

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community and Protective Services Committee
From: Kelly Scherr, Deputy City Manager, Environment and Infrastructure
Anna Lisa Barbon, Deputy City Manager, Finance Supports
Subject: Former River Road Golf Course – Plans for Ownership and Municipal Use
Date: November 1, 2022

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Environment and Infrastructure and the Deputy City Manager, Finance Supports, on the advice of the Director, Parks and Forestry and the Director, Realty Services, this report **BE RECEIVED**.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to summarize the status of due diligence activities and next steps with respect to the former River Road Golf Course Properties in accordance with the Sale and other Disposition of Land Policy. Approximately 20 acres of land will be explored for potential development. The remaining approximately 114 acres of the property will be retained for municipal park purposes given the site conditions and municipal need for additional lands identified to support the extension of the Thames Valley Parkway and the development of a future District Park in east London.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

The following report supports the Strategic Plan through the strategic focus area of Building a Sustainable City – London’s infrastructure is built, maintained, and operating to meet the long-term needs of our community. Retaining the River Road property for a District level park will enhance public access to the Thames Valley Corridor, provide recreational opportunities and create valuable links to expand the Thames Valley Parkway connections.

The disposition of a portion of the River Road Golf Course aligns with the City’s Strategic Plan and Growing London’s Economy through the disposition of surplus City owned land and Leading in Public Service by increased efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and maintain London’s finances in a transparent and well-planned manner to balance equity and affordability over the long term.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

SPPC – February 16, 2021 – City of London Service Review: Potential Closure of River Road Golf Course

1.2 Background Information

At its February 23, 2021 meeting, Municipal Council resolved the following:

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Parks and Recreation and the Managing Director, Corporate Services and City Treasurer, Chief Financial Officer, the following actions be taken:

- a) the Civic Administration BE DIRECTED to cease golf operations at the municipally operated River Road Golf Course, effective immediately, to mitigate budget pressures on the municipal golf system;
- b) the Civic Administration BE DIRECTED to initiate the disposition of property process in compliance with the Municipal Council's Sale and Other Disposition of Land Policy; and,
- c) notwithstanding the Municipal Council's Sale of Major Assets Policy, the proceeds from any partial or full disposition of River Road Golf Course lands BE ALLOCATED to the municipal golf reserve fund;

Further to this direction, Civic Administration ceased golf operations at the River Road site and commenced due diligence activities in accordance with the Sale and Other Disposition of Land Policy including property inquiry liaison with internal service areas, boards, commissions and the UTRCA.

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Property Overview

The salient property details are provided below:

<u>Municipal Address</u>	2115 River Road
<u>Existing Improvements</u>	Parking lot, Maintenance Garage, and former 18 Hole Golf Course
<u>Zoning</u>	Open Space 1, Open Space 2, Open Space 4 (OS1, OS2, OS4)
<u>London Plan</u>	Green Space
<u>UTRCA</u>	Flood Plan Regulation Controls
<u>Services</u>	Water & Sanitary
<u>Location</u>	Directly abutting the north side of the Thames River on the south side of River Road.
<u>Total Area</u>	~134 Acres (subject to final survey)
<u>Developable Potential Area</u>	Est. +/- 20 Acres (subject to feasibility assessment)

Description of Subject Property

The subject site is located on the south side of River Road immediately north of the Thames River. This was formerly a municipal golf course, established in 1992, which was closed by Council decision in 2021. The property is improved with an 18-hole golf course, maintenance garage, irrigation system, and surface parking. After a fire, the clubhouse was demolished in the interest of public safety and to comply with a make-safe order. The property is encumbered with several access roads servicing the former SE3 landfill property, along with a municipal 1200mm municipal sanitary trunk sewer. The total land area is approximately 134 acres. The surrounding uses include the Thames River to the south, rural residential homes to the east, a former landfill site north of River Road, and a former landfill site (SE3) to the west. The parcel has generally flat table lands near River Road and the topography drops and is rolling as it approaches the Thames River. A Property Overview Map is attached in Appendix A.

