

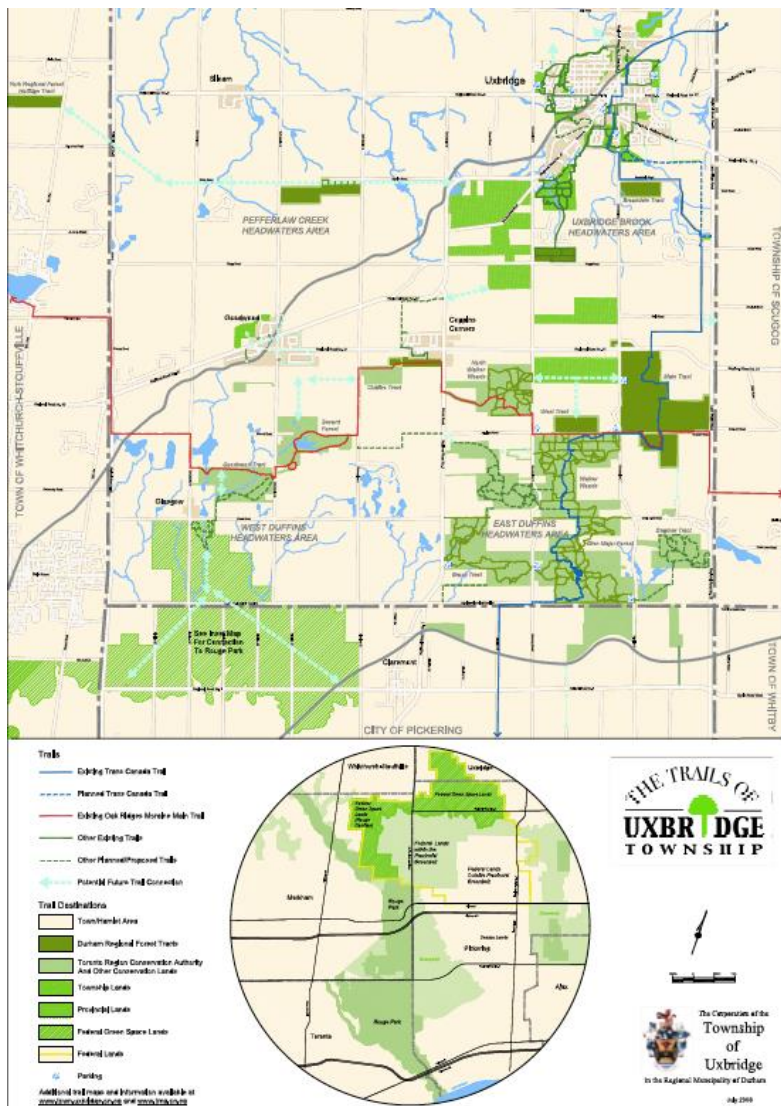
**Comments on Township of Uxbridge: Parks Master Plan
 Interim Report and Options for Recommendations**

November 29, 2017

Green Durham Association (GDA) is a non-profit registered charity dedicated to protecting, preserving and enhancing the forests, farmlands and natural areas which lie northeast of Toronto in Uxbridge, north Pickering and adjacent Greenbelt lands.

GDA supports healthy habitats for flora, fauna, wetlands and watersheds, promotes development of trails for passive recreational use, and provides a constructive voice on all issues which may have implications for our vision for these lands.

We work in partnership with municipalities, conservation bodies and other partners to plan, acquire and manage trail networks, nature corridors and conservation lands. We support and promote land protection and stewardship efforts on private lands. We support research, make comments and advise on policies and decisions affecting land use.



**Official map of the southern part of Uxbridge Township, 2009.
 Does not accurately reflect current land holdings and trails.**

Green Durham Association (GDA) board members have reviewed the Parks Master Plan Interim Report and the Options for Recommendations. The main focus of the Parks Master Plan is on the development of the municipal parks and athletic fields and recreation services within the Town and hamlets. The Municipality (Township of Uxbridge) is directly involved with managing and funding these assets and services.

Public conservation lands and associated trails in the Uxbridge countryside, as the Interim Report points out, are in most cases planned, managed, and funded by a variety of groups including Durham Region, associations, citizen groups and by two Conservation Authorities: Lake Simcoe Regional Conservation Authority (LSRCA) and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). Nonetheless, the Township plays a strong role in matters pertaining to these countryside lands and trails.

The Township has been actively involved in acquiring and/or managing lands not managed by the Conservation Authorities. Township involvement includes major countryside sections of the TCT trail travelling south from the Town to Durham 21, potential connections north and south of Coppins Corners, resolving issues around unopened road allowances, and parking on rural roads by visitors to these lands, to name but a few. The Township is involved with any possible acquisitions of conservation lands and connections initiated by conservation bodies. The Township has representation on Durham Regional Council, which makes financial decisions about support to the various Conservation Authorities which operate in Durham Region. The Township also has membership on stewardship committees and the Durham Trails Coordinating Committee.

