

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, November 9, 2021

WARD(S): 2

TITLE: HUMBER TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY

FROM:

Vince Musacchio, Acting Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To present the Humber Trail Feasibility Study (the “Study”) to guide future trail planning and development from Boyd Conservation Area to Steeles Avenue West, as prepared by Schollen & Company Inc.

Report Highlights

- Completed in collaboration with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), the Study explores ways to expand the Humber Trail and connect a seven-kilometre gap between Boyd Conservation Area and Steeles Avenue West.
- The Study is based on recommendations of the 2020 Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan to close gaps along key city-wide trails, and to further advance the Vaughan Super Trail and the TRCA Trail Strategy.
- The Study identifies options that balance the recreational and transportation needs of residents with the ecological functions of the natural heritage system of the Humber River Valley.
- An online platform and survey were available between June 8 to July 4, 2021 with approximately 240 participants visiting the online platform and approximately 130 providing a response to the survey.
- Two key priority areas have been identified to advance trail development in the short term, including Boyd Conservation Area south to Langstaff Road and trails within Doctors McLean District Park linking Islington Avenue to Clarence Street.

Recommendations

1. THAT the Humber Trail Feasibility Study prepared by Schollen & Company Inc., dated September 2021, be received and approved in principle to guide trail planning, design and development.

Background

City and TRCA Master Plans and Policies support advancing trail planning and development to help establish a comprehensive City-wide transportation network

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 (refer to 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 (refer to 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 reflects the following 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.

The recommendations of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan 2020 update approved in principle by Council on December 17, 2019 builds on the 2007 Pedestrian and Bicycle

Master Plan recommendations to ensure trail routes are connected with an emerging focus to close gaps along key city-wide trails, including the Humber Trail network.

On September 27, 2019 the TRCA Trail Strategy was approved at TRCA Board of Directors Meeting #8/19. The Strategy outlines TRCA's plan to work with partners to complete, expand, manage, and celebrate the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network, a connected trail network in the regional greenspace system. It serves as a framework to protect potential trail alignments, and to guide the planning, development, and management of these trails. By building upon past successes in trail development, the TRCA Trail Strategy refocuses efforts to expand the trail network by providing better connectivity between communities, transportation networks and regional places of interest.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Pedestrian and Bike Master Plan \(2020\)](#)

[Active Together Master Plan for Parks, Recreation and Libraries – 2018 Review and Update](#)

Analysis and Options

The Humber Trail Feasibility Study (the Study) is the first step of the planning process to connect a critical gap of the existing Humber Trail between Boyd Conservation Area and Steeles Avenue West. Closing this gap will create a key regional trail that extends northward through the William Granger Greenway to the Nashville Conservation Reserve in Vaughan, and into the Town of Caledon to the Oak Ridges Moraine, and southward through the City of Toronto to the Lake Ontario waterfront. The Humber Trail forms an important part of and further advances the Vaughan Super Trail, a bold initiative to create a world-class, identifiable trail that links communities and connects people with nature, cultural heritage, communities, and special destinations throughout the City of Vaughan (Refer to Attachment 1 for final draft Study).

The project team led by Schollen & Company Inc., in consultation with City and TRCA staff, assessed the study area conditions and identified trail alignments options for the proposed Humber Trail between Boyd Conservation Area and Steeles Avenue West.

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 Humber River Valley, ensuring the protection and enhancement of environmental features and functions. The Study includes a review of previous studies, a high-level assessment of cultural and natural features present in the Humber valley corridor, areas of environmental sensitivity, and opportunities to optimize active transportation to determine “best fit” trail options and informs the next steps for the project.

The Study recognized opportunities for trail connections with current and future multi-use trails and cycling facilities as identified in the TRCA Trail Strategy (2019), City of Vaughan Pedestrian & Bicycle Master Plan (2020), Vaughan Official Plan (2010), and Woodbridge Centre Secondary Plan.

