



Conservation Advisory Board Meeting Agenda

Thursday, December 9, 2021



Notice of Meeting
Conservation Advisory Board
Thursday, December 9, 2021
4:00 p.m.

This meeting will be held by WebEx videoconference.

**The meeting can be viewed live on HCA's You Tube Channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/HamiltonConservation>**

- 1. Chair's Remarks** – Bowman
- 2. Declaration of Conflict of Interest** – Bowman
- 3. Approval of Agenda** – Bowman
- 4. Delegations**
- 5. Election of Vice-Chair** – Bowman
- 6. Member Briefing**
 - 6.1. Turtle Road Mortality Mitigation Efforts along Cootes Drive – McDonnell
Video and Verbal Presentation
 - 6.2. Conservation Authorities Act – Phase 1 Regulations – Burnside
- 7. Chair's Report on Board of Directors Actions** – Bowman
- 8. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting**
 - 8.1. Minutes – Conservation Advisory Board (June 10, 2021) – Bowman
- 9. Business Arising from the Minutes**
- 10. Staff Reports/Memorandums**
 - 10.1. Fifty Point Conservation Area & Marina Master Plan – Smith
 - 10.2. Spencer Gorge Conservation Area Reservation System – Costie
 - 10.3. Conservation Area Experiences – Verbal Update – Costie

11. New Business

12. Next Meeting – Thursday, February 10, 2022 at 4:00 p.m.

13. Adjournment

Overview

Conservation Authorities Act

Phase 1 Regulations

Conservation Advisory Board - December 9, 2021



Phase 1 Regulations Include:

***Mandatory Programs and Services
Regulation (O.Reg. 686/21)***

***Transition Plan and Agreements
Regulation (O.Reg. 687/21)***

***Rules of Conduct in Conservation
Areas Regulation (O.Reg. 688/21)***

Phase 1 Regulations did NOT Include:

Community Advisory Board Regulation

MECP Decision Posting:

- many CAs across Ontario already have a diverse range of advisory boards*
- where there is not an existing advisory board, CAs will continue to have the ability to establish one*

Mandatory Programs & Services Regulations

Mandatory Programs and Services under each of these categories:

1. Natural Hazards,
2. Conservation Lands (**including passive recreation**),
3. Source Protection,
4. Lake Simcoe, (Not Applicable to HCA)
5. Other Legislation – North Bay CA related to sewage systems and the Ontario Building Code Act (Not Applicable to HCA)
6. Prescribed in Regulation – Core Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy, Provincial Water Quality and Quantity Monitoring

Mandatory Programs & Services Regulation

Six mandatory deliverables are to be completed **by December 31, 2024** to enable more time, where necessary, to complete them, including:

- ice management plans(s),
- natural hazard infrastructure operational management plan(s),
- natural hazard infrastructure asset management plan(s),
- a conservation area strategy,
- a conservation land inventory, and,
- a watershed-based resource management strategy.

All other mandatory programs and services are expected to be in place by January 1, 2024

Mandatory Programs & Services – Key Considerations

- Category 1 programs and services are eligible for general municipal levy
- Anything not included as a mandatory program and service could be delivered as **municipal** (category 2) or as **other** (category 3) programs & services
- From an HCA perspective, the new regulations do not appear to be intended to change any of our programs and services directly; the intent is to clarify who will be responsible to fund the activities, be it the Province, the Municipality or through self generated revenue

Transition Plan & Agreements Regulation

| Prescribed Dates | Key Deliverables |
|---------------------------------|--|
| December 31, 2021 | Transition Plan |
| February 28, 2022 | Inventory of Programs & Services |
| July 1, 2022 to October 1, 2023 | Quarterly Progress Reports: status of inventory & agreement negotiations |
| October 1, 2023 | Requests for Extension |
| January 1, 2024 | Transition Date: All required MOUs/Agreements to be completed |
| January 31, 2024 | Final Report: final inventory & stmt of compliance re: agreements |

Rules of Conduct in Conservation Areas

Regulation consolidates the current individual conservation authority 'Conservation Area' regulations made under Section 29 of the *Conservation Authorities Act* into one Minister's regulation.

Business as usual with no significant updates (i.e. no modernization of compliance tools)

Next Steps

HCA staff have created a Transition Plan that was reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors at their November meeting.

