

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS STRATEGIC PLANNING & PRIORITIES COMMITTEE MEETING ON JANUARY 9, 2012 at 4:45 pm
FROM:	P. McNALLY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT and ENGINEERING SERVICES
SUBJECT:	THAMES VALLEY CORRIDOR PLAN FINAL REPORT

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Executive Director of Planning, Environment and Engineering Services, the following actions **BE TAKEN** regarding the Thames Valley Corridor Plan to recognize that the Thames River Valley represents the City's most valued ecological, recreational and aesthetic resource:

- a) The Thames Valley Corridor Plan, attached as Appendix "A", **BE APPROVED** for the long-term protection and enhancement of the Thames River Valley in London;
- b) The implementation Action Plan for the Thames Valley Corridor Plan, attached as Appendix "B", **BE RECEIVED** outlining the City's plans for the long-term protection and enhancement Thames River Valley;
- c) Staff **BE DRIECTED** to initiate an Official Plan amendment to incorporate the recommended policies into London's Official Plan, and;
- d) The Corridor Advisory Committee **BE THANKED** for their participation in the drafting of the Plan.

It being noted, that a Business Case for additional funding for the Thames Valley Corridor Plan was submitted through the 2012 budget process to the Service Review Committee in order to carry out the recommended actions within a shortened timeline with enhanced features to meet community expectations. This business case was referred to the Investment and Economic Prosperity Committee for their consideration.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
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Dec. 13, 2010 BNEC report on the Draft Thames Valley Corridor Plan, recommending circulation for comments to finalize the Plan.

THAMES VALLEY CORRIDOR PLAN

The Thames River Valley is London's most important natural, cultural, recreational and aesthetic resource. It is highly valued by the community, and the City has recognized the need to prepare a comprehensive strategy that will protect and enhance its environmental features and accommodate the multi-functional role of the river valley system over the long-term, through the approval and implementation of the Thames Valley Corridor Plan.

The final document builds upon the research and documentation compiled in Phase 1 to create a comprehensive Plan that reflects community values, ecological and heritage attributes, current land use regulations, required municipal servicing needs, future directions for parks & recreation and natural areas planning.

Throughout the development of the Plan, several other City initiatives were in process that required coordination and/or input to ensure that these concurrent City projects were complimentary. This includes:

- Downtown Master Plan
- Clear Water Revival
- Climate Change research
- Springbank Dam reconstruction
- Thames River Fisheries Update
- Trail Planning and Design Standards for ESAs
- SOHO Community Plan
- Meadowlily Secondary Plan
- Meadowlily Bridge EA

Where appropriate, this Plan accommodates recommendations from other Plans, such as: potential future needs for greater flood protection, unresolved issues for dam reconstruction, efforts to improve the quality of river water and development concept plans adjacent to the Thames Corridor. Also, other Plans were revised to accommodate key recommendations of this Plan, such as refining the limits of possible redevelopment options within the SOHO Area.

PLAN COMPONENTS

The Plan represents an integrated product that illustrates, through a series of maps and supporting documentation, how the protection and enhancements of the valley corridor will be realized through:

- natural heritage protection, including species-at-risk
- new park pathways to complete system gaps, and improved trails
- focussed recreational activity areas and facilities along the Valley
- open space areas for stewardship initiatives and ecological restoration
- park enhancements at the Forks that support Downtown initiatives
- land use guidelines and related policies
- built and natural heritage interpretation possibilities
- adjacent urban redevelopment opportunities and constraints
- key land acquisition recommendations

PUBLIC and COMMITTEE INPUT

In order to obtain valuable community/public input on the valley corridor, the consultant hosted two open-house meetings and a public survey. Both activities were well received and generated issues ranging from improved natural heritage protection to water quality to recreation needs to heritage bridge retention. In addition, a Corridor Advisory Committee was struck and provided expertise into the direction for the future of the corridor. The Draft Report was posted on the City's web site for public comment. In 2011, the consulting team and staff met with the Corridor Advisory Committee to discuss any final concerns or comments that they may have had. Where possible, those suggested edits have been incorporated into the final Plan.

At the December 2010 Built and Natural Environment Committee meeting, the Committee received the draft report and a brief presentation, and provided staff with the following general comments: the Thames Valley is one of London's greatest assets and we should do more to make use of the river and the parklands; enhancement of the parks at the Forks should be a priority and done well in order to support upcoming Downtown initiatives; we need to provide

better access to the water; the Plan needs to focus on “actions” – projects that we can get started on now, rather than further studies first; the natural environment along the river requires protection and restoration, and land acquisition along the Thames should be a priority.

These comments have also been addressed in the final Plan. In particular, the format of the report has been changed to highlight the planned “action” items first – activities that can be started to implement the Plan, and then follow up with the longer-term components that require further planning or study.

The second main point was that we should implement sooner than planned, if possible, and think larger-scale for some key recommendations, as this Plan supports the up-coming planning for Downtown and the Thames River system has huge tourism potential. To respond, staff prepared a Business Case that proposes increases to current capital funding and brings forward construction of several key action items. The Business case has been submitted for review through the 2012 budget process.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The Plan calls for an enhanced focus on the Thames River Valley to build on current planning, design, restoration, acquisition and construction activities that make up the City’s annual activities. As a Canadian Heritage River, and the City’s most important natural, cultural, recreational and aesthetic resource, this renewed and expanded focus is warranted and supported by community input gathered as part of the process.

