

**SECONDED BY: Maria Topalovic
THAT the agenda be approved, as amended.**

CARRIED

4. Delegations

Mark Osborne and Michelle Stuck of Preserve and Protect Webster's and Tew's Falls Greensville presented concerns with the number of visitors to the Spencer Gorge Conservation Area and related traffic and safety issues in the community. Challenges with walk-in visitors were also discussed and a no walk-in policy requested. They noted relationship with HCA has been strained and requested to collaborate with HCA for a transparent cap on numbers as it is not sustainable for more buses and people in the area. While the shuttle is working, the Halton Conservation Authority reservation system was noted and asked HCA commit to a reservation system. It was noted social media expertise is required to reach Toronto visitors.

Jeff Laskey, a Greensville resident, and part of the initial third party shuttle operation with Think Greensville, also presented concerns with the reoccurring issues in regard to number of visitors to the Spencer Gorge Conservation Area and related issues in the community. He suggested diverse representation from the community needs to be involved in the development of solutions, including integration of sustainable visitation. He suggested the area remain closed for the rest of the year due to the COVID pandemic, and the time be used to develop a plan for the 2021 season and beyond.

The Chair thanked each delegate for their presentation and advised of a staff report later on the agenda proposing a reservation system for Spencer Gorge that addresses concerns noted.

BD12, 2783

**MOVED BY: Cynthia Janzen
SECONDED BY: Susan Fielding**

THAT the presentations from Mark Osborne, Michelle Stuck and Jeff Laskey be received as information.

CARRIED

5. Consent Items for Applications, Minutes and Correspondence

The following consent items were adopted:

5.1. Applications – Development, Interference with Wetlands, Alterations to Shorelines and Watercourses

- 5.2. Approval of Board of Directors Minutes – May 7, 2020
- 5.3. Association of Ontario Municipalities letter to Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks re Conservation Authorities Act – May 19, 2020
- 5.4. Telling Tales Virtual Announcement Notice for 2020 Event
- 5.5. City of Hamilton Press Release noting HCA Escarpment and Waterfall Areas Remain Closed – May 21, 2020
- 5.6. Township of Puslinch Council resolution in support of Conservation Authorities – June 3, 2020

6. Member Briefing

6.1. Greenbelt Foundation Business Case for Saltfleet CA Wetland Project

Scott Peck presented an economic analysis of the benefits of the Saltfleet Conservation Area wetland project, funded by the Greenbelt Foundation. It was determined the costs of the green infrastructure project will be recovered through economic benefits and will also have many intangible benefits. Staff will be able to use the business case to leverage funding opportunities.

The members were pleased with the report, adding that it will be helpful in communicating the benefits of the project to other levels of government. The members inquired if the report is able to be shared publicly. Scott advised the report is available on the Greenbelt Foundation website and will provide the members with a link to its location.

BD12, 2784

**MOVED BY: Brad Clark
SECONDED BY: Maria Topalovic**

THAT the verbal briefing on the Greenbelt Foundation Business Case for Saltfleet CA Wetland Project be received as information.

CARRIED

7. Business Arising from the Minutes

7.1. Reservation Service 2020 - Spencer Gorge Conservation Area

Lisa Burnside introduced the report. She thanked the delegates for their comments and shared that there was an increase in visitation in 2019, during the October Fall colours, as Dundas Peak was promoted on social media as the most iconic area to view the Fall colours in southern Ontario which directed visitors to the area rather than the shuttle at Christie Lake. She advised that staff were working on ways to address the visitation when the coronavirus pandemic occurred and that staff are now determining how to safely reopen the area in an equitable way.

Gord Costie presented a summary of the amended report. Covid-19 created challenges with closing 11,000 acres of lands, and in reopening showed how valuable these areas are to the public. Staff are working toward re-opening Spencer Gorge in Phase 4 of its reopening plan. In the interim, the area remains closed and the public is being directed to visit our other areas.

