TO: Chair and Members
Economic Development and Planning Committee

WARD(S) AFFECTED:
WARDS 1, 13 and 15

COMMITTEE DATE: February 2, 2010

SUBJECT/REPORT NO:
Cootes to Escarpment Land Management Strategy - Endorsement of Phase 2 Report (PED08009(a)) (Wards 1, 13 and 15),

SUBMITTED BY:
Tim McCabe
General Manager
Planning and Economic Development Department

PREPARED BY:
Cathy Plosz
(905) 546-2424, Ext. 1231

RECOMMENDATION:

(a) That Council endorse the Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation and Land Management Strategy Phase 2 Report, and the “Cootes to Escarpment Park System: A Conservation Vision”.

(b) That Planning and Economic Development Department staff continue to provide in-kind resources for implementation of the Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation and Land Management Strategy.

(c) That the City of Hamilton make a one-time contribution of $2,500 to be used for hiring a part-time Project Manager to continue with implementation of the Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation and Land Management Strategy, with this $2,500 contribution to be funded from the Planning Division’s Operating Budget (Account 55801 - Dept. ID 812018).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “Cootes to Escarpment Conservation and Land Management Strategy” (the “Strategy”) is a comprehensive land management strategy for the ecologically sensitive lands in the study area. This area extends from the former Town of Dundas in the City of Hamilton, to Brant Street in the City of Burlington; and from Cootes Paradise Marsh to the Niagara Escarpment (see Appendix “A”). The project partners included the Royal Botanical Gardens, the Cities of Hamilton and Burlington, Region of Halton, Hamilton Conservation Authority, Conservation Halton, Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan, Bruce Trail Conservancy, and the Hamilton Naturalists’ Club.

The study has been completed in two phases. Phase 1 (July to December 2007) involved gathering background information on the physical, social, and environmental features of the study area. This information was presented in the Phase 1 Background Report, which was provided to the Economic Development and Planning Committee in Report PED08009 in January 2008.

Phase 2 (January 2008 to June 2009) involved a public consultation process to identify issues and develop a vision, concept plans, and recommendations. During the development of the Phase 2 Report, staff provided two Information Updates in January 2009 and in November 2009. This “Strategy” is presented in the Phase 2 Report, “Cootes to Escarpment Park System: Conservation and Land Management Strategy”. Due to its size, the Phase 2 Report can be accessed on the Project Web Page at www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca.

The Report contains a Vision, Mission, Objectives, and a description of the study process. It also illustrates the Cootes to Escarpment Park System and provides recommendations for implementation, such as planning policy, stewardship, land acquisition, education and awareness programs, management plans, and habitat restoration.

This Strategy is not a land use plan. It is a management plan for public lands owned by the partners that are primarily within the Greenbelt Plan area and are characterized by environmentally significant features. Implementation of the Strategy will rely on the partners to work co-operatively to protect and promote the park system.

While staff recommends endorsement of the Phase 2 Strategy Report, it is important that the Economic Development and Planning Committee is aware of a potential issue. Figure 6 of the Phase 2 Strategy Report shows the Potential Cootes to Escarpment Park System. This map also appears in the centre of the Summary Document (Pages 8 and 9). Both of these Reports can be accessed on the Project Web Page at www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca. One privately-owned site is shown on the map as “Potential Additional Park Lands”, which is currently the subject of potential development: the Hammond property at 201 King Street East in Dundas. The Strategy
recommends that this property be included as part of the public park system in the future through ownership, easement, or handshake agreement. It also recommends that all or part of this private property should be transferred into the public park system, and the boundary and a suitable buffer should be negotiated at that time.

The self-storage facility proposed at 201 King Street East in Dundas has been appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board and a 4-week hearing has been scheduled to start on January 11, 2010. Until the outcome of this Hearing is determined, the use of this site will not be known. Since the use of this site will be determined through the OMB decision, the map showing the Park System (Figure 6) may have to be altered in the future to reflect this decision. For example, if the self-storage facility is approved, it might be more appropriate to identify 201 King Street East as “Complementary Stewardship Lands”.

Now that the Strategy Report is complete, implementation will begin. This report represents the first step in implementation, which is to seek endorsement of the Strategy from the Boards and Councils of the participating partners. A management committee to implement the Strategy will be established, and funding will be sought for priority projects. These projects include developing a land securement strategy, a marketing and communications plan, and establishing a long-term management committee to direct programs and secure funding.

