitat within an old apple orchard with evidence of old Thames River meander channels, and an ecological linkage to the Thames River. These and other areas were included based on the application of the City’s Boundary Delineation Guidelines for ESAs in the Environmental Management Guidelines and the old and new boundaries are identified on page 53 of the CMP.

- Total area of land inside revised Coves ESA boundary = 85.4 ha
- Total area inside current Coves ESA boundary as identified on Schedule B1 = 34.6 ha
- Publicly owned land within the revised Coves ESA Boundary = 46.2 ha
- 54% of the land inside the revised ESA boundary is publicly owned land

Trail Enhancements

The Coves ESA CMP is consistent with the Planning and Design Standards in ESAs document and process. The only notable exception is the Southcrest Ravine area which was identified as a Natural Area 1 Management Zone with a Level 2 Pedestrian Trail (using one of the two existing, informal trails) by the consultants at North South Environmental Inc., due to the high level of use by students at Westminster Secondary School, Ecole Frere Andre and many others from the surrounding community. This decision was supported by the LAC. There is a large area of woodland present on the steep slopes along Silver Creek Southcrest Ravine and native, tableland woodland-vegetation above which contributed to the Natural Area 1 Management Zoning being applied here. There are two well used informal-trails that currently traverse the ravine and woodlands.

To protect the NA1 sensitive features, the CMP recommends the closure and ecological restoration of the informal, existing, northern-trail, and improvement of the informal, existing southern trail including the installation of a boardwalk / bridge over Silver Creek to ensure a more sustainable solution that limits the number of trails through the ravine and woodland to one, to better protect the native vegetation in the ravine while permitting managed public-access through the Coves ESA. Level 2 Pedestrian Trails are hiking trails improved with surface hardening (such as limestone screenings), where the travelled portion of the trail falls within a variable standard of 0.5 – 2.0 m width.

CMP Implementation Priorities

Through a priority setting exercise with the LAC, and the public, the following areas and items are identified in the CMP as a high priority:

East Pond

- improved trail surfaces for public use
- installation of boardwalk to protect wetland

Elmwood Gateway

- improved trail connections from Elmwood Gateway to Coves ESA
- closure of trail and restoration of slope erosion

Euston Meadow

- re-alignment of trails to protect open habitat for species at risk
- improved trail surfaces for public use
- maintain open habitat for species at risk
- management of exotic and invasive species

Southcrest Ravine

- formalize and improve existing trail connection east to west across Silver Creek
- installation of a safe and sustainable trail crossing bridge/boardwalk over Silver Creek

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Monitoring and Adaptive Management of Coves ESA

- Invasive Species and Restoration
- Trampling / Erosion / New Informal Trails
- Encroachment / Inappropriate Uses
- Water Chemistry & Temperature

NEXT STEPS

The publically-owned Coves ESA lands will be managed by the UTRCA under contract with the City beginning in 2015. The Coves ESA has been formally adopted through the City's new Adopt an ESA program by the Friends of the Coves who have agreed to assist with stewardship and with fundraising to ensure timely implementation of the CMP.

There are funds identified in the City's capital budget forecast for ESA Management 2015, 2016 and 2017 to begin work on high priority implementation and management items in 2015. Staff applied to the National Trails Coalition for a grant of \$75,000.00 for additional Federal funding for implementation of the Coves ESA CMP.

Environmental and Parks Planning would like to thank Vanessa Kinsley, Julie Michaud, Pat Donnelly, Tom Copeland, Friends of the Coves, EEPAC, UTRCA, Nature London and members of the LAC for their work on the Coves Environmentally Significant Area Conservation Master Plan.

PREPARED BY:	SUBMITTED BY:
L. MCDUGALL ECOLOGIST, MES, OALA, RPP ENVIRONMENTAL & PARKS PLANNING	A. MACPHERSON, OALA MANAGER ENVIRONMENTAL & PARKS PLANNING
RECOMMENDED BY:	
JOHN M. FLEMING, MCIP, RPP MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER	

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Appendix A – Conservation Master Plan for the Coves Environmentally Significant Area, North South Environmental Inc.
(140+ Page Electronic PDF only - **do not print Appendix A in the PEC Report**)