In light of changes to operations resulting from Covid-19, staff amended the previous report tabled by the Board to pivot from a shuttle operation based out of Christie Lake by reservation to a direct parking reservation system on site at Spencer Gorge. It was felt that due to Covid-19, shuttle buses cannot form part of the operation this year with challenges to put in place sanitization, physical distancing and diminished public confidence in getting on and off a shuttle bus multiple times. A “driveway to driveway” reservation system proposed by staff is similar to that being used by other conservation areas and national parks. The reservation system aligns HCA to meeting community expectations of less people which will arrive in a managed way, and eliminates walk-ins as a reservation is required. An identified challenge with the shuttle service is that dogs were not permitted on the bus which resulted in traffic in the area and walk-ins.

The reservation system will include scheduled two-hour visit time slots based on the number of parking spaces available on gravel parking lots (approximately 50). Due to the lack of a trail connection, a separate reservation and time slot will be required for both Dundas Peak and Webster Falls. The system will come in to effect September 1, 2020. Staff are analysing the parameters of the system for its development over the coming weeks. The implementation of the pilot this Fall will be evaluated over the winter.

Community input into the system was discussed. Gord advised that community input is received from Ward Councillor VanderBeek, and that HCA works collaboratively with the City of Hamilton Waterfalls Motion Working Group which was formed to address concerns in the area. Lisa advised that comments are received from the community through delegations and letters to the Board and that staff have previously met with residents earlier this year to hear their concerns.

Tom Jackson commented on the popularity of all waterfall areas within the City of Hamilton and associated challenges. Physical barriers, visitor management and enforcement measures have been implemented. He empathized with local residents and expressed support for the proposed cautious, phased approach.

Lisa added that other Conservation Authorities, municipalities and tourism destinations are experiencing the same issues with increased visitation. She cited examples of other Conservation Authorities and organizations that are implementing and considering similar reservation systems. It was noted that due to Covid-19, the shuttle service is not a viable option and there is momentum for reservation systems as a result of the pandemic.

Visitors accessing the areas during the closure were also discussed. The members clarified the intent of the system is to create a long-term solution to limit the number of visitors to the area. Lisa noted that Covid-19 accelerated HCA's next evolutionary step to address visitor pressures.

The proposed September 1st started date was discussed. Staff clarified the area remains closed until that date so that the reservation system can be built, and the area made operationally ready. There is currently no date to open other waterfalls areas at this time.

Esther Pauls abstained from the vote due to a previously declared conflict of interest.

BD12, 2785

**MOVED BY: Tom Jackson
SECONDED BY: Cynthia Janzen**

WHEREAS the current COVID-19 pandemic has caused the Spencer Gorge Conservation Area to remain closed due to the difficulty in maintaining physical distancing on narrow one-way trails and viewing platforms;

WHEREAS the shuttle bus service for Spencer Gorge Conservation Area has been part of the ongoing operation based out of Christie Lake Conservation Area for the past two years to help address visitor management;

WHEREAS staff believe that shuttle buses will be fundamentally changed by the COVID-19 pandemic with challenges to put in place measures to help keep customers and operators safe with sanitization measures, ensure physical distancing and diminished public confidence is getting on and off a shuttle bus multiple times

THEREFORE, be it resolved

THAT Staff be directed to implement the following recommendations in place of the recommendations

outlined in the report titled “Shuttle Bus Service 2020 – Spencer Gorge Conservation Area”;

Recommendation #1 - THAT staff initiate a pilot reservation program for Tew Falls and Webster Falls to control and monitor the number of people in the parks where visitors will be required to book a reservation time slot prior to their visit and park or walk in on site; and further

Recommendation #2 - THAT the reservation system operates 7 days per week for both Tew and Webster Falls from approximately September 1 to November 15, 2020; and further

Recommendation #3 - THAT the number of visitors permitted to reserve a visitation time slot be based on Provincial directives and public health guidelines on maximum size of gatherings permitted and taking into consideration the maximum number of parking spots on site; and further

Recommendation #4 - THAT staff be directed to undertake permit applications with the Ministry of Transportation Ontario to obtain permission for road side signage along Highway #5 to inform visitors of the new reservation system; and further

Recommendation #5 - THAT staff evaluate the effectiveness of these measures and report back regarding their ongoing potential during the regular operation system from April to mid November 2021 when the shuttle bus would have been part of operations.

