



Report to: Development Services Committee

Report Date: February 17, 2009

SUBJECT: Rouge Park Implementation Task Force Report – Staff Comments

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RECOMMENDATION:

Whereas the Rouge Park Implementation Task Force report dated November 25, 2008 was received by Council on December 16, 2008;

And Whereas Council authorized the circulation of the Task Force report, and invited comments from agencies, boards, adjacent municipalities and the Provincial and Federal Governments;

And Whereas Council also requested Town staff to provide comments on the Rouge Park Implementation Task Force Final Report;

Be it resolved that the staff report entitled “Rouge Park Implementation Task Force Report – Staff Comments” dated February 3, 2009 be received;

And That the Town staff comments, along with comments to be received from other agencies, boards, adjacent municipalities and the Provincial and Federal Governments, be considered by Council at a future workshop to discuss comments received, and next steps in dealing with the Rouge Park Alliance and other stakeholders, including provision for obtaining public input; and further,

That staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Rouge Park Implementation Task Force (RPITF) was established by Council to further discussions regarding the Little Rouge Corridor and Bob Hunter Management Plans. The Task Force report had four major thematic areas with accompanying recommendations. The thematic areas were:

- Designating and naming Rouge Park;
- Public Use and Activities;
- Infrastructure; and
- Governance.

The intent of the comprehensive review by the RPITF was to address the implementation issues related to the Rouge Park in Markham. Staff participated in the Task Force meetings and supports the overall approach being recommended by the Task Force. This report incorporates comments from across Town Departments on the Task Force recommendations as requested by Council. The majority of the recommendations are supported, while some may pose financial or policy (Greenbelt and Official Plan) challenges, and may require further consideration by Council. Future decisions on the

governance and funding model for the Rouge Park will be a key factor in determining the outcome of many of the recommendation.

PURPOSE:

Council Resolution dated December 16, 2008 (Appendix A) directed that staff provide comments on the Rouge Park Implementation Task Force Final Report. This report is a response to that directive, and is based on inter-departmental staff review of the recommendations contained in the Task Force Final Report.

BACKGROUND:

On March 4, 2008 Markham Council created a Task Force to address a number of issues raised with respect to the Town endorsement of the Little Rouge Creek and Bob Hunter Master Plans. The Rouge Park Implementation Task Force (RPITF) included Mayor Frank Scarpitti, Deputy Mayor Jack Heath, Councilor Erin Shapero, Councilor Logan Kanapathi and Councilor John Webster, and was supported by Town staff. The recommendations of the RPITF were presented to Development Services Committee on November 25, 2008 by the Chair of the Task Force, Deputy Mayor Jack Heath.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

The recommendations of the RPITF and staff comments are provided and numbered to align with the RPITF report. The report of the Rouge Park Implementation Task Force is attached as Appendix 'B' for reference.

DESIGNATING AND NAMING ROUGE PARK LANDS***Recommendation #1.a.1***

The RPITF recommends that the Town establish a municipal park in east Markham called "Rouge Park."

Staff Comment

The lands identified by the RPITF to be formally recognized as Rouge Park by the Town include lands owned by the Province of Ontario, TRCA and the Town of Markham in eastern Markham. The RPITF recommendation to recognize these lands as 'a municipal park' may suggest a commitment by Markham to manage, support and operate the lands in accordance with the approved Rouge Park Management Plans, at municipal expense. While a municipal park approach would increase Markham's decision making and control, it could also bring with it primary (or sole) responsibility for capital and operating costs, unless our discussions going forward with our partners mitigate this potential.

The current model, which has the Rouge Park Alliance and support staff overseeing the Park, is best described as a partnership with lands and funds from the Government of Canada, the Province, the TRCA, municipal governments and other agencies. It has been an effective model in garnering land dedication from the Province as well as Federal, Provincial and municipal funding which has enabled the Rouge Park to expand in size, fund significant natural heritage restoration and undertake park policy studies. However, stable ongoing funding and the implementation of the public use component including

construction of park facilities north of Steeles is yet to be realized. There are also concerns that the Rouge Park Alliance is not always accountable to municipal government interests and input, such as in the area of outdoor activities and active public use, and provision for future programming, maintenance and enforcement practices. The Rouge Park Alliance and the TRCA need to coordinate more closely with the Town of Markham north of Steeles Avenue.

'Municipal parks' are generally those owned and managed solely by the Town. The Rouge Park is generally referenced as a 'Regional Park System' because the park crosses municipal boundaries and is owned and funded by multiple agencies (e.g. Markham, TRCA, ORC, Federal Government, City of Toronto). The financial and operating resources necessary to manage approximately 1730 hectares of municipal "Rouge Park" parkland in the Town of Markham would be significant, and could not be achieved within current Town park operations and budget.

A Rouge Park governance review has been initiated by the Rouge Park Alliance, and will include Town of Markham representation. Additional governance review initiatives may also result directly from the recommendations of the RPITF report. This is in recognition that the current 'partnership' governance model requires modification and refinement to deal with the future demands of park implementation and management, including increased accountability and statutory powers. The governance review (see RPIFT recommendation #4.a.1) should address such issues as overall decision making/executive committee composition, accountability to municipal government interests and jurisdiction (north and south of Steeles Avenue), need for a detailed Memorandum of Understanding and partnership arrangements between the park partners, land acquisition, land management, funding, policies and park programming, project management, operations and maintenance, enforcement, and public/stakeholder outreach and input. The need for a Provincial "Rouge Park Act" should also be considered.

