

Executive Summary

1.0 Introduction

Like many other cities in southern Ontario, Guelph is changing rapidly. Over the past decade or so, large areas of land have been developed and Guelph's population has increased significantly and this trend is expected to continue. Statistics Canada reported a population of 109,450 in 2001 accompanied by an annual growth rate of 2.84%. The projected population for 2021 is 150,040 with an annual growth rate of 1.02%. In addition to traditional recreation facilities such as arenas and swimming pools, residents are looking to the City to provide a well designed and well-maintained trail system to relieve the stresses of their busy day-to-day routine.

At the same time, the popularity of trails has been increasing steadily and recreation trail use is recognized as one of the top three recreational pursuits, having a 20% participation rate and estimated annual growth rate of 2.3% (Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, in Marshall Macklin Monaghan, 2001). Several factors can be attributed to this trend including:

- A renewed interest in spending “quality time” with family and friends pursuing high quality recreational experiences;
- Staying healthy through active fitness and recreational pursuits;
- An increased emphasis on the benefits of a healthy lifestyle;
- Trail initiatives such as the Trans Canada Trail which have helped to increase the profile of trails in Ontario and across Canada;
- A strong interest in tourism and recreational activities that respect the natural and cultural environments and offer educational opportunities;
- An interest in “getaway” travel where the goal is to obtain a high quality recreational experience for good value close to home;
- An increased interest and better understanding of the environmental health benefits of alternative modes of transportation such as walking and cycling.

A well designed and well-managed trails system in Guelph has the potential to serve all of these interests and the concept of a linked open space system is well supported in a number of long-range city planning documents. Like most other southern Ontario municipalities its size, Guelph has been developing a trail system, however it is being done in the absence of an overall vision to guide important decisions.

The Guelph Trail Master Plan (GTMP) provides that vision.

The goal of the GTMP is to:

develop a cohesive city wide trail system that will connect people and places through a network that is off-road wherever possible and supported by on-road links where necessary.

The primary **objectives** that need to be met in order to achieve this goal are to:

1. *Develop a City Wide Trail Master Plan that is consistent with the vision articulated in other important long term City of Guelph planning documents.*
2. *Develop an understanding of the needs and desires of trail users in Guelph.*
3. *Develop an implementation plan that describes trail routes and construction methods, priorities and costs.*
4. *Create a data management tool that can be updated and adapted as the trail system evolves over time.*

5. *Develop strategies to generate public interest in, and increase public use of the trail system.*

The GTMP is envisioned as a 20-year initiative that is designed to be complementary to other planning initiatives in the city. It will be implemented by the City through its own efforts and through partnerships with a variety of organizations that share an interest in trails. It goes beyond just identifying routes and also will guide the development and maintenance of trail infrastructure and programs. It will also provide the steps and tools necessary for the City and its partners to implement the plan while remaining flexible so that it can evolve over time.

2.0 Study Process

The two-phase study began in the late spring of 2003 and included a thorough consultation process with:

- A Steering Committee consisting of representatives from various City departments, trail user groups, the Guelph Development Association and other trail builders;
- Representatives from a wide range of interests and disciplines who participated in a site tour and workshop;
- The interested public through two public meetings held at key points during the study;
- Representatives of surrounding municipalities and the County of Wellington;
- City staff, individuals and various organizations through one-on-one meetings and presentations;
- Delegates at the 2004 Heritage River Conference; and
- The general population of Guelph through the posting of project materials on the City's website.

Although the study was limited to Guelph's urban boundary, potential connections to neighbouring municipalities as well as regional, provincial and national trails were also included as part of the work.

The GTMP summarizes these findings and recommendations. It is generally organized as follows:

Establishing the Need for Trails; sets the stage by summarizing the planning context within which a trail master plan fits. It also describes the many recreation, transportation, health and fitness, environmental and economic benefits trails can bring.

Understanding the Resources; lays the foundation for the plan by articulating what has been done in the past and what is being done today regarding trail development. This is augmented by the needs and desires of Guelph's citizens and stakeholders as collected through the public consultation program.

Planning for Trails; provides strategies for making trail connections across Guelph and with neighbouring municipalities, it outlines the process of route selection and describes in detail the trail network, construction priorities, related costs and potential sources of additional funding and resources to implement trails.

