



Report to: Development Services Committee

Report Date: April 24, 2017

SUBJECT: Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway - Report on Design Charrette and Next Steps

PREPARED BY: Lilli Duoba, MES, MCIP, RPP, Manager, Natural Heritage (ext. 7925)

REVIEWED BY: Marg Wouters, MCIP, RPP, Senior Manager, Policy & Research

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) That the report entitled “Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway - Report on Design Charrette and Next Steps” dated April 24, 2017 be received;
- 2) And that the staff presentation on the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway be received;
- 3) And that a Gateway Advisory Committee be established to assist in the review of Terms of Reference for the preparation of a Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Vision and Implementation Plan under the direction of the Markham Subcommittee;
- 4) And that consultants be retained through a competitive bid process to prepare the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Vision and Implementation Plan;
- 5) And that the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Vision and Implementation Plan be funded through the existing approved Cornell Secondary Plan Capital Budget 15025;
- 6) And that staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to summarize the results of the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Charrette held in November 2015 and to recommend a strategy to advance the planning and design of a Gateway from Cornell Centre into the Rouge National Urban Park extending along Highway 7 to the Hamlet of Locust Hill.

BACKGROUND:**Rouge National Urban Park**

Since the late 1980's community groups, municipalities, conservation agencies and governments at all levels have been working in partnership to establish the Rouge Park in eastern Markham, Toronto, Pickering, and Uxbridge. Markham has been an active partner in developing the park including taking a leadership role on many studies and initiatives over the past two decades. In 2011, Parks Canada committed to securing ownership and management responsibilities for the park as the new 'Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP)'. The *Rouge National Urban Park Act* was passed in 2015, providing for the long term protection and management of Canada's first national urban park. Parks Canada is engaged with the public agencies including Markham for the transfer of lands to Parks Canada for park purposes. The Rouge National Urban Park comprises 7,956 ha or 79.1 square kilometers. In Markham, the Rouge National Urban Park comprises a significant landscape of 3,424 ha. This represents 43% of the park as a whole and over 16% of the total land area of the City of Markham. The park extends along the entire eastern boundary of Markham from Toronto (Steeles Avenue) to Whitchurch-Stouffville (north of 19th Avenue). The RNUP will be open and accessible through trails at many entry points throughout the park. The location of a national park within Markham's boundaries provides a significant public open space and legacy for Markham residents. The Rouge National Urban Park is shown on Figure 1.

Cornell Centre Secondary Plan

Cornell Centre is the largest planned Regional Corridor/Key Development Area in proximity to the RNUP in Markham, centred on the Highway 7 rapid transit corridor. The higher density mixed use community provides ample opportunity to integrate land use, public realm and open space in a manner complimentary to a Gateway to the RNUP. The City is currently refining the Secondary Plan for Cornell Centre lands in response to comments received by agencies, landowners and the public on the Draft Secondary Plan (September 2015) and the results of the Charrette, as directed by the Markham Subcommittee. The draft Detailed Land Use Schedule from September 22, 2015 is attached as Figure 2. The Draft Cornell Centre Secondary Plan identifies the 'Gateway' by symbol and includes a specific policy to allow for the incorporation of recommendations arising from the Gateway Vision and Implementation Plan into the Secondary Plan as may be considered appropriate by Council. The Cornell Centre Secondary Plan will identify the detailed studies and plans needed to implement the Secondary Plan.

The results of the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Vision and Implementation Plan proposed in this report, would be integrated, as appropriate into the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan by way of an Official Plan amendment, as may be considered appropriate by Council.

Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway

In recognition of the unique opportunity of creating a highly articulated public and private space which would create a lasting and memorable impression for road users, residents and

park visitors, Development Services Committee in February 2015, directed that options for a 'Gateway' to the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) at the east limit of the Cornell community, be explored with area landowners through the Markham Subcommittee. The Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway is the transition lands between the Rouge National Urban Park and Cornell Centre and as such, the 'Gateway' comprises public and private lands forming part of the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan area and Rouge National Urban Park (currently owned by Toronto and Region Conservation Authority but part of the expected transfer to Parks Canada in 2017). A number of Markham Subcommittee meetings were held, and in June 2015 the Subcommittee directed that a design Charrette be undertaken to initiate ideas and help create a vision for a gateway that connects and transitions Cornell Centre with the Rouge National Urban Park along Highway 7. The Charrette study area is identified on Figure 3.

