

--	--

Planner: B. Bergsma

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
FROM:	JOHN M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER
SUBJECT:	MEDWAY VALLEY HERITAGE FOREST ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREA - NORTH TRAIL MASTER PLANNING STUDY MEETING ON APRIL 9, 2013
	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MEETING

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Planning and City Planner, the following recommendations regarding the Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA – North, Trail Master Planning Study **BE TAKEN**:

- a) The North Medway Valley Heritage Forest Environmentally Significant Area Trail Master Planning Study, Appendix “A”, **BE ACCEPTED**;
- b) The recommended Trail Option 5B – ‘Enhanced Accessibility’ **BE APPROVED** for implementation, as shown in Appendix “B”;
- c) Additional spring inventory to confirm the management zone limits and boardwalk layout around the ‘bend’ in the Medway Creek to cross the Wonderland Road Tributary **BE INITIATED** this spring;
- d) Implementation of the recommended trail option, including “on-road” linkages **BE INITIATED** and include involvement of the Transportation Division and the Trails Advisory Group as required by the City’s Trails Standards in ESAs;
- e) That staff **CONTINUE** land acquisition discussions with private landowners to support implementation of the preferred option; and
- f) That staff **DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT** a monitoring program for the long-term sustainability of the trail use for intended objectives that will consider adaptive management where and if required.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
--

August 30, 2004	Environment & Transportation Committee Report that recommended proceeding with the 30 day Environmental Assessment Addendum review period, noting that the concerns of S. Levin (specific environmental concerns) and the Attawandaron Residents Association (requesting asphalt pathway links) had been addressed.
Nov.16, 2009	Community Services Committee report for the approval of the Parks Recreation Strategic Master Plan Update. As part of the approval of the Master Plan, Committee and Council endorsed a “moratorium” on asphalt pathways in Environmentally Significant Areas (ESA).
June 7, 2010	Planning Committee report regarding environmental monitoring of Phase II of the Medway trunk sanitary sewer construction, which noted that the maintenance access road was gravel, except where it entered the valley and the steeper slopes warranted an asphalt surface.
June 26, 2012	Planning & Environment Committee report recommending approval of new standards for trails in ESAs. With the new trail planning process and design standards based on ecological zoning, the moratorium on asphalt pathways was lifted.

--	--

Planner: B. Bergsma

BACKGROUND

Environmentally Significant Areas

The key management decision for all ESAs in the City is: what is the best way to protect the ESA for the future and permit appropriate public use?

Environmentally Significant Areas, by definition, are areas that require more ecological protection than other parkland or greenspaces. The primacy of protecting these patches of significant natural environment as natural environments in urban areas needs to be recognized and respected. The key responsibility of urban conservation land managers is to find the best way to protect and restore (as much as possible) a healthy functioning ecological community in the face of fundamentally altered ecology of the urban environment and public pressure for access and recreation.

The ideal trail system for an ESA is one that recognizes this reality, provides protection of significant features of the ESA and permits appropriate use that can be maintained into the future. Planning and management of the Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA (north of Fanshawe Park Road) is unique as it contains a trunk sanitary sewer and permanent asphalt and gravel maintenance access roads that have already had impacts on the ecology of the ESA and changed how trail planning would normally occur.

Medway Trunk Sanitary Sewer Addendum

The 2004 Environmental Assessment Addendum was carried out to divide the sanitary sewer work north of Fanshawe Park Road into two steps to minimize environmental impacts and permit servicing in phases. As part of the process, new requirements for maintenance access were incorporated and the EA recommended that the construction of the sewer should be in general accordance with the original Class EA with modifications: “access to and along the sewer alignment should be provided to allow City operations staff ready access for maintenance purposes with such access route to be developed and constructed in conjunction with the master multi-use path system proposed for the Medway Valley north of Fanshawe Park Road”. The recreational pathway system for the valley was ultimately supported in the EA Addendum to address environmental issues, ecological restoration issues, and the inclusion of a recreational pathway with the sewer construction to provide social/community benefits.

