Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, November 7, 2023 **WARD(S):** 1

TITLE: BARTLEY SMITH GREENWAY TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY

FROM:
Vince Musacchio, Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide the final report on the Bartley Smith Greenway Trail Feasibility Study (the "Study") that will guide future trail planning and development through the Upper West Don River valley between Rutherford Road and McNaughton Road.

Report Highlights

- The Bartley Smith Greenway is an important trail system that supports the Vaughan Super Trail concept.
- The Study explored options for completing critical missing gaps in the Bartley Smith Greenway trail network between Rutherford Road and McNaughton Road, a segment totaling approx. 3km.
- This gap is a critical missing link that will connect the communities of Maple, Carrville, and Thornhill, while providing significant connectivity benefits for all trail users and the broader community.
- The Study identifies options that balance the recreational and transportation needs of residents with the ecological functions of the natural heritage system of the Upper West Don River corridor.
- Implementation of the preferred trail route is identified in two phases: Phase 1 from McNaughton Road to Naylon Park/Airport Park, and Phase 2 from Naylon Park/Airport Park to Rutherford Road.

Recommendations

1. THAT the Bartley Smith Greenway Trail Feasibility Study prepared by WSP Canada Inc., dated October 2023, be received and approved in principle to guide trail implementation.

Background

Trails play a vital role in enhancing the quality of life in communities by providing numerous benefits, including:

- **Linking key destinations** - such as natural areas, parks, cultural features, historic sites, and other public spaces within urbanized settings.
- **Acting as a tool for ecology and conservation** - greenways and trails help preserve important natural landscapes within urban settings, provide controlled access and an environment that will help protect natural features and wildlife habitats, and indirectly offer opportunities for protecting plant and animal species from uncontrolled human activity.
- **Creating healthy recreation and transportation opportunities** - providing a safe space for people of all ages to enjoy, as well as being a key element of urban local and regional multi-modal transportation systems.

Vaughan Official Plan (VOP) 2010 calls for a transportation transformation in how people move around Vaughan by establishing a comprehensive network that allows a full range of mobility options, including walking, cycling and transit (Section 4.2.3.1). The VOP also identifies the need to provide opportunities for passive recreation and trails, where such activities will not have an adverse impact on significant natural features and ecological functions (Section 7.3.1.3).

The 2018 Active Together Master Plan (ATMP), approved in principle by Council on May 23, 2018, sets out a vision for a healthier and more mobile community. The vision, goals and objectives of the Study reflect the following trail-related recommendations set out in the ATMP:

27. Ensure that implementation of the City's proposed recreational trail network – including the Vaughan Super Trail – is reflected as a high priority through the proper allocation of capital and maintenance funding and resources.
28. Work with the development community, TRCA and other landowners to enhance connectivity of the recreational trail network by linking woodlots, open spaces, parks, schools, civic destinations, transit hubs, and residential and employment areas. The development of a comprehensive map identifying potential synergies may assist in this regard.

29. Evaluate trail and pathway requirements through the planning and development process. Encourage the conveyance of corridors of land (over and above parkland dedication, where applicable) using the various tools available to the City.
30 Seek opportunities to establish trail loops for walking and running (as well support amenities such as seating , shade, etc.) within new and redeveloped parks and open spaces.

Additionally, the recommendations of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan 2020 update, approved in principle by Council on December 17, 2019, build on recommendations to ensure trail routes are connected with an emerging focus to close gaps along key city-wide trails, including the Bartley Smith Greenway (BSG) network. The BSG is a large component of the 100km city-wide Vaughan Super Trail concept, which is a signature recommendation of the City's 2020 Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan endorsed by Council.

The BSG trail provides an essential green space for passive recreation and facilitates an opportunity for residents to connect with nature within their own neighbourhoods and to other communities. Along the BSG trail network a missing link in trail infrastructure between McNaughton Road and Rutherford Road approximately 3 km in length currently exists. This gap in the existing trail network represents a critical missing link within the BSG, which originates at Steeles Avenue West and is planned to extend north beyond Teston Road at full build out, connecting to the Toronto trail network south of Vaughan. Closing this gap will provide 15 km of uninterrupted open space trail experience that connects the communities of Maple, Carrville and Thornhill. This study aims to provide a preferred route to close the gap in the current trail network, resulting in significant connectivity benefits for trail users and the broader community.

The BSG supports several strategic plans of the City such as the Official Plan (2010), Green Directions Vaughan (2019), Vaughan Active Together Master Plan (2018), 2020 Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plan, and the TRCA Trail Strategy (2019). Planning, design and construction of the Vaughan Super Trail, including the BSG, continues to be a Term of Council Priority initiative supporting the City Building strategic objective.