The Study was completed using the following phases of work:

- Phase 1: Research, Inventory and Analysis
- Phase 2: Alternative Designs, Preferred Design and Draft Master Plan
- Phase 3: Draft Feasibility Plan and Report
- Phase 4: Solicit public feedback on the draft feasibility study findings

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

Trail alignments were evaluated using the constraint criteria to arrive at the most beneficial and cost-effective solution to satisfy the specific conditions and environmental sensitivities of the site. In some cases, due to the availability of public land or to make a key connection, certain trail segments encroached upon natural features or within flood limit. Environmental mitigation will be required in these instances of encroachment.

The evaluation process resulted in a detailed breakdown of the trail system into five segments marked by major arterial roads and are organized from north to south as follows (Refer to Attachment 2 for trail alignment options):

- Segment One** – Pine Grove Road to Boyd Conservation Area
- Segment Two** – Thistlewood Avenue to Pine Grove Road
- Segment Three** – Highway 7 to Thistlewood Avenue
- Segment Four** – Highway 407 to Highway 7
- Segment Five** – Steeles Avenue West to Highway 407

Within each segment, the trail is broken down further, characterized by changes in site conditions and specific flood limits. The trail segments are most profoundly affected by the extent of the 2-year, 5-year and 100-year flood limits. This rationale is reinforced by consideration of construction logistics and cost as well as maintenance requirements which increase with vulnerability to flooding. Physical constraints, flood zones, land ownership, linkage opportunities and environmental sensitive areas were used to determine trail feasibility.

The Study is intended to be a foundational plan to support an anticipated Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) process for implementation of identified trail segments

The Study includes a Phasing Plan and Implementation Plan that are meant to provide high level guidance to the City in planning future capital budgets. The Study identifies Phase 1 priority areas within each of the five segments of trails for construction. These areas can be built sooner than other areas due to fewer constraints. Trail priority areas within each of the segment are depicted in Attachment 3.

The prioritization of future capital projects is incumbent on available capital, maintenance, and operating funding as well as permit approval from TRCA and other external government agencies, where required. Where multiple trail alignment options are proposed, it is anticipated that the EA process will result in a future in-depth evaluation of each option to further verify the potential to make key connections, protect natural heritage features and ensure public safety. The Study provides a summary of the landowners and stakeholders involved and their responsibilities as well as the coordination that would be required to implement various trail alignment options. The plan sets out a catalogue of trail types as well as recommendations for trail design that have been cross-referenced with City of Vaughan trail standards and details.

Public Consultation was undertaken as an integral component of the Study process with 240 respondents participating in the online project platform

Following the completion of the draft Study, Staff solicited public input on the Study through an online interactive “Have Your Say” platform and survey branded as “Building the Humber Trail – Boyd Conservation Area to Steeles Avenue West”. The online platform and survey ran from June 8 to July 4, 2021. Through the online platform and survey, participants were able to:

- Watch an 11-minute video to learn more about the proposed route options;
- Use an interactive map and provide comments directly on the map;
- Complete a survey to rank five identified priority areas;
- Share ideas on how to encourage more residents to use recreational trails; and
- Access a draft of the Study.

The online “Have Your Say” platform and survey was advertised through City and TRCA social media channels, targeted social media marketing, digital signboards, three mobile signs along Islington Avenue, Councillor e-letter, email distribution to key stakeholders including local ratepayer groups and posters at the Boyd Conservation Area gatehouse. In total, the survey received positive responses, with 240 participants visiting multiple pages of the platform, and approximately 130 participating in the survey, providing feedback and identifying route options on the interactive map. The majority of feedback was from residents residing in the Woodbridge and Kleinburg/Nashville communities.

In general, the Study was positively received by the public. Key comments received through the online public engagement “Have Your Say” platform is documented in

Attachment 5. Phase 1 priority areas within each of the five segments are described in the table below along with ranking received through the Have Your Say platform and survey.