It is recommended that City staff continue to support and implement this Strategy. In the near future, this would mean that one staff person would sit on the interim management committee, which would meet regularly with the other partners to define the long-term, ongoing management structure and funding. It is also likely that continued staff commitment will be required once the final management committee is set up. It is anticipated that this commitment can be met using existing staff from the following sections: Planning and Economic Development Department, Community Planning and Design Section, and Public Works Department, Open Space Development Section.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an overview of the Phase 2 Report;
- Request Council endorsement of the report;
- Seek Council approval for continued staff support to implement the recommendations in the Strategy in the future; and,
- Request Council approval for $2,500 in funding as the City’s share to hire an interim Project Manager to begin implementation of the Strategy until long-term funding is secured.
FINANCIAL / STAFFING / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS (for Recommendation(s) only)

Financial:

To date, the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation has provided funding for the project. While the Strategy was being developed, the City of Hamilton provided in-kind resources, including staff time to attend Steering Committee meetings and Open Houses, and providing text, data, mapping, and editing for the reports produced.

The Steering Committee for the project has asked each of the partner agencies and organizations to contribute $2,500 to fund a part-time Project Manager. In this regard, the Steering Committee is seeking funding support from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to hire a full-time Project Manager. Accordingly, staff recommends providing the interim $2,500 funding from the Planning Division’s Operation Budget for consultants, as it will keep the momentum of the project going until longer-term funding can be secured.

Staffing:

In the future, it is recommended that staff from the Planning and Economic Development Department, Community Planning and Design Section provide on-going representation and support for the implementation of the Strategy by providing representatives on the management committee, and participating in any projects that affect City interests. Continued staff participation can be accommodated by using existing staff.

Legal:

The Strategy contains a map (Figure 6 of the Phase 2 Report, which can be accessed on the Project Web Page at [www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca](http://www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca)), which shows a privately-owned property at 201 King Street East, Dundas, which is currently under appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), to permit a self-storage facility. City Council did not approve the proposal and the landowner appealed their decision to the OMB. The “Strategy” recommends that the site be included as “Potential Additional Park Lands”. The decision of the OMB may have implications for how the property is ultimately classified on the map in the “Strategy”.

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Project Description

The Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation and Land Management Strategy (the “Strategy”) focuses on 1,560 hectares (3,855 acres) of natural lands, which are owned by public and non-government agencies. The study area includes ecologically sensitive lands from the former Town of Dundas in the City of Hamilton, to Brant Street in the City of Burlington; and from Cootes Paradise Marsh to the Niagara Escarpment (see Appendix “A”). The “Strategy” is a new and visionary approach to protecting a unique area for future generations - Canada’s biodiversity hotspot and a region of spectacular natural beauty within one of the Country’s most vibrant and growing urban regions.

The project was completed with generous funding support from the Ontario Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. This funding covered the cost of developing the “Strategy”, and ran until the end of December, 2009.

In addition to the City of Hamilton, the project partners included: Bruce Trail Conservancy, City of Burlington, Conservation Halton, Hamilton Conservation Authority, Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan, Hamilton Naturalists’ Club, Region of Halton, and Royal Botanical Gardens.

The preparation of the “Strategy” has occurred in two phases. Phase 1 took place from July to December 2007, and involved collecting information on the existing physical, social, and economic characteristics of the study area. This information was documented in the Phase 1 Background Report. At this point of the project, staff prepared Report PED08009 to present the Phase 1 Report and request that staff continue to participate in the project.

Phase 2 began in January 2008. An in-depth public consultation program was developed to assist in identifying issues as well as developing a vision, concept plans, and management recommendations for the study area. This information can be found in the Phase 2 Report, which can be accessed on the Project Web Page at www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca.

Phase 2: Preparing the Strategy

After the Phase 1 Report was completed, a Public Open House was held to inform the public of the process for developing the Conservation and Land Management Strategy. Key milestones for the project are noted below:

January, 2008: Assembled the Project Advisory Committee and had first meeting.
January 16, 2008: First Public Open House to introduce the study to the public.


July-December 2008: Steering Committee to prepare draft Strategy based on input and review with Stakeholder Committee.

February 2009: Second Public Open House to present the draft Cootes to Escarpment Land Management Strategy.

February to June 2009: Preparation of the final Phase 2 Report.

June 2009: Approval of Strategy by Steering Committee.

December 2009 to February 2010: Final document to be approved by Boards of private partner organizations and Councils of public government partners.

Overview of the Strategy

The “Strategy” outlines the vision, mission, objectives, study approach, and consultation process. The Report contains a map (Figure 6) of the proposed Park System and provides recommendations on how to secure lands within the mapped system.

The “Strategy” proposes to conserve and manage the natural lands for the long-term, based on the following vision and mission:

The Vision for the Cootes to Escarpment Park System is that it will be known internationally as a protected, permanent, and connected natural lands sanctuary from the Harbour to the Escarpment that promotes ecosystem and human health within Ontario’s Greenbelt.

