

CHAPTER 3 UNDERSTANDING THE RESOURCES

3.1 Introduction

This section describes the current status of trails in Guelph. It provides a summary of observations and data collected by the study team regarding existing trails, trail uses and users, destinations and barriers. This information was gathered from existing reports, tourism mapping, and detailed field investigations. In addition, the public provided the study team with input throughout the study regarding the condition of trails, the positive and negative aspects of the existing trail system, and opinions regarding improvements that should be made. As the network was developed, stakeholders and the general public provided opinions about route preferences and construction priorities.

3.2 Inventory and Analysis

A thorough inventory of the existing trail system was conducted. Background mapping and reports were consolidated onto a single base map and referred to during fieldwork. A team of two conducted an inventory by traveling the entire trail system on bicycle. The location of each trail segment was mapped using a hand held Global Positioning System (GPS). Data points were collected as the observer traveled each segment. In addition to recording trail alignment; characteristics of the existing trail conditions were collected at regular intervals as well as locations where existing trail conditions changed significantly. All data was organized in a tabular format and was the basis for a trail database linked to the City's Geographic Information System (GIS). Data collected included:

- Trail width;
- Surface type;
- A subjective rating of trail condition;
- Longitudinal slope;
- Cross slope;
- Characteristics of the trail envelope such as vertical and side clearance;
- Setting for the trail (i.e. park, woodlot, stormwater management area, other open space); and
- Location of existing trail signs and other trailside amenities.

All of this information was summarized on two maps, one depicting existing trails, and the other describing destinations and physical barriers to trail development and use across the city. Each map is further described in the following two sections.

3.2.1 Existing Trails

Map 2 Existing Off-road Trails and On-road Bicycle Routes: depicts all of the off and on-road routes that were in existence at the time that the study was conducted. This information was gathered from a number of sources including background digital data, plans for newly constructed and registered subdivisions, information gathered during field reviews, and additional routes identified by city staff,

stakeholders and the public. The information was organized onto Map 2 according to the following categories:

- **Existing Off-road Trails;** consisting of those routes that are formally recognized by the City as trail routes. This includes trails that have been designed and constructed in city parks and on lands owned by others that are managed by the City, as is the case with some of the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) properties throughout Guelph. Examples include sections of stonedust and asphalt trails that are currently part of the Royal Recreation Trail throughout the city, trails in parks throughout the city, and walkways (e.g. sidewalk connections between parcels of private land that provide access to public lands). Formalized trails in the Hanlon Creek Conservation Area also fit into this group
- **Existing informal footpath or trails on private lands,** including trails on lands owned by the GRCA and managed by the City of Guelph. Many of these are shown for information purposes only and those that are located on private lands are not intended for public access. Examples include the trail along the south side of the Eramosa River between James Street and Victoria Road on the Cutten Club property, which is an informal trail that has been used for many years by Guelph citizens. However public use is not formally recognized or encouraged. Also included within this group are trails on public lands (other than those owned by the City) where general public access is permitted, or in some cases where access is restricted to certain groups having permission from the land owner. One specific case is the GORBA trail at Guelph Lake. This network is on lands owned by the GRCA, but is designed, constructed and managed by the Guelph Off-Road Bicycle Association (GORBA). GORBA members are allowed full access as part of their membership. The GRCA requires that non-GORBA members purchase a day pass for trail access.
- **Existing On-road Bicycle Facilities** includes existing on-road cycling facilities that were in place when fieldwork for the GTMP was conducted. Examples include the bicycle lanes on Gordon Street and those that have been recently built as part of the Stone Road reconstruction between Victoria and Watson Road. Also included with this group are existing signed bicycle routes through residential neighbourhoods such as the route through the University Heights neighbourhood.
- **On-road Bicycle Network from Schedule 9C (Official Plan)** includes bicycle lanes and on-road signed routes that make up the cycling network, but have not yet been constructed. Examples include sections of Gordon Street that will include bicycle lanes when reconstructed in the future through capital works infrastructure investment, as well as new on-road signed routes through residential neighbourhoods (e.g. Waverley Drive area).
- **Other legend items include:**
 - Parks, Open Space and Stormwater Management Areas;
 - Schools (elementary, secondary and post secondary);
 - Conservation Areas (lands owned by the Grand River Conservation Authority, but managed by the City of Guelph as an extension of the parks and open space system);
 - Wetlands.