Building Trails, is a compendium of design guidelines and details for the construction of various elements of the trail network.

Supporting Trails, includes recommendations for promoting trails, encouraging use, educating trail users and maintaining, managing and monitoring Guelph's trails.

3.0 Understanding the Resources

A thorough inventory of the existing trail system was conducted which included field surveys of all the existing trails in the City using a hand held Global Positioning System (GPS) unit. Data collected was linked to the City's Geographic Information System (GIS). This was overlaid with a map layer depicting major destinations and barriers to determine where gaps exist in the current system and where potential routes should be located.

Some of the major destinations that should be linked by the trail system include:

- Major parks and open spaces such as Riverside Park and the South End Community Park;
- Major employment areas such as the northwest industrial area, the Hanlon Business Park in the south end, the Watson Parkway Industrial area in the east end, and the new Hanlon West Business Park;
- Major retail centres such as the downtown core, Willow West Mall and Stone Road Mall,
- Schools and major institutions such as the University of Guelph, Conestoga College, elementary and secondary schools;
- Recreation and community centres such as West End Community Centre and the Evergreen Senior's Centre;
- The Trans Canada Trail and other major existing trails such as the Royal Recreation Trail along the banks of the Eramosa and Speed Rivers; and
- Significant cultural destinations/landmarks such as the River Run Centre.

Some of the major physical barriers that must be overcome by the trail system include:

- Major transportation corridors such as the Hanlon Expressway and the limited crossing points at intersections and overpasses;
- The Eramosa and Speed Rivers;
- Railways;
- Some of the major arterial roads, such as sections of Stone Road, Gordon Street, Victoria Road and Woodlawn Road;
- Major topographic and natural features including drumlins surrounding the downtown area and significant wetlands in the south end;
- Complex zones where a number of significant barriers intersect, as is the case where Wellington Street, the Hanlon Expressway and the Speed River intersect in the central west part of the city.

4.0 The Trail Route Network

Although it is intended that Guelph's trails are generally available to all levels of ability, it is important to note that a variety of users seek different kinds of trail experiences in different places. The trail design must accommodate this variety through different types of trails in different locations. Therefore, not all trails are appropriate for all types of trail users in all locations throughout the city.

To accommodate this wide range of expectations, a hierarchy of trails is envisioned for the network. The hierarchy consists of three types of routes: **primary**, **secondary** and **tertiary**. In addition, **water routes** (for canoeists and kayakers) provide an additional dimension to the network.

Primary trails act as the “skeleton” of the network offering opportunities to move throughout the city along major corridors that provide relatively direct access to major destinations and to communities outside the urban boundary.

The **secondary** system constitutes a large portion of the network throughout the city and provides links to the primary system, access to local points of interest and creates local neighbourhood or community recreational trail loops.

Tertiary trails include routes in special and/or sensitive locations, and trails where use may be restricted to specific user groups.

Water routes include reaches of the Speed and Eramosa Rivers that are considered to be both interesting and navigable by canoeists and kayakers with an average level of ability.

Permitted uses on Guelph’s trails include:

- Walking/hiking, and jogging/running;
- Persons with mobility-assisted devices (motorized and non-motorized);
- Cycling;
- In-line skating, and other small-wheeled uses (e.g. skateboards);
- Cross country skiing; and
- Snowshoeing.

Equestrians and motorized users other than mobility-assisted devices, City of Guelph maintenance vehicles, and emergency response vehicles will not be permitted for use on trails within city boundaries.

The **recommended trail network** is illustrated on the following page.

Recommendations for implementation priorities are based on the following considerations:

- Creating connections (i.e. filling some of the gaps in the existing system) that when completed will connect existing lengthy portions of trail;
- Focusing on upgrades to the existing system where significant problems currently exist (e.g. inappropriate trail uses and environmental concerns regarding the location and use of some trails in Preservation Park and Hanlon Conservation Area);
- Consideration of other influences in and around the city such as ongoing development areas and the Council-approved Northeast Guelph Trail Master Plan;
- Creating a balanced distribution of new trail development across all districts in the city;
- Responding to requests/suggestions from the Steering Committee, stakeholders, City staff and the public.

Trail construction has been separated into three phases:

- Short Term (0 to 5 years-2005-2010);
- Medium Term (5 to 15 years –2011 to 2021); and
- Long Term (beyond year 15 –beyond 2021).