Staff Position

A partnership approach, based on a modified and refined park structure to ensure better coordinated decision making, implementation, programming and ongoing funding, within a partnership system as determined through a governance review process, would be the model preferred by staff, rather than a traditional 'municipal park'. The TRCA governance model, with broad based funding and with statutory powers, regulations and enforcement, and an Executive Committee comprised of representatives of funding government agencies, is a model worth considering for the Rouge Park. The current arrangements south of Steeles Avenue, with the TRCA owning the Rouge Park lands and the municipal government (City of Toronto) managing them with partnership funding, should also be examined.

Recommendation #1.a.2

The RPITF recommends that the lands shown in Figure 3 as Rouge Park lands be included in the park: Little Rouge Creek Corridor, Bob Hunter Memorial Park, Eastern Markham, and Tompion, and that Toogood Pond Park, Milne Dam

Conservation Area, and the Middle Reaches north of Major Mackenzie not be included in Rouge Park.

Staff Comment

The publicly owned lands in eastern Markham all have draft management plans or detailed site restoration plans prepared or underway and have been formally identified as Rouge Park in Provincial, Municipal and Rouge Park Alliance policy documents. Whereas the majority of the “Rouge Park” lands in eastern Markham are owned by the TRCA, or ORC, the Town owns some valleylands in the Little Rouge Creek Corridor Management Plan area, as well as Cedar Grove Community Centre and Cedar Grove Community Park. The formal recognition and support for these public lands as Rouge Park is consistent with the policy and management approaches undertaken by the Town and Rouge Park partners, and is supported by staff.

The RPITF recommends that the “Middle Reaches” Rouge Watershed tributaries outside of the designated ‘Rouge Park’ public lands not be endorsed as Rouge Park. In response, staff comment that the Middle Reaches lands can be protected, secured into public ownership over time, and managed by the Town within the context of Provincial Greenbelt Plan and municipal policies. This can be achieved without treating the lands as “Rouge Park” lands. The Rouge Park Management Plan, adopted by Council in 2001 and implemented in part by Official Plan Amendment No. 140 (awaiting OMB approval of negotiated settlement and not yet in force) currently identifies a Rouge Park boundary delineation process for all tributaries of the Rouge Watershed. The recommendation of the RPITF would not change the boundary delineation process for OPA No. 140 or the protections in place for valleylands across the Town, but would change the land acquisition and land management model from the Rouge Park partnership model to the Town’s normal open space acquisition and management model. Unlike the larger Rouge Park acreage in eastern Markham, which demands greater capital investment in restoration, programming and facilities, the Middle Reaches lands are more equivalent to typical valleyland plus environmental buffer acquisition and naturalization, with less need for capital investment.

The Middle Reaches lands are protected by the Provincial Greenbelt Plan and Markham’s OPA 140. They may be brought into public ownership as a condition of any future development approval, or through a proactive program of environmental land acquisition, subject to available funding by the Town and /or other public agencies. It is also possible that some of the lands will be protected and retained in private ownership, through stewardship arrangements.

The recommendation of the RPITF is intended to separate the ownership and management of the Rouge Park in eastern Markham from the remaining tributaries of the Rouge watershed. Should Council support this recommendation, staff will clarify the proposed differentiation of “Rouge Park” lands from the Middle Reaches lands through the Environmental Policy Review and Consolidation Study (currently underway) and future Official Plan policy.

Staff Position

Staff support the existing publicly owned lands in eastern Markham being recognized as 'Rouge Park' lands (governance and funding model to be determined as per discussion under recommendation 1.a.1 above). Staff can also support and work towards implementing the RPITF recommendation that the Middle Reaches lands not form part of the formal Rouge Park, but rather fall under a municipal management model.

Recommendation #1.a.3

The RPITF recommends that the lands and properties owned by the Town of Markham known as "Cedarena," "Cedar Grove Community Park," and "Cedar Grove Community Centre" continue to be owned and managed by Markham.

Staff Comment

Cedar Grove Community Park and Cedar Grove Community Centre are rural based recreational facilities serving the eastern rural community, owned by the Town but programmed by the local communities. These are important facilities within the Town's recreational portfolio. The Town's Recreational Master Plan includes these facilities as part of the Town's ongoing recreational infrastructure. Cedarena is an outdoor skating facility located in the Rouge valley floodplain and owned by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). The Town would need to enter into negotiations with the TRCA to explore the possible conveyance of this facility. It should be pointed out that management of Town facilities by 3rd party groups such as local community groups is deemed acceptable and sanctioned by the Town's Community Services Division, subject to appropriate management agreements and reporting relationship from local boards to Council.

Staff Position

Town staff supports the recommendation and suggests that the current arrangements pertaining to Cedar Grove Community Park and Cedar Grove Community Centre be allowed to remain in place. Town staff should initiate negotiations with TRCA to explore the possible conveyance of the Cedarena lands to the Town.

Recommendation #1.a.4

The RPITF recommends that staff enter into negotiations with the Ministry of Transportation, the ORC, and the TRCA to complete the transfer of remnant parcels of land in east Markham to the Town, or to the future Rouge Park, according to the recommended boundaries.

Staff Comment

There are a number of land parcels located in eastern Markham remnant to Highway 407 and the Provincial Rouge Park transfers (see Map Appendix 'C'). The Rouge Park Implementation Task Force is recommending that these remnant parcels be reviewed and transferred to the Town for either parkland, open space or Rouge Park purposes depending on the location (some parcels are located outside of the Rouge Park boundary).