3.2.2 Destinations, Attractions and Barriers

Map 3; Destinations, Attractions and Barriers provides a graphic summary of major destinations and physical barriers to trail development. The Official Plan, Parks and Open Space Mapping, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and tourism maps were among the major resources consulted during the development of Map 3. The Steering Committee comments, fieldwork and public feedback were invaluable in confirming and supplementing information gathered from various documents. Some of the information depicted included:

- Lands in public ownership including parks and open spaces;
- Linear corridors such as existing trail systems, hydro corridors and abandoned railway corridors;
- Areas/sites of natural significance such as the Hanlon Creek Conservation Area;
- Major parks and open space such as Riverside Park and the South End Community Park;
- Major employment areas such as the northwest industrial area, the Hanlon Business Park in the south end, the new Hanlon West Business Park and the Watson Parkway Industrial area;
- Major retail centres such as the downtown core Stone Road Mall and Willow West Mall;
- Schools and major institutions such as the University of Guelph, Conestoga College, and elementary and secondary schools;
- The Trans Canada Trail and other major existing trails such as the Royal Recreation Trail along the banks of the Eramosa and Speed Rivers; and
- Significant cultural destinations/landmarks such as the River Run Centre, museums, the Farmer's Market, Public Libraries, the downtown core, churches and heritage buildings.

Barriers

Barriers are considered to be those features, both natural and constructed that create a physical impediment to the development of a trail system. Barriers in the City of Guelph include:

- Major transportation corridors such as the Hanlon Expressway and the limited crossing points at intersections and overpasses;
- The Eramosa and Speed Rivers;
- Railways;
- Some of the major arterial roads, such as Stone Road between the Hanlon Expressway and Gordon Street, many sections of Woodlawn Road and Victoria Road;
- Some of the major topographic features and natural features such as the drumlin on the east side of Downtown.

One area of particular note is in the zone surrounding the intersection of Wellington Street, the Hanlon Expressway the Speed River where it crosses below the Expressway. In this location, several significant barriers intersect, making this entire zone very challenging from a trail routing standpoint.

3.2.3 Understanding Trail Users

In order to understand the process of route selection, and the concept of the network, it is important to first understand the different groups of trail users in Guelph. Different user groups require/enjoy different types of trails, and not all trails are suitable for all user groups in all places throughout the network. For example, it may be cost prohibitive and impractical to have all sections of every trail in the city designed to accommodate people who depend on mobility-assisted devices. On the other hand, it may also be desirable to discourage certain user groups from some areas. For example, bicycles may not be appropriate on some trails in sensitive wetlands. The use of a woodchip surface combined with other design techniques, appropriate signage and education may help to discourage bicycle use in these areas.

Permitted uses will include:

- Walking/hiking, and jogging/running;
- Users with mobility-assisted devices (motorized and non-motorized);

- Cycling;
- Cross country skiing and snowshoeing;
- In-line skating, and other small-wheeled uses (e.g. skateboards, scooters, strollers);
- Canoeing and kayaking.

Equestrian use will be prohibited. Typically equestrian uses in urban areas are prohibited through bylaw and enforcement. It is worth noting that such a bylaw does not currently exist in Guelph.

Other than authorized City of Guelph maintenance vehicles and emergency vehicles, all motorized uses such as snowmobiles, motorcycles, all terrain vehicles will be prohibited from the land-based trail system and motorboats will be prohibited from the water-based trail system.

Table 1 provides a general description of trail user groups typically encountered on the Guelph trail system along with the design requirements that will allow them to successfully use the trails.

3.3 Learning from Guelph's Citizens

An important aspect in developing the GTMP was to obtain input from stakeholders and the general public. Throughout the course of the study, the Study Team received a large number of very helpful suggestions. Comments regarding the network, maintenance and monitoring, the promotion and encouragement of trail use were evaluated in the context of the objectives and guiding principles. Where appropriate, suggestions were integrated into the GTMP.