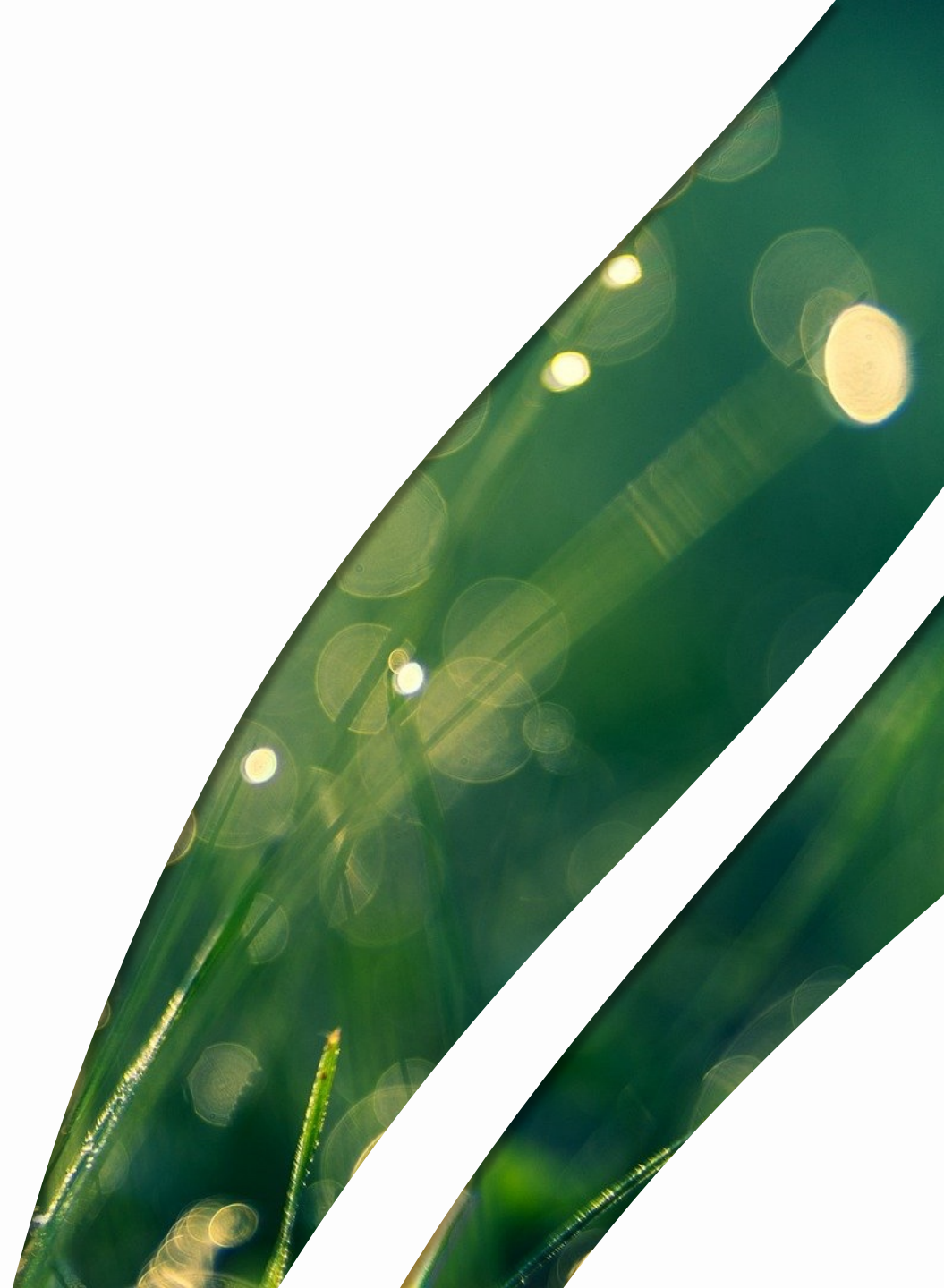
CO has finalized and circulated to CAs a template for the inventory of programs and services incorporating the requirements of the regulations which we will use and review with our neighbouring conservation authorities and in discussions with our participating municipalities

Questions?



**Hamilton
Conservation
Authority**

A Healthy Watershed for Everyone



HAMILTON CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Conservation Advisory Board

MINUTES

June 10, 2021

Minutes of the Conservation Advisory Board meeting held on Thursday, June 10, 2021, commencing at 4:00 p.m., by videoconference and livestreamed via YouTube.