Staff note that some of the Provincially owned parcels adjacent to Highway 407 have been integrated into the existing Secondary Plans.

Staff Position

Town staff supports the recommendation, and will continue discussions with MTO, ORC and TRCA.

FEDERAL AIRPORT LANDS

Recommendation #1.b.1

The RPITF recommends that the Town discuss with the Federal Government integration of the federal airport lands in Markham into Rouge Park.

Staff Comment

The Federal Pickering Airport Site in Markham comprises airport lands and a north-south corridor connecting the Rouge Park lands identified by the Minister of Transport as Federal Green Space. The RPITF is recommending that the Town engage in discussions with Transport Canada to secure all the Federal lands in Markham for Rouge Park purposes. These lands form part of the vision for the 'Greater Rouge Park'. Based on past discussions staff have had with Transport Canada it seems unlikely that Transport Canada will consider alternative options for the airport lands until such time as the Pickering Airport planning process is completed. However, discussions should be renewed.

Staff Position

Town staff support engaging Transport Canada in discussions regarding the long-term future of the Federal lands should these lands not be needed for airport purposes.

Recommendation #1.b.2

The RPITF recommends that the Town coordinate efforts with the Federal Government, the TRCA, and Rouge Park Alliance to implement the Green Space vision in a manner consistent with its vision and the objectives of the TRCA, Rouge Park and the Town.

Staff Comment

The north south corridor connecting the Rouge Park lands identified by the Minister of Transport as Federal Green Space has been considered redundant to airport land needs. Notwithstanding this, implementation of the Green Space corridor vision has only been undertaken for very minor projects (small trail connection and restoration along a watercourse). It is suggested that the Town initiate renewed discussions with the Federal government and other partner agencies.

Staff Position

Town staff supports a process to engage the Federal Government and seek opportunities to implement the Green Space corridor in a manner consistent with the Rouge Park vision.

NAMING PROTOCOL FOR ROUGE PARK LANDS***Recommendation #1.c***

The RPITF recommends that the Town engage the Rouge Park Alliance, TRCA, the Region, Province and the Federal Government to establish appropriate names for distinct areas and features within Greater Rouge Park. Such a process would recognize historic and current local contexts and include community consultation.

Staff Comment

Staff has no objection to providing distinct area names for areas within the Rouge Park. Further discussion would be required with Town Departments, local residents, TRCA, Province and with Rouge Park staff to ensure their support for this approach and to determine an appropriate lead and process for this activity.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation

CAMPING***Recommendation #2.a.1***

The RPITF recommends that ecologically focussed camping be permitted within Rouge Park and that a small number of sites be located after criteria are established by staff and the Alliance, and that one of the sites be large enough to handle group camping.

Staff Comment

Staff have no objection to establishing camping facilities within Rouge Park provided such facilities can be properly managed to reduce environmental impacts. The use could generate much needed revenue for the Park. The Town does on occasion receive requests from the public for camping facilities. None of the existing management plans (Rouge North, Little Rouge Corridor and Bob Hunter) include provision for camping as a recreational activity. A camping facility is provided in the Rouge Park at the Glen Rouge Campground south of Steeles Avenue, which is managed by the City of Toronto. The RPITF recognized the potential financial and public benefit that such a facility would provide and encourages the TRCA and Rouge Park to explore this public use opportunity for the Rouge Park in a non traditional and environmentally sustainable manner.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation in principle but suggests the development and management of a camping facility would best be resourced by the TRCA or the private sector with operating or lease revenues going to the Rouge Park.

Recommendation #2.a.2

The RPITF recommends that Council provide further direction on RV camping services within Rouge Park.

Staff Comment

RV Camping is permitted in the Rouge Park in Toronto, but has not been identified as a permitted use for the Little Rouge Corridor and Bob Hunter Park. RV camping presents many more challenges in terms of size and scale, potential environmental impacts, and requires additional services and infrastructure for it to be successfully undertaken. However, it is a use that is generally consistent with large natural areas and could provide public benefits, and if properly located and designed could be consistent with a large scale Regional Park. The Provincial Greenbelt Plan, which include Rouge Park, permits recreational facilities subject to the avoidance of sensitive landscapes.

Staff Position

Town staff is generally more supportive of tent camping (recommendation 2.a.1 above) than RV camping because of potential environmental impacts and land requirements. Further review would need to be undertaken by the TRCA or a private proponent to determine locational considerations, needs, and a cost-benefit analysis, to the satisfaction of the Town and other authorized agencies.

DOG OFF – LEASH SITES***Recommendation #2.b***

The RPITF recommends that staff be directed to consult with the Rouge Park to identify potential dog off-leash areas and that such sites be developed after criteria are established by staff and the Alliance.

Staff Comment

This recommendation is supported by staff as there is currently only one dog-off leash area in the Town of Markham located at the NW corner of Miller Avenue and Rodick Road. Community Services staff have identified the need for more dog-off leash areas in the Town's east end. Potential dog off-leash sites would have to be brought to the attention of the Leash Free Markham Committee which would then follow the approved guidelines. The Committee does not actively seek leash free areas, but works on the basis that a local responsible interest group may come forward to develop, manage and maintain a leash free area. In terms of location within a natural environment setting, staff suggest that this use be located on table land adjacent to an arterial road with adequate parking, preferably by trail heads and other public gathering areas to provide for easy access, and be outside of the core interior habitat to reduce wildlife conflicts.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation.