2.2 Property Conditions

Heritage/Archeological Potential

The property is not listed or designated pursuant to the Ontario Heritage Act, however it has been identified to have archaeological potential. The archaeological potential would need to be addressed prior to the development or alteration of the property.

Initial Ecological Assessment

A majority of the parcel, except for the portion of tablelands near River Road, are regulated by Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA). As identified in the City's London Plan under the Natural Heritage Map (Map 5), the parcel holds significant valley lands, several unevaluated wetlands, one (1) large unevaluated wetland, two (2) unevaluated vegetation patches, and a significant woodland along the southwest portion of the property near Hemlock Park. In addition, there is potential for several Species at Risk (SAR) to be present at this location.

Requirement for a Subject Land Status Report

The subject lands are currently zoned Open Space 1 (OS1), Open Space 2 (OS2) and Open Space 4 (OS4) and identified in the London Plan as Green Space. As part of a land disposition, it may be desirable to complete a Subject Lands Status Report (SLSR) to help delineate the ecological features of the property as noted above, identify any SAR species, and ultimately determine the potential developable portion of land. At present, the developable area is estimated to be approximately 20 acres.

Environmental Condition of the Property

The property is adjacent to two former landfill sites that date to the 1960's. Former landfill site SE3 is located immediately adjacent to the west boundary of the property. There are perimeter leachate system outlets to the sanitary sewer system at the property.

The other, older, former landfill is located to the north side of River Road. There is no perimeter leachate system and the groundwater drainage runs south through the park lands. It is unknown whether there is or has historically been groundwater leachate present below the golf course lands.

Further environmental investigations are likely necessary, subject to the future plans for the lands.

2.3 Rationale for Retaining the Subject Lands

Civic Administration commenced due diligence activities at the former River Road golf course property in accordance with the Sale and Other Disposition of Land Policy including property inquiry liaison with internal service areas, boards, commissions and the UTRCA. As a result of the various site conditions discussed in the previous section identified through due diligence activities, only about 20 acres of the former golf course site are expected to be suitable for development. The use of the balance of the land needs to be considered in the context of its significant natural features, including floodplain, valleys, wetlands, vegetated areas and woodlands. The conditions of the property have changed since the initial Council direction and the option to consider the sale of the property as a golf course is no longer viable.

In the context of the site conditions and in keeping with the Thames Valley Corridor Plan and the London Plan, the southerly portion of the former golf course lands could accommodate a new riverfront District Park. Currently, larger established parks are primarily located in central, north and west areas of the city, which feature parks like Springbank, Greenway, Thames, Harris and Gibbons. These lands could also connect

and combine adjacent open space lands with those north of River Road (i.e. River Road Park) into a larger and more functional space, permitting the potential for more recreational options in the future.

In addition, some of the valley lands can accommodate the Thames Valley Parkway's (TVP) eastward extension along the river corridor. Ultimately, the TVP will extend to and under Veterans' Memorial Parkway (VMP) and to areas east of the City. A route on the north side of the Thames River through the former River Road golf course property is expected to involve fewer environmental and property acquisition requirements than the high-level options that have been considered to the south of the river. Therefore, retaining the existing land to support the TVP extension would be far more cost effective and avoid additional land acquisition and associated processes on the other side of the river.

In addition to the future park and pathway uses, portions of the lands may be developable, mainly along River Road where development can be appropriately set back from top-of-bank, natural features, stream corridors, recreation corridors and the former landfill. The highest and best use of the potentially developable lands has yet to be determined, but there may be added value in exploring a portion of the re-developable lands for future light industrial uses. The estimated developable area can help maximize land values while still providing opportunity for future park and pathway uses.

The existing asphalt parking lot will be retained for parks purposes to support access to the TVP and the valley parklands. All golf-related assets from the lands, such as irrigation systems, will be recovered for use at the two municipal golf properties where practical.