PRESENT: Maria Topalovic - in the Chair
Dan Bowman Lydia Cartlidge
Joanne Di Maio Duke O'Sullivan
Wayne Terryberry

Santina Moccio – Ex officio

REGRETS: Cynthia Janzen

STAFF PRESENT: Jonathan Bastien, Lisa Burnside, Grace Correia, Gord Costie, Diana Gora, Matt Hall, Bruce Harschnitz, Monica Liedtke, Lesley McDonell, Neil McDougall, Alex Nizharadze, Chris Polap, Scott Peck, Kathy Smith, Mike Stone, Jaime Tellier, Stacey Van Opstal, and Nancy Watts

OTHERS: Judy Major-Girardin

1. Chairman's Remarks

The Chair called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present.

2. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The Chair asked the members to declare any conflicts under the HCA Administrative By-law. There were none.

3. Approval of Agenda

The Chair requested any additions or deletions to the agenda. The Chair advised there was one item of correspondence to be added as item number 8.1, with the remaining numbering of the agenda to be adjusted accordingly.

CA 2115 MOVED BY: Joanne Di Maio
SECONDED BY: Duke O’Sullivan

THAT the agenda be approved, as amended.

CARRIED

4. Delegations

There were none.

5. Member Briefing

5.1. McMaster University – West Campus Redesign Project

Wayne Terryberry introduced Judy Major-Girardin to provide an update on the lower campus restoration project at McMaster University. Judy explained that the goal of the project is to restore the parking lot area to a more natural environment, including a completed 30 meter riparian buffer along Ancaster Creek, planted with native species. Judy commented that the project is a joint interdisciplinary project at McMaster University. Patricia Johansen is the landscape designer and artist that has been hired for the project. She has international experience with projects that balance human infrastructure with natural environments, which is the aim of the project. Judy showed examples of previous projects similar to the work that is proposed. The project is proposed to encompass the west campus, including the northern parking area. The concept for the design is a butterfly wing, which allows for the desired function but also provides symbolism for the area. Data is still being collected, the design will follow analysis of the data. The proposal is for a mosaic of wetlands to replace Lot M that could be a variety of wetland habitat types, depending on what is suitable for the features and area wildlife. The team is investigating options to integrate infrastructure to the restoration area, including classrooms, using materials on-site. It was felt that wetlands would offer more habitat benefits than simply restoring a meandering watercourse. Currently, project leaders are focusing on engaging the community, McMaster employees and stakeholders.

Wayne noted that a reduction in the demand for parking has been observed, allowing for consideration for the project. Alternative parking facilities are being investigated. McMaster is currently undergoing a master plan exercise for the

campus to evaluate parking needs. The potential for mass transit is also being discussed.

To raise awareness for the project, the McMaster School of Art will be painting historic routes of water across the parking lot, also with the hope to attract funding to the project.

The decision to focus on wetlands was discussed. The area historically contained ponds and has coldwater groundwater upwellings, making it suitable, but the intention is for the site to also be a research and teaching facility for many disciplines which wetlands would offer. Wayne highlighted that the historic flows of watercourses show the area was historically floodplain, and important fish spawning habitat.

It was noted there has been a shift in thinking away from building in this area, congruous with this project and that HCA regulation of the floodplain in this area, helped minimize development in the area.

The Chair thanked Judy and Wayne for the presentation.

5.2. HCA Invasive Species Program Highlights

Lesley McDonell introduced Diana Gora and Monica Liedtke, HCA's recently hired invasive species technicians. She noted that invasive species are the second highest threat to biodiversity and habitat loss. HCA has an invasive species strategy. Following development of the strategy, staff have been working since 2016 to map and remove invasive species. Removals have been undertaken in partnership with other HCA staff, outside contractors and volunteers. In 2020, it was decided to hire the two staff technicians, to advance the strategy further.

Monica provided an overview of the program, highlighting a new mapping initiative to better track the presence of invasive species and the effectiveness of control methods. She also provided details of active control methods undertaken this year for a variety of species including gypsy moth, garlic mustard, and gout weed. Control methods included scraping/removing gypsy moth egg masses as well as trapping caterpillars with burlap banding, pulling garlic mustard, and smothering goutweed. Landscape trees at Valens Lake and Christie Lake Conservation Areas were actively managed for gypsy moths this season with marked success.

Ecology staff have also produced three instructional videos on how private landowners can control invasive species on their own properties, including how to remove gypsy moths egg masses, how to burlap band trees and how to smother invasive species. The videos have been posted to HCA's social media accounts and are proving popular. Additional videos will be added to the series in the coming months.

