

2018 April 05

To: PEC

From: Susan Hall, alternate representative from EEPAC on the LAC for the Conservation Master Plan Phase 2 for the Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA (south)

Re: Decision making process and role of the LAC

I am writing to comment on the process that was used to solicit and use public opinion (primarily opinion from the members of the LAC which included representatives from community groups and 2 City of London Advisory Committees) for the development of the Phase 2 CMP for the Medway Valley Heritage Forest, south.

The Terms of Reference of the LAC, (described in *Appendix B: Local Advisory Committee Terms of Reference and Meeting Minutes* in the March 18 draft) is “to provide an opportunity for small group discussion with those who are identified stakeholders related to the Medway Valley Heritage Forest (south) ESA. The LAC is an advisory committee and is not an approval authority. The group will discuss and provide feedback on the Phase 2 work to achieve the following specific objectives:

- Review information provided and provide input and insight related to Phase 2 of the CMP;
- Provide input and insight related to the consultation with the broader community;
- Represent diverse perspectives and interests; and,
- Work collaboratively to try to resolve issues ”

As outlined above, the meetings included opportunities to clarify and provide feedback in different ways including verbally, and through writing (electronic table format). Two meetings of the LAC were held before the public input session. Representatives sitting on the committee expressed a variety of different viewpoints. Some wanted bicycle paths that were continuous with the paths north of Fanshawe Park Road, others accessible options, some wanted minimal change.

Electronic, written comments provided by many of the LAC members indicated a clear opposition to crossings. Though positions were different, everybody cared.

At LAC meeting #3 which took place after the public information and input session a potential plan was presented which included 5 different locations for crossings.

When asked how this decision was made given the nature of the written comments it was explained “that while the LAC comments are under consideration there was other feedback from the public that also has to be considered and reviewed with the Guidelines which included requests for connections and crossings.” (*p. 2, LAC #3, Appendix B*) The facilitator “provided more clarity to the LAC on the engagement/survey process and that, with multiple platforms being used, comments have to be carefully considered as the comments are not weighted. The process was not intended to be one of statistical sampling/data collection for decision-making. Comments received during the engagement process from the public and the LAC to date were used to identify items for consideration in the Draft CMP and review with the Guidelines for Management Zones and Trails in ESAs rather than being tabulated to make decisions (*p. 3, LAC #3, Appendix B*)”.

The above rationale is open to interpretation and it doesn't provide a clear answer. It felt, though, like the comments made by LAC members had little value or weight in this decision. What then is the role of the LAC and why go through this process when greater weight appears to be given to the general public's input?

As mentioned above, one of the roles of the LAC is to “work collaboratively to try to resolve issues”. I don't believe that this happened. At the final LAC meeting, representatives were asked if they could endorse moving the plan forward to the public and Council. Only 4 out of the 12 present felt that they could endorse the draft CMP. A process encouraging collaboration or perhaps consensus might have produced different results. As an alternate LAC representative I would have been interested in knowing, for example, what accessible meant to the ACCAC and how that was operationalized for path surfaces and connections. How might common ground be reached in this process so that more members felt that they had used their time to make a positive contribution towards the next stage of the Medway Valley Heritage Forest (south)?

The Medway Valley Heritage Forest (south) is such a beautiful area and truly a jewel in the City.

In conclusion, a clear, open process using consensus building might have led to a more positive outcome. This would have mirrored the level of care and hard work that many, individuals and groups have put into the valley.

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