2005 Medway Valley North Pathway Master Plan

In conjunction with the sewer EA, it was recognized that a pathway master plan should be completed to address public use that would come with development. The Plan was developed with community input in 2004/5 and recommended a continuous asphalt multi-use pathway along the sewer alignment with 5 bridges over the Medway Creek. The pathway would provide the required maintenance access, with no further disruption to the environment of the valley. Phase I of the pathway Plan was installed with Phase I of the sewer. The access road/pathway was installed at 4m wide to suit truck access – normal recreational pathways are 3m wide. This pathway system saw an average of 1,900 users per month from August through October, 2012 and 520 users per month over the winter. Local residents have identified this as an important community linkage.

During the design of Phase I, an alternative sewer maintenance access route was proposed that eliminated the 3 northern bridges – saving substantial costs and reducing environmental impacts. Without a continuous route, the recreational pathway system could not proceed and the June 2009 tender documents for Phase II therefore eliminated the asphalt surfacing of the maintenance access road, prior to the asphalt moratorium. It was recognized at that time, that a revised Pathway Master Plan was required.

Agenda Item #	Page #

Planner: B. Bergsma

Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA Trail Planning Study

To test the new Planning and Design Standards for Trails in ESAs, the Medway Valley North project was brought forward as it needed resolution to complete the trail system. It was understood that the Medway Valley is an exceptional situation due to the construction of a trunk sanitary sewer within the ESA with permanent access roads and the resulting impacts that have had adverse impacts on the environment. Therefore, the Trail Standards document cannot be applied perfectly in this situation due to the infrastructure located within the valley, the resulting modified environment, and the recommendations from the 1999 EA and 2004 EA Addendum.

To carry out this project, a new group was established so that local residents could participate – the Planning Advisory Group (PAG). This is a standard process for developing master plans in ESAs as local residents can have specific knowledge of the area and will generally be the main users of the area. The first meeting of the PAG was in January 2010.

Three public meetings were held and public surveys and trail preferences tested and incorporated into the option evaluation. Additional meetings with the Sunningdale community were held as well as presentations to the City’s advisory committees – Environmental and Ecological Planning Advisory Committee and Accessibility Advisory Committee.

The summary of public input and Committee comments is included in the Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA Trail Master Planning Study, attached as Appendix A.

TRAIL PLANNING ISSUES SUMMARY

Environmentally Significant Areas are the City’s most significant natural areas and through policy and guidelines, the protection of the natural features and ecological functions of an ESA is the primary goal with appropriate passive recreation permitted. Within the Medway Valley ESA, north of Fanshawe Park Road, there are many competing (and often opposing) factors and circumstances to be considered in developing a sustainable trail system that will protect sensitive features and functions. These include:

- The 1996 Sunningdale Community Plan recommended a trail system within the Medway Valley for passive recreation.
- The 2004 Medway Trunk Sanitary Sewer Environmental Assessment (EA) recommended that the sewer maintenance access road be aligned with the planned asphalt pathway system in the Valley (completed in 2004/5).
- The pathway system was recommended as it provided a social and environmental benefit to help off-set the negative impacts of the sewer construction in the MVHF ESA.
- Phase I of the access road/pathway was installed, including 2 bridges across the Medway Creek and provides access to the sewer system, a planned route for ESA users through the valley and neighbourhood links both north-south and east-west through the Valley.
- As a result of modifications to the sewer alignment and maintenance access road, Phase II of the 2005 Medway Valley ESA Pathway Master Plan recommendation for a continuous multi-use asphalt pathway was not feasible as planned (3 planned bridges were not installed with the sewer project) and needed to be revisited.