The technicians have begun to control for Japanese Knotweed, Phragmites and Dog-strangling vine, which are very aggressive, and Wild Parsnip and Giant Hogweed, which are toxic. Future activities will include continued control for targeted species, ongoing mapping, and working with the stewardship program to assist private landowners with invasive species management.

The members thanked Diana and Monica for their work and for engaging volunteers in our invasive species management. It was also noted that the instructional videos are an effective way to reach private landowners in the community.

6. Chairman's Report on Board of Directors Actions

The Chair advised the members that CA 2109 Christie Lake Dam & Valens Lake Dam Public Safety Risk Assessments and Valens Lake Dam Safety Review were approved at the May 6, 2021 Board of Directors meeting.

7. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

7.1. Minutes – Conservation Advisory Board (April 8, 2021)

**CA 2116 MOVED BY: Joanne Di Maio
 SECONDED BY: Dan Bowman**

THAT the minutes of the April 8, 2021 Conservation Areas Advisory Board meeting, be approved.

CARRIED

8. Correspondence

8.1. Item of correspondence respecting 140 Garner Road East, Ancaster

The Chair noted the item of correspondence was circulated to the members prior to the meeting.

**CA 2117 MOVED BY: Duke O'Sullivan
 SECONDED BY: Lydia Cartlidge**

THAT the item of correspondence from Erin Davis, regarding 140 Garner Road East, Ancaster and dated June 2, 2021, be received.

CARRIED

9. Business Arising from the Minutes

9.1. Regulatory Proposal Consultation Guide released by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks

Lisa Burnside provided a presentation summarizing the memorandum and answered the members' questions.

Lisa provided additional detail with regard to the proposed regulations for mandatory, non-mandatory programming, and Section 29 of the Act. Mandatory programming will include risks related to natural hazards and management of CA lands, among other items. Non-mandatory programs and services will require memorandums of understanding to be funded by municipal levy or may be funded through self-generated revenue or grants. With regard to the proposed regulation for Section 29, HCA will be looking to ensure it has the needed tools to meet the needs of today's park users and the Conservation Authority to effectively protect its properties, provide opportunities for sustainable outdoor recreation, and facilitate natural heritage monitoring in these areas.

Wayne Terryberry indicated that the McMaster University Advisory Committee on Natural Lands discussed submitting comments on the Environmental Registry of Ontario, supporting HCA. Lisa indicated HCA would be pleased to work with McMaster on those comments.

Duke O'Sullivan inquired about changes in direction since the proposed changes have come into effect. Lisa noted that the province has increased consultation with Conservation Authorities and Conservation Ontario. Through the consultation process and ERO comments, HCA is hoping to maintain HCA's programming as is.

**CA 2118 MOVED BY: Duke O'Sullivan
 SECONDED BY: Joanne Di Maio**

THAT the memorandum entitled Regulatory Proposal Consultation Guide released by Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks, be received.

CARRIED

10. Staff Reports/Memorandums

10.1. Smith Landfill and Canal Park Monitoring

Scott Peck presented a summary of the memorandum.

**CA 2119 MOVED BY: Dan Bowman
 SECONDED BY: Joanne Di Maio**

THAT the memorandum entitled Canal Park Groundwater Sampling and Monitoring, 150 King Street East, Dundas and Former B.E. Smith Landfill Monitoring, 675 Jerseyville Road, Ancaster, be received.

CARRIED

10.2. Valens E. Coli Monitoring Program Mid-Year Report

Chris Polap and Stacey Van Opstal presented a summary of the memorandum and answered the members questions.

Duke O'Sullivan inquired about possible sources causing the two exceedances at the Valens Lake inlet. Chris commented that the inlet has a larger upstream drainage area, with more varied land uses. Staff are not concerned with the two exceedances, particularly as there is a length of time between the two samples, however, staff continue to monitor the site.

Duke also inquired about two notable readings at the inlet and the beach, specifically about the beach downstream having the higher result prior to a similar reading at the inlet. Staff were not able to comment on a relationship between the two without additional data.

Dan Bowman asked about the possibility of Canada Geese being the source of E. coli levels. Staff commented that it is possible that geese are the source. Lisa Burnside advised that HCA annually applies for a permit to relocate geese from Valens Lake. The relocation was completed the previous day. Approximately 40 geese were relocated. Staff are hopeful the management practice will assist with maintaining water quality.

