

## **Humber Historical Park – Project Update**

<b>Date:</b>	May 31, 2010
<b>To:</b>	Parks and Environment Committee
<b>From:</b>	Brenda Patterson, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
<b>Wards:</b>	Ward 5 – Etobicoke-Lakeshore Ward 13 – Parkdale-High Park
<b>Reference Number:</b>	P:\2010\Cluster A\PFR\PE31-061710-AFS#11803

### **SUMMARY**

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This report provides a status update on a proposal to create a historical park in the lower Humber parklands.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation received a feasibility study, “Toronto Historical Park: A Shared Path,” in 2008. This report proposed developing a series of interpretive stations within the existing park and trail network between Dundas Street West to Lake Ontario. The interpretive stations would highlight key historical sites in the Humber such as Baby Point, Old Mill, the Rousseau trading post, and Huron-Wendat, Mississauga and Seneca settlements. The feasibility study was reviewed by a steering committee comprised of staff from several City of Toronto divisions, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Heritage Toronto and La Société d’Histoire de Toronto.

The steering committee is proposing that the two existing *Discovery Walks* in the Humber be redesigned with greater emphasis on the unique cultural and natural heritage of the Humber River. The *Discovery Walks* program is managed by Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and produces a series of self-guided interpretive walks through City of Toronto parkland and urban spaces (see *Attachment A: Humber Historical Discovery Walk: Proposed Components*). The steering committee also looked for opportunities to implement other components of the project through collaboration with existing programs, such as Urban Forestry’s community tree planting program, and civic improvements being undertaken by the Transportation Services and City Planning (Urban Design) Divisions.

## **Financial Impact**

There are no financial impacts resulting from the receipt of this report. Future financial implications may result from capital work required to implement project components.

## **Equity Impact**

The proposed *Humber Historical Discovery Walk* showcases the First Nations, French and British histories along the Humber River. Discussions were held with representatives of aboriginal nations with historical ties to the Humber on how their languages and imagery would be used, and the appropriate locations for interpreting the history of these nations in the Humber Valley. The *Discovery Walks*' signage will be multilingual with text in French and English, and key words in aboriginal languages.

The project will be applying standards and best practices for accessibility to the signage design. Staff are exploring opportunities to develop a downloadable audio tour which would increase accessibility for the visually impaired. Opportunities to remove physical barriers on the trail and in parkland, such as converting steps to ramps, and improving trail surface, have been identified and will be implemented as funding becomes available.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

The Parks and Environment Committee, at its June 16, 2009 meeting, referred the recommendations in a motion (April 29, 2009) from Councillor Adam Giambrone to the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, for consideration and appropriate collaboration and consultation with all partners and stakeholders with a request to report back to the Committee on the status of the project.

Committee Decision – Item PE24.4:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/pe/decisions/2009-06-16-pe24-dd.htm>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

In 2008, La Société d'Histoire de Toronto approached Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division and Heritage Toronto with a proposal for the creation of a historical park along the Humber River, south of Dundas Street to Lake Ontario. La Société d'Histoire de Toronto is a non-profit French historical organization who have advocated for the creation of a historical park along the Humber River. In 1999, the Humber River was officially designated as a Canadian Heritage River due to its outstanding human heritage and recreational values and the contribution it has made to the development of Canada.

A feasibility study prepared for La Société d'Histoire de Toronto entitled, "Toronto Historical Park: The Shared Path" (March 2006), proposed using the existing park and trail network to celebrate and raise awareness of the Humber River's natural and cultural heritage by highlighting the inter-relationship or "shared path" of the First Nations,

French and British along the Humber River in Toronto. The study was funded by a Trillium grant to La Société d'Histoire de Toronto.

On April 10, 2008, the TRCA sent a letter to the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, with a TRCA resolution endorsing the concept of a historical park as described in the study, "Toronto Historical Park: The Shared Path," and that staff continue to work with La Société d'Histoire de Toronto and other stakeholders to achieve the objectives set forth in the study. The study was formally submitted for the consideration of the City of Toronto. Based on this action by the TRCA, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff were assigned to coordinate a steering committee to review the feasibility study and identify opportunities for collaboration.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Steering Committee**

A steering committee was formed with representation from the following project partners:

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division
- Toronto and Region Conservation Area
- Heritage Toronto
- Transportation Services Division
- Culture Services
- City Planning, Urban Design Section
- Heritage Preservation Services
- La Société d'Histoire de Toronto

La Société d'Histoire de Toronto, founded in 1984, is a registered non-profit organization whose primary mandate is to create a better knowledge and appreciation of Toronto's francophone heritage through exchanges of historical information, conferences, guided tours and workshops. Lisette Mallet and La Société d'Histoire de Toronto have been instrumental in raising awareness about the significance of the Humber River, and have clearly articulated a vision for the 'Shared Path' Humber historical park concept.