3.3.1 Public Information Sessions

3.3.1.1. Stakeholder Tour

Two tour groups were organized; pedestrians/hikers and cyclists. Each group followed a predetermined route that was designed to visit a cross section of trail types, potential issues and opportunities. Following the tour, the group reconvened to discuss their findings. Several topics were discussed and the main points have been highlighted.

1. What makes a good trail system?

- A hierarchy of trails or separate trails to facilitate a variety of uses and experiences.
- A connected system, a series of clearly marked loops.
- Signing needs to be repetitious to reinforce messages, control traffic and indicate permitted uses. Consider consolidating signs (fewer posts).
- Being clear about permitted uses.
- Maps, markers, plaques, distance markers, icons.
- Winter clearing of trails.
- Wayfinding, rest stops, interpretive information (natural, cultural, heritage, other connections/destinations along or near the trail, etc.).
- Consider adding amenities that compliment the trail (i.e. mural design on bare walls).
- Markings on the trail/road to define routes-especially at “tricky” points.

- Innovative solutions (i.e. complimented City staff that worked with developers on the John A. MacDonald building renovation on Neeve Street).
- Bike lanes that have been added to city streets are appreciated, and these efforts should be continued (i.e.. request for bicycle lanes on Stone Rd).
- Pedestrian signal crossings of arterial roads were appreciated.

2. What issues need to be overcome in developing a good trail system?

- Mix of pedestrians and cyclists on the trail can be a concern.
- Runners and cyclists noted a problem where long dogs leashes cross the path of oncoming runners and cyclists. In addition, dogs off leash can be intimidating to some trail users.
- Traffic conflicts (one mode crossing another, trails crossing roads).
- Paved trails are not necessarily better trails (not all trails should be paved).
- Ongoing maintenance (washouts, overhanging vegetation, sight lines etc.).
- Understanding and developing solutions for difficult areas such as the Royal Recreation Trail adjacent to Stone Road near Stone Road Mall.
- Barrier curbs at road crossings are a problem for cyclists and mobility-assisted device users.
- Crossing of major arterial roads (e.g. Hanlon Expressway at Wellington Street).
- Making critical connections across barriers (e.g. over Speed and Eramosa Rivers in key locations).
- Naturalization efforts in open space and safe school routes along trails don't necessarily go hand-in-hand as trails can become overgrown with vegetation, and this presents a safety concern.
- Pavement markings for bike lanes at intersections can be confusing for motorists and cyclists. Perhaps an education program would help.
- Bike lanes at bus stops are a problem, as the bus must occupy the bike lane.
- Must deal with accessibility and safety issues, including the use of motorized vehicles.

3. What are some of the opportunities that should be capitalized on?

- Create better links between places of work and places of residence (better in some areas of the city as compared to others).
- Using quiet residential streets to make connections where off-road opportunities don't exist.
- Piggyback with ongoing Public Works projects and Environmental Assessments by developing opportunities for trail access and crossings (i.e. intersection improvements such as Macdonnell and Elizabeth which will be soon redesigned, reconstruction of the Victoria Road bridge over the Eramosa River presents a good opportunity to create a needed crossing of the river for trail users).
- Underpass of the Hanlon Expressway south of Kortright Road is an excellent opportunity, but access and lighting improvements need to be considered.
- Create better connections to schools, especially secondary. This may encourage more pedestrians/cyclists and reduce the number of cars.
- Add trail to north side of Speed River between Edinburgh Road and Hanlon Expressway.
- Look at opportunities to continue connections along river as land uses change/properties change hands (e.g. Guelph Dolime).

- Try to foster connections to other communities (e.g. along Speed River to Hespeler, as this would open up a huge network of trails in the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge area).
- More trail connections to the University. At present these appear to be few and more emphasis should be placed on these connections;
- Current trail mapping shows off-road only. The next generation of the map should include on-road routes also.
- Let people know about the trail system; visitors don't know, a lot of residents aren't well aware either. Develop better/more maps; make them readily available in public places, at schools, school board offices, on the City's website etc..
- Develop primary trails in some locations that are wider than current (e.g. from Covered Bridge to Victoria along north side of Eramosa River).
- Naming/theming sections of trail; develop different themes in different parts of the city.
- Try to pursue a formal arrangement for the trail on the south side of Eramosa River between Gordon Street and Victoria Road on lands owned by the Cutten Club.