CARRIED

7.2. Enbridge Gas Pipeline Easement Request – Status Update

Scott Peck presented a summary of the memorandum and answered the members questions.

The process for the peer review of the EIS was discussed. Scott advised that HCA is developing the terms of reference for the assessment and will select the consultant. Enbridge has requested to be circulated the list of consultants that will be considered to undertake the work.

The members indicated they were pleased with the outcome of their earlier motion regarding the completion of the EIS and peer review prior to a decision on the expansion application and that Enbridge and Ontario Energy Board (OEB) have agreed to address the recommendation.

It was clarified that HCA's course of action remains the same as decided at the February board meeting. Scott affirmed there has been no change; that Enbridge has agreed to the request for a peer reviewed EIS. The need for the easement will be determined by the outcome of the application to the OEB.

BD12, 2786

**MOVED BY: Brad Clark
SECONDED BY: Maria Topalovic**

**THAT the memorandum entitled Status Update -
Easement Request – Enbridge Gas Inc. (Union Gas)
Kirkwall Hamilton Project be received as information.**

CARRIED

Esther Pauls left the meeting due to a conflicting appointment.

7.3. COVID-19 – Verbal Update

Lisa Burnside provided a verbal update on HCA's activities since the previous board meeting. Lisa and Neil McDougall presented a recommendation to City of Hamilton Council, jointly with City staff, to not operate Wild Waterworks for the 2020 season due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendation was endorsed for safety concerns due to the difficulty of physical distancing in a wave pool and the projected deficit that facility would run if it were permitted to open. The operational change will result in a shortfall of \$300,000 that must be covered through our operating reserve. However, the closure is allowing for capital improvements required to be undertaken by the Hamilton Public Health Department.

In mid-May, parking lots and trails at HCA's major conservation areas successfully reopened for passive use. HCA has received a very positive response from annual pass holders and the community with regard to the reopening. With easing of provincial restrictions, the marina and seasonal camping at Fifty Point Conservation Area have also re-opened.

Watershed Planning and Engineering continues to issue permits, has completed repairs and upgrades at the Christie Lake dam, are working on finalizing the design for the Saltfleet wetlands, and are continuing floodplain mapping for Battlefield and Stoney Creeks.

While some aspects of the organization have been able to re-open, there are no immediate plans to phase-in any re-opening of the main office to full staff or the public and all events and programs remain suspended. Best practices from the Province and other organizations indicate continued work from home, and that virtual and teleconference meetings remain in place as standard protocol. The Provincial state of emergency has been extended until June 30.

It is possible that further easing of restrictions could be announced and for HCA, it is anticipated this could relate to permitting regular overnight camping.

Our Waterfall and Escarpment Areas remain closed and were noted to re-open only in the final phase of HCA's re-opening plan (phase 4). These areas present significant challenges for physical distancing.

Staff will continue to closely monitor our finances and revenue projections, and bring a year end projection to the Budget & Administration Committee later this month. Lisa advised that HCA has been approved for the Federal Canada summer jobs Service wage subsidy for 30 students that will offset \$100,000 of casual summer wages for our operations.

Lisa concluded by recognizing staff's resilience and flexibility to ensure our business continuity and support received from the Board of Directors and Chairman.

The Chair thanked staff for their efforts, leading Conservation Authority re-openings in the province and without incident. HCA's areas are proving to be very popular, with positive reports for day-use activities.

