

CHAPTER 2 ESTABLISHING THE NEED FOR TRAILS

2.1 Why a Trail Master Plan?

Across North America, the popularity of trails has been steadily increasing over the last decade and a half, and this trend is expected to continue to increase in the foreseeable future. Some recent trends in recreation, tourism and transportation contributing to this appeal include:

- Staying healthy through active recreational pursuits;
- A renewed interest in spending “quality time” with family and friends pursuing high quality recreational experiences;
- A strong interest in tourism and recreational activities that respect the natural and cultural environments and offer educational opportunities;
- An interest in “getaway” travel where the goal is to obtain a high quality recreational experience for good value;
- An increased interest in alternative modes of transportation including walking and cycling, both of which are well served by integrated trail systems.

In response to these trends, municipalities, agencies and independent organizations are planning, designing, implementing and promoting trail systems to meet the demand. Municipal Economic Development Departments are beginning to understand the economic benefit that well-planned trails systems can bring to their communities. Increased tourist traffic, better quality of life for residents, and the additional amenity that can help attract new commercial and industrial business are just a few of the benefits that trails bring to communities.

The City of Guelph is no exception. There is the need and desire among staff, politicians and residents to develop a community trail system that is as integral to the community as the road system itself. Planning at this level fosters a good understanding of the City’s expectation of new development and provides an excellent marketing tool for the developers of new communities.

2.2 Long Term Planning in Guelph

The concept of a linked open space system, supporting recreational trails and alternative modes of travel is well documented in long-range City plans. The trail theme is introduced in the Official Plan and reinforced through recommendations in plans focusing on transportation, recreation, land use and natural resource management. The following is a summary of trail and bicycle-related policies and recommendations contained in important city planning documents.

The City of Guelph Official Plan (2001), contains general policies related to trails and bicycle facilities. The Official Plan states that:

- Opportunities to use energy efficient modes of travel such as walking and cycling and reduce energy consumption for motor vehicles within the City be maximized (Section 3.8.10);
- The City will provide facilities for walking and cycling (Section 3.8.10.4);

- It is an objective to develop a walking and cycling trail system within the open space system that is accessible to the public utilizing paths, trails, streets and other public open spaces (Section 7.12g);
- The City will support the development of a bicycle network, as indicated on Schedule 9C of the Official Plan (Section 7.12.9);
- Support be given to the creation of programs and facilities that will encourage walking and greater uses of bicycles (Section 8.2.1);
- Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian ways be integrated into the design of new road projects (Section 8.2.1d);
- Bicycle / pedestrian linkages and street sidewalks be provided in plans of subdivision and development proposals (Section 8.2.1e);
- That the City will support the Bicycle Network Plan, as illustrated on Schedule 9C of the Official Plan, as the basis for the City's trail development (Section 8.2.2).

The Guelph and Area Transportation Study (1994), recommends that the city undertake initiatives to:

- Increase the use of bicycles throughout the City (Section 7.3);
- Support activities that promote cycling as a desirable mode of transportation (Section 7.8);
- Implement measures and policies to encourage a reduction in travel demand and encourage other modes of travel (Section 7.8).

The City of Guelph Transportation Strategy Update (1994), gives direction to the development of trails throughout the City. Some of the key recommendations include:

- Multi-use trails should be developed in the linear parks within the City to improve accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists (Section 7);
- A bicycle network plan will be developed and maintained by the City to identify the location and condition of bicycle facilities and identify the location of improvement priorities (Section 8);
- The City will endeavor to acquire additional bike routes through the use of the rail right-of-ways should they be abandoned (Section 8);
- The City will work in cooperation with neighboring jurisdictions in order to establish connections with bikeways (Section 8).

The City of Guelph's Green Plan (1994), states that the Community Involvement Program expressed strong support for bicycle paths to be integrated with the neighborhood transportation networks and the primary city-wide transportation system.

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (1992), released a policy that recognized the bicycle as an alternative mode of transportation. The Ministry has taken an active role in facilitating support for the bicycle through the integration of cycling considerations into Ministry activities.

Design Principles for Stormwater Management Facilities (1996), identifies that community trails within subdivision stormwater management facilities should be designed to enhance user comfort and safety.

