

Staff Report

Report To: Community Services Committee
Report From: Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services
Meeting Date: May 15, 2024
Report Code: CS-24-041
Subject: Harrison Park – Final Draft Master Plan

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-24-041 respecting the Harrison Park – Final Draft Master Plan, the Community Services Committee recommends that City Council:

1. Approve the Harrison Park Master Plan, substantially in the form attached to the report; and
2. Approve the use of \$10,000 from the capital reserve and the \$6,500 (approximate) donations to upgrade the waterfowl and bird area subject to a future report with details through the Community Services Committee.

Highlights:

- Updating the Harrison Park Master Plan is an important tool to ensure that parks' capital spending and operations are optimized and meeting the needs of the public and reflect current best practices;
- In 2023, the Committee approved an approach to updating the Harrison Park Master Plan utilizing in-house staff with some consulting support relating to the bird/waterfowl area;
- In December 2023 Committee received a report and summary of the public feedback that had been received.
- The public feedback, together with the background and best practices, expert advice respecting the waterfowl and avian area

and operating and capital budget considerations, have been used to inform the draft actions of the master plan.

- Committee reviewed the draft Master Plan and Recommendations at their last meeting. Based on the feedback received, some updates and modifications have been made to the final Draft Master Plan.
- The Plan is recommended for approval.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Service Excellence. KR1 – Further develop a culture of learning, development, and well-being and embrace new approaches to service provision.

Climate and Environmental Implications:

This supports the objectives of the City's Corporate Climate Change Adaptation Plan by considering climate adaptation in the development of the City's strategies, plans and policies.

Previous Report/Authority:

[Harrison Park Master Plan](#)

[Recreation Parks and Facilities Master Plan](#)

[Owen Sound Strategic Plan 2021-2023](#)

[City of Owen Sound Official Plan](#)

[CS-23-030 Harrison Park Master Plan](#) – Background and Project Approach

[OurCity](#)

[CS-23-130](#) Harrison Park Master Plan – Summary of Public Feedback

[CS-24-032](#) Harrison Park Master Plan – Draft Recommendations

[Swan Song for Owen Sound Swans](#) – CBC Ontario Morning Show

[The Current](#) – CBC Radio Show (Avian Influenza)

Background:

In March of 2023, Committee received report [CS-23-030](#) together with a visual presentation. The report provided a significant amount of background information respecting Harrison Park.

The initial report provided an outline, approach and timeline relating to the update of the 2002 Harrison Park Master Plan.



The approach to the Master Plan included 5 phases:

1. Define Purpose and Objective,
2. Identify Issues and Opportunities,
3. Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation Workshops,
4. Action Planning and Recommendation Development, and;
5. Master Plan Framework and Implementation Plan. ←

We are now at the stage of finalizing the Master Plan and Recommendations for implementation. The public feedback, together with the background and best practices, expert advice respecting the waterfowl and avian area, and operating and capital considerations, have been used by a multidisciplinary staff team to inform the draft master plan and actions.

At the meeting of the Community Services Committee held on April 17, 2024, the Committee received report [CS-24-032](#) that summarized the background and provided an overview of the draft Master Plan focusing on the draft recommendations and receiving feedback from Committee on those recommendations.

At the Committee meeting on April 17, 2024, each member was asked to place green dots on recommendations they support and red dots on any recommendations they do not feel are warranted. They were also asked to add any recommendations that they thought may be beneficial.

Attachment one shows the input from the Committee on the draft recommendations.

Analysis:

The draft Vision for the Harrison Park Master Plan is:

Inspired by a rich cultural heritage and diverse natural environment, we envision a vibrant space that fosters community connections and environmental stewardship and celebrates and maintains the rich cultural and natural history. Committed to sustainable practices, we

strive to cultivate a place of beauty, learning, community, and recreation for all, ensuring a legacy of inspiration, memories, and wonder for generations to come.

The Master Plan addresses 5 overall considerations relating to the development of the actions, including:

- a. Conflicting and Competing Use/Overuse
- b. Natural amenities and slopes;
- c. Accessibility and Inclusion;
- d. Cultural Heritage Landscape; and
- e. Asset Renewal and rationalization.

