



To: COUNCIL

Meeting Date: 12/19/2023

Subject: Blair-Preston Trail and Pedestrian Bridge Municipal Class Environmental Assessment

Submitted By: Leah Walter, Director of Engineering

Prepared By: Jamie Croft, Manager of Infrastructure Engineering

Report No.: 23-200-CD

File No.: A/00919-20

Wards Affected: Ward 1
Ward 3

RECOMMENDATION(S):

THAT Report 23-200-CD Blair-Preston Trail and Pedestrian Bridge Municipal Class Environmental Assessment be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council authorize staff to complete the Schedule B Municipal Class Environmental Assessment process including authorization for staff to post the Notice of Study Completion and share the Project File Report publicly for a 30-day comment period.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Purpose

- To provide Council information regarding the work that has been completed on the Blair-Preston Trail and Pedestrian Bridge Municipal Class Environmental Assessment, Schedule B and next steps;
- To request Council's authorization to finalize the Project File and post the Notice of Study Completion for the 30-day public review period.

Key Findings

- A Municipal Class Environmental Assessment, Schedule B, was completed to evaluate a regionally significant active transportation trail and pedestrian bridge connection over the Speed River in the Blair and Preston area of Cambridge.
- The identified preferred alternative is a trail along the northern boundary of the rare Charitable Research Reserve land with a pedestrian bridge across the Speed River connecting to the B. McMullen Linear Trail.

Financial Implications

- The Blair-Preston Trail and Pedestrian Bridge MCEA has been fully funded by the Region of Waterloo, and managed by City of Cambridge staff.
- If Council approved a future design project it is estimated to require \$965,000 in funding, 50% of which could be eligible for cost sharing with the Region of Waterloo subject to future Regional Council budget approvals.
- The construction project is estimated to require \$4,750,000 in funding (2023 dollars), 50% of which could be eligible for cost sharing with the Region of Waterloo subject to future Regional Council budget approvals.
- Ongoing maintenance and repair of the trail and pedestrian bridge if constructed, including future replacement would be the responsibility of the City.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT:

- Strategic Action; or
 Core Service

Objective(s): GETTING AROUND - Emphasize connectivity and active transportation choices to help people travel in and beyond the city without a car

Strategic Action: Promote and develop more transportation options

Program: Active Transportation Network

Core Service: Active Transportation Planning

This trail and associated bridge would form part of a regionally significant off-road active transportation connection which was identified as an opportunity in the City's Cycling Master Plan (2020), and as special study area #5 in the list of gap/ infill projects identified in the Region of Waterloo's Active Transportation Master Plan (2014) and confirmed in its 2018 Active Transportation Network Strategy.

BACKGROUND:

Introduction

R.J. Burnside & Associates Limited was retained by the City of Cambridge to prepare a Schedule B Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) for the development of a trail and pedestrian bridge spanning the Speed River to connect the neighbourhoods of Blair and Preston. Routes through lands owned by the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve (*rare*) were considered. The proposed trail and bridge would connect the B. McMullen Linear Trail to the existing multi-use trail on Fountain Street by crossing over the Speed River upstream of its confluence with the Grand River.

This EA addresses the location of trail linkage and provides measures to mitigate possible impacts to the natural, social, cultural and built environment. Existing conditions proposed alternative solutions and public consultation process are all presented in the Project File Report (**Appendix A**).

Study Area

The Study Area is located within the area locally known as the Junction (or Confluence) of the Speed and Grand Rivers, broadly defined as the area bordered by Fountain Street to the west; a natural area to the north; the B. McMullen Linear Trail to the east; and the Grand River to the south. The majority of the Study Area lands are owned by *rare*; the remaining lands are owned by the City of Cambridge and Region of Waterloo. The lands are known to contain a variety of significant and sensitive environment and archaeological features. The study limits were confirmed in consultation with stakeholders and refined as part of the project and are shown in **Figure 1**. It should be noted that a larger study area including Fountain Street South corridor was initially considered, but screened out due to property impacts on up to 33 private property frontages.