The Hanlon Creek Watershed Plan (1993), recommends, as part of an overall strategy:

- That all trails be developed in conjunction with all interested groups (including the City, the Conservation Authority and the Guelph Hiking Trail Club);
- That the Hanlon Swamp Trail system to run southward along the edge of the linking corridor across Clair Road, then eastward to connect to the Halls Ponds Wetland ESA;
- That a balanced approach considering the objectives of those using the trails and the need to protect sensitive habitats is necessary. More specifically that:
 - i. The function of wildlife corridors and linkages be considered when trails are designed and that trails not be placed in the central part of a wildlife corridor but along the outside edge;
 - ii. There be an adequate vegetative screen along the trail to shield wildlife from human disturbance and to prevent humans from entering the corridor;
 - iii. That trails are not recommended along the lower reaches of Tributary A, connecting the headwaters area to the lower Hanlon Valley as it is a vital wildlife corridor and the presence of trails may result in a significant overuse of this area.

The Torrance Creek Subwatershed Study Management Strategy (1999), provides a series of guiding principles and recommendations that relate to the development of recreational corridors. These include:

- To develop community linkages among places of work, recreation and points of interest (Section 4.10.8);
- Anticipate, and where possible, allow for the creation of an integrated trail system with potential future connections to:
 - i. The open space trail system in the City of Guelph;
 - ii. Surrounding watersheds; and
 - iii. Regional, provincial and national trailways.
- Ensure continuity and consistency in the development of the open space system within the watershed (Section 4.10.8);
- Maximize interpretation and education while respecting and enhancing the natural functions of the open space system (Section 4.10.8);

In addition several maps and illustrations provide recommendations for main trail corridors, connecting links and trail design.

The City of Guelph Policy Guidelines for Planning and Management of River Systems (1993), recommends the following principles and design objectives:

- To provide continuous public access along the Speed and Eramosa Rivers (Objective 6);
- To encourage a variety of uses (i.e. walking and bicycling) along the corridors of the Speed and Eramosa Rivers (Section 7, Objective 13);
- That the City make improvements to Riverside Park, Goldie Mill Area, Downtown, Wellington Street Area, St. Patrick's Ward, West of the Hanlon Expressway and Eramosa River East to improve the trail network (Section 8.3);
- That the City acquire lands along the river systems, as they become available, to develop a continuous recreational trail corridor.

Hanlon Creek Business Park West

More recently, the planning and development of the Hanlon Creek Business Park West has gone from an idea to reality. An important aspect of this development is the integration of an off-road trail system into the land use plan that will allow employees to choose walking or cycling instead of automobile as their commuting option, and provide them with opportunities for exercise during breaks.

2.3 The Growing Demand for Trails and Keeping Pace with Change

Across Ontario, recreation trail use is recognized as one of the top three recreational pursuits, having a 20% participation rate and estimated annual growth rate of 2.3% (Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, in Marshall Macklin Monaghan, 2001). The demand for trail facilities across Ontario is very high. Trail and cycling clubs, conservation authorities, municipal and regional governments are all developing networks to encourage walking and trail use for recreation and transportation. At the provincial level, the Ontario Trails Council is working towards the development of the Trillium Trails Network that will serve to promote the integration of community and City trail systems into a province-wide system. Also at the provincial level, two recent initiatives clearly indicate strong government support for trails. The Ontario Trails Strategy and the Active 2010 Program by the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation will have a positive impact on both urban and rural trails. At the national level, progress is being made on the Trans Canada Trail, which is a cross-country route of local trails linked with a common theme. When it is complete, it will be the longest trail in the world measuring 13,000km from coast to coast. The Trans Canada Trail has received the support of individuals, corporations, charities, trail organizations, agencies, municipal, provincial and federal governments.

According to David Foot, author of *Boom, Bust and Echo*, significant changes are occurring in recreation as a result of the changing demography of our population. A large proportion of our population is aging and looking for different types of recreational opportunities than were typical in the past. Current Canadian research indicates that people are taking shorter but more frequent vacations closer to home. Walking, cycling, and jogging are among the top ten most popular recreational activities of Canadians and all trail activities are experiencing substantial annual growth in participation rates. Health professionals are placing a renewed focus on the pursuit of trail activities and seniors groups are forming to participate in a range of trail activities for their social and fitness benefits.

As part of an informal survey of municipal trail managers across southern and central Ontario conducted during the GTMP study, questions were asked about trail maintenance practices, trail successes and lessons learned. The following are paraphrased comments recorded through this survey which clearly indicate this increasing popularity and demand.