MILNE TWO (GROUP PICNICS)***Recommendation #2.c.1***

The RPITF recommends that staff work with RP to identify potential locations for a large group picnic area and that implementation be considered a priority.

Recommendation #2.c.2

The RPITF recommends that Rouge Park include numerous smaller picnic sites throughout the park and consideration be given to a celebration forest and an arboretum / horticultural garden area.

Staff Comment

Picnic sites are a compatible low-impact public use which are contemplated for the Rouge Park. Both the Bob Hunter Master Plan and Little Rouge Creek Management Plan identify small scale picnic sites (as a permitted use but not designated to a specific site in the Little Rouge Creek Management Plan and as a designated site along 14th Avenue in the Bob Hunter Master Plan). The provision for a larger group picnic site similar to Milne Park would meet a need identified by the Community Services Commission. The Town currently operates the group picnic site at Milne and uses the revenue to help offset the administrative and operating costs. Staff support this recommendation, but suggest in order to balance the usage with Milne Park, that a permitting system be implemented consistent with the Milne Dam Conservation Area. Operations staff discourage the development of small free picnicking facilities, as these areas would be difficult to monitor and maintain, and would be in direct competition with the paid picnicking opportunities at Milne and any future Rouge Park picnic facility. The small picnic facilities also provide the potential opportunity for groups to congregate at inappropriate times, where there would be little monitoring of these sites and where social behaviours could be detrimental to the park (i.e. littering, vandalism, destruction of habitat, leaving food and garbage that could be hazardous to wildlife). The provision of washroom facilities would also be problematic at small picnic facilities.

Staff Position

Town staff fully supports the recommendation for larger, regulated group picnic areas, but would discourage smaller picnic areas for reasons cited above. The recommendation with respect to a celebration forest and an arboretum/horticultural area is also supported. TRCA or private sector development and management of these facilities should be explored along with revenue generators such as parking meters and seasonal passes.

TRAILS, TRAILHEADS AND PARKING***Recommendation #2.d.1***

The RPITF recommends that staff and the Alliance treat with the highest priority the preparation of a detailed Rouge Park trails and pathways plan, especially in Eastern Markham and the Little Rouge Corridor.

Recommendation #2.d.2

The RPITF recommends that, until such a trails and pathways plan is approved, that staff identify appropriate locations for trails and parking, and protect for them, on all pending site restorations in RP.

Staff Comment

The Rouge Park Alliance have funding available for the implementation of the Rouge Park. Funding sources, include a significant Provincial grant provided with the transfer of lands, Rouge Park Natural and Cultural Heritage Funding, Markham Trees for Tomorrow funding and potential funding from the Ecological Enhancements - Southeast Collector Trunk Sewer Environmental Assessment. To date most of the Rouge Park funding has been directed to natural heritage restoration.

The Rouge Park plans all identify a conceptual trail network, however the trail plan needs to be detailed to ensure that all implementation efforts in the Rouge Park identify and protect trail locations for future implementation.

Staff in the Development Services Commission consider a detailed trails plan for the Rouge Park as a priority item to ensure the public use component of the Rouge Park is planned, protected and integrated with the Town's Pathways and Trails Master Plan and the Region's proposed trail network.

Staff Position

Town staff support these recommendations.

Recommendation #2.d.3

The RPITF recommends to staff and the Alliance that they ensure that some Rouge Park attractions be located near the YRT / VIVA terminal and the Havelock GO stations, and that enough parking be available at each entry node and trailhead so that traffic is not impeded and that no parking overflow occurs in the residential areas in or near Rouge Park.

Staff Comment

This recommendation is consistent with statements made in the Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan which identifies the opportunity for persons visiting the Park to arrive via York Region Transit with potential routes along 14th Ave, 16th Ave and Highway 7, future potential GO station in the vicinity of the Park and through the expansion of York Region's VIVA transit system along Highway 7 through Locust Hill.

In addition, future planned initiatives such as the Hwy 407 Transit way, rapid transit on Steeles Avenue and "Mobility Hub" east of Box Grove would be beneficial to the Park.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation

OUTDOOR ACTIVITY AND CULTURAL CENTRE***Recommendation #2.e.1***

The RPITF recommends that staff and the Alliance identify a location for an outdoor activity centre in Eastern Markham.

Recommendation #2.e.3

The RPITF recommends that staff and the Alliance identify a location for an outdoor cultural centre in Eastern Markham, for plays, music, nature lectures, and volunteer planting activity coordination.

Staff Comment

The uses proposed by the Rouge Park Implementation Task Force include active (sports fields) and cultural (music) recreational uses that are generally associated with open space and community parkland. The Rouge Park Alliance are on record as not supporting active recreational uses in the Park. This position is reflected in Rouge Alliance policies and programs to date.

The Town of Markham Council and staff have consistently supported more active public use and recreation on Rouge Park lands. The Provincial Greenbelt Plan also supports municipal recreational facilities and major recreation uses in certain areas and identifies appropriate consideration be given to geographic specific park plans. The development of the Rouge Park as a Regional Park is supported by the Greenbelt Plan. Active recreation and cultural facilities could provide a significant public benefit and a gateway into the natural areas of the Rouge Park, provided they are designed in an ecologically sensitive manner.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation as it represents an opportunity to generate revenue and create a wholly accessible Rouge Park for diverse public interests.