Figure 1: Study Area

Project Justification and Need

A number of City and Region master planning documents have identified the opportunity and need for this trail and bridge infrastructure. The City of Cambridge Trails Master Plan (2010) identified the project as a short-term priority, stating:

Investigate the opportunities and process to construct a bridge crossing to link west side trails from Blair to Preston. A trail linking Preston with Downtown Cambridge was the trail section that was most often stated in the community survey and workshops. A bridge linking the Linear Trail with the Grand Trunk trail was identified in the 1996 City-Wide Multi-Use Trail Study. A bridge connection will be a long process and will require discussions with landowners; environmental impact studies; feasibility studies and other discussions. Bridge construction would follow and would likely be 5 to 10 years away from the start of the process. Given this length of time it is important that this trail section be identified as a short term priority so that process gets started. (p.15)

The Region of Waterloo's Active Transportation Master Plan (2014) also identifies the opportunity for a trail and bridge in the Study Area. In addition, a Class EA for the Fountain / King Street / Shantz Hill Improvements dated April 17, 2012 as part of Engineering Report E-12-029, recommended the Region of Waterloo, in conjunction with the City of Cambridge, explore the feasibility of a new pedestrian / cycling bridge

across the Speed River and an off-road multi-use trail between Fountain Street and the B. McMullin Linear Trail. The existing right-of-way corridor on Fountain Street between Preston Parkway and Shantz Hill Road is constrained, and unfortunately does not support expansion for Multi Use Trail facilities which are installed to the west. This presents a significant barrier linking cycling facilities and the off road trail network.

The City of Cambridge Cycling Master Plan (2020) also highlighted the need for this infrastructure as a short-term priority, tying Active Transportation infrastructure to meeting broader City goals including sustainability, Greenhouse Gas Reduction, connection to the natural environment and enhancing community health, safety and quality of life.

Installation of the proposed trail and pedestrian bridge in this location is an opportunity to address a significant gap in the City's existing Active Transportation network. With this new infrastructure in place, each of the City's main four core areas (Galt, Hespeler, Preston and Blair) would be continuously connected by an off-road trail system. In addition, this new infrastructure would provide a continuous off-road connection between Preston Town Centre and the Doon area of Kitchener (via the existing pedestrian bridge at Morningside Drive over Highway 401. This route forms part of the Trans Canada Trail and the Walter Bean Grand River Trail which are Regionally significant.

The construction of this proposed connection is also anticipated to improve the safety of area students accessing both Preston High School and William G. Davis Public School from the subdivisions on the west side of the Speed River, and for Conestoga College students residing on the east side of the Speed River. With the future LRT connection in Preston the preferred trail alignment would also provide more options for residents of Blair and Preston to consider alternate modes of transportation as well as offering convenient off-road access for users to visit the Fountain Street Soccer Complex. This proposed connection would provide convenient commuting and recreational access for a wide range of users and supports the objective of reducing the number of vehicles on City and Regional roadways.

Discussions with *rare* and Narrowing Down the General Bridge Location

Based on the recommendations from the City's 2010 Trails Master Plan, in 2015 City staff began internal processes to narrow down potential trail crossing locations. The primary factors considered included property ownership, setback needs for privacy, connectivity to existing and future trails, and potential environmental impacts to sensitive landscapes. Analysis determined that the new trail and bridge would likely need to be installed on lands owned by *rare*, who own the vast majority of the lands between the Village of Blair and West Galt, on the west side of the Speed River and the

south side of the Grand River. A formal visioning meeting was held in January 2016, bringing together stakeholders that included *rare* representatives; two City of Cambridge Councillors; staff from the Township of North Dumfries, Region of Waterloo, City of Cambridge, and GRCA; members of the Cambridge Trails Advisory Committee and Trans Canada Trail; and members of the public. Part of the meeting included a walk of *rare* lands to observe potential bridge crossing points. Support for exploring the potential of a new trail utilizing *rare* lands was communicated by those in attendance, provided that the installation could be completed in a location that was least impactful to the natural environment, and provided that several concerns from *rare* relating to design and operations could be adequately addressed. These concerns and several suggested solutions have been highlighted in the Project File Report and would be further explored and addressed during the detailed design of the project if this project were to proceed to that stage.