1. Residences near to/next to trails tend to sell the fastest and get higher prices. **People want to be near trails.**
2. Those that have done trail count surveys have been surprised by the number of users they are getting. For example in the City of Cambridge, the Cambridge Trails Advisory Committee, and the Grand River Conservation Authority have set out electronic trail counters as a way to measure the level of use of some local trails. They have been surprised by the results, which are much higher than anyone had anticipated. **People use trails.**
3. Developers use trails/proximity to trails in their advertising to attract prospective buyers and sell houses. **Community builders understand the value of trails.**
4. Municipal officials say they get more “good news stories” about their trails than any other type of recreation facility they offer, and municipal officials are more often asked for trails than any other type of recreation facility. **People want more trails.**
5. Those who promote trails can’t keep maps and brochures in stock. **Trails are very popular.**

6. Trails provide the biggest “bang for the buck”. Compared to other more traditional recreation facilities, the cost to install and maintain them is low, and accessible to the widest cross section of the population regardless of age or social status. ***Trails are a good investment.***
7. Trail related tourism is increasing in popularity. In comparison to resident trail users on any given trail, the proportion of visitors/tourists seems to be increasing. ***Trails and tourism “go hand in hand”.***

2.4 The Benefits of Trails

The benefits of having and promoting trails are many. They have been grouped under the three themes of healthy citizens, a green city and balanced transportation system and a strong economy. Each of these themes is further elaborated below.

2.4.1. Healthy Citizens

Trail use enhances fitness and provides an enjoyable, convenient and affordable means of exercise and recreation. The most effective fitness routines are moderate in intensity, individualized and incorporated into our daily activities. Trails are well suited to this type of routine. There are other health benefits to recreational trail use in addition to the physical gains. Recreational trail use can enhance one’s mental outlook and well being, improving self-image, social relationships and increasing self-reliance by increasing a sense of independence and freedom.

Trails pass through a variety of neighbourhoods, helping to unite communities. They act as meeting places, and provide for informal interaction between people from a variety of backgrounds. Trail projects (construction, operation, maintenance and promotion) can help to foster partnerships among individuals, government, local business and interest groups. Across the country, there are many examples of successful private and public-sector partnerships that have developed as a result of trail initiatives.

Our health system is shifting from protecting people from hazards in the environment to developing healthy environments in which people live. Evidence suggests that improved walking, hiking and cycling facilities lead to higher participation rates. Increased physical activity such as walking, cycling and other trail related activities should help to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. A more active population can in turn, reduce the cost of medical care, decrease workplace absenteeism and maintain the independence of older adults, reducing the cost of institutional care. Trails are also an excellent venue for physical rehabilitation.

About two thirds of Canadians are physically inactive, resulting in about \$2.1 billion of direct health care costs in Canada. Increased physical activity such as cycling can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and the cost of medical care, decrease workplace absenteeism, and maintain the independence of older adults (Canadian Medical Association Journal, Nov. 2000). The Institute of Medicine recently announced that in order to stay healthy, Canadians must exercise for at least an hour a day. For many, this makes the trip to work an ideal opportunity for some to satisfy their entire exercise needs for the day. In Ottawa for example, two-thirds of 1700 commuter cyclists surveyed in 1991 ranked health and fitness as the primary reason for cycling to work.

The physical and psychological benefits of aerobic exercise are well established:

- Aerobic exercise has been shown to improve physical fitness, and to reduce blood pressure. Exercise also seems to have positive psychological effects. (American Journal of Health Promotion, in Public Health Agency of Canada).

- Four large population studies in the U.S. and Canada have shown that general well-being is somewhat greater, and depression is much less frequent, in those who take much more exercise relative to those who take little or no exercise. (Exercise and Relaxation in Health Promotion, Sports Medicine, in Public Health Agency of Canada).

The Heart Health Knowledge Attitude and Beliefs Survey (Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Community Heart Health Network, 2002) provides a comparison of attitudes related to heart health in 1998 and 2002. Some of the findings point to the potential health benefit that trails in Guelph can provide.

Specifically;

- When asked about awareness of strategies to reduce blood pressure, there was an 11% increase between 1998 and 2002 in the number of respondents who indicated that regular exercise is a good strategy to reduce blood pressure. Regular exercise was also the number one response;
- Lack of time due to work or other activities was noted as the number one barrier for respondents to increase their personal levels of exercise. There was an 11% increase between 1998 and 2002 in respondents noting that time was a barrier to increasing their level of physical activity.