For the purpose of the design Charrette, the 'Gateway' was not specifically pre-defined and the Charrette participants were encouraged to consider all approaches that would create a strong sense of arrival and a legacy space in Markham. This included simplified boundary approaches such as nodes or artistic landmarks, as well as gateway transition treatments using a combination of pathways, landmarks, nodes, edge treatments, public space and land use.

The consulting firm dtah + USL was retained to undertake the Charrette and to prepare a report summarizing the ideas generated at the event. The Charrette Summary Report, is a comprehensive compilation of the ideas discussed at the event. The report can be viewed through the attached link [Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Report](#).

The Charrette Summary Report was presented to Markham Subcommittee in April 2016. The Subcommittee directed staff to finalize the report, reflecting further discussion at the meeting, for release to the participants and the public, and to prepare a report to Development Services Committee providing direction on the implementation of the report's key findings.

Rouge National Urban Park Charrette Event (November 23-25, 2015)

The Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Charrette was conducted over a three day period between November 23 and 25, 2015 and included representatives from Parks Canada, Provincial government, Region of York, TRCA, landowners, agencies, Members of Council, City staff and the public. The event included a series of presentations followed by working design groups focussed on Transportation and Mobility, Tourism and Open Space and Land Use and Urban Design. The Charrette resulted in interesting and thoughtful ideas and themes for the creation of an inspiring gateway into the RNUP. Although the design teams had different ideas and expressed design in different ways, many common themes emerged related to park supportive land uses within the Cornell Centre lands, strong public realm and open space and trail elements, streetscape and transit improvements, opportunities for partnering with private development and potential Parks Canada infrastructure. The Charrette participants also provided ideas and guidance for improvements in the Hamlet of Locust Hill and design ideas along Highway 7 in Cornell Centre. In order to further advance

the creation of a gateway, the Charrette Report provided a set of refined principles and a set of recommended actions (see Appendix 'A') which summarize the emerging common themes being generated by the Charrette event.

OPTIONS/DISCUSSION:

Next Steps: Confirming and Implementing a Gateway Vision

The Charrette process was an exciting and creative event that brought forward many inspiring ideas for how to enhance the entry and interface from Cornell Centre into the Rouge National Urban Park and create the gateway. The emerging development in Cornell Centre also provides opportunities to potentially address built form, land use and public realm in a manner that supports both the urban community and visitors to the RNUP. The Charrette event highlighted the following matters that require consideration in order to advance further planning for a Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway:

- there is consensus that creation of a unique and inspiring gateway at the Highway 7 RNUP location presents a tremendous opportunity that should be advanced
- there is no single clear vision for a specific gateway but there are common elements and themes that were shared by all participants which include, but are not limited to:
 - ✓ provide a range of experiences within the gateway
 - ✓ provide for a suitable and gradual transition into the RNUP
 - ✓ support a range of uses that would be compatible with the park
 - ✓ protect important views
 - ✓ high quality design standards and sustainability
 - ✓ plan for active transportation
 - ✓ respect existing cultural heritage and promote re-use of buildings
 - ✓ consider distinct features including public art and public realm elements
 - ✓ tame traffic through Locust Hill and RNUP and consider traffic circles
 - ✓ improve streetscape to address pedestrian safety and rural character of the RNUP
 - ✓ ensure appropriate RNUP facilities and references are located in the gateway area
- implementation of a Gateway requires the shared vision and participation of Markham, Parks Canada, Region of York, Ministry of Transportation, Locust Hill and Cornell Centre residents and landowners and other agencies and interest groups
- appropriate policy may need to be included in the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan
- need to address Locust Hill as part of the Gateway

Phase 1 of the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Project can be considered complete with the public Design Charrette event having solicited ideas about what a Gateway could look like. Should Committee wish to continue to advance the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Project, the following process and actions should be considered.

Phase 2 of the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Project should comprise the preparation of a Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Vision Plan and Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Implementation Plan. Phase 2 would be a staged process that would first comprise the establishment of a Gateway Advisory Committee comprised of agencies and landowners which would work with Markham staff to identify the design elements and structural recommendations resulting from the Charrette Summary Report that should advance for further review and consideration. This will include, but is not limited to:

- confirm that the land uses and policies in the Draft Cornell Centre Secondary Plan and Official Plan 2014 Hamlet policies are appropriate to create the synergy and vibrancy needed to support an active and functional gateway
- confirm opportunities with Ministry of Transportation and Region of York for short and long term road and streetscape improvements compatible with a legacy Gateway
- confirm opportunities with landowners for enhanced public realm, open space, vista protection and pedestrian and mobility connections
- advance discussions with Parks Canada and landowners on potential location and function of the Primary Welcome Area and connections to park trails and other park infrastructure
- determine opportunity for positive, dramatic and meaningful artistic elements to define and animate entry into RNUP and Cornell Centre
- determine major design elements needed to create a seamless but distinct transition from Cornell Centre into the natural setting of the Rouge National Urban Park
- discuss opportunities for partnership on shared public private facilities

Once the Terms of Reference process is complete by staff and agencies, in consultation with the Gateway Advisory Committee, consulting services to assist in preparation of a Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Vision and Implementation Plan would be secured through a competitive bid process. The Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Implementation Plan would include Design Guidelines and land use policy recommendations, as appropriate, to inform the implementation of the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan, Locust Hill Hamlet and the Rouge National Urban Park Management Plan. Staff met with public agencies in November 2016 to ensure and confirm their commitment to participate with the City to further advance the Gateway Project, should Council direct completion of the Gateway Project. The Vision and Implementation Plan for the Gateway will be expected to be inspiring, visionary and supportable by all stakeholders, while still being implementable within the parameters of stakeholder budgets. A high degree of stakeholder and public engagement throughout the process is recommended.

Staff will report back to Markham Subcommittee with associated timelines, budget and consulting services to complete the Gateway Project once the Gateway Advisory Committee has reviewed the Charrette findings and provided input into the Terms of Reference for the preparation of the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Vision and Implementation Plan.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

A planning/urban design consultant will be required to assist with the preparation of a Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Vision and Implementation Plan. Sufficient funding is available in the previously approved Capital Budget 15025 allocated for the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:

City staff from across a number of Departments are involved in the implementation of the Rouge National Urban Park.

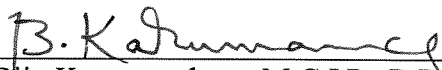
ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

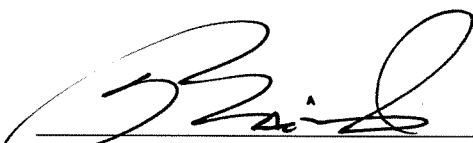
The implementation of the Charrette key findings relates to the Safe and Sustainable Community goal in Building Markham's Future Together.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Planning, Urban Design, Engineering Services, Asset Management and Community Services have and will continue to be engaged in this project.

RECOMMENDED BY:


Biju Karumanchery, 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

- Figure 1: Rouge National Urban Park
- Figure 2: Cornell Centre Draft Detailed Land Use Schedule
- Figure 3: Cornell RNUP Charrette Study Area
- Appendix 'A' Principles and Recommended Actions of the Cornell RNUP Summary Report

- Filepath: Q:\Development\Planning\MISC\MI512 Cornell Secondary Plan Update\Cornell Rouge Park Gateway\Charette Summary Staff Report 1d.docx