8. Reports from Budget & Administration Committee, Conservation Advisory Board, and the Foundation

8.1. Foundation Chairman's Remarks

Margaret Reid thanked staff for their efforts to support the Foundation over the past few months and reported on the following:

Donations

We received a total of **\$4,829** in donations from May 1 to 31. They break down as follows:

- \$2,400 to support native tree and shrub plantings at the Hermitage Ruins
- \$1,226 for the Area of Greatest Need Fund
- \$500 for the Tribute Tree Fund
- \$335 for Land Securement
- \$236 for the Saltfleet CA Wetland Project

- The remaining \$132 came in donations to Outdoor Environmental Education, the Dundas Valley Trails Fund and Westfield Heritage Village

This brings our **Fiscal Year-to-Date (Dec 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020) total to \$136,344.**

Staff and Foundation Board members continue to engage with donors and shifting project priorities to raise funds needed for priority projects.

One of the Foundation's Strategic Goals for this year is to create a pro-active legacy giving program; during this down time, we have been focusing our efforts on creating effective communication and outreach messaging around legacy giving to be in a position to actively promote this to our donors, friends, and professional contacts.

The Foundation has been successful in receiving a Canada Summer Jobs grant that will allow us to hire a student to assist with a full review and cataloguing of our tribute and memorial benches.

9. Other Staff Reports/Memoranda

9.1. Current Watershed Conditions as of May 21, 2020

Scott Peck presented a summary of the memorandum and answered the members questions. Flows in local watercourses are at base flows, with no flooding observed. Lake Ontario levels remain at 75.35 masl, 26cm above average, however better than the record high levels in 2019. High volumes of water are still coming into Lake Ontario from the upper lakes. Lake Ontario appears to be going into a seasonal decline at this time

The Christie Lake dam gates were installed in the weeks prior; the reservoir is filling to summer operating levels. Valens Lake is at its summer levels.

9.2. Upcoming HCA and Partner Events

Bruce Harschnitz presented verbal update on HCA operations as the Conservation Areas reopen. HCA is transitioning from Phase 2 to Phase 3 of the reopening plan. Passive day-use areas have reopened. All parks report high day-use visitation. Seasonal camping and the marina at Fifty Point have also reopened. Most boats are in the water at Fifty Point, however some opted to keep boats in storage this year. Gate houses have been retrofitted with plexiglass safety barriers. Day-use washrooms are set to open this weekend. Campground washrooms remain closed per provincial direction. Waterfall and escarpment areas remain closed. Membership pass sales have been strong, having sold nearly 800 passes in the past three weeks, just 90 less than the entire month of May In 2019.

HCA and third-party events have been cancelled, for example Tough Mudder, Christie Lake Antique and Vintage Show, and Summer YMCA camps. Telling Tales is transitioning to a fully virtual platform.

10. New Business

There was none.

11. In-Camera Items for Matters of Law, Personnel and Property

BD12, 2787

**MOVED BY: Cynthia Janzen
SECONDED BY: Maria Topalovic**

THAT the Board of Directors moves *in-camera* for matters of law, personnel and property.

CARRIED

During the *in-camera* session, one property matter was discussed.

11.1. Confidential Memorandum – BD/June 01-2020

Scott Peck provided a summary of the memorandum regarding a property matter and answered the members' questions.

BD12, 2788

**MOVED BY: Tom Jackson
SECONDED BY: Cynthia Janzen**

THAT the confidential memorandum entitled BD/June 01-2020 be received and remain in camera.

CARRIED

BD12, 2789

**MOVED BY: Santina Moccio
SECONDED BY: Susan Fielding**

THAT the Board of Directors moves out of *in-camera*.

CARRIED

12. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Directors will be held on Thursday, July 2, 2020 at 7:00 p.m., location to be determined.

13. Next Meeting Adjournment

On motion, the meeting adjourned.



Neil McDougall
Secretary-Treasurer