**CA 2120 MOVED BY: Wayne Terryberry
 SECONDED BY: Dan Bowman**

THAT the memorandum entitled Valens Lake *E. coli* Monitoring Program Mid-Year Report, be received.

CARRIED

10.3. Fifty Point Conservation Area & Marina Master Plan

Kathy Smith presented a summary of the memorandum and answered the members' questions.

There was discussion about increasing development surrounding the conservation area, and the potential for related impacts to camping. Kathy commented that the master plan process allows for evaluating and commenting on changes to surrounding land uses and implications for the conservation area. The master plan public engagement tools include questions about specific aspects of the conservation area, including camping and the marina, but also have open ended questions. In addition, during internal consultation, staff will review current uses in and around the area, as well as future business cases. Vacant agricultural land to the east of the conservation area was identified as having potential for expansion. Staff will bring regular updates to the members for additional input and advice.

**CA 2121 MOVED BY: Dan Bowman
 SECONDED BY: Lydia Cartlidge**

THAT the memorandum entitled Fifty Point Conservation Area Master Plan Update, be received.

CARRIED

10.4. Parking By-law Enforcement at HCA Areas

Gord Costie presented the report and answered the members' questions. There was discussion about the need for City assistance with parking enforcement. Gord commented that to ensure fairness to HCA membership pass holders and day use visitors that do pay fees, assistance with parking violations is needed. The City has offered this assistance. There was discussion about the potential to cost share revenues generate from tickets issued. Gord noted that the City will be recovering the costs to provide the service to HCA. Gord also commented staff are hopeful that additional signage about parking by-laws will result in users complying with fee payment and that not many tickets will need to be issued. Bruce Harschnitz noted that when HCA transitions some parking lots from voluntary payments to auto gates requiring payment, revenues increased by 50%, indicating 50% of visitors were not paying previously. Parking fees are needed to maintain the Conservation Areas and parking lots.

The potential for negative comments from the public were discussed. Lisa commented that staff will need to develop a marketing and communications campaign to educate the public about the changes and suggested this year could be a pilot initiative to introduce the practice. Duke O'Sullivan requested the staff recommendation be amended to add that the agreement be for an initial pilot period of 6 months, from July to December 2021, and staff report back on the experience to the Conservation Advisory Board and Board of Directors.

**CA 2122 MOVED BY: Dan Bowman
 SECONDED BY: Joanne Di Maio**

WHEREAS HCA has limited resources to enforce paid admission at non-gated Conservation Area parking lots with only pay & display systems; and

WHEREAS HCA is currently working with City Parking Bylaw Enforcement in discouraging roadside parking near Conservation Areas through their enforcement of No Parking signage or Special Enforcement Area signage across the city where deemed unsafe or where causing vehicle congestion around communities;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

THAT the Conservation Advisory Board recommends to the Board of Directors:

THAT City of Hamilton Parking Bylaw Enforcement Officers be authorized to enforce all unauthorized parking on private property at Conservation Areas for non-payment of daily permit or non-display of HCA membership access at selected parking lots; and

THAT HCA staff undertake the steps necessary to obtain an agreement between City of Hamilton Parking Bylaw Enforcement and HCA to enforce Unauthorized Parking – Private Parking at non-gated Conservation Area parking lots.

THAT the agreement be for an initial pilot period of 6 months, from July to December 2021, and staff report back on the experience to the Conservation Advisory Board and Board of Directors.

**MOVED BY: Duke O’Sullivan
SECONDED BY: Dan Bowman**

CARRIED

10.5. Conservation Areas Experiences Update

Gord Costie provided the members with a verbal update, highlighting that visitation to all Conservation Areas has been increasing and staff are ready for further increases as we move into the Summer season, particularly with Step 1 of the Provincial re-opening. Nightly camping at Fifty Point and Valens Lake are permitted and ready to re-open. The pilot Spencer Gorge reservation system opened on May 1st. Staff are tracking all visitors and early analysis indicates low weekday and

moderate weekend visitation. It is still early in the season and the Province was still in lock down during this time. Staff will continue to track the visitation and will be able to provide a more detailed analysis at the next CAB meeting.

**CA 2123 MOVED BY: Duke O’Sullivan
 SECONDED BY: Lydia Cartlidge**

**THAT the verbal update on the Conservation Areas
Experiences Update be received.**

CARRIED

11. New Business

There was none.

12. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the CAB is scheduled for Thursday, August 12, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. We will canvass prior to the meeting for quorum should people be taking vacation time.

13. Adjournment

On motion, the meeting was adjourned.