2.4 Next Steps of the Process

All future uses of the site – paths, parks and development – will require appropriate planning and studies, with recommendations brought to Council in accordance with Council policies and applicable Provincial legislation. The park and pathway planning work for the 114 acre site being retained for municipal use can be funded from existing budgets in 2023. Similarly, the land use feasibility studies planned for the 20 acres that has development potential can occur next year with existing resources. Both of these efforts will help inform future budget submissions for Council's consideration. Development of the future district park will be done consistent with the needs identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

It should be noted that to proceed with the sale of the approximate 20 acres of the developable lands, the lands will need to be declared surplus through a public declaration of Council. Civic Administration recommends that further studies be completed prior to declaring a portion of the property surplus.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

3.1 Costs Associated with the Portion Retained for Municipal Purposes

The retention of the 114 acres of the site for pathway and parkland purposes will mitigate the need to purchase alternate lands for parkland purposes in this area of the city in the future, which would otherwise be funded through the Parkland or Urban Forestry Renewal Reserve Funds.

Parks and Forestry has identified sources of funding within the 10-year Capital Budget forecast that could, at least in part, support the development of a park and pathway extensions at this location. Funds are available in existing budgets in 2023 to proceed with planning work to better define future capital funding needs.

Funding for future ongoing operating costs will be pursued through the City's assessment growth and budget processes at the appropriate time.

3.2 Financial Implications Associated with Potential Development

Civic Administration is continuing to complete further due diligence studies as well as a land use feasibility study to identify what land use/redevelopment possibilities are possible for the approximately 20 acres of developable lands. Costs to complete the due diligence studies will be funded through existing approved operating budgets.

4.0 Key Issues and Considerations

4.1 Summary Analysis, Recommendations and Next Steps

Civic Administration completed several studies while completing proper due diligence further to the direction from Council to initiate the disposition of property process in compliance with the Municipal Council's Sale and Other Disposition of Land Policy. Considering the results of the study findings to date as well as the parkland needs that have been identified to support the extension of the TVP and the development of a future District Park in east London, 114 acres of the River Road property will be retained for municipal parkland.

Civic Administration will undertake further studies and consideration for highest and best uses, if feasible, for the potential development lands of approximately 20 acres. Once studies are completed, recommendations will be brought forward for Council consideration through a future report, noting this work will take some time to complete.

Conclusion

Approximately 114 acres of the former River Road Golf Course will be retained for the likely future transition into a District Park and extension of the TVP, benefitting from its location along the Thames Valley Corridor. Preliminary planning work for these lands will start in 2023.

In addition, Civic Administration will continue working on the required studies to help guide Council with appropriate options for any development or sale of a portion of the lands for a higher and better use, with an expected report back to Council in 2023 as well.

A Property Overview Map is attached as Appendix A.

An Estimated Developable Portion of Lands Map is attached as Appendix B.

A Conceptual Thames Valley Pathway (TVP) Map is attached as Appendix C.