4. Who are potential partners that might assist with trails in Guelph?

- Service Clubs: to provide support for the implementation of components of the trail plan.
- School Boards: to establish and develop safe routes to school using the trail network.
- Private enterprise: to sell/distribute maps, sponsorship of trail segments, amenities, rest stops.
- Wellington-Dufferin Health Unit: to promote trails as part of a healthy lifestyle.
- Guelph Accessibility Advisory Committee: to ensure that barrier free access is factored into trail design.
- Neighbourhood Associations and Coalitions: to assist with the implementation, maintenance and promotion of trails.
- Police Services: to assist with safety and security on the trails.
- Correctional Services and Parole Board: to assist with trail implementation and maintenance (public service hours).

3.3.1.2. Public Meetings

Evening public meetings were held at two critical points during the study. Each meeting included a slide presentation that provided a study update and solicited input on key decisions being made. At each of the sessions, relevant maps were on display and participants were encouraged to provide comments by recording them directly on the maps. City staff organized the sessions and booked venues, arranged advertising, notified stakeholders and the media. Staff were on hand to present further information, answer questions and were also available to receive feedback following the sessions. In addition comment forms and a list of study contacts were made available for the members of the public.

Public Meetings #1 and #2 (October 28, 2003 and December 04, 2003)

Public Meeting #1

A first Public Meeting was held on October 28, 2003. This session provided participants with:

- A detailed study outline and steps;

- An introduction to Guiding Principles;
- Some of the things that the Study Team had already learned/been told regarding the current status and condition of trails in Guelph;
- A description of trail users and permitted uses;
- An inventory of existing trails and the associated data collection process;
- A summary of destinations within the city and physical barriers to trail development;
- An introduction to the concept of a hierarchy of trails in the Guelph system;
- A first draft of a trail network; and
- An introduction to some of the design treatments/standards being considered for the trail system.

The following is a brief summary of the comments received. They have been grouped into five categories: Network Routing and Design, Trail Monitoring Maintenance and Management, Trail Promotion, Priorities and Other. They are listed in no particular order or priority.

Network Routing and Design

- Looped trails are preferred over linear trails (“out and back”);
- Not all primary trails need to be paved and lit. Primary trails serving as direct corridors between major destinations are a good idea. They provide a good opportunity for an alternate mode of transportation;
- A spine route running from east to west connecting to the University is needed, as is at least one paved spine trail running from north to south;
- The University is a major destination, and there are already trails that the general public use, not just University students. The City and University need to work together to establish links (e.g. trail along river by Cutten Club, Arboretum etc.);
- Old Hanlon Road should be a primary commuter trail corridor. It provides direct access to the Hanlon Business Park;
- Paved trails are necessary in some neighbourhoods to provide access for a wider range of abilities. Locations suggested included Bailey Park, northwest part of city, Two Rivers neighbourhood;
- There is a need to provide for skateboarders and in-line skaters (e.g. asphalt trails in some locations);
- Concern regarding increased traffic and on-road parking if a pedestrian bridge over the river at Emma Street is constructed;
- Intercity linkages should be considered for future connections to surrounding communities;
- Formalize arrangements with the Ministry of Transportation to provide access below the Hanlon Expressway at key locations (south of Kortright Road, at Wellington Street and the Speed River);
- A bridge over the Speed River near the Hanlon Expressway is a much-needed connection to the northwest area of the city. However, a brand new pedestrian only bridge over the Speed River in the Wellington/Hanlon area would be very expensive. Don’t spend large sums of money on this. Other alternatives need to be considered (e.g. use existing Edinburgh Road bridge, negotiate to make use of old Guelph Dolime bridge);