Report

TO: Conservation Advisory Board Members

FROM: Lisa Burnside, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

RECOMMENDED BY: Matthew Hall, Director; Capital Projects & Strategic Services

PREPARED BY: Kathy Smith, Landscape Architect; Capital Projects & Strategic Services

MEETING DATE: December 9, 2021

RE: Fifty Point Conservation Area Master Plan

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Conservation Advisory Board recommends to the Board of Directors:

THAT this report and accompanying Master Plan of November 2021 be received as information for project background and general understanding; and further

THAT the Fifty Point Conservation Area Master Plan 2020 be approved.

BACKGROUND

An HCA 10 Year Masterplan Update Strategy was approved by CAB on February 14, 2019 and by the Board of Directors on March 7, 2019 for properties that HCA owns and manages. As per this strategy document, the scheduled property for review in 2020-21 is the Fifty Point Conservation Area.

An interim report on this plan was provided to CAB in June 2021. Since that time our public engagement, stakeholder, and agency review and commenting process was completed to help finalize the draft plan presented with this report. Work on this plan began January 2020 and was implemented by HCA staff through a four-stage process. Throughout the process the plan was refined through ongoing staff consultation, reviews by an in-house steering committee, and public circulation and input as follows:

Phase 1 Background began January 2020, was interrupted by the covid-19 pandemic and completed spring 2021. This phase included engagement of HCA staff and the steering committee, collection of mapping information, assembling background information, and presentation of an information report to CAB in June 2021

Phase 2 Inventory was also interrupted in 2020 by the pandemic, and completed by August 2021 with the collection and assembly of all-natural areas field surveys and mapping information, ecological reports, trail counter data and public surveys. Two public information booths were operated by staff in the conservation area in June 2021. Visitor surveys ran from May to mid August 2021, over 440 surveys were submitted by the public. Visitors to the information booths, and to HCA's online public engagement site, were able to register and join the stakeholders list and provide comments in Phase 4.

Phase 3 Concepts were completed in-house by HCA staff through a series of five facilitated workshop sessions covering site concepts/vision planning, financial sustainability, day use and campground operations, marina operations, and capital project priorities and plans. All information gathered was considered for the draft plan during this phase, along with the information submitted through public surveys. The plan was further refined from stakeholder comments received in Phase 4.

Phase 4 Summary and Public Input included reviews of the compiled draft plan by HCA staff and steering committee, outside agencies, stakeholders, CAB, Board of Directors, and members of the public who provided us with their contact information during the public engagement process. With the closing of the public commenting period November 26th, the Master Plan is now at 95% and will be completed upon endorsement by the Conservation Advisory Board, and adoption by the HCA Board of Directors.

STAFF COMMENT

Comments received during Phase 3 and 4 noted above, were reviewed with the HCA executive team and steering committee. The following is a brief overview of the key items brought forward that resulted in edits to the draft master plan:

- Section 3.4 Site Concept / Philosophy was brought into the executive summary, to set out the key items and vision for Fifty Point referenced in the remainder of the document.
- Section 3.7 Capital development priorities lists a number of major projects needed for the marina. The marina is a significant source of revenue for HCA, but it is worth noting that to sustain the operation over the next ten years capital projects estimated at approximately 3.95M will be required. In comparison, the entire capital expenditure for the Valens Master Plan was estimated at 4.9M. HCA is committed to sustaining Fifty Point's marina, campground, and day-use operations over the

next ten years, accordingly the capital projects noted in this plan have been assessed with this goal in mind.

- The eastern portion of the Fifty Point property is located within the municipal boundary of the Town of Grimsby and Niagara Region. HCA staff have consulted with officials from these agencies on the draft plan, and conducted two tours of the property with delegations to review areas of the property noted for future improvement.
- The majority of public comments received on the plan focused on community access into Fifty Point through the pedestrian gates. This plan sets out a high-level vision to address public access and park operations. The access projects noted in this plan will require more detailed design and approvals in order to be implemented, HCA is committed to working with all agencies and stakeholders to satisfactorily move these projects forward.

STRATEGIC PLAN LINKAGE

The initiative refers directly to the HCA Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023:

- **Strategic Priority Area – Organizational Excellence**
 - Initiatives – Identify opportunities to engage the community, adjacent landowners, and Indigenous Peoples.
- **Strategic Priority Area – Natural Heritage Conservation**
 - Initiatives – Identify restoration projects in master plans.
 - Initiatives – Identify details of the approved Invasive Species Strategy and natural heritage plans in HCA master plans.
- **Strategic Priority Area – Conservation Area Experience**
 - Initiatives – Update and develop master and management plans, and implement priorities to further enhance conservation areas for current and future generations.