Agenda Item #	Page #

Planner: B. Bergsma

- Phase II of the sewer was installed in 2009/10 without the asphalt pathway, but with a permanent 4m wide grass-covered gravel maintenance access road. This road is currently being utilized as a trail route in the valley.
- The public has created a continuous north-south trail from the end of the Phase I pathway around the north-western “bend” in the Medway Creek across the Wonderland Road Tributary and through a particularly sensitive part of the valley. In natural areas with no planned trails, people will make their own trails often causing negative environmental impacts.
- There is a local community expectation that the continuous asphalt pathway would be installed to continue the well used neighbourhood links installed in Phase I.
- In 2009, Council endorsed the London Stronger Neighbourhoods Strategy which includes strategies to better promote ESAs and the benefits that they provide to Londoners and to ensure connectivity of all neighbourhoods as long as ESAs are not jeopardized.
- In 2010, a Planning Advisory Group (PAG) was established to assist the City in planning the new trail system in the Valley. The PAG agreed that a properly designed trail system is required to protect an ESA and meet the needs of a wide mix of trail users in an urban setting.
- The PAG produced 13 trail options for evaluation against 6 environmental and 6 social criteria with equal weighting as the EA is relying on the social benefit of this system to off-set previous environmental impacts.
- More stringent standards for the planning and design of new trails in ESAs were approved by Council in June 2012. Through the document’s approval process, it was understood that new trail standards for ESAs may not be fully applicable in this situation where major sewer infrastructure has been installed through the ESA.
- In 2012, Council endorsed London’s Age Friendly City designation, which includes recommendations to improve the connectivity of pathways and to meet accessibility standards.
- Three public meetings have been held where the public had a chance to hear the history of the project (as above), review the 13 trail options and “vote” on their preference and review the evaluation criteria. After collating all the public input, there is no consensus on which trail option to proceed with. There are 3 options that provide the desired continuous north-south link in the Valley and these were further reviewed with the PAG.
- Based on the public survey of options through the process, the majority of people would be satisfied with a trail system to compliment the natural beauty of the valley and provide easily walkable trails with neighbourhood connections.
- Most of the immediate local residents favour a continuous asphalt pathway system with boardwalks as required to protect sensitive features in order to provide good community links and the most “accessibility”.
- Many others have said that a paved multi-use pathway in the valley will result in more people, particularly bicyclists, using the ESA as a means of going “through” the ESA rather than “to” the ESA for passive recreation.
- Cycling routes in the City are to “go around” ESAs, as the primary recreational use is hiking in ESAs and these two uses are not compatible on narrow trails. The trail

Agenda Item #	Page #

Planner: B. Bergsma

standards can consider an asphalt pathway link only through a detailed study approved by Council.

- Cycling linkages as proposed by the Bicycle Master Plan can be accommodated around this part of the Medway Valley on local roads for additional costs.
- The existence of the permanent 4m wide gravel access roads invites increased use, over and above traditional “trail” uses as they are clearly open, flat and visible.
- Permitting increased accessibility for wheel chairs on asphalt pathways, also permits other “wheeled” users like roller bladders and cyclists.
- The City’s Environmental and Ecological Planning Advisory Committee has recommended that we select only trail options that are “discontinuous” to limit use and protect the core area of the ESA as best possible.
- The City’s Accessibility Advisory Committee has recommended that we proceed with the option that provides the most accessibility with due care for the ecological sensitivities of the Valley.
- The new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act includes built environment standards to be incorporated into new public space developments starting in 2016. Generally trails in ESAs will be exempt from the new design standards as “wilderness trails”. In this case, trails that are off of the flat/level gravel access road would be considered wilderness trails. The City has utilized our own accessibility standards for many years (which also focus on more traditional “park” pathways) which provide some direction that could be utilized in this situation to make the trails as accessible as possible, given ecological and topographical constraints.

Although the PAG was extremely productive in resolving most issues and narrowing the options down, and more preferred Option 5B (as enhanced by the discussions), the PAG could not reach a consensus on a preferred trail option.

A full summary of all of these issues and additional information is covered in the Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA Trail Master Planning Study attached as Appendix A.

