

Stakeholder Focus Group meeting summary

Meeting date: Tuesday, December 8, 2020
Location: Virtual meeting via WebEx
Time: 6:30-8:30 p.m.

About the meeting

There are a number of trail advocacy and user groups in Guelph and representatives from these groups are considered key trail stakeholders. We met with key stakeholders on December 8 through a virtual meeting to listen to their feedback on:

- How we classify our trails
- How to integrate third party trails into our network and work plans
- What criteria should be used to prioritize our trails
- What are our priorities
- Pedestrians and cyclists
- Trail surfaces

Representatives from the following user groups were engaged: Royal City Trail Committee (RTC), Guelph to Goderich Rail Trail (G2G), Guelph Hiking Trail Club (GHTC), Speed River Cycling, Guelph Victors, Speed River Gravel Grinders, Nature Guelph, Guelph Off-road Bicycling Association (GORBA) and Guelph Coalition for Active Transportation (GCAT). Staff from the following departments were also present: Park and Trail Development, Park Operations, Community Engagement.

What we heard

Impact of COVID-19 on trail use

Many stakeholders noted that trail use has significantly increased over the last year as a result of COVID-19. Community members are investing in new equipment and are exploring the city's trail system in new ways. Sales of bikes, cross country skis, running shoes and other similar equipment have skyrocketed and in many cases local stores are sold out or have many items on backorder. This trend is across Ontario – and exploring our trails or purchasing new equipment is bringing people to Guelph as a destination.

Trail stakeholders believe this 'outdoor boom' will last for another 5-10 years as people have developed a new love of the outdoors. We need to capitalize on this now and set Guelph as a destination and leader in Ontario.

Our priorities and how we set them

Stakeholders were asked about how we should set our priorities and if there were any specific priorities they thought were at the top of the list. We heard:

- Connecting trails and addressing key gaps or crossings in the system is important.
- Making the trail system well connected and intuitive to use through new signs and wayfinding strategies.
- Making improvements to connect into regional trail systems like the Trans Canada Trail, Hespeler Mill Run Trail or Cataract Trail in Elora. Creating a trail hub/destination in Guelph is important and can bring significant economic return on investment.
- Making better connections between off and on-road connections and working to keep trails off road as much as possible.
- Creating interim solutions if a long term solution is expensive or too long-term.
- Capitalizing on this stakeholder group as community builders and advocates for trail building and promotion.
- Focusing on creating a good destination oriented trail system. Routes might include: Downtown to Guelph Lake, Downtown to Kissing Bridge Trail, and Preservation Park to Guelph Lake.
- Improving trail crossings (e.g. Speedvale underpass project, Victoria Road at the Turf Grass institute).
- Implementing the ATN plans.

Prior to the meeting, we received GHTC's priorities in a letter. The GHTC encouraged other user groups to provide their list of priorities.

We also heard from stakeholders the desire to be actively involved in reviewing and setting priorities through the master plan process.

How can the City use this stakeholder group more

Throughout the meeting stakeholders raised their willingness and ability to partner with the City on projects and to provide more detailed feedback on trails. There were two main requests:

A **Trails Advisory Committee** was requested to formalize the stakeholder-city relationship. The City committed to working together to work out details on a more formal relationship.

Third party trails built by volunteers. The GHTC offered their expertise and volunteers to build new tertiary trails on City-owned land. The Bruce Trail Conservancy was used as an example model that might be able to be right-sized to Guelph to help this happen in our





community. The City can help or lead these processes. More work is needed to tease out the details of this plan.

Some stakeholders noted that we should start a process and use the process as an example as a case study to formalize a model for future projects.

Cyclists and pedestrians

Stakeholders were asked if there are any areas where there are conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians. We heard many ideas of how to improve the relationship between users on the trail system.

- On busy trails there is sometimes conflict between users but can generally be fixed through promoting proper etiquette and knowledge of how to use trails. Many users are alarmed at cyclists bells or don't hear them with earphones in.
- The City can take a leadership role in promoting the proper use and etiquette of trails through social media, signage or other methods. As trail use continues to increase due to COVID-19 or population increases, this will be needed more often.
- There are 30,000 mountain bikes in Guelph and there are two to five times as many users this year as a result of COVID-19. There are lots more volunteers too. Mountain biking should be preserved on the Arkell Springs grounds.
- The G2G from Kissing Bridge to Goderich uses trail counters to measure use. This year the G2G overall trail use was up 400% for the 2020 season (May to October) over 2019, and, interestingly for our Guelph efforts, the completion of the trail surface upgrade west of Millbank saw an increase in trail use of 1000% in 2020 in that section.
- Providing trails that are wide enough to accommodate a range of users and that is appropriate to the focus of the trail (e.g. recreation vs transportation). With the recent formalization of the James Street trail the group determined that an appropriate width for the bridge would be 2.4m (8') – this can be a start to help with developing standards.

We also heard that our trail classification should help define this relationship better and it seems to meet our needs. Very few comments received about the classification system.

About the Guelph Trail Master Plan update

The Guelph Trail Master Plan (GTMP) update guides how we plan, design, fund, build, and maintain our trail system. We are updating the GTMP to recognize changing needs as well as new approaches, standards, and City practices and policies.

This is the third opportunity to hear feedback on the [Guelph Trail Master Plan \(GTMP\) update](#). We used previous feedback to ask questions that dig a little deeper and validate what we heard. The input we collect during this phase will be a component of what feeds





into the draft plan, focusing on mapping our network and understanding the way in which we classify trails and prioritize their implementation.

How we will use this feedback

Community feedback is one factor we use to make decisions, we will also consider:

- Alignment with other plans and strategies (e.g. Community Plan, Strategic Plan)
- Overall community benefit
- Environmental sustainability
- Future trends and population changes
- Technical considerations and operating impacts
- Financial sustainability

Next steps

The feedback we received will help us determine our plan moving forward. Our intention is to present the GTMP to Council in June 2021.

Based on the group's interest and willingness to be further involved in the master planning progress, staff will determine how we can involve the group again in 2021. Details coming soon.