Recommendation #2.e.2

The RPITF recommends that staff and the Alliance identify a location for a park maintenance facility in Eastern Markham.

Staff Comment

The Rouge Park will be the largest open space parkland in the Greater Toronto Area, with the potential area in Markham being in excess of 1730 hectares. It seems prudent to identify early in the park planning process a location for a park maintenance facility that can be utilized by the landowner or Rouge Park partner that assumes management responsibilities for the park. The maintenance facility would store park maintenance equipment and provide washrooms and staff space in a secure facility and could be integrated with other park facilities.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation

ROUGE PARK OFFICE AND WELCOME CENTRE*Recommendation #2.f.1*

The RPITF recommends that the Alliance be advised that the Town supports the relocation of the Rouge Park offices to the park in Markham and encourages Rouge Park to commence review of their office / interpretive centre requirements with a vision of locating in or near the park.

Recommendation #2.f.2

The RPITF recommends to staff that the Town make every effort to assist Rouge Park in finding a suitable location at a reasonable cost.

Staff Comment

The Rouge Park offices are currently located in Aurora in a provincial government building operated by the Ministry of Natural Resources. The Rouge Park offices were at one time located in the Pearce House in the Toronto portion of the Rouge Park, but were relocated to Aurora to benefit in part from cost savings. Where any major public uses are contemplated (such as the outdoor activity and cultural centre), it would make sense to determine if the Rouge Park offices could also be combined with such a facility.

Generally, park office facilities are located within the park they serve, however this is not always the case. Should the Rouge Park wish to locate into the Park itself, the TRCA as their current land managers would be in the best position to assist in identifying an appropriate location, in consultation with Town staff.

Staff Position

Town staff support these recommendations and are available to assist in whatever way appropriate in the relocation of the park offices, if deemed desirable.

Recommendation #2.f.3

The RPITF recommends to staff that the relationship between the Markham Museum and RP be formalized and that staff explore all opportunities to develop a shared experience for the visiting public

Staff Comment

Town staff generally support the recommendation to formalize the relationship between the Museum and the Rouge Park. In the past, the Museum delivered programs for the Rouge Park including the construction of bird boxes as an activity at the museum. This initiative could potentially be extended to include all Cultural Heritage facilities (e.g. the Art Gallery) in the Town.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation.

OTHER OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES***Recommendation #2.h.1***

The RPITF recommends that Council provide further direction on items one through thirty five above.

Staff Comment

The activities listed in the report range from passive (croquet and kite flying) to very active (BMX biking and ATVing), some requiring infrastructure while others do not. The Rouge Park plans (Little Rouge and Bob Hunter) currently support only very passive public uses (trails and small picnic areas). The RPITF is recommending that the public uses, normally associated with community parkland, not be precluded, with the exception

of ATV use which presents significant enforcement challenges for By-law staff. Some of the activities may require some level of controlled management by the landowner or Town, which also has associated liability considerations. Staff have no objection to the incorporation of leisure and recreation uses within the Rouge Park, subject to appropriate management and location of these uses. Where these uses are concentrated in one area, the remainder of the park can retain a focus on passive recreation, agricultural and natural heritage restoration.

Also of importance, is the fact that early feedback from the Community Services "Integrated Leisure Services Master Plan", indicates a strong interest in informal open space with open mowed areas for recreation.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation. (Individual uses to be the subject of further discussion with Council and Rouge Park partners).

Recommendation #2.h.2

The RPITF recommends that staff and the Alliance increase their efforts to enforce the ban on hunting in Rouge Park.

Staff Comment

The Town of Markham has a By-law that prohibits the discharge of weapons (firearms, bow and arrow and other weapons) within Town limits. By-Law staff will participate in the implementation of regulations, signage, and numbers to call to report illegal hunting. York Region Police and the Ministry of Natural Resources will enforce the ban. The Town, Rouge Park Alliance, and other authorized agencies should review regulations and enforcement practices pertaining to recent reports of illegal hunting within the Park.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation.

RAIL, ROADS, SEWERS AND MORE

Recommendation #3.a

The RPITF recommends that the Town and the Alliance support the planning of necessary infrastructure improvements, such as road widenings, sewer projects, transit enhancements, etc., in a manner that provides opportunities for enhanced environmental benefits in support of the goals and objectives of Rouge Park.

Staff Comment

Infrastructure development is a necessity, but must be appropriately planned and executed, so as not to impact negatively on the Rouge Park. Decisions to undertake a specific project must take into consideration best practices as well as whether alternative design or enhancements are practical, feasible and cost effective from an implementation and maintenance perspective. Guidelines developed for infrastructure development in the Rouge Park stresses the protection and enhancement of the integrity and long-term sustainability of the resources.

Capital works are governed by Environmental Assessment process requirements, which normally ensure that the best alternatives for infrastructure projects are considered based on technical, economic, social and environmental considerations. Recent projects which have been proposed such as the South East Collector Trunk Sewer now incorporate a specific range of enhancement projects (including ecological enhancement projects) over and above the mitigation measures that would be normally associated with a project of this nature.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation.

SIGNAGE

Recommendation #3.b.1

The RPITF recommends that the Town support watercourse crossing signage to identify watersheds (Don, Duffins, Highland, Petticoat, and Rouge) for crossings of watercourses with official names except that, inside Rouge Park, the signs would identify the park rather than the watershed.

Recommendation #3.b.2

The RPITF recommends that the Town endorse in principle the proposal of the Don Watershed Regeneration Council for water- course crossing signage.