RECOMMENDED TRAIL OPTION - Option 5B – “Accessibility Enhanced”
--

Staff have considered all background data and history, recent trail planning design standards, the intent of the recommendations of the EAA, the expectations of the community, the sensitivities of the Valley ecosystem, the practicalities of managing ESAs in urban settings and cost considerations and make the following recommendation:

The City should proceed with **Option 5B** with enhancements suggested by the PAG, as shown in Appendix B. This Option provides a new asphalt, fully accessible east-west neighbourhood link from Sunningdale West to Sunningdale Meadows along the existing sewer alignment and includes a new bridge over the Creek in the northern end of the Valley, but is not a continuous asphalt pathway heading north-south “through” the ESA.

Between this pathway and the existing Phase I pathway to the south, a formal hiking trail would be created using a portion of the existing trail route. To protect the sensitive area around the north-western “bend” in the Creek, a boardwalk system would be constructed.

Through discussions with the PAG, several “enhancements” were suggested to provide better accessibility and educational opportunities:

Agenda Item #	Page #

Planner: B. Bergsma

- a) Install a short multi-use pathway from the proposed northern pathway to the look-out at the “oxbow” special feature;
- b) Install a wider boardwalk over sensitive features around the “bend” for better accessibility;
- c) Widen and provide a wood-chip surface for the “trail” sections for accessibility;
- d) Provide a more suitable/accessible grade at the south end of the trail section where it meets the existing gravel access road;
- e) Install attractive wood fences at the end of the asphalt sections to signify that the trail type and permitted uses are changing;
- f) Install signage to clearly show what users are permitted on what sections of trail; and
- g) Install educational/interpretive signage as needed.

IMPLEMENTATION

Option 5B “Enhanced” has components that can be implemented starting 2013. Full implementation could take many years due to several factors:

- timing of land acquisition
- timing of development of remaining Sunningdale Golf holes
- time / process requirements for project approvals from agencies – UTRCA, MNR etc.
- limitations on construction windows when working in ecologically sensitive areas
- budget constraints

The City does not currently own all the land required to complete Option 5B through the valley or to complete the planned neighbourhood links. There is a 70 m wide gap at approximately the mid-point between Sunningdale Road West and Fanshawe Park Road West that remains in private ownership. The owner of those lands has been apprised of the study and has attended some of the public meetings. They were not available for a one-on-one meeting prior to the writing of this report. For the near future, unless the lands can be acquired, or an easement granted, the City will not be able to implement a continuous linkage trail in the valley as shown on Option 5B. There is an option to reroute a hiking trail around the private lands that can be utilized, if required.

The full pathway connection to the Sunningdale West neighbourhood cannot be completed until the existing golf course has been relocated. Corlon has indicated that they are working on those plans, but have not provided a specific timeline as there are many planning approvals to be completed.

With the approval of the preferred Option, the City’s existing Trails Advisory Group will be engaged to assist staff with implementation of trail plans as required. Any required detailed ecological inventories in the areas of construction (outside of the existing sewer alignment) will be under-taken.

As the ESA lands have been acquired by the City, corresponding capital budgets have been approved for improvements in the ESA. As a result of the delay to revisit the 2005 pathway plan, these funds have been set aside to implement the preferred option from the 2013 Plan. At this time, there is \$740,000 available to implement the plan. The cost estimate for the 5B “Enhanced” Option is \$660,000, excluding any land acquisition costs, ecological restoration works beyond what the Sewer Project will be completing in 2013, and any upgrades to the Wonderland Road boulevard to accommodate a recreational pathway link. Some potential cost savings for the trail/pathway work have been lost due to the delay in completing these works at

Agenda Item #	Page #

Planner: B. Bergsma

the same time as sewer construction. Additional funding may be required to fully complete the preferred plan and will be brought forward in future capital budgets.

Proposed 2013 Works

Early in the spring of 2013, staff will carry out an ecological inventory of the creek bend area to provide clearer delineation of the Nature Reserve Zone and to determine if any species-at-risk exist that would require an alternative trail and boardwalk alignment. With that work complete, detailed plans will be developed for these works and a UTRCA permit will be sought for construction.