To assist in refining the most appropriate crossing point on *rare* lands, *rare* provided City staff with mapping of Priority Protection areas (Figure 5-2 of Project File Report). Generally, the alternative options for alignment were focused in the lower priority protection areas northwest of the confluence of the Speed and Grand Rivers, between Fountain Street at Linden Drive and the Speed River adjacent to Preston High School – an area known locally as ‘Preston Flats’. The Region of Waterloo has installed multi-use trails along this section of Fountain Street connecting to the area.

Additional meetings with *rare* were held on numerous occasions prior to the MCEA study, both informally and formally, including a meeting with *rare* Executive Director and staff in July 2016, and a presentation to the *rare* Board of Directors with assistance from the Cambridge Trails Advisory Committee in June 2017. A Planning Ecologist with *rare* was assigned as staff liaison to the MCEA study for the duration of the project in order to ensure seamless coordination. Additional meetings with the *rare* Environmental Advisory Committee and *rare* Board of Directors have taken place during the study with the most recent meeting occurring in July 2020. Following the completion of additional consultation and discussions in 2021 and 2022, a detailed summary response to the concerns raised by *rare* was provided in August 2022, to be shared by *rare* staff to their Board of Directors. The detailed correspondence and meeting summaries with *rare* is outlined in Appendix N of the project file.

One of *rare*'s primary concerns is over trespassing and vandalism caused by the public leaving the trail. Mitigation measures have been proposed and discussed including having natural plantings to discourage the public from leaving the trail, and potential for additional by-law presence and enforcement. It is also noted that the adjacent land is currently being used for livestock grazing, and historically been used for agriculture.

Ultimately *rare* Staff and board of directors are opposed to further consideration of the trail through the proposed property following the filing of the EA. They no longer see the project as being consistent with their mandate for conservation and have indicated they are no longer willing to consider further discussions over property easement or acquisition for the trail on this particular property. Sections 9.0, 10.0 and 11.0 of the Project File Report have been updated to reflect *rare*'s current position.

ANALYSIS:

A summary of the alternatives considered as part of the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment are presented below. Alternative 1 (Northern Route) was identified as preferred as shown in Figure 7-2 of the Project File Report.

Three screened alternatives were reviewed in detail as part of the study, in addition to a Do Nothing alternative:

1. **Northern Route:** Development of a trail along the northern boundary of the agricultural field on the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve land with a pedestrian bridge across the Speed River connecting to the B. McMullen Linear Trail to the north of Dover Street South;
2. **Dover Street South Route:** Development of a trail along the northern boundary of the agricultural field on the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve land with a pedestrian bridge across the Speed River connecting to the B. McMullen Linear Trail at Dover Street South, near the Dover Street Pump House Building; and
3. **Southern Route:** Development of a trail along the northern boundary of the agricultural field on the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve land with a pedestrian bridge across the Speed River connecting to the B. McMullen Linear Trail to the south of Dover Street South, west of the Preston High School field.

The four alternative solutions were evaluated against the natural, social, cultural, land use/ policy, technical and economic environment (see Section 6.2 of the Project File Report). Alternative 1, is identified as the preferred solution which creates the shortest connection between Fountain Street and the B. McMullen Linear Trail and provides a route that is the least likely to encourage trail users to venture off-trail and trespass on *rare* Charitable Research Reserve lands. The bridge and trail are the farthest distance from the confluence of the Speed and Grand Rivers (a sensitive waterfowl wintering area) under this alternative. The Preferred Solution also has a moderate cost relative to the other alternatives. Refer to Section 7.0 of the Project File Report for additional description, key considerations and discussion of the preferred Alternative 1.

In consideration of *rare's* opposition to the continuation of property discussions following EA completion three options are presented below which would be available to Council as part of the current project.

Option 1: Withdrawal of the EA

This option is available to the proponent of an EA at any time in the process prior to the deadline for completion per the Ontario *Environmental Assessment Act, 1990*.