AGENCY COMMENTS

The plan reviews include lands within the municipal boundaries of the City of Hamilton, Town of Grimsby, and Region of Niagara. These agencies were circulated for their comments during Phase 4 of the public consultation period. Minor corrections to Zoning and Natural Heritage sections within the plan will be forthcoming as a result, prior to HCA Board of Directors approval.

LEGAL/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

CONCLUSIONS

These plans will support the goals as outlined in HCA's 2019-2023 Strategic Plan as well as the Ten-Year Masterplan Update Strategy. This information has been provided as background for review, and recommendation that the Master Plan for Fifty Point Conservation Area be endorsed by the Board of Directors as the official policy document for the management and development of this conservation area.



Report

TO: Conservation Advisory Board

FROM: Lisa Burnside, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

RECOMMENDED AND PREPARED BY: Gordon R. Costie, Director of Conservation Area Services
Bruce Harschnitz, Manager, Conservation Area Services

MEETING DATE: December 9, 2021

RE: Reservation System - Spencer Gorge Conservation Area

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Conservation Advisory Board recommends to the Board of Directors **THAT:**

WHEREAS the pilot 2020 and 2021 reservation system for Dundas Peak, Tew Falls, and Webster Falls, was highly successful at improving the Conservation Area experience by controlling and regulating the number of visitors, and for reducing vehicle traffic and congestion within the nearby community;

WHEREAS staff were directed to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot reservation system and report back on the operations in 2021;

WHEREAS staff were directed to monitor and evaluate the reservation system as a potential and continuous part of the operations in addressing parking and visitor management strategies for the area;

THEREFORE, be it resolved

THAT the reservation system be integrated as part of the ongoing operation of Spencer Gorge Conservation Area based on the following parametres:

THAT future reservation periods for Spencer Gorge Conservation Area continue to reflect the dates of May to November, with specific start and end dates to be determined by staff; and further

THAT the reservation period operates based on weekend and Public Holiday reservation requirements in 2022 until mid-September when 7 day a week reservation will be required for Fall colours; while still providing the ability of staff to undertake real time adjustments for reservation system requirements to add additional reservation days if required.

BACKGROUND

Spencer Gorge Conservation Area continues to be one of the most spectacular tourist attractions across the city featuring the iconic escarpment features of Tew Falls, Webster Falls, and the Dundas Peak. HCA has evolved its visitor management strategies for the area over the past decade to adjust to its growing popularity.

The pandemic was the genesis of the pilot 2020 reservation system operations for the Fall colour season, which was very successful. The reservation system continued as an extension of the 2020 Fall pilot program during the main operating season in 2021, allowing staff the opportunity to further evaluate the effectiveness of a longer reservation service period. The 2021 experience has again demonstrated its effectiveness and provides the basis for the recommendations for 2022.

STAFF COMMENT

In the past, the Spencer Gorge has experienced high numbers of visitors and crowding on its trail system and viewing platforms, particularly during the Fall colour season. Additionally, there was traffic congestion in the small community causing safety concerns. The reservation system experience of 2020 and 2021 has ensured an enjoyable experience for visitors, by guaranteeing a parking spot and the ability to enjoy these areas without big crowds. A safe and equitable way to see this beautiful area is especially important during the ongoing pandemic. The overall impact to the local community has been mostly positive and profound.

Reservation Overview and Metrics:

The reservation system operated for a 6-month period from May 1, to November 14, 2021. During this time period 14,112 reservations were successfully made and brought 40,506 visitors to the Spencer Gorge.

Over the 2021 reservation period, weekday traffic from both parking lots were significantly lower than the overall parking capacities. The weekend traffic fared better yet still has adequate room for growth demand periods.

As expected, October weekend and weekday traffic increased significantly as leaves started changing colour. The Fall colour season can create the most unpredictable

outcomes regarding traffic and staff are recommending continuation of the 7 day a week full reservation to both parking lots in visiting Spencer Gorge Conservation Area during that period.

Table 1 below provides the attendance and capacity summary experienced at both locations.