- Revisit the Royal Recreation Trail logo and signage;
- The trail system should connect with the bicycle transportation routes from Official Plan and Transit routes/stops;
- Consider connections to and interpretation of Guelph's heritage resources as part of the trail system. For example, the heritage plaque commemorating the founding of Guelph is located across Wellington Street from Allan's Mill, an interesting rest stop on trails that exist today;
- Natural areas (e.g. Hanlon Creek Conservation Area). Not all uses are appropriate and some are not permitted presently. It may make sense to develop multiuse corridors on either side of the sensitive natural area. Respect integrity of natural areas;
- If trails are well designed and designated in sensitive environments (e.g. dry) users tend to stay on the trails and out of sensitive areas;
- There needs to be some flexibility within the design standards to accommodate various trail types in different settings.
- Where trails meet roads is a problem. Some areas are more difficult to deal with than others, especially where there are no crossing aids (signals) for trail users;
- How do the developers know where to provide trails, and what to provide? Are there standards or expectations?;
- Establish a privacy barrier between homeowners and trails.

Trail Maintenance, Monitoring and Maintenance

- Better maintenance of existing trails is needed;
- Undertake a trail use survey to see how trails are being used (i.e. determine which ones are most popular);
- Better enforcement of leash by-laws in parks and on trails is needed;
- The concept of "Trail Ambassadors" should be investigated as a way to monitor and promote the trail system;
- Seniors like to use trails in winter and asphalt trails are more easily plowed. Winter maintenance of the system needs to be considered as well.

Trail Promotion/Education

- Trails should be promoted (i.e. host events on the trail system);
- Better maps are needed (i.e. flipbook maps);
- Education and enforcement program(s) are needed;
- Information on trail etiquette is needed.

Priorities

- Direct commuter links should be improved, and links between existing trails should be constructed to improve the existing trail network;
- Improve signing, mapping and advertising of trails;
- Royal City Park should be considered as the main hub of the trail system;

- Create connections to/from/through new Hanlon West Business Park while still in the planning stages;
- Continue to improve road crossings;
- Create the link below the Hanlon Expressway at Speed River;
- The north part of Guelph is under serviced by trails. More are needed;
- Create/complete trails connections to and from Downtown (i.e. between River Run Centre and Riverside Park);
- Implement the plan in stages, so that Council and taxpayers can manage it;
- Do not spend more than is necessary; don't develop a "Cadillac".

Other

- A review or update of the Master Plan is needed every 4 to 5 years to keep up with other changes happening in and around Guelph;
- Create a Trails Advisory Committee to provide ongoing contact with citizens during the implementation process;
- Where potential critical links crossing private lands are identified, City Staff should work with private landowners to develop agreements and incentives;
- Develop partnerships with larger institutions. (e.g. St. Joseph's Long Term Care Facility, Homewood, University of Guelph). Trails could provide opportunities for facility patrons as well as the public at-large;
- Develop partnerships with service clubs.

Public Meeting # 2

A second Public Meeting was held on December 04, 2003. This session provided participants with:

- A summary of comments from the first meeting and responses to them;
- Study progress since the last meeting;
- A draft network concept and listing of potential priorities;
- A summary of best maintenance practices collected from an informal survey conducted among a number of municipalities across southern Ontario;
- Confirmation of the proposed trail hierarchy and pertinent design details for trail construction; and
- A review of unit costs for construction of various trail elements.

The following is a brief summary of the comments received. Once again, they have been grouped into three categories: Network Routing and Design, Trail Monitoring Maintenance and Management, and Trail Construction Priorities.

They are listed in no particular order or priority:

Network Routing and Design

- Trails outside the city boundary: There are a number of very popular trails outside the municipal boundary. How can they be recognized and integrated into the plan? (i.e. Trails in the Arkell

Springs area, the Guelph Radial Line Trail to Limehouse, Starkey Hill Trail, trails along north/west side of the Speed River between Niska Rd. and the municipal boundary near the Wastewater Plant);