Figure 1: Rouge National Urban Park

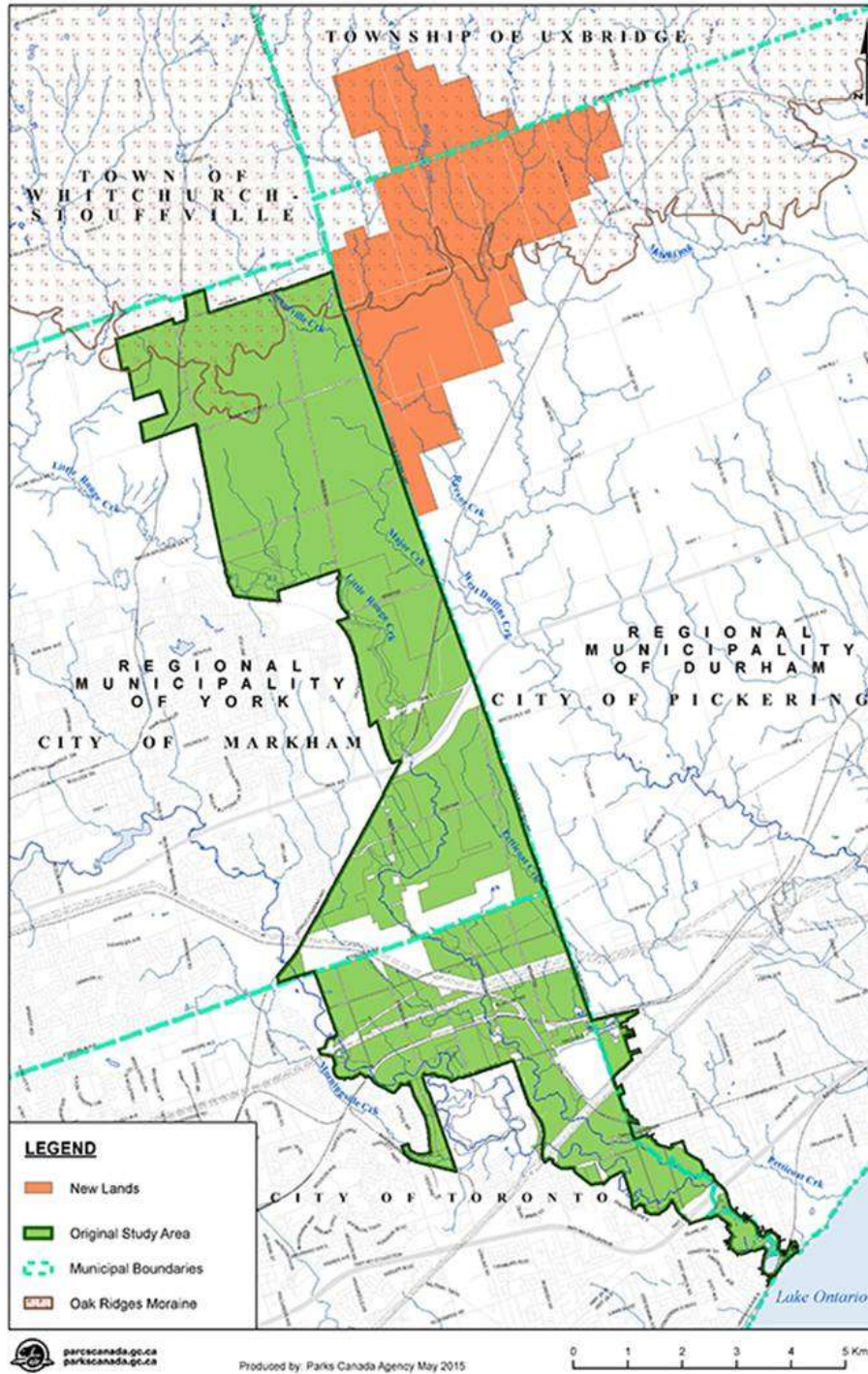
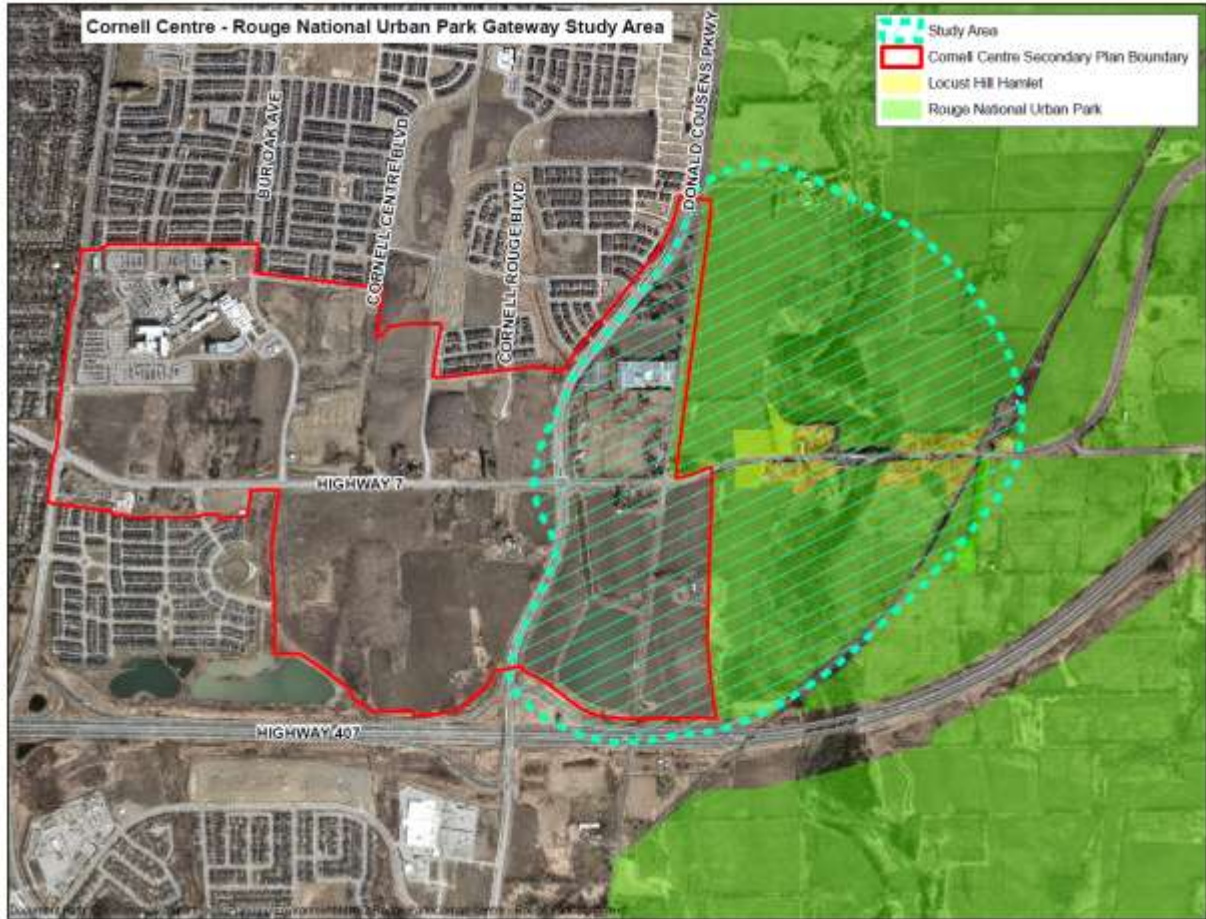