Recommendation #3.b.3

The RPITF recommends that the Town, York and the TRCA / Alliance introduce “You are Entering RP” signage along the lines discussed in this report.

Staff Comment

The RPITF is recommending that Don Watershed crossing signs be prepared and erected in accordance to the watershed sign design outlined in the Task Force Report and Appendices (see Appendix ‘A’). This recommendation proposes that some of the \$75,000 grant allocated to date by Markham Council to the Don Watershed Council (\$25,000 per year in 2003, 2004, and 2005) be used to complete the watershed sign erection program with remaining funds allocated to the Rouge Park in Markham. The costs of the Don Watershed signage is proposed to be shared equally between Toronto, TRCA and Markham. In January 2006, Council passed the following resolution with respect to the Don Watershed grant “ That Council defer providing further grants to the Don River Watershed until such time as the Don Watershed Regeneration Council reports back on projects completed in Markham using the \$75,000 already granted for 2003, 2004 and 2005 which are being held by the Town of Markham in a capital based account”. The Don Watershed Regeneration Council and the TRCA is aware of and are in support of the recommendations.

Staff Position

Town staff supports the recommendations

PROTECTION OF HERITAGE BUILDINGS

Recommendation #3.c

The RPITF recommends that staff develop a heritage building preservation strategy for Greater Rouge Park using principles enunciated in this report and that they work with Public Works Canada, the TRCA, and the Alliance to create a heritage subdivision and infill lots for the protection and concentration of moved heritage buildings.

Staff Comment

Heritage staff have retained consultants to undertake a Threatened Heritage Building Study for the purpose of looking at options and strategies to deal with threatened heritage buildings in the future. This study is Town-wide and will look at opportunities and constraints posed by the Rouge Park. The study has commenced and it is anticipated that a report will be presented to Council in the spring of 2009. The study will also review and consider the constraints posed by the Provincial Greenbelt Plan relative to land severances.

Staff Position

Town staff supports the recommendations.

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES IN THE PARK

Recommendation #3.d.1

The RPITF recommends that the draft Little Rouge Corridor and Bob Hunter Management Plans be amended to permit the privatization of residential properties under the strict conditions outlined in this report and that this approach apply to all such properties in Greater Rouge Park.

Recommendation #3.d.2

The RPITF recommends that staff assist all public entities holding residential properties in Greater Rouge Park to proceed, using Option #2 as a guide, to privatize the residential properties in the park.

Staff Comment

It is noted that in addition to TRCA, ORC and the Federal Government, the Town of Markham currently owns a limited number of houses within the Rouge Park.

The recommendation of the RPITF to convey publicly owned land and buildings to private purchasers appears to be contrary to the position identified by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in the interpretation of Provincial Greenbelt policies. The Greenbelt Plan sets out specific conditions for the severance of lands within the Greenbelt. The Official Plan policies in the Markham Official Plan are also very specific with respect to the severance of lands in the agricultural area. In order for the Town to include appropriate severance policies for the Rouge Park, the Rouge Park Alliance and TRCA would need to be in agreement with this approach and identify the intent and criteria in the Rouge Management Plans in order that they may be considered and rationalized in the Town's Greenbelt conformity exercise. Such an approach would require further discussion with Council and public agencies.

An alternative approach to outright sale of land and buildings might also be to consider the sale of the existing houses and the establishment of long term land leases at market rates. The option to sell the houses and lease the land would maintain the land in public ownership, while transferring the costs and benefits of maintenance and repair to the home purchaser. Further, it provides the home purchasers with an affordable investment alternative that is significantly lower than the cost of purchasing the land.

Options to deal with existing residential properties within the park require further analysis and discussion. Consideration needs to be given to Provincial policy, municipal policies and regulations, property location and context relative to park policy and programming objectives, among other matters.

Staff Position

Options to deal with existing residential properties within the park require further analysis and discussion, in consultation with Rouge Park partners. Agency comments on the RPITF report can be expected to include commentary on this matter.

3.e Agriculture in the Park

Recommendation #3.e.1

The RPITF recommends that staff and the Alliance place a high priority on the preparation of an agriculture master plan for Greater Rouge Park, and that consultation with all stakeholders commence as soon as possible.

Staff Comment

A number of agricultural initiatives are currently underway. The Town is undertaking an Agricultural Study and the Rouge Park Alliance is currently undertaking a study to prepare a management plan for the Rouge Park East lands. On December 8, 2008 the Rouge Park Alliance reviewed a staff report identifying agricultural principles for the Rouge Park and a request from Agricultural stakeholders for direct participation on the Markham East Steering Committee and the Rouge Park Alliance. The report was deferred until the next meeting of the Rouge Park Alliance, to enable Rouge Park staff to have discussions with the farmers in the area. Staff will continue to address eastern Markham agricultural issues in the Town-wide agricultural study and consult with the agriculture community.

Staff Position

Town staff supports the recommendation. The Town should initiate discussions with the Rouge Alliance to coordinate the respective agricultural studies currently underway, including provision for public input.

Recommendation #3.e.2

The RPITF recommends that no further plantings be permitted after those scheduled for next spring until the agriculture master plan has been completed and approved by Markham Council.