Previous Reports/Authority

Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan (2020)

Active Together Master Plan for Parks, Recreation and Libraries – 2018 Review and Update

Analysis and Options

The Bartley Smith Greenway Feasibility Study (the Study) is the first step of the planning process to connect a critical gap of the existing BSG between Rutherford Road and McNaughton Road. The City retained WSP Canada Inc. to provide professional consulting services in community engagement, landscape architecture, design services, master planning, trail development, and active transportation planning to complete a feasibility study and 30% detail design.

The Study aims to identify options that balance the current and future recreational and transportation needs of residents with the ecological functions of the natural heritage system of the Upper West Don River Valley, ensuring the protection and enhancement of environmental features and functions. The study was completed in two parts:

Part 1: Research and Preferred Trail Route Analysis
Part 2: 30% Design Development

Part 1 evaluated the feasibility to develop a continuous 3km pedestrian and cycling trail system to fill the existing gap, which included a comprehensive review of existing conditions, policy and land use, engagement and outreach, the completion of key technical studies including hydraulics assessment, natural heritage assessment, a review of opportunities and constraints analysis, Stage 1 archaeology assessment, trail route analysis, property and land acquisition needs assessment, as well as a review of operations and maintenance and implementation costing. As a result, master plan mapping, phasing and preliminary costing were developed.

Part 2 was the development of a 30% detail design drawing package of the preferred trail alignment. The 30% drawing package will be used to inform future detailed design and will require further study and refinement prior to trail implementation.

Public Consultation was undertaken as an integral component of the Study process.

Public engagement throughout the entire Study process was a critical strategy for advancing the vision, objectives, and goals for inclusivity, social equity and informed decision-making. WSP's engagement and outreach program incorporated multiple opportunities and methods for public involvement, including:

- Online community engagement survey (Oct. 4 to 19, 2021)
- Online public focus group discussion (two sessions on Nov. 30, 2021)
- Online public information centres (Feb. 24, 2022)
- In-person public information centres (July 7, 2022)
- Field staking of proposed trail alignment focus group discussion (Oct. 12, 2022).

Through the online platform, online focus groups and in person public information centres and survey, participants were able to:

- Watch a 3 minute video to learn more about the proposed route options, features and amenities, and project timeline;
- Use an online interactive tool to provide comments directly on the map;
- Complete a survey to rank the trail options and select a preferred route;
- Review the Open House materials relating to the project area;
- Share ideas through an online comment form on the proposed alignment and refined alignment of the trail;
- Access a draft implementation plan; and
- Provide feedback on the engagement to identify community needs and priorities.

The online "Have Your Say" platform and survey, online and in-person public information centres were each advertised through City social media channels, targeted social media marketing, digital signboards, mobile signs, lawn signs, Councillor e-letter, and email distribution to key stakeholders including The South Maple Ratepayers' Association. Letters were mailed to approximately 4800 residential addresses within 500 meters of the study area inviting them to both online and in-person public information centres. In total, the survey received responses, 229 participating in the survey, providing feedback and identifying route options on the interactive map. The focus group meetings included discussion with approximately 40 residents, and the combination of both online and in-person public information sessions was attended by approximately 120 residents. The majority of feedback was from residents residing in the Maple community within the vicinity of the study area.

The initial stages of the engagement program focused on developing a vision, priorities and principles that would inform the alignment and trail character. With a vision and mandate already in place for the BSG trail system, the visioning component of the Study focused on how best to facilitate a trail which *"provides both mobility connections, provides a source of recreation, and facilitates an opportunity to connect with nature"* while considering the site-specific needs, opportunities and constraints.

Community engagement for the BSG will continue to be a vital component to ensure success as the project transitions from this feasibility study and preliminary design, into detail design and implementation which is planned to be completed in several phases.

Existing conditions analysis and technical studies were undertaken to develop trail alignment options.

The Study includes a phasing plan and implementation approach that are meant to provide high-level guidance to the City in planning future capital budgets. The implementation approach was developed as part of the Study to guide future detail

design and construction of the trail. The strategy prioritizes sections of trail that are implementable, and of which will create meaningful connections for users to the existing trail and local amenities.

The evaluation process resulted in a detailed breakdown of the trail system into five target study areas marked by major arterial roads and are organized from north to south as follows:

Target Area 1: McNaughton Rd. to Major Mackenzie Dr.
Target Area 2: Major MacKenzie Dr. to Naylon St.
Target Area 3(a): Naylon St. to Bevan Rd.
Target Area 3(b): Bevan Rd. to Merrick Dr.
Target Area 4: Merrick Dr. to Rutherford Rd.
Target Area 5: Rutherford Rd. to Keele St.

Within each target area, the trail route is broken down further, characterized by changes in conditions, existing infrastructure and other natural components such as specific flood limits. Physical constraints, flood zones, land ownership, linkage opportunities and environmental sensitive areas, as well as feedback from technical reviewers and engagement with the public, were used to determine trail feasibility. The study identifies specific on-road active transportation improvements with the adjacent communities to facilitate access and wayfinding to the preferred route. Target areas are combined to develop and phased implementation plan.

