

April 8, 2018

To: Chair and Members of the Planning and Environmental Committee

**Subject: Public Meeting of the Planning and Environment Committee of Council
Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA (South) Conservation Master Plan – April 16th**

We are supportive of the environmental analysis and restoration elements in the Conservation Master Plan, Phase II MVHF South March 2018 (CMP). We are NOT supportive of the current trail plan presented in the CMP as it comes up well short of extending the North section's multi-use pathway (from Sunningdale to Fanshawe) through the South portion of the ESA to Western University campus.

Recommendation to Planning and Environment Committee (PEC):

We recommend PEC consider requesting City staff to develop a trail option for PEC's review that would include a multi-use pathway through the South connecting the North pathway with connection points at Western. The trail could include a multi-use pathway connecting Windermere and Gainsborough. The pathways would be mostly installed over the sanitary sewer lines, similar to the pathway design in the North section. It would be fully compliant to the AODA requirements. The option from staff should include Rough Order of Magnitude Costing.

Background:

At the February 2017 Council Meeting, City Council initiated the Phase II CMP be developed. Council specified that the process for the CMP development follow the process described in the Trail Guidelines in an ESA (2016), revised by Dillon. During the Local Advisory Committee (LAC) meetings, Dillon communicated that the trail designs must be compliant with the Trail Guidelines. This decision effectively turned the Trail Guidelines into requirements. During the review of trail options and features, Dillon determined that a multi-use pathway would not be compliant with the Guidelines and was rejected. Furthermore, Dillon advised that the trail system in the North, and the current Metamora Bridge in the South are also NOT compliant with the Trail Guidelines. This is surprising, shocking actually, because both of those are included in the CMP and are held up by Dillon, staff and users, as examples of effectively protecting the environment, while allowing users to enjoy the natural environment. We disagree with Dillon's interpretation and application of the Trail Guidelines, believing that a multi-use pathway over the combined sewer meets the intent of the Guidelines. Like the pathway in the North, the South would be AODA accessible and used by a diverse group of users, including City maintenance staff and Upper Thames Conservation Authority staff and their vehicles. After all, it is one ESA.

The environment vs the trail system:

The trade-offs are not between a properly designed trail system, that goes where users want to go, and the environment. The CMP points out that in the North users are staying on the path. The CMP also points out that when a trail is not properly designed and doesn't offer the connections they desire, users go off the formal trail and make alternatives. This can be seen in the South maps with many informal trails and creek crossings. At the open house, many attendees stated they wanted a connected, continuous pathway through the valley. This CMP does not accomplish this, so we can expect some users to continue to make informal trails and crossings. The CMP states that the biggest negative impact to the environment is the introduction of invasive species. Community involvement in the North has been a resource to aid the City when the call goes out to help in this area. Therefore we see the trade-off being the cost of the trail, the bridges and if required, private property acquisition, not the environment.

The London Plan

One of the three Plan cornerstones is "Connected". It applies to a wide range of characteristics of our City, including our walking trails and bike path systems. Several sections of the plan and attached maps detail the vision and the gaps. The decisions made for this CMP offer a further opportunity to fill in more gaps, connecting the pathways North of Sunningdale, East of Richmond from over the approved pedestrian bridge and West from Foxfield through the MVHF ESA to the Thames Valley Trail System that runs through Western. Page 364, paragraph 1421 states CMPs "shall consider the City's Planning and Design Standards for Trails in ESAs" (The document has been replaced with The Guidelines). This gives Council wider scope in its review and approval of trail options, as fully complying with the Guidelines is NOT required by the London Plan.

Bicycles in ESAs

Bicycles are generally harmful for ESAs and are therefore mostly prohibited. The CMP in several places states that bicycles are a prohibited use along with camp fires, dogs off leash, etc. However, bicycles are allowed on level 3 trails and are currently allowed on the paved path in the North and on some of the granular paths in the South. We are not aware of bike user issues in the North. Consideration by the LAC of bike paths in the South, was not included in LAC's scope. We suggest that the CMP be revised to qualify the prohibition of bicycles, noting there is one new level 3 trail in the CMP. We are not advocating that bicycles should or should not be allowed in the MVHF ESA. However if allowed, we think biking should be restricted to recreational biking. We do recommend that PEC review this aspect of the CMP. The London Plan is helpful, page 79, paragraph 352 specifies a completely separate network for recreational cycling. While this can be accomplished on residential streets, it is part of the North ESA and pathway connections into the ESA. PEC may want to review extending this feature through the South.

Keith Zerebecki (member of LAC) and Lori Zerebecki
205- 240 Village Walk Blvd.
London, Ontario, Canada
N6G OP6

Sent from my iPad