### **Community Engagement**

Early in the process, it was identified that consultation and support from aboriginal communities was essential for the success of the historical park project. Parks, Forestry and Recreation met with Diversity Management & Community Engagement staff in the City Manager's Office in March 2009 who recommended a presentation to the Aboriginal Affairs Committee of the City of Toronto. On May 20, 2009, the TRCA, made a presentation on behalf of the steering committee to the Aboriginal Affairs Committee.

During fall 2009, Heritage Toronto had a series of meetings with representatives of aboriginal nations with historical ties to the Humber River, including: Six Nations, Huron-Wendat, Mississaugas of the New Credit, and the Métis Nation of Ontario. The aboriginal nations agreed to a set of principles for how their languages and imagery

would be used in signage, and the appropriate locations and methods for interpreting the history of these nations in the Humber Valley. It was agreed the Humber River history of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, Huron-Wendat and Six Nations will each be presented at a unique site, linked archaeologically to each respective nation.

In addition to consultation with aboriginal communities, there have been a series of community meetings and events which have provided opportunities for the steering committee to preview the historical park concept with the community and receive feedback. Community engagement events include: Community Workshop with Trails for Active Transportation in March 2009; Walking Tour of the Humber during Rivers Day - June 2009; Celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the Humber being designated as a Heritage River - September 2009; and Jane's Walk - May 2010. Area councillors (wards 5 and 13) have been briefed on the proposal and components at various stages of project development.

## **Project Components**

The steering committee reviewed the Toronto historical park feasibility study and identified opportunities to coordinate with existing programs or include project components within future initiatives. It was determined that the Humber historical park could be identified and celebrated through the existing *Discovery Walks* program. The two existing *Discovery Walks* in the Humber would be re-designed with greater historical detail and emphasis on the 'Shared Path' – the history of the three founding cultures of Toronto on the Humber River. The *Discovery Walks* program is managed by Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and produces a series of self-guided interpretive walks through City of Toronto parkland and urban spaces.

The key sites for interpretation include:

- Toronto Carrying Place Trail;
- Transportation along the Humber – Boats, Roads and Rail;
- Rousseau homestead and trading post;
- Natural heritage of the Humber watershed;
- Mississauga, Huron and Seneca settlements, including Teiaiagon;
- Hurricane Hazel;
- French fort at Baby Point;
- French explorers – e.g. Samuel de Champlain; and
- Early milling communities, including Old Mill, Fishers Mill & Lambton Mill.

In addition to the *Humber Historical Discovery Walk* program, other project components have been identified below under the following categories: Cultural Features, Natural Environment, Recreation & Infrastructure, and Marketing & Promotion.

## Humber Historical Discovery Walk

*Discovery Walk* Panels – Major entrances to the Humber recreational trail will have large introductory panels with a map of the *Discovery Walk* route and an introduction message to the ‘Shared Path’. The *Discovery Walk* Panels will serve as trailheads for the system.

Interpretive Nodes – The *Discovery Walk* will feature 15 interpretive nodes that represent points of interest or stations along the route. The nodes will have consistent, distinct design and elements.

Interpretive Signage – At each interpretive node will be one to four interpretive signs highlighting the cultural and natural heritage of that location, and creating the story of the Shared Path. The signs will be multi-lingual with text translated into French, English and aboriginal languages.

Audio Tour – The steering committee is exploring opportunities to develop an MP3 audio tour using interactive digital technology. The audio tour would be available to download from any computer and help achieve accessibility objectives of the project.

## Cultural Features

First Nations Monument and Gathering Place – Economic Development & Culture Division is exploring opportunities to commission a significant piece of public art to recognize the First Nations presence in the Toronto area. The Western Waterfront near the mouth of the Humber is a valuable location as it signifies the start of the Toronto Carrying Place Trail.