Because of the size and complexity of the Park, the Master Plan divides the 150-acre park into 9 Functional areas with certain global recommendations that apply across the entirety of the Park:

1. West Park Entry;
2. West Woodland and Escarpment Lands;
3. Island and Pleasure Grounds;
4. Inn, Good Cheer Rink and Bandshell area
5. Community Hall, Tennis/Pickleball Court, Upper Meadow and Pool Area;
6. Campground Area;
7. Bird area and Parks Operations Yard;
8. The Mile Drive; and,
9. Toboggan Hill, Commemorative Forest Grove, Fitness Trail and Northeast Woodland;

Together, the sum of the parts comprises Harrison Park and reflects a diverse and complex set of interrelated parts.

The Master Plan recommendations are organized to address Operational & Maintenance Issues as well as Capital program needs.

Given the public feedback, capital and operating considerations, public feedback, and the four considerations noted above, the focus of the actions prioritizes revitalizing existing assets and features as opposed to creating new assets.

For each functional area, there is a high-level description of each of the areas. Each of the areas is named using an abbreviated short form, followed by OM for operating and C for Capital Recommendations.











As an example:

West Park Entry (WPE) Operational/Maintenance (OM) Recommendations

WPE-OM-001; or

WPE-C-001.

The various recommendations have been classified under the following ten general themes. For many of the actions, more than one theme may apply.

Theme	Icon
Accessibility	
Environmental Stewardship	
Parks Management Best Practice	
Operational Efficiency	
Safety	
Asset Management	
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	
Cultural Heritage	
Communication	
Implement a previously approved action	

The draft master plan including the recommendations is attachment two.

The priorities have been added in the Plan, as short (1-5 years), medium (6-10 years) and longer term (10-15 years). A fourth category for timing is ELP, meaning the initiative would Extend over the Life of the Plan.

Actual implementation will depend on overall capital funding available and the ability of staff to undertake the initiatives.

The Recommendations comprise Section 9.0 of the Plan.

Based on the input received, the following changes have been made to the recommendations:

- Moved recommendations that apply across the Park from one of the 9 sections to the Global recommendations;
- Clarification that the rink boards would be installed only for the winter season and not all year as this would inhibit use for basketball etc.
- New recommendation adding signage to Park to link to the report a concern website to facilitate identifying concerns in a format that is tracked and to make donations to the park electronically.
- New recommendation regarding continuing to explore opportunities for revenue generation.

Attachment 3 provides a summary of the recommendations that had red dots and outlines a response or changes to the Master Plan. Some inputs resulted in modifications to the recommendation as noted in Attachment 3.

Section 9.7 of the Master Plan Recommendations includes the recommendations for the Bird and Waterfowl Area.

The public survey asked:

The City is engaging an avian expert as a component of the Master Plan. Would you like to see the City repopulate this area with waterfowl and birds?

82% of the public indicated that they would like to see the City repopulate the area with waterfowl and birds. Additionally, in the open-ended question about an Amenity, Service, or Feature people would like to see, 120 individuals noted improving the bird area, more birds, or a petting zoo.

The community has a strong sentimental attachment and affection for this area of the park and the memories associated with it.

This question was included in the Master Plan survey following the City's experience in 2022 with highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in the

waterfowl and poultry at the Park. This infection resulted in Orders from CFIA to destroy the birds and decontaminate the area.

Through a recommendation from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, staff was connected with Christopher Sharp, Population Management Biologist with Environment and Climate Change Canada who offered an expert opinion on this issue:

The following is an excerpt of his recommendations on a Path Forward for Harrison Park, Owen Sound, Ontario, and the Implications of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza.

- *Despite a reduction in mortality in 2023 compared to 2022, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) continues to circulate in Ontario's wild birds at a prevalence similar to what was observed in Fall 2022.*
- *As a result, interactions with wild birds, especially waterfowl, continue to represent a significant risk of HPAI infection in poultry or avicultural species (captive wild species).*
- *If the Municipality of Owen Sound decides to repopulation and operate Harrison Park as done historically (intermingling between poultry, captive wild birds, and wild birds), it will likely only be a matter of time before the park has another HPAI outbreak, with similar consequences to Fall 2022. I strongly recommend against having poultry, captive wild birds and wild birds intermingling on the same site.*
- *For me, the options are as follows:*
 - 1) *Poultry Focus - If you are going to have poultry, there can be no intermingling between them and wild birds. I would also indicate that poultry are unlikely not compatible with the captive swans as it would be very difficult to provide sufficient housing for the swans and prevent intermingling with wild birds.*
 - 2) *Swan Focus - If you are going to keep the swans, then I would suggest you do not have poultry. I would try to mitigate mingling between the swans and wild birds (ex: feed in an area inaccessible to the wild birds, netting to prevent direct contact, etc.).*
 - 3) *Wildlife and Native Species Focus - Forgo reintroducing any captive birds (poultry or swans) and naturalize the site to encourage use by native species. This option eliminates any risk of HPAI that would*

require depopulation and allows residents of Owen Sound, an accessible park, to interact with nature.