Once the build-out is complete, the system will measure approximately 300km in length. The following table provides a breakdown of facility length according to route type.

	Off-Road¹	On-Road²	Totals
Existing in 2004	73.9 km	6.4km ³	80.3km
Phase 1 (2005-2010)	57.6 km	28.8 km	86.4km
Phase 2 (2011-2021)	69.2 km	49.2km	118.4km
Phase 3 (2021 plus)	10 km	5.1 km	15.1km
Totals	210.7 km	89.5m	300.2km

Network Statistics by Phase

1. Off-road trails are multi-use and all user groups can be accommodated with a single facility.
2. On-road routes include (i) bicycle facilities on the road as cyclists are not permitted to ride on sidewalks except in limited circumstances, and (ii) existing sidewalks for pedestrians and other similar users.
3. Includes only those portions of the existing on-road cycling network depicted in the Official Plan that are considered as critical links for the GTMP Network. Note that other on road cycling routes (both existing and planned as depicted in the Official Plan) should still be considered as viable parts of the city's overall transportation network. Exclusion from the GTMP is not a suggestion that they are redundant and or should be removed if already implemented.

5.0 Investing in Trails

The GTMP requires significant capital investment. As discussed in Section 2.1 of the main report, an investment in trails has significant individual, societal, environmental and economic benefits that will begin to be realized well in advance of the completion of the network.

In addition to the City's contribution to the implement the trail network, a significant portion will be implemented as part of the land development process across the city. To illustrate this point, network construction costs have been grouped according to those that are a direct cost to the existing residents and those that are associated with land development. The latter portion can be funded through Development Charges and does not represent an additional tax burden on existing residents.

	City Funded (Capital Costs)	Developer Funded (Development Charges)
Phase 1 (2005-2010)	\$1,890,000.00	\$3,219,000.00
Phase 2 (2010-2021)	\$4,633,000.00	\$1,953,000.00
Phase 3 (beyond 2021)	\$1,108,200.00	\$173,200.00
Total (Phases 1 to 3)	\$7,661,200.00	\$5,345,200.00

Network Development Costs: Costs associated with the development of on-road facilities include new additions to the on-road route network proposed in the GTMP, as well as critical links (necessary on-road link in the GTMP) illustrated in Schedule 9C of the Official Plan. The costs associated with some of the routes illustrated in Schedule 9C may have already been accounted for in scheduled road improvement projects across the city. To provide an estimate of overall network cost, the costs associated with these routes have been included in the above table.

6.0 Supporting Trails

It is important that trails receive support beginning when the first trails have been constructed. This support must be continued long after the network build out has been completed to ensure that trails remain a vital component of Guelph's recreation and transportation system. Supporting trails has many facets including:

- Promotion to raise awareness, encourage use, and seek participation in trail building;
- Coordination of annual programs and events, including recognizing those who have contributed to the development of trails;
- Educating users about the proper use of trails through public service campaigns, trail signing, trail maps and trail etiquette;
- Cooperative programs with agencies to deliver messages about trail use and skills related to specific trail user groups;
- Managing risk and taking care of the trails once they have been constructed (monitoring and maintenance).

Updating the GTMP

The GTMP is not intended to be a static document. It should serve as a guide for the City in its efforts to achieve the goal of a linked system of trails that is supported by appropriate policies and programs. It has been developed in part on current needs, issues and priorities, as well as experiences from other municipalities facing the same challenges. These experiences have been used to look to the future and project where Guelph will likely be 5, 10 and 20 years from now. It is inevitable that needs, issues and priorities will change, therefore the GTMP must evolve to continue to be an effective planning tool.

7.0 Summary of Recommendations

General/Master Plan Administration:

1. The Master Plan should be adopted as the basis for the systematic implementation of an integrated community trail network in the City of Guelph.
2. The network concept as proposed in the Master Plan is intended to be flexible. The Master Plan should be reviewed, evaluated and updated where necessary, at least every five years. The purpose of this review is to take advantage of opportunities that may arise; to reestablish or reallocate priorities, and to generally update the findings of the current project. This should include a public consultation process. The first review should be scheduled for 2010.
3. A municipal staff position (part-time) should be allocated to oversee the coordination and implementation of the trail network and supporting programs. This may involve new staff, an intern, or reallocation of responsibility of an existing staff person(s).