2021 Spencer Gorge Reservation System Summary

| Month | Dundas Peak/Tew Falls | | | | Webster Falls | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | % Weekday Attendance | % Weekend Attendance | # of Weekend Days Over 75% Capacity | # of Weekday Days Over 75% Capacity | % Weekday Attendance | % Weekend Attendance | # of Weekend Days Over 75% Capacity | # of Weekday Days Over 75% Capacity |
| May | 8.48 | 58.59 | 4 | 0 | 10.81 | 73.64 | 7 | 0 |
| June | 8.09 | 62.33 | 3 | 0 | 12.5 | 86.04 | 6 | 0 |
| July | 9.87 | 41.80 | 1 | 0 | 16.75 | 67.17 | 4 | 0 |
| August | 8.82 | 33.87 | 0 | 0 | 17.35 | 59.1 | 3 | 0 |
| September | 10.22 | 48.44 | 0 | 0 | 11.27 | 56.11 | 2 | 0 |
| October | 57.07 | 94.12 | 10 | 8 | 23.08 | 86.52 | 9 | 0 |
| November (1-14) | 31.78 | 77.07 | 3 | 0 | 10.74 | 57 | 2 | 0 |

* - Weekend Days include Holidays

As a result of the attendance and capacity experience of 2021, staff are recommending weekend and Public Holiday reservation requirements until mid September, then for the Fall colour season, 7 day per week reservations will begin. Weekend reservations in the May to September period mirrors the past shuttle bus operating days that operated prior to the pandemic, but without the flaws of the shuttle such as its inability to address sudden inclement weather and barring of dogs. The return to 7 day a week reservation for the Fall colours addresses the higher visitor volume that coincides with the brilliant Fall colours and which the reservation system effectively handled in both 2020 and 2021.

Staff note that 2021 Fall visitation was lighter than 2020, however, the weather was not as good and the easing of pandemic restrictions did open up more recreation options for people to once again experience.

Fall colours September 19 – Nov 15, 2020 – 8,100 reservations booked
 Fall colours September 19 – Nov 14, 2021 – 5,856 reservations booked

While numbers were down, the reservation system, coupled with support from City parking and bylaw, were once again effective in keeping traffic congestion to a minimum and provide a safe and enjoyable visitor experience.

Given that the 2021 experience demonstrated that HCA parking lots can handle the weekday capacity, staff have confidence in recommending that no reservation will be required Monday to Friday until the Fall colour season. This allows for regular day use and membership pass access without reservation, which includes available drive-up, cycle-up, and community walk-in access. This operating approach addresses feedback from both the community and passholders to provide access when there was capacity. Should attendance and visitor volume increase beyond parking lot capacity, staff can quickly pivot and update the reservation system as needed.

There was a significant decrease in issued parking violations which was a dramatic improvement over 2020. The Greenville area experienced a large reduction in parking tickets in the special enforcement area, with municipal bylaw advising of a reduction of approximately 62%, over the same period in 2020.

Similar to the previous years of the reservation system, the reservation system will require timely and effective public communication campaigns from the HCA Marketing department. This will include (but not limited to) working with media partners such as Bell Media, Corus Entertainment, Metroland Media, Social influencer websites, Google, Social media networks and HCA's own website and social media platforms.

HCA intends to continue to operate from the Greenville Optimist parking lot as the reservation parking area for Webster Falls when reservations are required.

STRATEGIC PLAN LINKAGE

The initiative refers directly to the HCA Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023

Conservation Area Experience

- Initiative – Develop visitor and parking management strategies to support conservation areas for sustainable recreation, education, and tourism.

Organizational Excellence

- Initiative – Providing a positive and safe environment for both staff and visitors.

AGENCY COMMENTS

Staff continue to work closely with the City of Hamilton Waterfall Working Group addressing city and community concerns in a balanced and reflective manner. The working group has been successful in identifying and implementing meaningful change which will continue to help shape future operations.

LEGAL/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Reservation system costs as well as expenses for staff and security, will remain part of the operating budget for Christie Lake business unit. The reservation system and security costs remain an ongoing expense at all HCA major Conservation Areas where required. The reservation fee will help offset these expenses as well as administration and client support costs for booking support.

CONCLUSIONS

The collective results of the reservation system have provided a vastly improved visitor experience with less crowding and a guaranteed parking space, and has also built an overall greater rapport within the Greenville community by addressing traffic volume and congestion.

Staff have acquired the experience and confidence in managing an effective reservation operation that provides equitable access to the Spencer Gorge conservation Area through a reservation system which addresses weekend and Fall colour visitor volume and also provides weekday access without reservation during the non-colour season.