Withdrawing the EA would result in the Project File Report and the information within it to remain undocumented. This would include documentation related to the extensive public and stakeholder consultation as well as archeological and environmental studies undertaken as part of this project. As this study was funded in full by the Region, with significant efforts carried out by City staff, not filing the EA would be an unfortunate conclusion to the work and this option is not being recommended by City staff at this time.

Option 2: Re-Evaluate Screened-Out Alternative

This option would expand the study area and allow for re-evaluation of the screened-out alternative of acquiring property from 33 private frontages along Fountain Street South. Fountain Street South is a constrained right of way, and currently does not have available property to support separated cycling facilities. In addition to the social impacts of the number of property frontage acquisitions, the costs associated with this option are considered to be very high. This may include full property takings for businesses which have been identified as having private parking eliminated through this option. Further there may be extensive hydro relocations required. If this option was selected by Council, additional City funding would be required for expanding the EA, and additional rounds of consultation and would need approval of the Region of Waterloo. The Region has funded the EA study to date, however further expansion to this option would be at the City's discretion and cost and is not supported by the Region of Waterloo staff. The costs of this option would be subject to further detailed scope review, however would be anticipated to be in the order of \$100,000- \$150,000 to be required from the Capital Works Reserve fund for the additional study as part of an expanded EA. Note that costs for property acquisition, design and construction are not included in this figure, and would need to be further defined. These costs would likely be 100% City cost, subject to further discussion with the Region. This option is not being recommended by City staff at this time.

Option 3: Complete the Schedule B EA Process

This option will allow staff to complete the mandatory steps of the Municipal Class EA process for a Schedule B Project. Staff will prepare and issue a Notice of Study Completion which will initiate the 30-day period for public review and comment of the

Project File Report. All comments received will be documented within the Final Project File Report and will be taken into consideration in any future stages of the project. By completing the EA process and filing the Project File Report, the City is not obligated to move ahead with the preferred alternative. The City also has the ability to amend the study in the future for example if there was interest in expanding the study area to further explore alternative solutions as suggested in Option 2 above. Staff are recommending Option 3 to complete the Schedule B EA process and proceed with filing the Project File Report.

EXISTING POLICY / BY-LAW(S):

There is no existing policy/by-law

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The Blair-Preston Trail and Pedestrian Bridge MCEA was fully funded by the Region of Waterloo. With the Regional significance of this trail connection cost sharing was agreed to in principle with Region of Waterloo staff, subject to future Regional Council budget approvals outlining a shared funding model (50/50 cost sharing) for design and construction of the trail and new pedestrian bridge.

The design project is estimated to require \$965,000 in funding, 50% of which could be eligible from the Region subject to future Regional Council budget approvals. This design estimate includes provision for Stage 3 Archaeological Assessment work, which accounts for approximately \$600,000 of the design budget, however, should additional Stage 4 Archaeological Assessment work be required, additional design funding will be required, the amount of which would be informed by the outcome of the Stage 3 Archaeological Assessment work.

The construction budget is estimated to be \$4,750,000 (2023 dollars). It should be noted that this a preliminary Class D (+/-30%) level estimate. The City could be responsible for 50% of the construction costs, subject to future Regional Council budget approvals, and the ongoing maintenance and repair of the pedestrian bridge, including its future replacement.

PUBLIC VALUE:

Sustainability:

This project supports the Public Value Principle of sustainability by promoting alternate modes of transportation, reducing reliance on vehicular travel. The proposed connection is part of a Regionally significant active transportation route as identified in the Region's Active Transportation Master Plan (2014). It addresses a gap in the City's Active

Transportation network by linking the four core areas with a continuous off-road trail system. With the future LRT connection in Preston, it would also provide more options for residents of Blair and Preston Heights to consider alternate modes of transportation. It also provides an off-road trail connection linking to the Trans Canada Trail, connecting the residents of Hespeler and Preston to this Nationally significant trail network.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE INPUT:

Advisory Committees Consulted:

Project staff provided a presentation to the Cambridge Cycling and Trails Advisory Committee (CCTAC) on February 11, 2021. The CCTAC has subsequently ranked this project as the highest active transportation priority in both 2021 and 2022. Additional detailed comments and information can be found in Section 9 of the Project File Report and Appendix M.