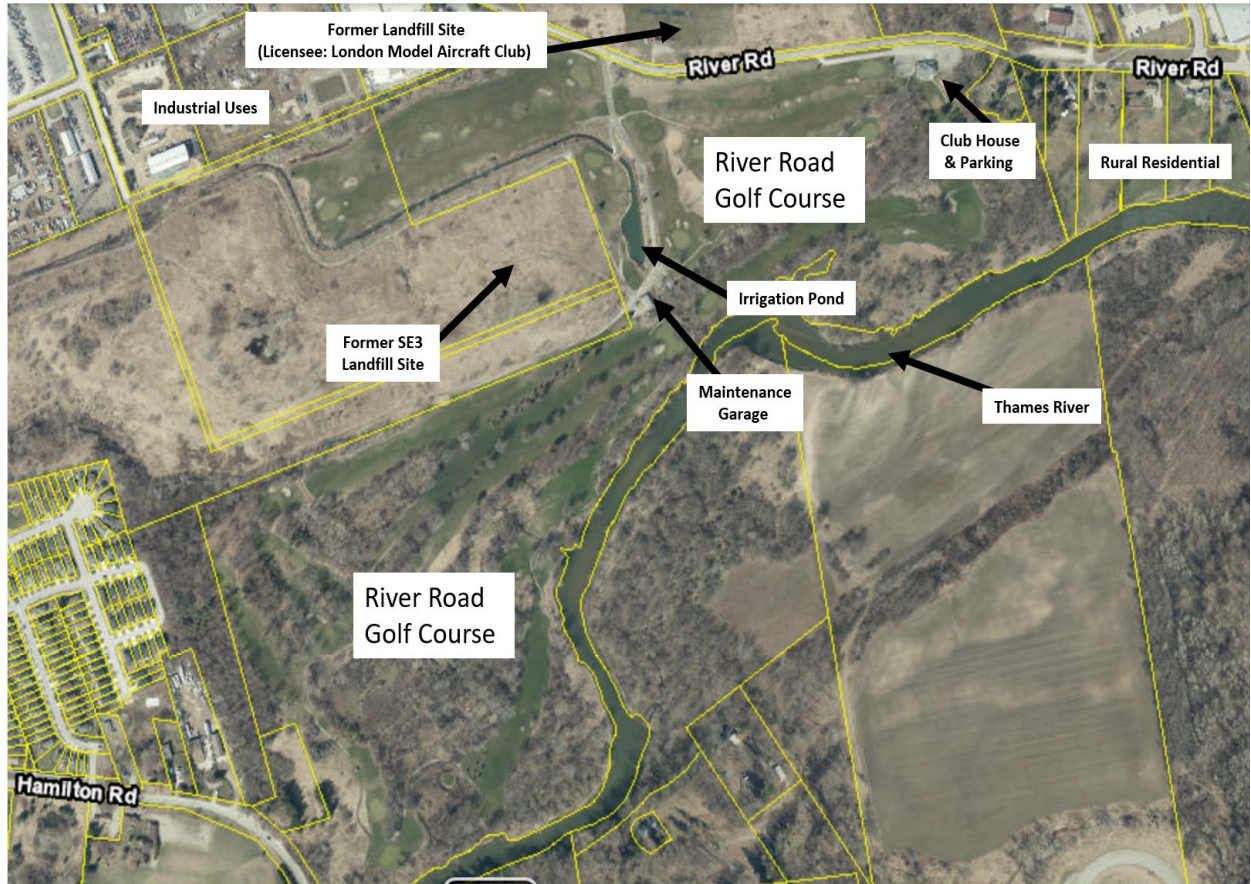
Submitted by: **Scott Stafford, Director, Parks and Forestry**