Key implementation actions that highlight the main areas of the Plan and the collective community interests include:

1. **Ecological Restoration Plan** - With the assistance of our 2011 summer student, we were able to create an Ecological Restoration Plan that pulls together all of the ecologically focussed recommendations into a project-based plan. This includes addressing invasive species, woodland degradation and species-at-risk habitat protection and enhancement. As almost all current annual funding for woodland management is being recommended for use in addressing the impacts of Emerald Ash Borer, a very limited amount of the recommended work in this Plan can be accomplished within current annual capital programs over the next several years.

An application has been made seeking Federal funding in 2012 to assist with the protection of species-at-risk habitats along the Valley. Other work from the Ecological Action Plan could begin in 2012, if funding in the Business Case is approved through the 2012 budget process.

2. **Harris Park Redevelopment** – Harris Park has been identified in our District Park capital budget (PD1023) for funding over several years, starting in 2014, for a total budget of \$1.3 million. As this is a relatively small annual budget and covers 24 district parks across the City, it is proposed that capital be pooled over several years to start design in 2014 and construction in 2017. The work will include pathway and lighting upgrades and shoreline restoration work to address river bank stabilization and naturalization.

Also included in the Business Case is a request for \$1 million to fund the enhanced redevelopment of Harris Park to better support events and permit greater access to the river’s edge with boardwalks. This request brings forward the start of the design process into 2012 and construction of the park from 2017 to 2014.

- 3. Thames Valley Parkway** – The Parkway is the City’s most valued recreational asset and public input into the process identified that completing gaps in the pathway system as a high priority. These have been identified in our capital budget forecast, beginning with the design study for the connection between Richmond Street and Adelaide Street North in 2012 and \$850k for construction. Linking Riverbend to the west end of the main pathway in Springbank Park is forecasted for 2014/15 at \$750k and completing the Forks “loop” along Riverside Drive and a link to the Cavendish Area under Wharncliffe Road is currently slated for 2017.

The Business Case seeks funding to complete these projects sooner and with a higher level of design and amenity, such as river look-outs and seating/rest areas.

- 4. Celebrating our Heritage River** – The Thames is a Canadian Heritage River and its valley contains many historical attributes that are not well known or celebrated. The Plan calls for an expanded and consistent interpretive program for the river valley. Implementation of this work will require a partnership approach with the many heritage groups and volunteers who have assisted the City with such projects in the past. Alternative funding sources will be sought out for this work.

As coordination and implementation can be very time-consuming to properly recognize the wealth of London’s history, the Business Case contemplates funding to hire heritage specialists to lead this component of the Plan.

To support the implementation of the Plan, a Business Case was submitted to identify additional capital requirements to satisfy the intent of the recommendations and the direction of Council to bring forward implementation of key components sooner than the current budget forecast permits. This would include a 2-year contract employee to initiate all of the new and expanded projects, ensure that the other related City studies continue to be coordinated with this Plan and that the City continues to benefit from the partnerships developed through the creation of the Plan.

Without the funding proposed in the Business Case, existing staff resources will address the recommendations of the Plan as part of our yearly activities and as capital budgets permit over an extended period. Many of the goals and recommendations of the Plan confirm the on-going efforts of the City in managing the lands along the Thames River for its wide range of uses. In addition to new recommendations and “actions”, several annual capital programs that support the Plan will continue to be implemented. In summary, the projects planned in 2012 are:

- Apply for funding from the federal government for the protection and enhancement of habitats for Species-at-risk along the Thames;
- Initiate the planning and design of the Thames Valley Parkway between Richmond Street and Adelaide Street North;
- Increase trail management activities in newly acquired areas of Meadowlily Woods ESA to deter BMX/mountain cycling;
- Complete a pathway section under Highbury Avenue North eastward to link to new neighbourhoods;
- Install a trail boardwalk to protect a sensitive ravine in Kains Woods ESA, and;
- Complete the planned look-out over the Blackburn Memorial Fountain at the Forks.

For 2013, the Plan recommendations will be reviewed for integration into the annual capital budget and implementation of the Plan will continue yearly.

CONCLUSION

The Thames Valley Corridor Plan represents a comprehensive strategy that will protect and enhance the environmental features of the Thames River Valley while accommodating the multi-functional role of the river valley system over the long-term. A focussed effort will be required to implement the recommendations of the Plan and continue our efforts to ensure that all subsequent planning, design and engineering processes and projects align with Londoner's vision for the Thames.

The City will continue to seek out the knowledge and experience of those who assisted us through the preparation of the Plan to date. We will work with our partners to continue the detailed planning and design aspects of the Plan to ensure that Londoner's vision for the Thames River – a Canadian Heritage River- is fulfilled by the implementation of this Plan.

A follow up report on implementation progress and successes will be provided in 2017.

PREPARED BY:	SUBMITTED BY:
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RECOMMENDED BY:	CONCURRED BY:
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January 24, 2012
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APPENDIX A

THAMES VALLEY CORRIDOR PLAN

(Enclosed Separately)

APPENDIX B

**ACTION PLAN
(Enclosed Separately)**