- Signs in the Arkell Spring grounds are very confusing. Although it is outside of the City boundary, there are City of Guelph signs posted in association with the access-controlled areas and structures. This area is very desirable from a trail user point of view, and should become part of the trail system;
- There is a trail on south side of Eramosa River between James Street and Victoria Road, informally referred to as the “Cutten Club Trail”. Is there potential to develop a partnership with the owner?;
- There has been talk in the past about developing a staging area off Victoria Road near the Speed River to alleviate the problems/potential danger of people using the shoulder to park and access the Royal Recreation Trail and the trail to Guelph Lake. Will this be part of the plan?;
- There should be a formalized link between Guelph Lake Conservation Area and Guelph Lake Sports fields to create a connection with the GORBA trails
- The current trail crossing of Edinburgh Road at Silvercreek Park/Eramosa River (mid-block pedestrian signal) takes at least one and a half minutes to activate. This is very frustrating for trail users; they often wait for a minute or so then take their chances by crossing at a break in traffic even before the light switches. This needs to be improved;
- There is an existing trail behind the plaza at the corner of Gordon and Wellington Streets (north side of river). Has this area been included as part of the trail plan? This area is not very comfortable from a personal security point of view. How will the trail extend behind the animal hospital and in behind the businesses that front on Wellington?;
- Lands on east side of Eramosa River between Stone and York should really be considered public as they are currently owned by the Ontario Realty Corporation. There should be access between the rear of the Better Beef property and the edge of the river. If there is no public ownership in this location, the City should negotiate an access agreement with the owners about an access agreement or easement.

Trail Monitoring and Maintenance and Management

- There needs to be better coordination among various departments (e.g. Parks and Public Works). By way of example, some areas that were considered for trail routes in the Northeast Trail Plan may be somewhat compromised by other projects being considered by other City departments. Departments need to get together and better understand what each other are planning.
- There should be improved public access to GRCA lands (e.g. Guelph Lake Conservation Area);
- There should be a publicly accessible website where trail users can provide input regarding trail maintenance and management issues.

Priorities

- The City held meetings in 2002-2003 regarding new trails as part of the compensation fund for Eastview area residents. The results of this work must be incorporated into this plan, and these should be constructed first as the City has already committed to build these trails with funds that were earmarked for this purpose;
- As the area surrounding the Hanlon Creek Conservation Area continues to be developed there is increased pressure on the natural resource. Encroachment, increased use, inappropriate trail location are a few of the factors contributing to this increased pressure. Some of the trails in this area should be closed and rehabilitated, and no new trails should be created;

- Currently there is no education program in place to advise users of the ecological sensitivity of areas like Hanlon Creek Conservation Area. Plans need to incorporate strategies to deal with these kinds of impacts;
- A priority of the plan should be to set out plans/guidelines for integrating trails with new development;
- Can/will the City accept trails in linear open spaces as part of park dedication instead of taking cash-in-lieu of parkland dedication?

3.3.2 Consulting Other Stakeholders

In addition to the two public meetings additional feedback was collected using a number of methods:

- Presentations were made to twelve different groups, which included Standing Committees of Council, several agencies and a number of local interest groups. The presentations focused on the study process and interim results. Comments were collected in the form of group discussions, formal submissions and comment forms that were returned;
- Information packages were sent out to thirty different property owners, including individual landowners/representatives of holding companies with lands where desired trail corridor connections are shown on the network plan (Map 4), representatives of various agencies that have lands where informal trails currently exist and/or where desired trail connections are shown on the network plan (Map 4), as well as managers of two city facilities where future trail routes have been proposed in the GTMP;
- Information packages were sent out to representatives of thirty-six stakeholder groups including various interest groups, service clubs, city departments and agencies, all with an interest in the GTMP. The packages provided clarification regarding guiding principles, details of the trail network proposal (Map 4), trail hierarchy and implementation priorities.

Comments were received by some of the recipients of presentations and information packages. Appendix 1 (under separate cover) contains the complete list of recipients of presentations and information packages as well as returned comment forms and other correspondence received. To the greatest extent reasonable/possible, these comments were considered during the ongoing development of the GTMP.

3.3.3 The City Website

In addition, the public was invited to provide comments at any time throughout the study by phone, fax and email. Study materials including public meeting materials, maps, comment sheets and newsletters were posted on the City website for the duration of the study at:

(<http://www.city.Guelph.on.ca/document.cfm?category=738>)