4. The off-road trail system should be implemented as an extension of the Parks and Open Space system, and the on-road components of the system should be implemented as an extension of Public Works, including all adequate provisions for insurance.

Planning for Trails

5. All new development/redevelopment (greenfield and brownfield/infill) and road reconstruction proposals shall follow the recommendations outlined in the GTMP beginning at the preliminary design stage and continuing through to the completion of construction.
6. Ensure that new development/redevelopments plan for efficient movement of people, which includes connections with main trails, destinations and linkages with other modes of transportation.
7. Appropriate references to the GTMP will be included as part of the next update to the Official Plan. This will include but not be limited to;
 - a) A Schedule depicting routes (i.e. GTMP Map 4);
 - b) Cross referencing of the GTMP under the appropriate sections in the Official Plan;
 - c) An update of Schedule 7 and 9C where appropriate.
8. References to, and supporting the GTMP shall be included in other long range City planning documents such as those that deal with land use, environmental and transportation planning.
9. Staff and Council will protect and develop the network as illustrated on Map 4, which includes off-road and on-road routes. Efforts will be made to improve and expand upon this network, add missing links and overcome physical barriers. Amendments to the network plan will not be required for route revisions provided that continuity of the network can be maintained.
10. As part of assessing and developing new trail routes and making modifications to existing trail routes, follow the guiding principles and route evaluation criteria outlined in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.
11. Trail development should be restricted to public lands; private lands will not be considered until a mutually agreeable arrangement has been prepared.
12. Retired road and rail rights-of-way, and other linear corridors will not be sold until it has been clearly demonstrated they do not/cannot perform a trail network function. If and when they are sold, attempts will be made to maintain a public easement.
13. Staff and Council should review the required parkland dedication under the Planning Act with a view towards determining if, and under what circumstances the provision of trails can be included as part of the parkland dedication.
14. Based on the criteria outlined in Section 4.4.5, staff and Council should review and develop a consistent approach related to the placement of trails in relation to environmental buffers.

15. An interdepartmental communication process should be developed and implemented so that Recreation and Parks staff who are responsible for implementing the GTMP are aware of new infrastructure development and upgrades to existing infrastructure that has an effect on or may be affected by the trail system.
16. Council should continue to empower Recreation and Parks staff representative(s) to work with other agencies and municipalities in developing strategies for trail connections to surrounding municipalities.

Building Trails

17. The City will develop the trail network illustrated in Map 4, the recommended hierarchy and design details as described in Chapter 5.
18. The network will be phased in over time in association with development, and municipal infrastructure improvement projects. Projects may also be implemented based on changing construction opportunities or specific trail related demand.
19. All streets with proposed on-road route links (existing developed areas and new development areas) will also have sidewalks and/or boulevard trails to accommodate pedestrians and other trail users.
20. Detailed route design will involve a public consultation process with the local neighbourhoods and agencies where consultation is deemed appropriate by City staff.
21. To take advantage of the benefits represented by the implementation of this trail network, annual capital budgets should be established for the organized implementation of the system.
22. All other sources of funding and viable partnerships should be considered in implementing the GTMP.

Supporting Trails

23. Trail use will be supported as a viable and desirable form of recreation and transportation by highlighting the benefits of trails.
24. Staff and Council will support and promote trails. This may include:
 - a) The formation of a Trails Advisory Committee to assist staff with appropriate aspects of the implementation, promotion and care of the trail system;
 - b) Raising the profile of trails by employing strategies outlined in Section 6.2 and others that may be developed over time. These include promotion, education and awareness products and programs. Some programs will be designed and implemented by the City whereas others will be developed through partnerships with other agencies and organizations having a common interest

in trails. Annual capital budgets should be established for the development of programs to support trails.

- c) The development of a new and distinctive logo to replace the existing Royal Recreation Trail identifier. This logo should be used at every appropriate opportunity for trail-related design, signing, promotion and events.
- d) Evaluating the benefits of membership in the Ontario Trails Council, and making a decision regarding membership;
- e) Monitoring and caring for existing and new trails based on the recommendations outlined in Section 6.4 which includes establishing annual operating budgets and sufficient staff resources for the organized maintenance of the trail system.