

Trails Advisory Group (TAG) – Minutes (Final)

Onsite Meeting: The Coves ESA & Byron Valley ESA – Draft Byron Valley Conceptual Nature Trail Plan

Date: August 15, 2018 4:00pm – 6:00pm

Attendees:

Anna Hopkins – Ward 9 Councillor, Lila Albinger, Councillor’s Assistant, Dan Jones – UTRCA, Dave Potten – TVTA, Randy Trudeau – EEPAC, Anita Caveney – Nature London, Janet Edwards – Byron Valley Adopt an ESA, Debbie Park – Byron Resident, Jeff Santin – Byron Resident, Catherine Morrison – Byron Community Organization, Dan Doroshenko – Byron Community Organization, Douglas German – Byron Woods Condominium Board, Andrew Macpherson – City/E&PP, Linda McDougall – City/E&PP, Kara Muro – City/E&PP

CC: Participation House Staff

Minutes: Kara Muro / L. McDougall

Beginning at the Coves ESA at the Brookdale Access point, City Staff outlined some of the similarities between the 2015 Coves ESA trail enhancement project and the proposed Draft Nature Trail Plan for the Byron ESA. TAG reviewed the Level 1 trails (woodchips), the boardwalk, Level 2 trails (granular, limestone-screenings), the accessible lookout (3 large armour stones) and successful work to date on invasive species management and naturalization of City owned manicured lawn areas. City staff and the UTRCA ESA Team’s experience is that a well-designed and managed trail system directs trail access, protects the environment and encourages sustainable access to nature for the local community. Hardcopies of the Draft Byron Valley Conceptual Nature Trail Plan and TAG Terms of Reference were circulated at the start of the TAG walk in Byron Valley ESA.

- TAG walk began with review of the Draft [Byron Valley Conceptual Nature Trail Plan](#) presented at the [Community Meeting in March](#). Goal of TAG walk was to review and understand issues with the Draft Plan and incorporate suitable changes that could address those issues and benefit the environment and trail users.
- Some TAG members concerned that residents and staff at Participation House at 242 Halls Mills Road may not support nature trail plan. See notes from City staff August 22, 2018 and September 4, 2018 meetings with Participation House staff and resident attached to minutes.
- TAG member asked about trail use and protection of habitat for deer, bats and turtles. City Staff noted that the findings of the natural heritage inventory and evaluation for the Byron Valley ESA were presented at the Community Meeting in March 2017 and the slides identified that: *“Existing unmanaged/informal trails and proposed trails within the Study Area were reviewed for compatibility with the surrounding significant ecological features based on the list provided in Table 1 in the Guidelines and trails are compatible.”* The draft conceptual nature trail plan

proposes trail improvements for mainly existing nature trails, and some modifications to avoid sensitive habitats to protect native trees and plant communities and more specifically:

- Deer are hyper-abundant, native species, commonly observed by residents in natural areas and backyards across the City. Deer and their habitat will continue to be protected in the ESA. Local TAG members noted deer appear to be crossing the Thames about 100 meters west of the proposed managed, nature trail system.
 - In the Byron Valley ESA the density of tree cover, lack of open substrates for nesting, and north facing banks (i.e. less direct sunlight), are not good habitat for turtle nesting. The Thames River is a movement corridor for turtles and this will continue to be protected.
 - The entire Byron Valley provides good bat habitat, and, as native trees will be protected, bats and their habitat will continue to be protected in the ESA.
 - Local TAG members noted concentrations of mussels are found in the Thames about 100 meters west of the proposed managed nature trail system.
- TAG reviewed the existing/proposed Level 1 trail that heads south up the slope towards Commissioners, and agreed that near the top of the slope, relocating the trail with a “bench cut” trail, a few meters below the existing trail along the property line, while protecting native trees, is preferred to reduce sightlines to and from residential properties.
 - TAG reviewed and agreed that the trail from the new access from Commissioners Road West into the ESA would be:
 - Level 1 woodchip trail, winding through and protecting all native trees, and located as close to center of the newly acquired City lands as possible.
 - A bicycle barricade (open to pedestrians) and signage with ESA rules etc. would be placed at the Commissioners access point.
 - A trail closed barricade and signage would be placed where existing trail heads west at the top of slope, behind the apartment building.
 - A request for enhanced privacy fencing between City lands and Condominiums at 1337 Commissioners Road W was made by some TAG members, City does prefer fencing between City owned ESA lands and private property and staff will coordinate fencing with permission of the condo board.
 - TAG reviewed existing, western sections of Level 1 trail and the proposed lookout location:
 - Lookout to consist of two or three pieces of large armour stone, set back from rivers edge, on slightly higher ground.
 - TAG was in general support of Level 1 trail locations identified on TAG map
 - There was a discussion about the historic use of the sewer alignment (Identified as a Utility Overlay on TAG Map) further south and perhaps the trail loop could/should go there.

