

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Like many other cities in southern Ontario, Guelph is changing rapidly. Over the past decade or so, large areas of land have been developed and Guelph's population has increased significantly. This trend is expected to continue. Statistics Canada reported Guelph's population and growth rate in 2001 as 109,450 and 2.84% respectively. By 2021, the population is expected to increase to 150,040, and this will be accompanied by an annual growth rate of 1.02%. Other cities in the Greater Toronto Area have also grown tremendously and people continue to look for places to live and raise families further and further away from the mega city, yet still wish to be close enough to commute to the larger centres. The City's Economic Development Department and Visitor and Convention Services have devoted significant resources to promote Guelph as a very desirable place to live.

New residents and those that have lived here their entire lives are demanding high quality recreation facilities close to home where they can escape the pressures of their busy day to day lives. In addition to traditional recreation facilities like swimming pools and sports fields, there is an expectation that Guelph has a well designed and connected linear recreational trail system. At the same time, there is a growing proportion of the population that prefers to travel around the city on foot or by bicycle, or must travel by a mobility-assisted device. They too are looking for a linked linear system to guide them throughout the city.

Most southern Ontario cities larger than Guelph as well as many that are smaller have had trail master plans in place for several years and have been taking steps to implement their networks and supporting programs. Guelph has been doing the same, but with the disadvantage of not having an overall "Master Plan" in place to guide important decisions that will have long-term effects on the entire trail network.

The Guelph Trail Master Plan (GTMP) described in the chapters that follow, provides that vision. It is a long-range planning document that will guide City Staff, Council, Developers, Agencies and other key stakeholders through the design, implementation and management of a comprehensive multi-use trail system throughout the entire city.

The GTMP will benefit Guelph in many ways:

- It provides a communication tool that can be shared among various City departments so that implementation of a trail network can be coordinated with other initiatives related to transportation, recreation, tourism, land use and economic growth throughout the city;
- It communicates the City's commitment to public health and active living;
- It communicates the City's intent with respect to an integrated trail system, which can be shared with developers who have interests in expanding the community;
- It sends a message to potential residents and business owners that Guelph is a desirable place to live, work, run a business and play;
- It provides the basis for communication tools that can be provided to residents with an interest in trails for recreation and utilitarian purposes;
- It provides a vehicle by which points of cultural interest can be connected and highlighted throughout the city;
- It communicates and provides the means to support the City's objective to reduce the dependence on the automobile and provide viable transportation alternatives that are environmentally friendly and sustainable.

The GTMP goes beyond identifying routes. It has been designed to complement other planning efforts in the City. It provides the steps and tools necessary for the City and its partners to implement the plan.

This plan includes:

- A recommended network of off-road trails supported by on-road links (whereby bicycles are expected to travel on streets and pedestrians travel on sidewalks) to ensure continuity of the network that connects neighbourhoods and key destinations;
- An implementation strategy that identifies priorities and costs, and an approach to implementation that can be integrated into the City's annual service, capital investment and delivery programs.
- Program recommendations to promote, encourage and increase the level of trail use in the City of Guelph;
- A monitoring and maintenance strategy to ensure that the trails are properly cared for once they have been constructed.

## **1.2 Goal and Objectives**

The **Goal** of the Guelph Trail Master Plan is:

***To develop a cohesive city wide trail system that will connect people and places through a network that is off-road wherever possible and supported by on-road links where necessary.***

The goal is supported by the following five **Objectives**:

1. To develop a City Wide Trail Master Plan that is consistent with the vision(s) articulated in the Official Plan, the Recreation, Parks and Culture Strategic Plan, the River Systems Management Plan, the Smart Guelph principles, the Guelph and Area Transportation Strategy, the Green Plan, various watershed plans and other relevant long range planning documents.
2. To develop an understanding of trail users in the City of Guelph.
3. To create a management database of current trail conditions that can be updated and adapted as the trail system evolves over time, and that can be used as a tool to monitor and maintain the trail system.
4. To develop an implementation plan that describes trail construction methods and details, priorities and costs.
5. To develop strategies to generate public interest in, and increase public use of the trail system.

## **1.3 The Study Process**

The two-phase study began in May of 2003. The first phase "Understanding the Resources" included the following key steps:

- Assembly and review of background information pertinent to trail development in the city. This included related key planning documents;

- Collection of data relating to existing trail conditions in Guelph and development of a Global Positioning System (GPS) database;
- Collection and mapping of data related to potential trail destinations and significant barriers to trail development;
- Development of a Geographic Information System (GIS) based mapping system that integrates the current city base map with the data management system;
- Identifying and understanding the needs of various trail users groups in Guelph through public meetings and stakeholder contacts;
- Research and documentation regarding best management practices for trail design and management.

The second phase “Developing the Master Plan“ included the following key steps:

- Development and refinement of trail network concepts;
- Development of an implementation plan which included prioritizing trail construction projects and assigning trail development costs over the short, medium and long term;
- Making recommendations for raising awareness of the trail system, encouraging use, promoting trails, and education opportunities related to trails in Guelph;
- Making recommendations regarding monitoring and maintaining trails;
- Summarizing all that was learned into a comprehensive report.

A thorough public consultation program was a key component of the study. Highlights of this program included:

- Regular consultation with a Steering Committee of City Staff and representatives from trail user groups, developers and other trail builders;
- A study tour with invited participants representing a wide range of interests and disciplines;
- Two public meetings at critical phases of the project (October 28, 2003 and December 04, 2003);
- Comment forms and newsletters at each of the public meetings;
- One-on-one meetings and correspondence with many organizations and stakeholders that have a vested interest in Guelph’s trail system;
- Presentations to City staff, a number of organizations and interest groups to raise awareness of trails in Guelph and to invite comment on the GTMP;
- A presentation at the Heritage River Conference; and
- Posting of project related information (newsletters, maps, comment forms) on the City’s website.

The study area included the entire City of Guelph (**Map 1**). Although limited to the City limits, potential connections to neighbouring municipalities were developed, part of which involved a basic inventory of trails outside the city boundary.

## **1.4 Organization of the Report**

This report describes the GTMP in detail, and is organized as follows:

**Chapter 2, Establishing the Need for Trails**, sets the stage for the plan by summarizing the planning context in Guelph within which a trail master plan fits. It also describes the value of trails in today’s

society. Specifically, it includes documented facts regarding benefits provided by trails from the transportation, recreation, health, fitness, environment and economic point of view.

**Chapter 3, Understanding the Resources**, lays the foundation for the plan by:

- Consolidating what the city has done before and is currently doing regarding trail development;
- Providing the details of the extensive inventory conducted for this study; and
- Summarizing opinions gathered from citizens and stakeholders throughout the course of the project.

**Chapter 4, Planning for Trails**, provides background information and details regarding the route selection, trail planning strategies and tools for the GTMP, a detailed description of the trail hierarchy and network, the implementation plan, related costs and funding opportunities.

**Chapter 5, Building Trails**, provides design guidelines and details for the construction of various elements of the trail network.

**Chapter 6, Supporting Trails**, includes recommendations for promoting trails and encouraging trail use, education initiatives, maintaining, managing and monitoring trails in Guelph.

**Chapter 7, Summary of Recommendations**, is a compilation of the recommendations developed in chapters 3 through 6 of the report.