Further approvals will be required to build a bridge over the Medway Creek, as it remains a navigable waterway under Federal regulations. A permit from the UTRCA will also be required and through these two steps, issues related to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Ministry of Natural Resources will be addressed. The City is currently undertaking an update to the Medway Creek Subwatershed Study for potential hydrological impacts due to climate change and proposed works will be reviewed against those recommendations as well. The level of community engagement, ecological studies and protection of the natural heritage achieved through this planning process will assist those approvals.

With or without any land ownership constraints in the valley, Environmental and Parks Planning is working to connect the neighbourhoods adjacent to the Medway Valley (and across the City) with bicycle paths and bike lanes to encourage active transportation and support healthy lifestyles and stronger neighbourhoods as per Council approved policies and Master Plans. We will complete the easterly on-road link through the Sunningdale Meadows Subdivision by adding signage and “sharrows” along Valley Run Blvd. We will further investigate the “in-boulevard” recreational pathway along Wonderland Road to connect Sunningdale West residents to the closest entrance to the ESA accessed from Franklinway Crescent.

We can proceed to develop a plan for the suggested asphalt path link to the oxbow pond in order to permit full access for all people to this special feature in the Valley. Plans will be developed for new wood rail fencing and rules of use signage to be erected at the limit of asphalt pathways.

We will continue discussions with the two landowners in the Valley regarding the Plan implementation and the City’s interest in timely completion of the continuous trail to direct current use away from and over sensitive ESA features.

We will establish a base-line ecological measure in the area around the “bend” to ensure that future monitoring of the success of the trail boardwalk in accommodating use and protecting the ESA can be assessed. If in the future, limiting users and increasing ecological impacts are an issue, we may have to revisit the preferred solution.

CONCLUSION

The proposed trail option “5B – Enhanced” is a good compromise between many competing planning, design and management factors and a balance of strongly-held opinions of how the ESA should be managed for appropriate public use.

Updating the 2005 Medway Valley ESA Pathway Master Plan reflects current planning and design standards as best possible, given the existence of a trunk sanitary sewer and permanent maintenance access roads. The planning process invited many opportunities for public input, which was utilized to fine tune the option evaluation process. The local Planning Advisory Group helped to refine the best available option for enhanced accessibility and important neighbourhood links, while maintaining a primarily “hike-only” experience through the more

Agenda Item # Page #

--	--

Planner: B. Bergsma

sensitive core of the ESA north of Fanshawe Park Road.

PREPARED BY:	PREPARED & SUBMITTED BY:
BONNIE BERGSMA M.Sc ECOLOGIST PLANNER	A. MACPHERSON, MANAGER, ENVIRONMENTAL AND PARKS PLANNING
RECOMMENDED BY:	
J.M. FLEMING, MCIP, RPP MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER	

March 29, 2013
BB/AM

Appendix A – Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA Trail Master Planning Study
Appendix B – Trail Option 5B - Enhanced
Appendix C - Typical trail photos from Medway Valley North ESA

Y:\Shared\parksplanning\REP&RECS - Working Reports\2013\PECApril9_MedwayTrailNorth_short version.doc

