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# HALDIMAND COUNTY

## Report CDP-02-2019 Community Partnership Program – Dunnville Thompson Creek Park Rehabilitation Project Update



For Consideration by Council in Committee on March 26, 2019

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### OBJECTIVE:

To provide an update regarding the Dunnville Thompson Creek Park Rehabilitation Project, coordinated by the Dunnville Horticultural Society, including the request for Haldimand County to amend an existing Lease Agreement with Ducks Unlimited Canada related to the property, and approval for Haldimand County to enter into a Habitat Conservation Agreement with the City of London to support remediation of the grassland area.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report CDP-02-2019 Community Partnership Program – Dunnville Thompson Creek Park Rehabilitation Project Update be received;
2. AND THAT the request to amend an existing Lease Agreement between Haldimand County and Ducks Unlimited Canada related to management of the entire Thompson Creek property, be approved;
3. AND THAT the request to enter into a Habitat Conservation Agreement with the City of London, to support remediation of the grassland area, be approved;
4. AND THAT a By-law be passed authorizing the Mayor and Clerk to execute the 1998 Lease Agreement Amendment and the Habitat Conservation Agreement.

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**Reviewed by:** Sheila Wilson, CPRP, Manager, Community Development & Partnerships

**Respectfully submitted:** Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, General Manager of Community & Development Services

**Approved:** Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In May 2018, the Dunnville Horticultural Society (DHS) received approval through report PED-COM-09-2018 to undertake the rehabilitation of Thompson Creek Park to create an outdoor classroom and eco-centre. The proposal was reviewed and approved through the County's Community Partnership Program (CPP) and included \$11,550 in CPP grant funding towards the overall proposed project budget of \$33,000.

While beginning to conduct rehabilitation work on the site, DHS was approached by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) about an opportunity to enter into a Habitat Conservation Agreement with the City of London. This type of agreement is required when protected habitat has to be removed for infrastructure works and requires that a replacement habitat be created. This original infrastructure work occurred in the City of London; unfortunately, no property meeting the criteria was found in London and the City

turned to DUC—as its agent for the remediation—to find another suitable property. DUC identified the grassland (upland) section of Thompson Creek as an ideal location given its size and location within southwestern Ontario’s Carolinian habitat. This five-year agreement would provide approximately \$235,000 worth of work on the site, including the planting and maintenance of native wildflower seeds.

The proposal to partner with the City of London—and Ducks Unlimited Canada’s Restoration Services—to rehabilitate the grassland portion of Thompson Creek Park complements an existing Lease Agreement between the municipality and Ducks Unlimited Canada for the overall management of the site, including the adjacent wetland.

The proposal has been reviewed by staff and senior management. In order to be able to accommodate the request, staff are recommending amendment of the above-noted existing Lease Agreement with DUC for management of the entire Thompson Creek site to allow the City of London to undertake remediation of the grassland/upland portion of the Park (through its agent, Ducks Unlimited Canada/Restoration Services).

## **BACKGROUND:**

Haldimand County’s Community Partnership Program (CPP) is intended to encourage and enhance strategic partnerships to the benefit of community stakeholders and the municipality, offering a simple, streamlined and customer-focused approach. The Program is intended to balance the rigor of the review process—necessary to ensure legitimate public interest issues are addressed—with flexibility and respect for the volunteer commitment of the groups.

Since 2011, 82 CPP projects have been approved and more than seventy completed, leveraging more than \$2 million in community-raised funds to construct \$3.7 million in County enhancements. All projects, whether or not County funding is provided, require approval from the County for improvements on public land.

The Dunnville Horticultural Society (DHS) has been a proactive and engaged community group for almost ninety years and has a track record of completing many CPP projects, both small and large. Most recently, DHS completed the \$30,000 restoration of the public art fountain and rehabilitation of several gardens in Centennial Park, adjacent to Thompson Creek Park. The current request at Thompson Creek represents the completion of a project that was started more than twenty years ago, when a group of local organizations came together as the Dunnville Bioregion Association to develop a plan to restore the 45-acre site. While that Association was unable to see its original plans to completion due to unforeseen circumstances, DHS has taken up the challenge to revitalize the project and the area. As part of that work, DHS completed the previously-mentioned project last year and has now been presented with an opportunity to partner with the City of London and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) on the replanting of the grassland/upland area with native wildflowers, at no cost to the community groups or the County.

At this time, the request from the group is for:

- (i) Haldimand County to approve an amendment to an existing thirty-year Lease Agreement between the former Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk and DUC to manage and maintain the entire Thompson Creek area; and
- (ii) Haldimand County to enter into a five-year Habitat Conservation Agreement with the City of London to seed the grassland/upland area with native wildflower seeds.