- ACCAC was unable to attend TAG walk but provided the comments which will be incorporated in the revised plan:
 - *It was noted earlier these trails are existing seemingly implying there is not the same obligation under the AODA. ACCAC would fundamentally disagree. These are unmanaged informal trails. There are currently NO EXISTING city maintained trails, hence all is new development. That said, we do recognize limitations to some areas within the study area for accessible trails.*
 - *The entrance off Commissioners is only suitable for level one (as it is identified as natural environment zone) so we would have no real comment on that.*
 - *The point where that entrance meets up with the other loop systems (the level 2 to the east, level one to the west) would be the earliest we would look at an accessible path along that route. Only other potential access to it is off private property so an accessible connection to private property is redundant.*
 - *ACCAC obviously supports a level 2 loop on the east side if the trails as proposed.*
 - *the trail width be 1.5 m throughout (consistent with both level one and two trails)*
 - *the surfacing throughout remain firm natural earth throughout as much as possible (consistent with both level one and two trails)*
 - *where frequently wet or eroding soil is expected we propose those segments only having granular surfacing (consistent with both level one and two trails)*
 - *ensuring sufficient overhead clearance for safety (again consistent with both levels), noting that a blind or low-vision hiker may require a safety clearance sufficient for an average to slightly above average height person to walk through without risk of a face-full of branches*
 - *ensuring the maintenance of the trail meets needs for accessibility, rather than only safety. This would be the only difference between what is contained within the proposal, and an accessible route.*

- Near end of the walk some TAG members proposed changes to the Level 2 trail loop alignment on top of the Byron Dyke to further limit proximity to the residential properties. This change was generally supported by TAG and is shown on the revised TAG map:
 - *Realign proposed Level 2 trail loop, keeping loop to the west of existing homes, over an existing berm, over the existing, un-opened road allowance for Old Bridge Road. This alignment would not be visible or act as an attractant to those using multi-use pathways leading to and from Springbank Park.*

- Relocate existing vehicle barricade and gate closer to sewage pumping station/trail, further west to allow for parking (2 accessible spaces and 2 standard parking spaces). This addresses concerns about trail users parking on local streets, noting trail is intended as a local amenity for the community to have sustainable access to nature trails, and, is not a notable destination that many folks would drive to.
- Naturalization of lawn areas on City property to enhance pollinator habitat near the sewage pumping station.
- Nature London TAG rep. inquired why Byron Valley ESA is identified as an ESA on London Plan Map 5 despite its relatively small size, and, potentially not meeting 2 or more of the London Plan ESA Criteria. Staff advised Schedule B-1 of the previous Official Plan identified the Byron Valley as ESA - likely since the early 90's. Staff are working from current mapping and City's TAG process and ESA Guidelines for Management Zones and Trails in ESAs despite the ESA being less than 40 hectares in size.
- At end of TAG walk City staff advised minutes and revised Trail Concept Plan based on TAG walk would be circulated to TAG and posted on the City website.

Added Notes from August 22, 2018, Meeting with Participation House staff and City staff re Byron Valley ESA Nature Trail and Accessibility

- Any increased use of Byron Valley area would be welcomed to increase opportunities for community/neighbourhood interaction with Participation House residents.
- Support an accessible trail access to river's edge for Participation House residents.
- Support naturalization of City owned lawn areas near sewage pumping station and opportunities to assist with naturalization.
- Steep hill and condition of Halls Mills Road itself is an issue for Participation House residents.
- Support for accessible trails noting trails with "gravel" surfaces with larger, loose pieces can be challenging for wheelchairs to use.
- City staff and Participation House staff and residents will visit Coves East Pond and Byron Valley ESA in early September, to review existing trail surfaces and accessibility.

Added Notes from September 4, 2018, Site Visit with Participation House staff and resident re Byron Valley ESA Nature Trail and Accessibility

- Began visit at Coves ESA – Brookdale Access. Tested accessibility of granular trails (crushed limestone/chips and dust), boardwalk and woodchip trails for manual, push wheelchair accessibility with Participation House (PH) staff and resident in a manual, push wheelchair.
- All three trail surfaces were accessible for PH staff to push the resident in his wheelchair along however, it was noted that pushing the wheelchair along the woodchip trail was difficult, bumpy, and would be more challenging if trails are wet.

- PH staff noted that pushing a manual wheelchair over woodchip trails or granular trails may not be feasible if a larger person is in the wheelchair.
- PH staff noted that asphalt is most accessible trail surface for some PH residents in their specific types of wheelchairs as:
 - Electric wheelchairs can weigh about 1300 pounds plus the weight of the person and small front wheels can sink and get stuck in woodchips, soil, or granular trails and this is made worse in wet conditions. Electric wheelchairs operate best on firm and stable, smooth surfaces.
 - Some PH residents use manual, foot propel wheelchairs and find it very challenging to independently operate them over trails with woodchips, bare soil or granular trails and this is more challenging in wet conditions.
 - One PH staff can take all 3 of the Byron PH residents out for a walk at the same time when trail surface is firm and stable and smooth like asphalt.
 - One PH resident is in a stretcher style wheelchair and PH staff can only take him and his wheelchair out for walks on firm and stable, smooth surfaces.
- PH staff noted they generally support the Byron Valley Trail Concept TAG Trail Concept Map but prefer the Level 2 trail loop identified on the TAG Map be an accessible, asphalt trail loop that includes access down to the west Lookout marked on the TAG Map.
- Noted PH residents enjoy spending time in nature and being near enough to the water to see it at lookouts etc.
- Noted some PH residents and their friends would be able to access the proposed Byron Valley trail independently if the proposed Level 2 trail loop surface was asphalt.
- Noted that one PH staff could take all 3 of the Byron PH residents out for a walk in the Byron Valley at the same time and would not need to drive or assist the residents in and out of a vehicle if the if the proposed Level 2 trail loop surface was asphalt.