Staff Comment

The Rouge Park Alliance have approved the Natural Heritage Action Plan which sets out the short and long term natural heritage restoration plan for the Rouge Park along the Little Rouge Creek and Bob Hunter Park. The Rouge Park Natural Heritage Program is funded in part by ongoing endowment funds and direct contributions (\$25,000 annual grant) from the Town to the program. This funding is used to support restoration activities in the Rouge Park. In addition, the Town has also recently used the Trees for Tomorrow (TFT) Project funding to support tree planting activities in Rouge Park through contributions to purchase saplings which were then planted by Friends of the Rouge Watershed volunteers. Further, the Town has been promoting the TFT Fund with NGOs and community groups such as the FRW and 10,000 Trees for the Rouge and expect to receive grant applications this February for Town funded tree planting projects in Rouge Park. Town funded tree planting efforts in the Rouge Park should be directed to areas where existing agricultural leases are not affected, and plantings should be directed to the watercourse corridors where possible to meet the intent of the recommendation of the RPITF.

The Rouge Park Alliance is currently undertaking a study to prepare a plan for the agricultural lands in Eastern Markham. Town staff are participating in that process through involvement on a steering committee and through stakeholder's group meetings. Rouge Park plans are generally approved by the Rouge Park Alliance and endorsed by the Rouge Park partners. This matter requires further discussion with Council and Rouge Park partners. The Rouge Park should not initiate new planting programs on existing agricultural lands, pending the outcome of the agricultural studies noted above.

Staff Position

Staff recommend that the RPITF revise its recommendation to allow planting beyond spring, in areas known not to be in conflict with existing agricultural uses. The Town should initiate discussions with the Rouge Park Alliance to coordinate the agricultural studies and future planting programs.

REESOR ROAD PARCEL***Recommendation #3.f***

The RPITF recommends that staff notify the Province, ORC, TRCA, York Region, and the Alliance that Markham's priority is for employment uses on the Reesor Road parcel, and that Markham would be interested in exploring ecological enhancements for the site in the context of an upscale business campus.

Staff Comment

The Reesor Road parcel is a 15.3 hectare parcel owned by the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC). The Cornell Secondary Plan, adopted by Council on January 22, 2008 originally identified the Reesor Road parcel for an Industrial - Business Park designation in the Official Plan and a Business Park Area designation in the Secondary Plan, as recommended by staff. However, Council deferred the designation of the Reesor Road parcel to allow for additional consideration of options regarding future use of these land

owned by the Province, including possible designation of these lands for business park employment, open space, Rouge Park and/or other appropriate uses (possibly including a Rouge park office). The Rouge Park and the Province are currently studying the options for use of these lands. Town and Regional staff are also participating in the discussions and will report back to the respective Councils.

Staff Position

Town staff supports the recommendation.

PARK OPERATIONS, MANAGEMENT AND FUNDING

Recommendation #4.a.1

The RPITF recommends that Council initiate a Rouge Park Governance Review, to be managed and funded by Durham, Markham, Pickering, Toronto, York, the Province and the Federal Government, to review the current governance and operational structure of RP with an objective of recommending a long-term governance model.

Staff Comment

As noted under recommendation 1.a.1, future decisions on the governance and funding model for the Rouge Park will be a key factor in determining the outcome of many of the RPITF recommendations.

The recommendation of the RPITF proposed that the Rouge Park municipal partners and senior governments work together to coordinate a governance review of the Rouge Park Alliance to explore alternative governance models which could better coordinate and fund the implementation of the Rouge Park. The RPITF supported a municipal lead for the process to allow for a more comprehensive review of options. The Rouge Park Alliance has undertaken organizational reviews in 1997 and again in 2005 with no major changes made to the governance structure.

On December 5, 2008 the Rouge Park Alliance passed a resolution to undertake a funding and structural review to be completed under the direction of the Rouge Park Chair. The Steering Committee did not originally include a Markham representative, but this was modified at the meeting to include Markham.

The study is expected to cost \$100,000 with funding provided by the Province, Federal Government and member municipalities. Members identified on the Steering Committee (now including Markham) are requested to appoint its member to the Committee. The study is expected to commence early in 2009.

Although the approach recommended by the Rouge Park Alliance to lead the review of their own organization, is different than the recommended 'external review' approach undertaken by the RPITF, the general intent to conduct a review has been recommended subject to funding support.

As discussed under RPITF recommendation #1.a.1, the governance review should address such issues as overall decision making/executive committee composition,

accountability to municipal government interests and jurisdiction (north and south of Steeles Avenue), need for a detailed Memorandum of Understanding and partnership arrangements between the park partners, land acquisition, land management, funding, policies and park programming, project management, operations and maintenance, enforcement, and public/stakeholder outreach and input. The need for a Provincial "Rouge Park Act" should also be considered.

Staff Position

Town staff support the recommendation for a Rouge Park governance review. The nature and scope of such a review can be discussed further with Council once comments are received back from circulation of the RPITF report to public agencies. We also note that the Rouge Park Alliance has already started a review process which will require a Town appointee to the Steering Committee, as well as potential funding support.

Recommendation #4.a.2

The RPITF recommends that Council include \$150,000 in its 2009 budget as a Rouge Park Operating and Small Capital Projects Grant to be held for Council release pending the satisfactory results of the governance and operating review under #4.a.1.

Recommendation #4.a.3

The RPITF recommends that York include \$150,000 in its 2009 budget as a Rouge Park Operating and Small Capital Projects Grant to be held for Regional Council release pending the satisfactory results of the governance and operating review under #4.a.1.