Submitted by: **Bill Warner, AACI, Papp, Director, Realty Services**

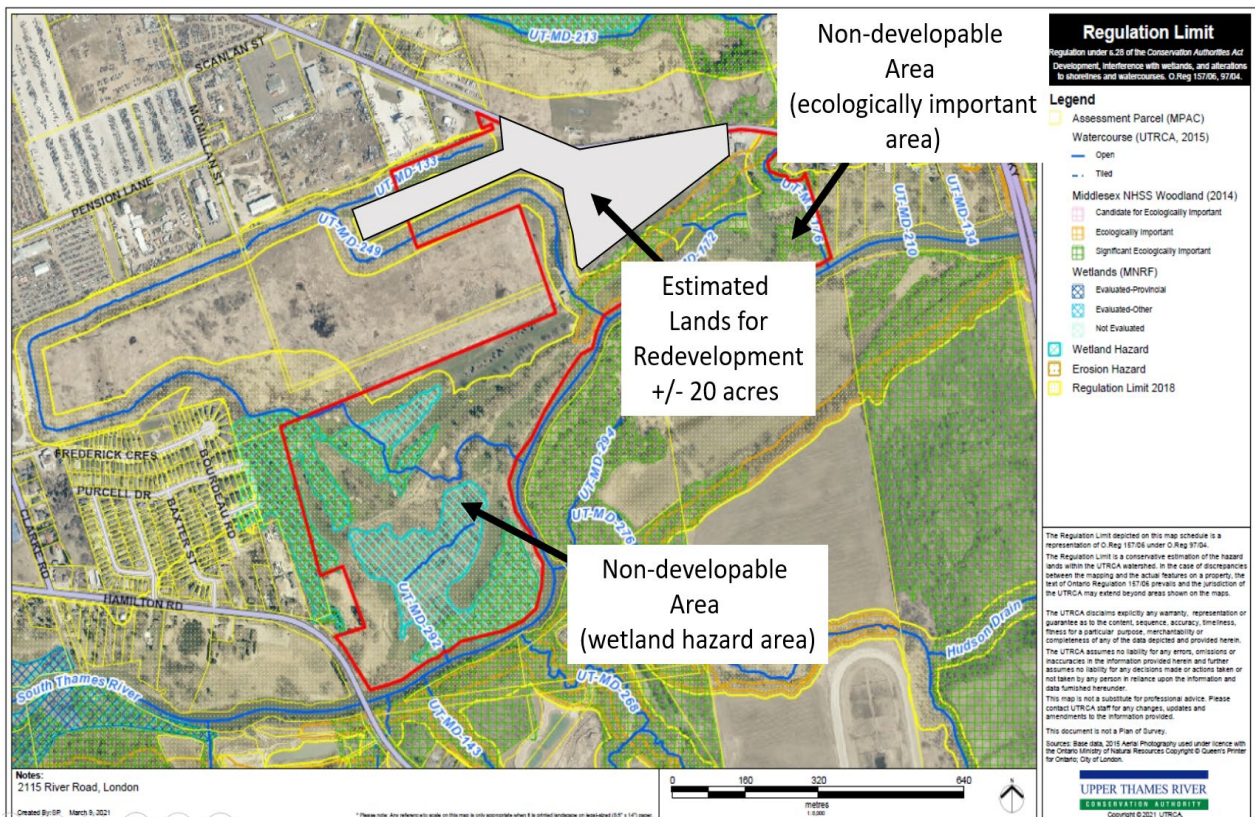
Recommended by: **Kelly Scherr, P.Eng., MBA, FEC, Deputy City Manager, Environment and Infrastructure**

Recommended by: **Anna Lisa Barbon, CPA, CGA, Deputy City Manager, Finance Supports**

