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L. McDougall

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS COMMUNITY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING ON OCTOBER 20, 2015
FROM:	J. M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER
SUBJECT:	COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS - WESTMINSTER WORKING GROUP

RECOMMENDATION

That a 2 meter wide, granular-surface, pathway connection open to bicycles and pedestrians, from Parliament Crescent to Commissioners Road East in Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA, as recommended by the Trails Advisory Group, **BE APPROVED**.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
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August 25, 2014 Community Services Committee – Provided updates and a request for funding to complete the ecological studies.

November 12, 2012 Community Services Committee – Provided updates and next steps regarding the feasibility of a community connection from Parliament Crescent to Commissioners Road East.

May 29, 2012 Community Services Committee – Directed the Civic Administration to work with the Westminster Working Group to develop a proposal for a multiuse pathway from the Westminster neighbourhood to Commissioners Road East and report back within 6 months.

BACKGROUND

Context

The Westminster Working Group requested a multiuse pathway (Level 3) be constructed from the Westminster neighbourhood to Commissioners Road East. Level 3 multi-use asphalt pathways are not typically part of the trail system within an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA). However, the Council approved Planning and Design Standards for Trails in ESAs document states that: *"In exceptional circumstances, Level 3 pathways may be constructed ... to maintain an existing connection among neighbourhoods where a safe alternative route outside of the ESA is not available."* To proceed with the study of the feasibility of a multi-use connection, an update of the ecological inventory of the Westminster Ponds / Pond Mills Environmentally Significant Area (WMP ESA) was required.

The City's consultants have completed the ecological inventory work and Management Zone (MZ) map for the WMP ESA and the Ecological Inventory & Management Zone Report has been reviewed by Environmental and Ecological Planning Advisory Committee (EEPAC). EEPAC's comments were formally addressed on their April 16, 2015 agenda. Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks are confirmed to be nesting in the centre of the meadow over the former landfill. These ground nesting birds are Provincially listed as Threatened Species at Risk making the central portion of this meadow area a Nature Reserve (NR) MZ following the Planning and Design Standards for Trails in ESAs document. Any possible multi-use connection must avoid this NR area. In fact all trails should avoid this NR area. The improved neighbourhood connection is therefore proposed on the adjacent lands in a Natural Area 1

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(NA1) MZ primarily over a Utility Overlay for the sanitary sewer for the landfill. This proposed route is also parallel to the Utility Overlay for CN rail line and the hydro corridor as identified attached WMP ESA Trails Advisory Group Map (Schedule A). As this proposed route was not contemplated in the ESA Master Plan, the Council-approved process requires further review by the Trails Advisory Group (TAG).

The surface and width for the connection were further refined based on a site-visit meeting with members of the TAG on September 10, 2015. TAG members present (and those who were notified but not did not attend*) included a representative from each of the following member groups consistent with the TAG Terms of Reference (TOR) and as identified in the TAG minutes.

- Thames Valley Trail Association
- EEPAC
- Nature London
- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
- Accessibility and Advisory Committee*
- Westminster Working Group (local community group)
- Adopt an ESA Group (Westminster Ponds / Pond Mills ESA)
- City Ecologist (facilitator)

TAG unanimously agreed that a 2 meter wide, granular-surface pathway over the existing sewer and avoiding the NR zone, open to permit bikes, with a bike tunnel design for the stairs (and repairs to the stairs and railings) at the Parliament Crescent access was the best solution to satisfy the original intent of the community's desire and Council's direction to staff.

TAG also agreed that closing the existing trails through the NR MZ areas with wood barricades and strategic plantings of Prickly-ash, is best for the protection of the significant habitat.

Conclusion

Creation of the new path and the closing of existing ad hoc and unmanaged trails is the best way to provide the community connection and improve protection of significant habitat in the ESA.

Next Steps

Funding for this project was included in a previous year's budget for the Westminster area. Construction will proceed later this fall or in the spring of 2016.

PREPARED BY:	SUBMITTED BY:
L. MCDUGALL, MES, OALA, RPP ECOLOGIST 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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SCHEDULE A