Figure 3: Cornell RNUP Charrette Study Area



Appendix 'A'

Principles and Recommended Actions of the Cornell RNUP Summary Report

5. Charrette Summary

During the charrette, the participants further refined the principles to aid in the vision for the Gateway. The refined principles built upon those first identified by the Markham Sub-Committee but with further clarity and detail. The following summarizes the refined principles based on the charrette:

1. Respect for Existing and Emerging Context:

Gateway must be respectful of the heritage, natural, rural, cultural and aboriginal context of the Park, Locust Hill as a rural settlement whose character holds great value, and the community at large.

2. Landscape Transition: The Gateway will serve as the transition from urban land uses to rural land and natural areas in the Park.

3. Hierarchy of Streetscapes: Gateway should have a hierarchy of streetscapes including an urban edge along Donald Cousens Parkway, enhanced active public open spaces along Highway 7 up to the Park and a scenic rural character along Reesor Road and Highway 7 through the Park. Explore and address traffic calming and scenic attributes (e.g. Reesor Road as a minor collector road, but designed to retain its rural character by using setbacks and streetscape elements).

4. Dramatic Streetscape: Highway 7, from Donald Cousens Parkway, should incorporate softer urban edge conditions (e.g. meandering multi-use pathways and public spaces); distinct change in streetscape to signify that it is a gateway.

5. Compatible Design: Gateway built form should be compatible with Cornell Centre development as well as Locust Hill built form character.

6. Traffic Calming: Through coordination with the public realm, Highway 7 should be reduced in lane width and have traffic calming measures put in place (possibly using traffic circles, lane reductions, traffic medians and other means).

7. Expand Mobility Networks: Highway 7 should have a separated pedestrian and cycling pathway from Donald Cousens Parkway into

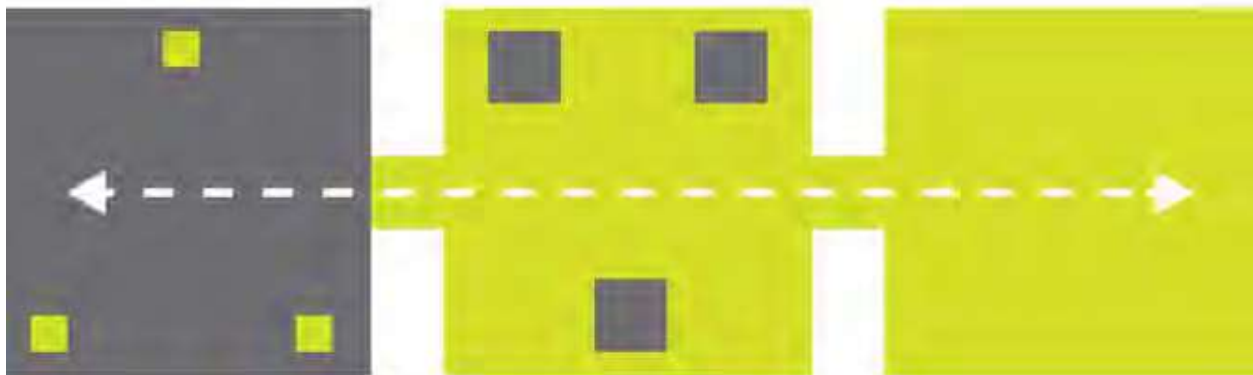


Diagram that summarized the general consensus of the charrette. The Gateway Area would be a distinct area, which would also act as a transition from the City to the Park.