## **ANALYSIS:**

### **The Project:**

More than twenty years ago, a group of local organizations came together to create the Dunnville Bioregion Association with a plan to restore Thompson Creek as well as plant a Carolinian Arboretum, establish a Wetland Complex and a Tall Grass Prairie Plantation. The intent was to use the 45-acre area as an outdoor education facility for local schools as well as provide a naturalized walking trail system for the community. More than 800 Carolinian-species trees were planted, a riparian zone was restored along the creek banks and 35 acres of wetland was restored by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and planted with native Tall Grass species and native wildflowers. As well, the pavilion in Centennial Park was constructed as an outdoor classroom. Due to unforeseen circumstances, several of the key volunteers had to step away from the project and the plan stalled. For many years the area flourished as an example of Carolinian habitat, although it is now in need of remediation.

DHS—with Council approval in 2018 to rehabilitate the area—has planned the following:

- The creation of four distinct ecological cells: Carolinian Arboretum, Creek Restoration, Wetland Complex and Tallgrass Prairie. Each cell will include a naturalized trail, species identification signs and information panels describing the habitat, ecology and wildlife residents of each cell;
- Establishing a 1.5 km naturalized walking trail through the Tallgrass Prairie, with its view of the wetlands and connecting to both Centennial and Lions Parks; and
- Installing signage at the outdoor pavilion in Centennial Park—as originally conceived in 1998—to create an outdoor classroom.

Since last year, DHS has been working hard to begin the rehabilitation, collaborating with County staff and reaching out to partners including the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) for expertise, support and assistance. To date, the following has been undertaken:

- Assessment and inventory of the trees in the Carolinian Arboretum;
- Development of a plan for removal of dead trees and brush to clear the area and prepare for the planting of new trees and plant species;
- Establishing the naturalized walking trail through the Tallgrass Prairie;
- Installation of signage to identify the area as protected and restricted from motorized vehicle access;
- Professional spraying of the area to eradicate invasive plant species (phragmites); and
- Development of text for the signage throughout the Park.

Upcoming activities on the site include a controlled burn in the Tallgrass Prairie in spring 2019 followed by native plantings and ongoing grooming of the naturalized trail. The controlled burn is ecologically required for the restoration; the prescribed burn plan has been reviewed and a burn permit will be issued and indemnifications put in place to ensure risk management. Significant public notification will take place in advance of the burn and Emergency Services (Fire) will be on site when it occurs.

### **Proposed Habitat Conservation Agreement:**

During the course of this work, DHS was approached by DUC—as agent for the City of London—to enter into a five-year agreement for habitat conservation of the 23.5 acre grassland area. Specifically, the City of London and DUC would plant the area with native wildflower seeds immediately after the controlled burn and continue to manage, seed and maintain the area for the next five years. The value of this work is estimated to be \$2,000 per acre or \$47,000 per year/\$235,000 over five years. This opportunity was presented to Haldimand County related to an obligation on the part of the City of London—in compliance with Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry legislation—to replant an area of grassland bird habitat in the Carolinian forest. The City was unable to find a suitable property within

its municipal borders; however, identified Thompson Creek as an ideal location for the required remediation given its size and habitat.

This is a great opportunity for both the DHS project and the County as the work will not only boost biodiversity but also provide improved nesting habitat for grassland birds and waterfowl.

### **Existing 1998-2028 Lease Agreement:**

During the review of this request, it came to Haldimand County's attention that an existing agreement for the entire Thompson Creek property—both wetland and grassland—was executed between the former Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk and DUC. This thirty-year Lease is in place until May 13, 2028, and relates to the ongoing maintenance and management of the entire 45-acre property.

In order to be able to accommodate the new request from the City of London, Haldimand County has been asked by DUC to amend the existing Lease Agreement—including reducing the area for which DUC is directly responsible to the wetlands—while the City of London would take on the obligation of managing the grassland area.

### **Project Review & Community Benefit:**

The proposal and all related documentation was reviewed by an interdepartmental team of County staff as well as senior management and was favourably received as it meets the following CPP priorities and objectives:

- (i) Community Vibrancy and Healthy Community;
- (ii) Corporate Image and Efficient Government;
- (iii) Creates or maintains public infrastructure;
- (iv) Reduces the cost of government services by optimizing partnership resources; and
- (v) Capitalizes on collective energies and expertise of participating groups.

The partners—DHS, DUC, City of London and Haldimand County—will continue to work together to manage the maintenance of the entire Thompson Creek ecosystem.

### **FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Not applicable.

### **STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:**

This application was assessed and supported by staff from Community and Development Services, Corporate and Social Services, and Public Works.

### **REPORT IMPACTS:**

Agreement: Yes

By-law: Yes

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Project Location Map – Dunnville Centennial Park and Thompson Creek Restoration Area.

2. Original Lease Agreement (1998) – Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk and Ducks Unlimited Canada.
3. Letter Requesting Amendment to 1998 Lease Agreement from Ducks Unlimited Canada.
4. Proposed Lease Agreement Amendment – Haldimand County and Ducks Unlimited Canada.
5. Proposed Habitat Conservation Agreement – Haldimand County and City of London.