Recommendation: My recommendation is Option 3. However, if there is a strong desire to continue to have the swans, I would recommend that you discourage reproduction and once the birds pass away, they are not replaced, and you move towards Option 3.

Committee input had 8 green dots in support of the recommendation from the Master Plan which supported the recommendation from Mr. Sharp.

When the Minutes from the Community Services Committee of April 17, 2024, went forward to Council for approval there was some discussion around the recommendations respecting the Waterfowl and bird area. Staff were asked if the City could cull the Canada Goose population. Staff received the following feedback on this question from Environment and Climate Change Canada:

In order to get a permit to cull Canada Geese a municipality would need to demonstrate significant damage or danger and show that they have exhausted all other options. That is not the case in Owen Sound. In addition, culling Canada geese to mitigate HPAI risk will not be effective as dabbling ducks are likely play a much larger role in transmission than do Canada geese.

Since the last meeting, staff has also received information on how communities including Stratford and Kitchener house and care for their swans.

In both Kitchener and Stratford, there is a swan population that is in community parks that mingle with wild birds and waterfowl.

Based on what we understand from these other communities, staff are recommending that we investigate Sharp option 2 moving toward option 3.

The area at Harrison Park is currently too small for the current population of swans (there are 5 swans currently and 4 newly hatched signets).

The swans are in an area of less than 0.2 acres whereas in Stratford there are 2 pairs in an area of 1.5 acres. As part of a future report, the number of swans that are retained will need to be considered and based on the area of the space. Any swans not able to be housed here can be given to another community.

Until the swans die of natural causes, we could investigate option 2 moving toward option 3 as outlined in the Sharp recommendation. The swans could remain (maximum number to be determined) and other areas would be naturalized with the idea that they would be phased out in the medium term (5-10 years).

During this time, staff will be able to monitor the progress and status of HPAI as well as observe how the naturalization is being received and how many birds and waterfowl are in this area. The health outcomes of the swans will also be tracked.

It is not practical to cover the area with netting and there is a high risk other birds and waterfowl may be caught up in the netting. The netting may prevent physical contact with the swans but would be imperfect from a biosecurity perspective. Housing can be improved and efforts to feed the swans that are retained in a more secure space can also be achieved. Having the swans eat in an area of lower possible contamination is preferable.

As we move toward implementing the naturalization of this area, a plan and detailed costing would come forward for approval both to Community Services Committee and to Council as part of the overall capital budget process.

The feeding of the geese and ducks is recommended to cease. This will attract fewer birds and reduce the risk of intermingling. Significant communication will be required to educate the public in terms of why it is preferable not to feed any of the wild birds or swans.

An updated recommendation is included in Attachment 3 as well as the Draft Master Plan (Attachment 2).

Financial Implications:

The focus of this master plan is not on the generation of new assets. This master plan focuses on asset investment and renewal.

The approval of the Master Plan does not pre-approve the operating or capital budget. These projects will be factored into the capital program as required, based on timing, and be considered in the context of the City's overall budgets.

There have been donations received by the City (approximately \$6,500) for the bird and waterfowl area. These funds can be allocated to the research, design, and implementation of the swan habitat improvement and overall naturalization. Additional funds may be required and can be considered as part of the overall capital budget. The original funds allocated for the Master Plan (\$20,000, including \$10,000 from Development Charges) were put in the capital reserve at the end of 2023. Any use of these funds would require approval from Council.

Communication Strategy:

Draft plan and report will be added to the [OurCity](#) Page.

Anyone who signed up for notices will receive an update.

This report and draft were published through committee agenda and minutes to council.

A media release was done with the draft master plan to communicate the background regarding the plan and the recommendation respecting the birds and waterfowl. Further communication will be completed once the plan is approved.

Consultation:

A plan for public consultation and communication was established at the outset of the project. There has been significant consultation. In part, the recommendations are based on the consultation.

The draft plan will be added to the [OurCity](#) page.

Attachments:

1. Committee Input
2. Draft Harrison Park Master Plan
3. Summary of amended recommendations

Recommended by:

Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services, at pcoulter@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 Ext. 1252.