the Park. Pathway and multi-use trail linkages from the adjacent neighbourhoods and within the Park throughout the Gateway should be separate, safe, and linked. Provide connections to and expand transit/shuttle service to the Gateway and the Park.

8. Animation: Streetscape should have animated public uses and services to promote a sense of arrival. Private development should animate the Gateway and provide additional services for the Gateway, community at large and future employment areas.

9. Intensity of Development: Provide a transition in built form towards the Park, reducing intensity of development and increasing setbacks moving eastwards within the Gateway. Consider the type, nature and volume of potential uses, and the importance of views into the Park and back towards the urban community.

10. Major Gateway Intersection: Design and locate structures and buildings at the intersection of Reesor Road and Highway 7 to protect views and provide enhanced architectural and design details. Provide a suitable streetscape design that includes public art and other character defining elements.

11. Parking: Design and manage Parking in a manner that compliments the built form and Gateway Area. Include shared Parking arrangements and measures to protect the environment and community.

12. Wayfinding: Clear wayfinding to be provided for vehicular, pedestrian and cycling.

13. Ecological Linkage: Create a strong ecological connection from the woodlots, wetlands and stormwater management pond in Cornell Centre to the Park.

14. Cultural Resources: Cultural resources should be protected and incorporated into the Gateway.

15. Public Art: Public art is an important part of the Gateway and should become a recognizable symbol. Consider public art as landmarks throughout the Gateway and the Park, with special attention to the eastern and western Park entrances.

16. Sustainability: All components of the Gateway will be based on the principles of sustainable development, and become a showcase for sustainability, design and art.

17. Employment Area to provide additional recreational and complementary uses to support businesses and animate the streetscape.

6. Recommended Actions

Following from the presentations and discussions from the Charrette are several key recommendations that Markham should consider as development in Cornell Centre and the National Urban Park moves forward:

- The gateway to the National Urban Park is a procession and not a single point of entry. The gateway should provide a range of experience that enhances both the Park and the Centre.
- The main entrance from Cornell Centre is Highway 7 and should provide a suitable and gradual transition from the Centre to the Park and Locust Hill. Between Donald Cousens Parkway and Reesor Road, this transition should include a change in built form, land uses, and streetscape character from urban (street related mid-rise and tall buildings with hard surface boulevards) to rural (lower scale buildings set further back from street with green and well vegetated boulevards).
- Allow a range of uses in the employment lands. Other uses within the gateway should include a variety of commercial uses to serve visitors to the National Urban Park, recreation and leisure opportunities, support for local agricultural activities, and public education.



Cornell Rouge Gateway Concept Sketch - Summary of Stakeholder design charrette input.

- Consider important views into the Park from the boundaries and various points of entry. Ensure that key views are protected when siting new development.
- Sustainability should permeate all aspects of the Gateway and National Urban Park. Aspire to the highest quality design standards and measure performance over time.
- A range of landscape and open space types will contribute to the green network that connects Cornell Centre to the National Urban Park, providing habitat corridors and improving overall environmental health.
- The active transportation network of on-street bike lanes, multi-use paths and sidewalks will improve mobility and connections between the Centre to the National Urban Park.
- Respect, enhance and incorporate cultural heritage (built form and landscape) as key aspects of the National Urban Park. Promote the re-use of existing buildings for Park facilities.
- Introduce a distinct streetscape to Highway 7 that enhances the Park character and supports the anticipated user increase. Consider introducing a distinct feature or features as part of the streetscape, such as a landscaped traffic circle with public art.
- Tame the speed of vehicle traffic through Locust Hill and the National Urban Park to improve safety, enhance the rural character and emphasize the sense of place. Provide suitable pedestrian facilities along Highway 7.
- Markham should amend the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan to include the recommendations from this summary report.



Park vs. Farm. Photo Credit: Pound and Stewart Planning Consultants.