Agenda Item #

Page #

--

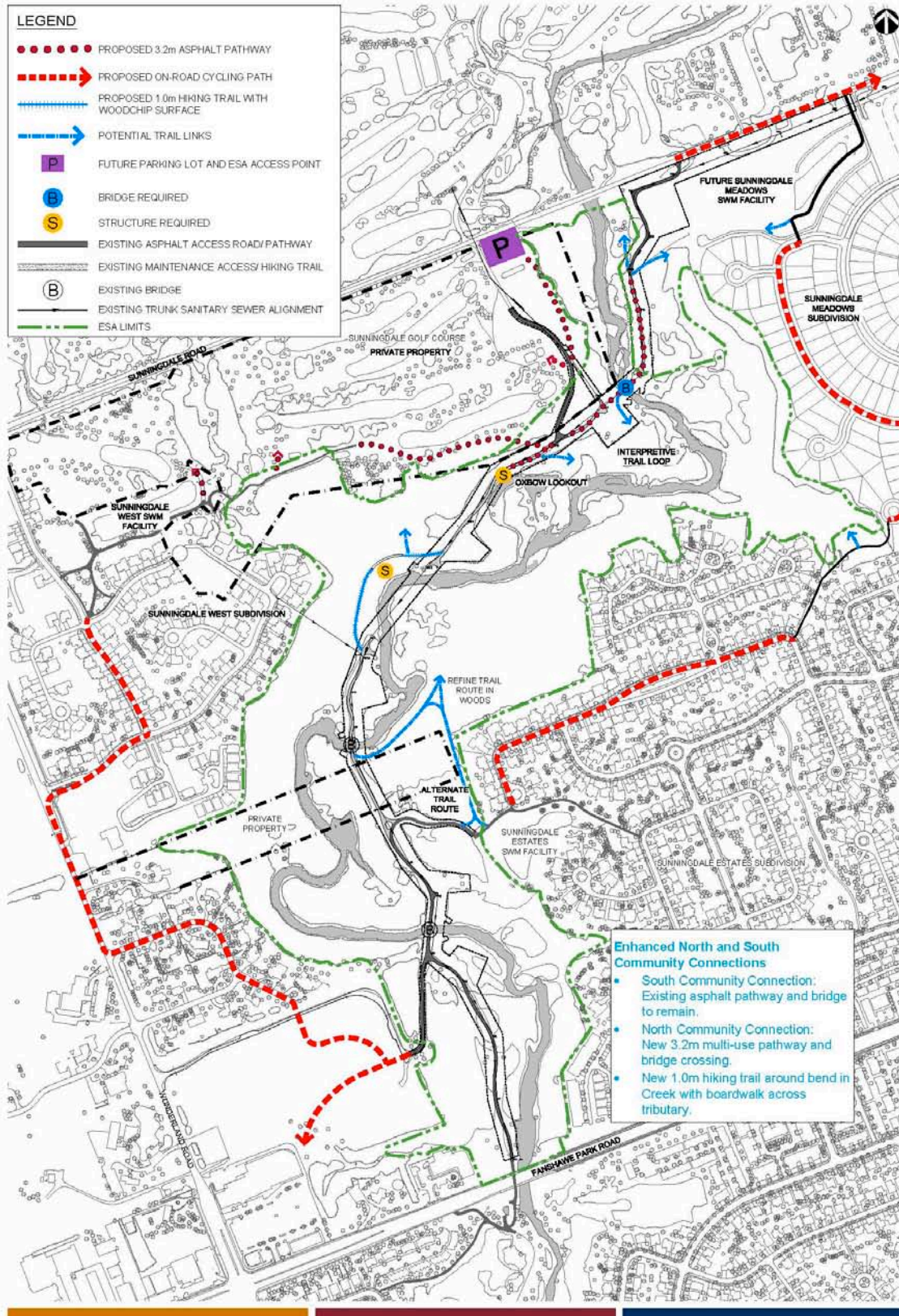
--

Planner: B. Bergsma

APPENDIX "A"

--	--

APPENDIX "B"



**Medway Valley Trail North of Fanshawe Park Road
5B - Enhanced Accessibility & North and South Community Connections**
Asphalt Connections to Adjacent Communities with Accessible Hiking Trail Linkage

March 2013



Agenda Item #

Page #

Planner: B. Bergsma

APPENDIX "C"

EXISTING MAINTENANCE ACCESS ROAD

4m wide gravel base with 5cm of soil and grass and directional posts



Agenda Item #

Page #

Planner: B. Bergsma

**EXISTING 4M WIDE ASPHALT ACCESS ROAD IN PHASE 1
(Parks standard is 3.2m for a “pathway”)**



EXISTING DIRT HIKING TRAIL