The Mission Statement of the Cootes to Escarpment Park System is to collaboratively continue preserving and enhancing the natural lands using a sustainable approach that balances natural ecosystem health with responsible human appreciation and activities to achieve this vision.

The primary goal of the “Strategy” is to create the Park System by connecting and expanding existing greenspace. This will be achieved through:

- Securing additional lands that provide linkages to existing protected areas;
- Protecting natural features on complementary lands that link and support the ecological function of the park system;
- Creating management plans for specific lands;
• Promoting stewardship actions (i.e., education and awareness programs); and,

• Restoring degraded habitat.

A secondary goal of the “Strategy” is to ensure that recreational uses are provided in appropriate locations and will not disturb sensitive natural habitats.

The “Strategy” includes a section on governance, as there needs to be considerable discussion on future implementation and the management committee that would carry it out.

Finally, the “Strategy” also lists recommended Implementation Actions (see Page 44 to 45 of the Phase 2 Report, which can be accessed on the Project Web Page at www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca). The management recommendations that specifically apply to the City of Hamilton are:

• Seek endorsement of the Strategy from Council. Establish an interim management committee. (All partners)

• Confirm a management structure and staffing for Management Network. (All partners)

• Undertake a viewshed study. (Hamilton and Burlington)

• Develop a land securement strategy. (All partners)

• Assist in the organization of a National Symposium on Sustainable Natural Areas. (All partners)

• Produce a Park System logo. (All partners)

• Undertake a trails survey to quantify numbers and types of users. (All partners)

• Complete a mountain bike use strategy. (All partners)

• Develop management plans for properties. (All partners)

• Promote the historical role of Desjardins Canal in the development of the area. (All partners)

• Develop a communications and marketing plan. (All partners)

• Develop roadside bicycle routes along York Road, Valley Road, King Road, Snake Road, and Waterdown Road. (Hamilton and Burlington)
• Close or restrict King Road and King Street to through traffic and develop for trail use. (Hamilton and Burlington)

• Secure wildlife and pedestrian crossings at identified areas. (Hamilton)

• Develop interpretive program illustrating the influence of Thomas McQueston. (RBG and Hamilton)

• Pursue coordinated advertising for public programs. (All partners)

• Implement inter-regional trail. (All partners)

• Develop through management plans, a trail system review including closure of trails with restoration of disturbed habitats. (All partners)

• In cooperation with the Ministry of Transportation, install a sound barrier along the Hamilton waterfront trail section between Highway 403 and Cootes Paradise. (Hamilton)

• Develop the King City Quarry node. (Hamilton)

• Design and install Park System area entrance signage. (All partners)

• Explore and provide public transportation service to identified parts of the Park System including the Nature Interpretive Centre for school groups. (Hamilton and Burlington)

• Consider including a safe pedestrian crossing across Waterdown Road to protect the public and Bruce Trail corridor in the Waterdown Master Transportation Study (Hamilton and Burlington).

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The natural lands in the study area are currently affected by various statutes, provincial policies, and associated plans, including the Provincial Greenbelt Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan, Provincial Policy Statement, Parkway Belt West Plan, Natural Heritage Systems identified in municipal Official Plans, and the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan.

The Strategy contains recommendations for land management that affected landowners can voluntarily implement, and is not a legally binding document. It is anticipated that there will be no conflict with any existing policies, plans, or legislation currently in effect in the study area.
RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Staff in the Public Works Department (Open Space Development Section, Environmental Services Section, Traffic Engineering Section, and Support Services Section) and Planning and Economic Development Department (Community Planning and Design Section) has attended past Steering Committee meetings.

Also, staff from external agencies was consulted, including the Royal Botanical Gardens, Conservation Halton, Hamilton Conservation Authority, Hamilton Naturalists’ Club, the Region of Halton, the City of Burlington, the Bruce Trail Conservancy, and the Bay Area Implementation Team (which implements the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan).

The following summarizes the consultation process undertaken for the Phase 2 Report:

- A Public Open House was held in January 2008 to introduce the project and seek residents to participate on the Stakeholder Advisory Group. This meeting was attended by about 180 people.

- A Stakeholder Advisory Group was formed, consisting of 28 members from local and provincial agencies, special interest organizations, and citizen landowners. This group met seven times through the course of the project.

In addition to the Stakeholder Committee, staff from the partner organizations participated in sessions to provide their feedback on management of the natural lands.

ANALYSIS / RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION (include Performance Measurement/Benchmarking Data, if applicable)

Implementation of the Strategy

This report seeks to begin implementation of the Strategy by completing the first two actions on Page 44 of the Phase 2 Report, which are to:

- Seek endorsement of the Strategy from Council; and,
- Establish an interim Management Committee.