Consultation was undertaken with the City's Environmental Advisory Committee, including providing the Project File report for comment. Detailed comments and responses can be found in Section 9 of the Project File Report and Appendix R.

Consultation with the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee will be undertaken during detailed design stage of the trail and pedestrian bridge.

PUBLIC INPUT:

- Notice of Study Commencement for the project was published on April 23, 2020, mailed out to agencies, Indigenous communities, to homes and businesses surrounding the study area, and a printed notice was advertised in the local newspapers.
- A project website was maintained for the duration of the project on the City of Cambridge website at www.cambridge.ca/blairpreston that included contact information for the City and consultant project leads. Project updates were mailed out to anyone who subscribed to the project page.
- The project team hosted a Public Information Centre (PIC) from October 30 to November 27, 2020. A presentation and short survey was made available through a link on the City webpage to the EngageWR website. Notices of the PIC were mailed and/or emailed to all properties within 200m of the study area, to approval agencies, stakeholders and Indigenous communities. The PIC was also advertised in the Cambridge Times on October 20, 2020.
- Project staff met with the *rare* Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) and Board of Directors (BoD) prior to the Study's commencement. During the Study,

additional meetings with the EAC and/or BoD took place in May 2019, April 2020 and July 2020. The project file was provided for comment to EAC in June 2023 for comment. Detailed comments and responses are available in Appendix R of the Project file.

- Written comments were received from several members of the public. Staff received a mix of comments, some in support and some opposed, with the majority of respondents preferring Option 1: Northern Route. Of the online surveys completed, 75.0% of respondents were supportive of the City developing a trail between the communities of Blair and Preston. 35.0% of respondents estimated they would use a new trail in this location once per week during peak months; 30% estimated their usage would be a few times per week. A detailed summary of comment themes and project team responses is provided in Section 9 of the Project File Report, along with all comments received as part of the Public Information Centre.

INTERNAL / EXTERNAL CONSULTATION:

- The following Indigenous communities were consulted at key stages of the Study. Detailed information is available in Appendices O, P and Q of the Project File Report:
 - Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN);
 - Six Nations of the Grand River (SNGR);
 - Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council [Represented by the Haudenosaunee Development Institute (HDI)]
 - Métis Nation of Ontario
- Representatives of Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN), Six Nations of the Grand River (SNGR) and Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council participated in the Stage 2 archaeological field surveys;
- Detailed summaries of concerns from indigenous communities and project team responses with proposed mitigation measures are presented in Appendices O, P and Q of the Project File Report.
- Review agencies consulted during this Study included the following. Detailed information is available in Appendix J of the Project File Report:
 - Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks
 - Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

- Ministry of Heritage, Sports, Tourism and Culture Industries
- Regional Municipality of Waterloo
- Grand River Conservation Authority
- City and Region staff were also consulted during the study included Engineering, Recreation & Culture, Parks, Legal, Property, Planning and Communications.

CONCLUSION:

The Blair-Preston Trail and Pedestrian Bridge provides an opportunity to strengthen the City's and the Region's active transportation networks, would result in increased recreational activities for residents, and would help to reduce the number of cars on City and Region streets. This connection would complete a network of off-road commuting options for residents to travel between all four cores – Galt, Hespeler, Preston and Blair – completely off-road, and also provide a better connection to the existing off-road trails network in Kitchener's Doon neighbourhood, through a new and safer way to help people move within and beyond the city without using a car.

The Municipal Class EA Study was completed as per the guidelines set out under the Environmental Protection Act by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP). City Council's endorsement would allow the Notice of Study Completion to be published and the Project File Report to be shared publicly for a 30-day comment period. Any comments received will be incorporated into the Final Project File Report which will be subsequently filed with the MECP following which the EA study phase of the project would be completed.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: **No**

By-law: **No**

Budget Amendment: **No**

Policy: **No**

APPROVALS:

This report has gone through the appropriate workflow and has been reviewed and or approved by the following as required:

Director

Deputy City Manager

Chief Financial Officer

City Solicitor

City Manager

ATTACHMENTS:

When naming attachments please use the following format:

1. 23-200-CD Appendix A – Project File Report