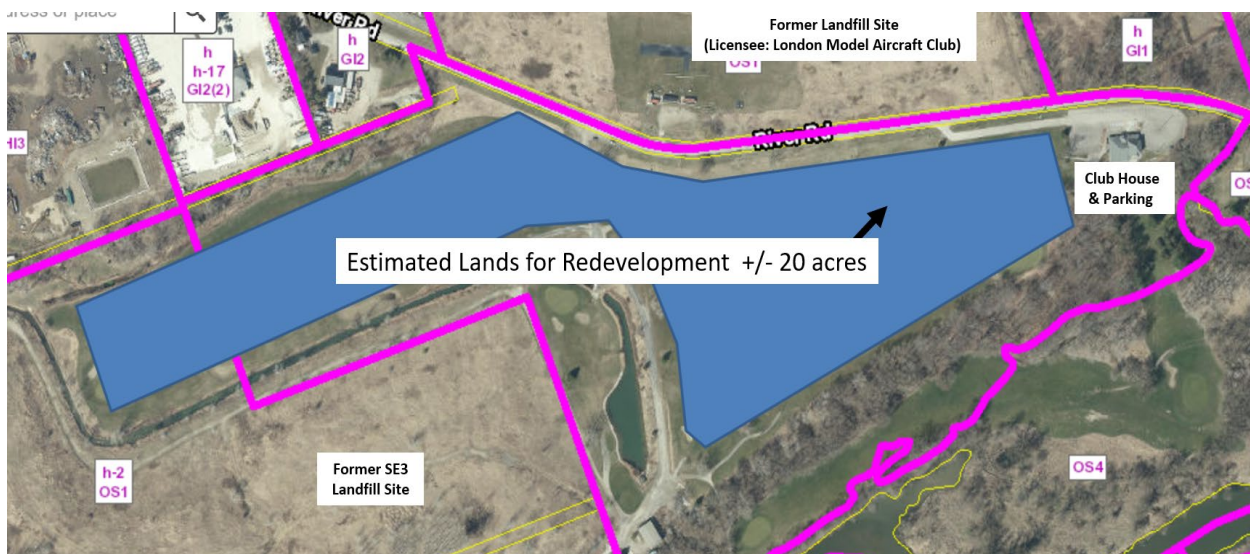
Appendix A – A Property Overview Map



Appendix B – Estimated Developable Portion of Lands

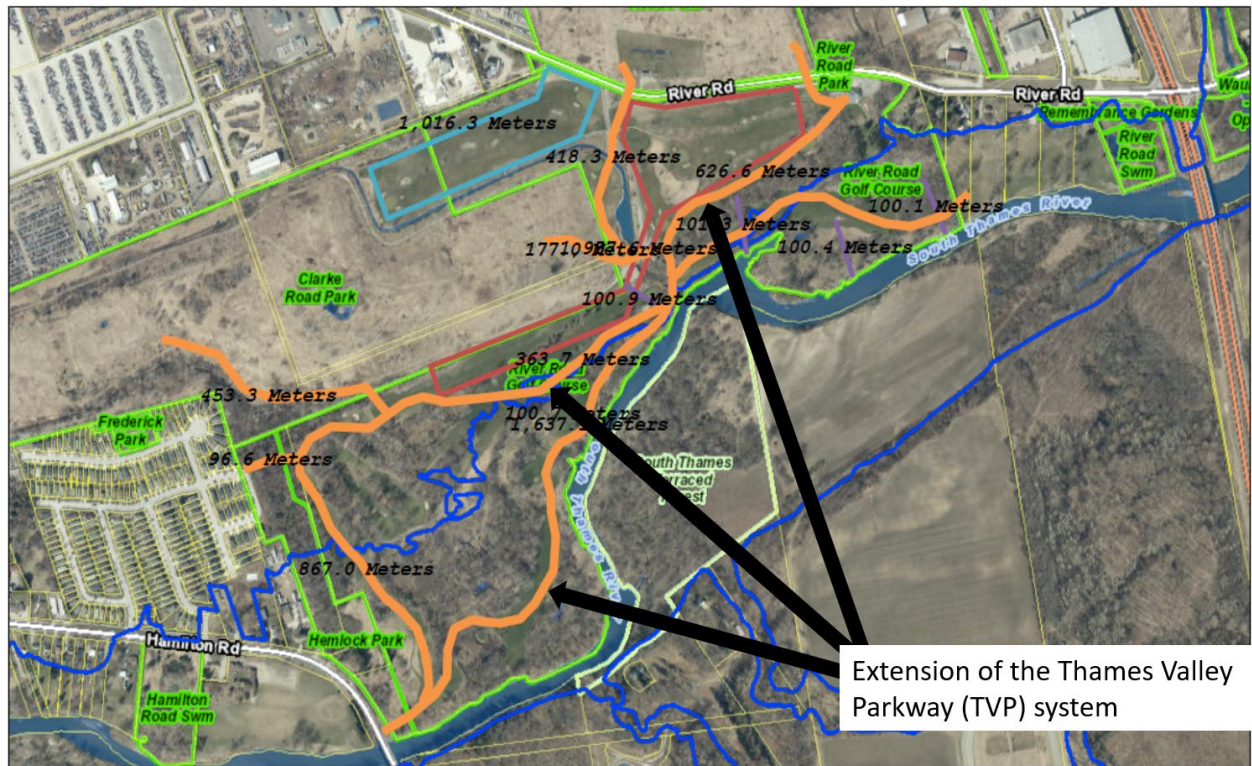


Note: Estimated lands for redevelopment are subject to further feasibility and planning assessment.



For illustration purposes

Appendix C – Conceptual Thames Valley Pathway (TVP) Map



Conceptual Plan provided by Parks Planning
Various pathway & connection routes shown as part of the eastward extension of the TVP system