Endorsement

The first step in implementation of the “Strategy” will be for Councils and Boards of the participating partners to endorse the “Strategy” in the Phase 2 Report. Staff from the Planning and Economic Development Department and Public Works Department have reviewed the Report (which can be accessed on the Project Web Page at
www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca), and recommend that the “Strategy” can be supported. However, Council should be aware of the following issues.

Figure 6 of the Phase 2 Report shows the Potential Cootes to Escarpment Park System. This map also appears in the centre of the Summary Document, (Pages 8 and 9). One privately-owned site is shown on the maps as “Potential Additional Park Lands”, which is currently the subject of potential development: the Hammond property at 201 King Street East in Dundas. The “Strategy” recommends that this property be included as part of the public park system in the future through ownership, easement, or handshake agreement. It also recommends that all or part of this property should be transferred into the public park system, and the boundary and a suitable buffer should be negotiated at that time.

The self-storage facility proposed at 201 King Street East in Dundas has been appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board, and a hearing has been scheduled to start on January 11, 2010. Until the outcome of this Hearing is determined, the use of this site will not be known. Since the use of this site will be determined through the OMB decision, the map showing the Park System (Figure 6) may have to be altered in the future to reflect this decision. For example, if the self-storage facility is approved, it might be more appropriate to identify 201 King Street East as “Complementary Stewardship Lands”.

Establishing a Management Committee

Another important initial step in implementation will be to form the Cootes to Escarpment Park System Management Committee. The Committee would meet regularly to guide the implementation actions outlined in the “Strategy” and to refine the management structure and seek funding. The committee partners would report annually on progress and include project implementation reports on their web sites.

In the near future, this would mean that one staff person from the Planning and Economic Development Department would sit on the Management Committee which would meet regularly with the other partners to define the long-term, ongoing management structure and funding. It is also likely that continued staff commitment will be required once the final Management Body is set up. It is anticipated that this commitment can be met using existing staff.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION: (include Financial, Staffing, Legal and Policy Implications and pros and cons for each alternative)

As an alternative to the recommendations, the Economic Development and Planning Committee could choose to:

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1. **Not endorse the Strategy:**

To date, the majority of the project partners have endorsed the “Strategy” through their Boards and Councils. If this alternative is chosen, the City of Hamilton would likely be the only one of the partners to not endorse the “Strategy”. This would be of particular concern because most of the study area lies within the City’s boundaries. Endorsing and supporting the “Strategy” would demonstrate that the City of Hamilton supports the preservation of the biodiversity, ecological functions, and the recreational use and enjoyment of this highly significant area.

Also, the “Strategy” is not a land use plan; it relies on voluntary actions of public and private landowners. It serves as a means to increase dialogue and coordination between agencies and landowners in managing their lands within the park system. The implementation actions in the “Strategy” should be considered by landowners (including the City) and City staff when a land use change is being contemplated, but are not binding policy.

2. **Discontinue providing staff support to the implementation of the Strategy:**

This option is not recommended because the City of Hamilton is a key partner in the implementation of the “Strategy”. The majority of the study area is within the City of Hamilton and many of the implementation actions require City participation. Ultimately, it is intended that implementation of the “Strategy” will be carried out by dedicated project staff hired by the Management Committee. For this reason, City staff time commitment will be minimal and can be met using existing staff.

3. **Not approve providing financial support of $2,500 to fund an interim Project Manager, to ensure that implementation of the Strategy proceeds:**

This alternative is not recommended. At this time, all of the project partners have agreed to contribute $2,500 to keep the project going until the spring of 2010, when it is hoped that funding from other sources will be approved. Since the City of Hamilton is a key partner in the “Strategy”, it would be appropriate to make a one-time contribution.
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CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN (Linkage to Desired End Results)


**Skilled, Innovative & Respectful Organization**
- More innovation, greater teamwork, better client focus.

**Financial Sustainability**
- Effective and sustainable Growth Management.

**Intergovernmental Relationships**
- Maintain effective relationships with other public agencies.
- The Strategy has involved a partnership with other government and non-government agencies.

**Environmental Stewardship**
- Natural resources are protected and enhanced.
- Remove Hamilton Harbour from the Great Lakes area of concern list by 2015.

**Healthy Community**
- An engaged Citizenry.

APPENDICES / SCHEDULES

Appendix “A” - Map of Study Area

:CP
Attach. (1)

The following Reports can be accessed on the Project Web Page (www.cootestoescarpmentpark.ca), due to their large size:

- Cootes to Escarpment Park System Conservation and Land Management Strategy Phase 2 Report.
- Cootes to Escarpment Park System: A Conservation Vision.