Community Murals – The *Discovery Walk* travels under or past several bridges and retaining walls that are currently covered in graffiti and ‘tags’. Several community arts groups have expressed interest in turning these neglected sites into large-scale murals highlighting the natural and cultural heritage of the Humber River.

Historical Bronze Plaques – Large bronze plaques with the Carrying Place Trail and the Canadian Heritage Rivers designation will be installed on the Bloor and Dundas bridges during rehabilitation works being undertaken by Transportation Services Division.

Old Mill Subway Station Exhibit – Toronto Transit Commission has been requested to have appropriate staff collaborate with La Société d’histoire de Toronto on a permanent or temporary exhibit at Old Mill Subway Station. Initial discussions between the organizations have occurred.

## Natural Environment

Community Tree Planting – Preservation of the natural heritage of the Humber Valley is an important objective of the project. Urban Forestry has identified several locations for

naturalization and stewardship. These sites will be planted over the next few years by community volunteers.

Canopy Enhancement Tree Planting – In addition to the community-based naturalization, there are opportunities to increase the tree canopy by planting larger trees (ball and burlap) in the parkland.

Natural Resource Management – Urban Forestry will continue management of the savannah and forest habitat in the Humber Valley. Efforts include invasive plant management and controlled burns in South Humber Park.

Humber Marshes Wetland Enhancement – Ministry of Natural Resources is developing a restoration concept for the Humber Marshes, within the Humber Historical Park study area. They will be working in partnership with City of Toronto and TRCA to identify and implement restoration projects to improve the aquatic features and ecological functions of the wetland complex.

#### Recreation & Infrastructure

Kingsway / Queensway Interchange Improvements – In 2008-2009, Transportation Services undertook a significant redesign of the Kingsway / Queensway interchange. Included as part of the road reconstruction were enhancements to the pedestrian / cycling paths and the relocation of the Jean Baptiste Rousseau Ontario Heritage Plaque to a geographically correct location at the top of the bank.

Improvements to Park Pathways – Parks, Forestry and Recreation is working in partnership with Transportation Services to improve the multi-use trails to facilitate cyclists, pedestrians and other trail users. Trail improvements will continue to be implemented as funding becomes available.

Recreational Boating Opportunities – There are two existing boat launches in the study area – Humber Marshes on the east side and Kings Mill Park on the west side. The boat launches are functional but would benefit from minor enhancements.

South Humber Washroom Pavilion – The iconic South Humber washroom pavilion has suffered repeated vandalism and has been non-operational for several years. The design of the washroom pavilion has significant heritage value but is in a location which makes maintenance and security difficult. Next steps to address the condition of the building could include a feasibility study to determine the cost and constraints with restoring the building, but will have to be confirmed through further staff investigation.

#### Marketing & Promotion

Marketing Strategy – The steering committee will develop a marketing and promotion strategy to identify opportunities to promote the new *Discovery Walk*, such as inclusion in War of 1812 Bicentennial celebrations and promotion materials. Information and

downloadable brochures will be added to the City of Toronto, TRCA and Heritage Toronto's websites. Printable brochures will be distributed to civic centres, local community centres and libraries.

## **Proposed Implementation Timeline**

The launch and opening ceremony for the 'Shared Path' Humber *Discovery Walk* is scheduled for June 2011 in partnership with Parks, Forestry and Recreation, TRCA and Heritage Toronto.

The features that will be completed or commenced by that time are:

- Discovery Walk Panels
- Interpretive Nodes
- Interpretive Signs
- Historical Bronze Plaques
- Kingsway / Queensway Interchange improvements
- Improvements to the recreational trail system
- Community Tree Planting and Natural Resource Management

The *Discovery Walk* components (panels and interpretive signage) have already been funded through civic improvements generated by Transportation Services' road and bridge reconstruction in the study area. Other activities will be implemented as resources, capital funding and partnership funding are secured. Potential funding for additional project components may be available through Section 37 funding as well.

## **Next Steps**

Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division will continue to work with TRCA, Heritage Toronto and other stakeholders to redesign the existing *Discovery Walks* with greater historical detail and emphasis on the "shared path" – history of the French, British and First Nations on the Humber River and work on implementing other project components identified in this report.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Humber Historical Discovery Walk: Proposed Components