Further to this, WSP Canada Inc. provided recommendations that should be considered when proceeding with trail implementation. These include:

1. An informal pilot trail be tested using the proposed alignment by mowing meadow. The trail will not be compliant with accessibility standards and not ideal for stroller users/cyclists; however, there should be sufficient pedestrian traffic to gain insight into the conditions a future trail would create.
2. A detailed tree inventory to be completed for each segment or target area of the trail to inform minor changes to the alignment. Tree preservation and protection plans will also be completed and inform the compensation planting/restoration planting.
3. A monitoring program to be put in place and focus on user activities such as entry into naturalized areas, littering, noise and other actions. The monitoring program should be used to inform any design changes, by-law requirements and levels of maintenance.
4. A clear and transparent maintenance strategy within 5 years of implementation. After the monitoring period, the actions should be assessed to determine requirements for long term practices.

5. An education program be put in place regarding encroachment, landscaping and composting in the greenspace. TRCA has expressed concern over these activities and desire for the trail project to include a rectification of the natural landscape. Prior to trail construction, education material should be issued to those who have properties abutting the greenspace. This information should include direction discouraging mow, composting, and planting gardens with clear examples of the harms these actions cause.
6. Ongoing monitoring of development to capture future opportunities to bring the section of trail along Rutherford Rd. off of the roadway and into or adjacent to the greenspace.

Financial Impact

Phase 1 implementation of this portion of the BSG will focus on Target Areas 1 and 2 to provide a meaningful trail route from McNaughton Road south to Naylon Park and Maple Airport Park utilizing the new Major Mackenzie Drive pedestrian underpass. The order of magnitude cost for design and construction of Phase 1, approximately 650 m in length, is estimated to be in the range of $1.5M to $1.8M, to be funded from a combination of DC and potentially Gas Tax funding included in future capital budget submissions. Phase 1 is proposed to be advanced in the short-term for implementation with detailed design starting to start in late 2024 and will take approx. 2 to 3 years to complete construction.

The timing for implementing Phase 2 needs to align with the timing of future residential development proposed at Bevan Road when the valley lands required for trail development are transferred to the City. Securing these lands through the development process will allow construction of the trail segment from Naylon St. south to connect to Rutherford Road. The order of magnitude cost for design and construction of Phase 2, approximately 1500 m in length, is estimated to be in the range of $2.3M to $2.6M, to be funded from a combination of DC and Gas Tax funding included in future capital budget submissions. Phase 2 is anticipated to proceed in the medium-term starting in 2027 and will take approx. 2 to 3 years to complete. Cost estimates exclude cost escalation, tax, administrative fees, land acquisition/easements and permitting fees.

The segment of BSG trail located south of Rutherford Road to Keele Street will be reassessed when future redevelopment of the area presents an opportunity that is currently not practical or achievable (refer to Attachment 1 for reference map).

Operational Impact

Implementation of the BSG trail will have operational impacts related to ongoing maintenance of the proposed trail routes as well as lifecycle asset replacement considerations. Operational costs for Phase 1 and 2 trail works are estimated at approximately $3,300/year and $7,800/year respectively per phase excluding winter

maintenance. This includes routine asset upkeep, mowing, horticultural activities, routine seasonal repairs. Recreational trails within natural open space contexts are generally not winter maintained.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The Study recommendations are generally in conformance with federal, provincial, regional and municipal legislation and regulatory agency guidelines in relation to natural heritage and community planning. The Study recommendations align with Regional and Provincial trail and active transportation strategies outlined through the TRCA Trail Strategy (2019), York Regional Transportation Master Plan, York Region Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plan (2008), Ontario's Cycling Tourism Plan: Tour by Bike, City of Toronto Cycling Network Plan, Natural Environment Trail Strategy, and Toronto Ravine Strategy. Additional information on the comprehensive policy and land use background review are detailed in the Study.

Conclusion

The recommendations of the Study provide comprehensive and sustainable trail alignment options to meet the City's Service Excellence Strategic Plan, with a priority to implement the BSG as a key segment of the Vaughan Super Trail. Staff recommend that Council receive and approve in principle the Study to guide future trail implementation and capital budget planning.

For more information, please contact: Jamie Bronsema, Director, Parks Infrastructure Planning and Development, Extension 8858.

Attachments

1. Bartley Smith Greenway Trail Feasibility – Preferred Route Map
2. Bartley Smith Greenway Trail – Closing the Gap Feasibility Study and 30 Percent Trail Design
3. Bartley Smith Greenway Trail – Closing the Gap Feasibility Study Appendices (linked due to size; Appendix A to Appendix G on the Bartley Smith Greenway Trail webpage)

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