

Guelph Trail Master Plan update

Phase one engagement summary

Purpose

The purpose of this phase of community engagement was to inform the public of the project scope, outline the study process and understand the community's thoughts and feelings about trails in the City of Guelph.

What we did

Engagement included the following activities:

- Online survey on our website open from October 14 – November 14, 2017
- Online discussion board using Mindmixer on our website throughout October 2017
- Social media and email correspondence October 2017
- Public open house at Evergreen Seniors Community Centre on October 19, 2017
- Landowner and developer open house at City Hall on October 18, 2017
- A pop-up event at the Main Branch of the Guelph Public Library on October 19, 2017
- A pop-up booth at the **Guelph Farmers' Market** on October 21, 2017
- Joint stakeholder meeting with Environmental Advisory Committee and River Advisory Committee on September 13, 2017
- Stakeholder meeting with Guelph Accessibility Advisory Committee on October 17, 2017
- Stakeholder meeting with trail groups, including: Guelph Off Road Bicycling Association, Guelph Hiking Trail Club, Guelph Bikes and Active Guelph on October 17, 2017
- Internal stakeholder workshops with key municipal departments such as Open Space Planning, Parks Operations and Forestry, Recreation Services, Policy Planning, Asset Management, Accessibility, Engineering, Operations and the City management team on October 20, 2019
- Advertising and correspondence sent to a number of key stakeholders and groups

In total, we received feedback from 570 people from the eight in-person events and four online platforms.

Wherever possible, we have reviewed and incorporated community engagement data from related City of Guelph projects such as the [2019 Strategic Plan](#), the [2018 Community Plan](#), the [2017 Citizen Satisfaction Survey](#), [Natural Heritage Action Plan](#), [Urban Forest Management Plan \(UFMP\)](#), [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) phase one data and the [Guelph and Wellington County Vital Signs](#) data.

What we heard

Community engagement helped us understand:

- who uses Guelph's trail system;
- what priorities they want us to focus on;
- how they feel about the trail system right now; and
- what their vision is for the future of trails in Guelph.

Both staff and community data revealed overwhelmingly how much we collectively value our trail system. Guelph residents desire a bicycle and pedestrian-friendly city that connects people to nature and to the places they want to go.

We heard common top of mind themes including:

- Difference between transportation focused trails vs. recreation focused trails
- Trail safety and trail crossings at roads or other barriers
- Winter maintenance
- Where to find relevant information and mapping
- Communicating trail conditions to help users understand level of difficulty
- Signs and wayfinding
- Protecting the environment while also providing accessible trails
- Risk management and liability of informal trails
- Funding trail improvements and expanding the trail network

Survey results

The respondents to the online survey were 48 per cent male and 49 per cent female. The largest age group that participated in the online survey was between 41- 60 years old; the next largest age group was 26-40 years old. The data shows:

- Most respondents are interested in using trails for exercising (47%), transportation (23%) and experiencing nature (20%)
- Social interaction, dog-walking, bird-watching and photography are other important reasons people use trails
- Most respondents use trails daily or more than once per week in spring and summer (85%), fall (75%) and winter (57%)
- Many respondents identified themselves as beginner and intermediate users of trails across different activities, including: walking, hiking, biking, cross country skiing, snowshoeing and jogging/running
- A small group of respondents are expert users of trails and are comfortable with surfaces and trails that are more challenging
- Most respondents (86%) feel very or somewhat safe on City trails
- Safety at night, off-leash dogs, distracted people, drug-use on trails and cycling paths on roads are the most common reasons why people feel unsafe
- Most respondents feel that existing trails serve a wide variety of users and abilities, but that small changes would make it better

Survey respondents helped us prioritize trail improvements from most urgent to least urgent:

1. Fill gaps in the existing trail network
2. Expand the existing trail network by building new trails
3. Change the surfacing (material, size, etc.)
4. Focus on trail/ road/ rail crossings
5. Focus on trail/ river crossings
6. Build trails in new developments
7. Improve trail maintenance (e.g. condition of the trail)
8. Create more and better trail maps
9. Add more trail related facilities (e.g. benches, garbage cans)
10. Focus on trail way-finding signs (e.g. you are here and key destinations)
11. Promote trails so more people use them

Data Collection

Following community engagement in fall 2017, staff and our consultants put their time and attention into collecting and refining data on our current trails and studying future and current route connections.

Why the data is important

Collecting accurate and complete data on our trail network means mapping every corner of **the existing trail system. It's a big** job and accurate data is important.

Updated data gives us the ability to:

- accurately map where our trails are, including important informal pathways;
- review trail surfacing and length; and
- understand how accessible our trails are.

By updating our data, we can bring forward a complete and well-researched set of recommendations that could drastically improve our trails. Good data will give us a literal **map to where we're going.**

Aligning the GTMP with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP)

We have decided to merge the GTMP engagement process with the [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) (PRMP), which is currently underway. This makes it easier for you to provide feedback on trails, parks and recreation – together! The goals, deliverables and objectives of the GTMP will remain the same: plan, design, fund, build and maintain the trails of tomorrow.

By aligning the two processes, we are well-positioned to respond to provincial changes stemming from Bill 108. The aligned GTMP and PRMP will feed into the Community Benefits Charge Study and help us understand the financial impacts of both plans.

Next steps

The next round of engagement is happening in fall/winter 2019. Sign up to receive updates and participate at haveyoursay.guelph.ca.

In the next phase we are using the feedback gathered in the first phase of engagement to ask new questions that dig a little deeper. We want to understand the themes better and to validate what we heard.

In spring 2020, we will be reviewing potential recommendations of the plan and prioritize which ones are the most important to tackle first.