Recommendation #4.a.4

The RPITF recommends that Markham and York Region each give positive consideration to a target of an annual Operating and Small Capital Projects Grant to Rouge Park of \$1,000,000, through a seven year escalating process, pending a satisfactory outcome of discussions with their partners on governance, operations, and the many other matters raised in this report.

Staff Comment

The Town's current draft 2009 budget does not include additional Rouge Park funding at this time. The additional funding support for the Rouge Park Alliance recommended by the RPITF would be tied to the satisfactory resolution of a long-term governance model that addresses the issues raised in the Task Force report. The governance review recently initiated by the Rouge Alliance, and any additional reviews, arising from the RPITF report, will take significant time to complete. Funding and support for the Rouge Park Alliance also needs to be considered in the context of other Town priorities.

Staff Position

At the January 19th, 2009 Budget Sub-committee meeting there was some discussion regarding the placement of \$150,000 in the Capital Budget for 2009 for Rouge Park, however, following further discussion, it was agreed to take no action pending the

submission of the staff report to Council in February, at which time there would be an opportunity to address the matter of funding.

MUNICIPAL/ ROUGE PARK STAFF LIAISON

Recommendation #4.b

The RPITF recommends that staff establish a municipal staff liaison committee, consisting of representatives from all municipalities and the park, to address implementation issues with a timely and consistent approach.

Staff Comments

In the early years of the Rouge Park Alliance, a number of technical committee were formed (Planning and Land Use, Land Acquisition) to provide staff input into Rouge Park matters. This formal liaison structure was useful in providing an exchange of information and to coordinate ongoing projects.

Given the abundance of implementation activities now underway and the need to identify municipal interests, staff supports the return to a more formalized communication process. This will also assist the Rouge Park in areas where they do not have specific expertise such as trails planning, and policy development.

Staff Position

Staff supports this recommendation.

TOWN ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMMES

Recommendation #5.1

The RPITF recommends to Council that the five Town environmental programmes be expanded to include a specific minimum percentage for community participation activities in Rouge Park and that staff report back with detailed recommendations.

Staff Comment

Staff have no objection in principle to examining current Town of Markham community based environmental programs to reflect Rouge Park activities, as appropriate. The referenced programs include Adopt a Park, Colour Your Corner, Markham Environmental Sustainability Fund, Markham Trees for Tomorrow and Pitch in Week, and generally provide financial support to community groups to plant trees, do park clean up and other environmental projects. This recommendation would be forwarded to the leads of each program for consideration. It should be pointed out that the "Colour Your Corner" Program is currently an urban program and therefore may not be as directly applicable to the Rouge Park. It also should be noted that the success of these programmes is heavily dependent on the initiatives taken by community groups.

Staff Position

Staff supports this recommendation.

Recommendation #5.2

The RPITF recommends to Council that the Environmental Land Acquisition Fund include an allocation portion for specific Rouge Park projects and that staff report back with detailed recommendations.

Staff Comment

The Environmental Land Acquisition Fund is a Town-wide program with priority sites identified including lands for the Rouge Park. Under the current Rouge Park partnership model, a number of properties have been acquired over the years on a co-funding basis (i.e. Town, Region and TRCA funding). Future arrangements and potential funding sources for land acquisition (e.g. Middle Reaches), will need to be considered in the context of the Rouge Park governance review.

Staff Position

Rouge Park properties are already identified on the Town's list of priority sites for acquisition, and should be given ongoing consideration as opportunities arise. Town staff would not recommend a separate allocation for Rouge Park properties at this time, but the potential need for such could be considered following the review of governance and funding options.

Recommendation #5.3

The RPITF recommends to Council that staff develop an MOU to be used when Markham funds are used to purchase properties that will be held by other governments or agencies.

Staff Comment

Staff supports this recommendation as it creates greater certainty and accountability for lands where Town money is used in their acquisition.

Staff Position

Town staff supports this recommendation.

MATTERS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Part 6 of the RPITF Report identifies several matters that need further discussion by Council, without making any specific recommendations, including:

Approval of the Two Management Plans

Town By-laws (Signage, Animal Control, Dumping, Fires, Tree Preservation)

Entrance Fees

Memorandum of Understanding

Target Date (re park implementation).

Staff Comment

The matters for further discussion are subject to the outcome of the governance review, agency comments and future discussions with Council.

FINANCIAL TEMPLATE

A number of the recommendations proposed by the RPITF would have short and long term financial implications for the Town. Should Council support the recommendations which require financial support, these should be considered in the context of the Town's annual capital and operating budget process. The results of the governance review of the Rouge Park will have a bearing on future capital and operating financial requirements.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

The recommendations support a number of the Town's strategic priorities including those related to future considerations for the environment, growth management, transportation/transit, municipal services and Parks and Recreation.

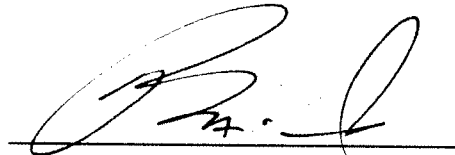
DEPARTMENTS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

The recommendations were circulated internally to Community Services, Operations, Finance, Heritage, Legal, and By-Law Departments, and their comments, where provided, have been incorporated.

RECOMMENDED BY:



Valerie Shuttleworth M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Director of Planning and Urban Design



Jim Baird M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Commissioner of Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 'A': Council Resolution Dec. 16, 2008 Rouge Park Implementation Task Force Report

Appendix 'B': Rouge Park Implementation Task Force Final Report Nov. 25, 2008

Appendix 'C': Map showing remnant parcels of land in eastern Markham

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