

Trails Advisory Group for Environmentally Significant Areas

Terms of Reference

1.0 Background

The Trails Advisory Group (TAG) will assist with the implementation of the Planning and Design Standards for Trails in Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) as approved by City Council on June 27, 2012. The Council resolution specifies that; *an ESA Trails Advisory Group be established representing all user groups with diverse membership, including the Thames Valley Trail Association, to comment on any trail related issues in ESAs that were not addressed or contemplated in the most current Conservation Master Plans.*

ESAs are identified in the City's Official Plan as areas that contain natural features and perform ecological functions that warrant their protection in a natural state. Publicly-owned ESAs have a purpose and function distinct from all other publicly owned open space parks. Permitted uses, access, and the provision of recreational activities within ESAs are governed by the Environmental Policies of the Official Plan for significant components of the natural heritage system. These policies and practices must be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement issued under authority of Section 3 of the Planning Act to protect essential ecological processes and natural values of provincial interest and the quality of the natural environment from incompatible development and site alteration.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of the TAG is to provide comment on trail related issues in London's ESAs that were not addressed or contemplated in the most current Conservation Master Plan (CMP) for each ESA. It serves as an information conduit with respective organization members and leverages resources within the community. The TAG serves as the communication link for local trails volunteers and stakeholders. The expected benefits of such a strategy include sharing expertise and perspectives leading to greater understanding and cooperation among stakeholders.

Policies for trail planning and design are implemented through the CMP process which typically includes consultation with Environmental and Ecological Planning Advisory Committee (EEPAC), public participation meetings, and a public meeting before Planning Environment Committee. As most CMPs include recommendations for implementation over a 10 year period, situations may arise where alternative trail alignments or solutions may be required due to the dynamic nature of ecosystems. The TAG will provide part of the public engagement process for comments on trails not originally addressed or contemplated in the most current CMPs. The TAG is an advisory body and is not an approval authority.

3.0 Responsibilities and Functions

The TAG will provide timely, consistent and effective trail planning and design comments by:

- (a) Reviewing and suggesting creative trail design responses to the identified problems in the establishment of trails and trail structures;
- (b) Ensuring proposed trails and trail structures are consistent with the Council adopted Planning and Design Standards for Trails in Environmentally Significant Areas.
- (c) Fostering an effective working relationship with all trail user groups and organizations; and
- (d) Broadening public discussion about trails and ESAs in London and strengthening public input.

4.0 Membership

The TAG shall be comprised of:

- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from TVTA
- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from EEPAC
- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from Nature London
- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from UTRCA
- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from Accessibility Advisory Committee
- A representative from the neighbourhood community association and a representative from the directly associated “Friends of” ESA group will be included based on which ESA the TAG is reviewing
- City staff who will facilitate meetings and site visits

5.0 Terms of Office

Service on the TAG is a 2 year appointment confirmed by October 1st. TAG representatives shall serve without compensation. Appointment to the TAG will be by nomination from within each of the user groups and organizations. Representatives (or their alternate representative) must be available and provide their own transportation to attend all meetings of the TAG.

6.0 Processes / Meetings

- The TAG will meet as required, usually onsite, to address specific trail projects and identified problem trail sites in ESAs that were not originally contemplated or addressed in the current ESA Master Plans.

- City staff will set the meeting agenda, location and provide background information, maps and photos to facilitate meetings.
- The TAG will strive for consensus in making decisions. However, if consensus is not reached after significant effort, a majority of the TAG members present will be required to make a decision.
- City staff will take TAG meeting minutes and summarize the results and distribute the minutes to TAG members within two weeks after TAG meetings.
- The TAG representatives will liaise with members of the public as well as their respective stakeholder groups in order to share information both to and from the TAG.
- Communication between EEPAC and TAG and back will be through the City Ecologist.