Segment priority areas	Public Survey Ranking	Timing
<p>Segment One – Pine Grove Road to Boyd Conservation Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion of an existing maintenance path to a public use trail in Boyd Conservation Area. • Make a connection over the Humber River to Langstaff Road. • Exploring opportunities to commemorate the bowstring bridge. 	47%	Short-term
<p>Segment Two – Thistlewood Avenue to Pine Grove Road</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of new trails within Doctors McLean District Park linking Islington Avenue to Clarence Street. 	17%	Medium-term
<p>Segment Three - Highway 7 to Thistlewood Avenue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widen existing Riverwalk Trail in Nort Johnston District Park. • Extend trail further south under Highway 7, with improvements to Woodbridge Pool and Memorial Arena parking lot. 	4%	Short-term
<p>Segment Four - Highway 407 to Highway 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of a new trail in Legion Park on the east side of the Humber River from Highway 7 to Legion Court Road, • Extend trail under Highway 7 or at the intersection of Highway 7 and Islington Avenue. 	10%	Medium-to Long term
<p>Segment Five - Steeles Avenue West to Highway 407</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of a short section of trail and a series of switchbacks in Thackeray Park. • Connect Humber Trail to the City of Toronto, linking to existing asphalt trail network. 	22%	Medium-to Long term

Through the survey, respondents indicated that they enjoy trails for an opportunity to bike, walk/hike and experience nature. Additional comments received on how the City can encourage residents to use trails are summarized below:

Trail Activation: Make trail more interactive for residents and consider programs such as nature photography, tree caching, organized hiking groups and online platform to share experiences.
Trail Signage/Wayfinding: Provide signage for biking etiquette, cultural and natural heritage signage, and Indigenous Land Acknowledgement.
Programming: Organize or encourage local destination such as outdoor events or markets around trail heads.
Outreach and Promotion: Promotion of local trails through various channels such as online engagement, public facing maps, incentives for trail use e.g., badges.
Safety: Developing safe biking and pedestrian infrastructure along major roads, crossing and intersections.

Based on the public engagement information received and the project consultants review with staff of the trail segment, the final route options and corresponding lengths are summarized in Attachment 3.

Financial Impact

Phase 1 Projects

Out of the five priority areas, areas identified within segments 1, 2, and 5 ranked high based on public input. While Segment 5 did achieve second place ranking, most of the trail route is located outside of City of Vaughan jurisdiction and may be considered for implementation in the medium to long term through future discussions and in partnership with the City of Toronto.

Priority areas identified within Segments 1 and 2 can be advanced in the short term for implementation starting in 2022 (refer to Attachment 4 for reference map):

	<u>Segment 1</u>	<u>Segment 2</u>
Priority Area	Boyd Conservation Area to Langstaff Road	Doctors McLean District Park from Woodbridge Avenue to Clarence Street (part of the Riverwalk Trail)
<u>Scope</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement with TRCA to undertake project works on TRCA lands • New trail development within Boyd Conservation Park to Langstaff Road • Decommissioning and commemoration of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New trail development from Woodbridge Avenue and Clarence Street • New bridge crossing • New signage and trail amenities • Landscaping and restoration works

	existing bowstring bridge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New bridge crossing • New signage and trail amenities • Landscaping and restoration works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portions of the identified trail within Doctors McLean District Park were completed in 2021 (approximately 390 metres length)
Approximate Trail Length:	1400 metres	1150 metres (excludes constructed segment)
Approximate cost:	\$2.6 million*	\$1.2 million*
Timeline to implement:	3 to 4 years*	2 to 3 years*
Planned start date:	Q2 2022	Q1 2022

*Approximate costs and timelines to implement are rough-order-magnitude estimates based on the Study prepared by Schollen & Company Inc.

These priority areas are identified under the City’s capital plan, with funding identified through the 2022 budget process and subsequent years under the Vaughan Super Trail Program.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The Study recommendations are generally in conformance 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.

Conclusion

The recommendations of the Study provide comprehensive and sustainable trail alignment options to meet the City’s Service Excellence Plan, with a priority to implement 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: Martin Tavares, Manager, Parks and Open Space Planning, Extension 8882

Attachments

1. Vaughan Humber Trail Feasibility Study
2. Humber Trail Segments with Alignment Options (5 maps)
3. Humber Trail Feasibility Map identifying Priority Areas Preferred Route
4. Phase 1 Projects Reference Maps (2 maps)
5. Summary of Online Public Survey Findings
6. [Vaughan Humber Trail Feasibility Study Appendices](#) (linked due to size; please refer to Appendix A to Appendix F on the Humber Trail Project Updates page)

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