Providing better access to trails by increasing the number of kilometres of trails throughout the city may help to encourage higher levels of activity. Furthermore, a more connected network that is easy to follow may help to encourage more local commuting on trails, allowing users to get some of their regular exercise traveling to and from work.

2.4.2. A Green City and A Balanced Transportation System

Walking, cycling and other non-motorized trail uses are energy efficient, non-polluting modes of travel, whereas motorized transportation is one of the largest contributors of harmful emissions. Motorized transportation produces 25 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. In Canada, the number of automobiles continues to increase steadily and people are driving greater distances more often. The average car travels 16,000 km/year or about 300 km/week. Limiting the number of kilometres driven by choosing another mode of transportation is by far the best way to reduce air pollution. (*Public Health Agency of Canada*).

Short-distance motor vehicle trips are the least fuel-efficient and generate the most pollution per kilometre. In a 2003 report, The Pedestrian and Bicycling Information Centre stated that sixty percent of the pollution created by automobile emissions occur in the first few minutes of operation, before pollution control devices can work effectively. Since "cold starts" create high levels of emissions, shorter car trips are more polluting on a per-mile basis than longer trips. Short distance trips have the greatest potential of being replaced by walking and cycling trips, and contribute to the mitigation of ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect, ground-level air pollution, photochemical smog, acid rain and noise pollution. According to the Harvard University School of Public Health, air pollution contributes to the deaths of 60,000 people nationwide in the United States, and in urban areas with poor air quality, asthma is becoming a more significant health concern. Reducing short distance trips by automobile has the greatest potential for reducing air pollution. For example:

- The Worldwatch Institute states that a six kilometre round trip by bicycle keeps about 15 pounds of pollutants out of the air;
- If half the workers in Canada who lived within walking distance of work left their cars at home, their efforts would save 22 million litres of gasoline a year;
- If 5 million Canadians walked or cycled instead of using their automobiles for short trips (averaging 3 kilometres per week), polluting car emissions would be reduced by 30 metric tonnes over a six-month period. (Go for Green, 1994);
- Cycling and walking are not only popular recreational activities; they are also a means of transportation that is efficient, affordable and accessible. In congested urban cores, cycling is actually the fastest of all modes for distances in some cases up to 10km;

- Many of the trips that Americans make every day are short enough to be accomplished on a bicycle, on foot or via mobility-assisted device. The 1995 *National Personal Transportation Survey* (NPTS) found that approximately 40% of all trips are less than 2 miles in length – which represents a 10-minute bike ride or a 30-minute walk.

When compared to roads, trails are less expensive to construct and maintain, making them an attractive and cost effective component of a balanced transportation system.

2.4.3. A Strong Economy

There is ample evidence to suggest that trails provide significant economic benefits for local landowners and businesses. Trails provide benefits to the local economy during both construction and operation. Trail construction results in direct benefits such as jobs, including the supply and installation of materials. Following construction, benefits emerge in the form of expenditures by trail users. A few examples include:

- Trails in New Brunswick employ around 1500 people for an average of 6 months per year;
- 70% of all Bruce Trail users report that the trail is their main reason for visiting the area, and they spend an average of \$20.00 per visit, per user, within a 10km corridor on either side of the trail;
- The San Antonio Riverwalk is considered to be the anchor of the tourism industry in San Antonio, Texas and contributes an estimated \$1.2 billion annually to the local economy;
- In 1988, users of the Elroy-Sparta Trail in Wisconsin averaged expenditures of \$25.14 (US) per day for trip-related expenses (over \$1.2 million annually);
- More than 600,000 Americans took a bicycle vacation in 1985 and when traveling in a group spent \$17 per day (camping), and \$50 per day (staying in motels). Cyclists traveling alone spent an average of \$22 per day (camping) and \$60 per day (staying in motels);
- In Ontario, the Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance estimated that at the end of a 10 year build-out period of the 320km system, approximately \$36 million in annual economic benefits will be generated in the communities through which it passes, and will create/sustain over 1100 jobs;
- A study conducted in the City of Surrey in 2000 found that homes nearest established trails sell the fastest and commanded higher prices;
- Economic Development Departments have recognized the value of trail systems integrated into commercial and industrial developments. For example, the new Hanlon West Business Park proposes to have a trail system surrounding the central natural feature. This is being used as promotion to attract buyers whose employees will benefit by being able to travel to and from work, and take exercise breaks using local trails.