Our comments and suggestions are listed below. We have used the “Options for Recommendations” presented to Council on November 13, 2017 as headings to link our suggestions easily to the Master Plan process. An appendix follows which comments on some of the information with respect to the countryside trails which informed the Interim Report.

1) Update the Master Trails and Conservation Plan

In 2005 the Township of Uxbridge completed and approved a [Master Trails and Conservation Plan](#). Members of GDA were given the opportunity to be involved in the preparation of this plan. The Options for Recommendations recommend that the Master Trails and Conservation Plan be updated. We applaud this recommendation.

Updating the Plan will further clarify the Township’s vision and priority goals, enhance public awareness and support of them, and bring attention to the essential role the Township has played, and needs to continue to play, with respect to countryside trails and conservation lands. Updating the Plan will capitalize on Uxbridge’s title “Trails Capital of Canada. Making this process collaborative and transparent and the information publicly available will engage the community and help gain broad support of many interests.

The stated vision of the Plan in 2005 was: *“The protection of the Township’s natural heritage system through the enhancement of the existing recreational trail system so that it will ultimately link together the Uxbridge Urban Area, the Township’s hamlets, key natural heritage areas, significant areas of public land, and other important areas, and the protection of lands for conservation and passive recreation purposes.”*

The Plan states the commitment of the Township to working closely with stakeholders to proactively support the creation of a countryside trail system that links conservation lands and communities. A map is included in the 2005 Plan, which outlines future potential trail routes, and off-road connections in the southern half of the township. In 2009 the Township prepared a map which is currently on the Township website and which updated some of the public lands and potential trail routes shown on the Master Plan Map. This map needs further updating to reflect additions to conservation lands since 2009:

<http://town.uxbridge.on.ca/sites/default/files/UxbridgeTownshipTrailsRevJuly28-09.pdf>

Ideally the Master Trails and Conservation Plan would be updated quickly and included in the Parks Master Plan before it is finalized. If that is not possible the Parks Master Plan should at least include an updated Township map and commentary that accurately reflects current land holdings and desired land connections. The Interim Plan as it exists now does not even show an old map of the Uxbridge Township Trails.

2) Encourage sport tourism and economic development (a)

The \$75,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant GDA received in 2017 will be used to develop a master plan to upgrade the trail route across Webb road, north to the Oak Ridges Trail Association main trail. Additional funding for the entire \$150,000 project, including implementation, has been provided by Parks Canada, TRCA, ORTA, and GDA. Parks Canada’s willingness to provide funds for a project aimed at improving linkages beyond their Park boundaries is an important precedent.

We believe that as the Park develops trail systems running north through the 5200 acres just added to the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) in Durham, to connect with the improvements being planned just north of the RNUP initiated by the Trillium grant, that the RNUP will begin to have a very beneficial economic and tourism impact on Uxbridge. The Rouge National Urban Park now comprises 19,500 acres, 1000 of which fall in Uxbridge Township. This northern end of the RNUP will be close to public transit from the GTA.

Has the Park Plan committee considered studies of the economic impact national parks can have on local and regional economies? One of many recent reports exploring this issue states “The economic benefits of national parks extend beyond tourism. The greatest value of natural amenities and recreation opportunities often lies in the ability of protected lands to attract and retain people, entrepreneurs, businesses, and retirees” (www.headwaterseconomics.org). The United States National Parks Service has collected data for more than 25 years on the

contributions of national parks to economies of local “gateway” regions. An excellent report released in 2017 can be found at: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>. Uxbridge now has a national park at its doorstep. GDA has also proposed that “gateways” be added to RNUP which will directly connect the Park to the nearby communities of Seaton and Claremont, to take advantage of the many benefits the Park will offer to Durham. GDA’s proposal can be seen here: <http://www.greendurham.ca/gateways>

3) Encourage sport tourism and economic development (b)

The Parks Master Plan tracks the demographics of Uxbridge citizens and their use of Township managed facilities, but gives less attention to assessing the extent to which Uxbridge residents and non-resident visitors use existing countryside trails now, and are likely to want to use them in future. Surveys show that visitors to the trails of south Uxbridge are likely to come from beyond Uxbridge. Also in addition to trails, cyclists are increasingly using lesser-trafficked paved roads in Uxbridge and local and regional cycling groups keep year-by-year stats on roads used by cyclists, and volumes.

The Interim Report estimates a 27% increase in population in Uxbridge by 2031, and 48.6% in Durham by the same year. The TRCA Management Plan for the East Duffins Headwaters properties in Uxbridge Township estimates growth of 47% in nearby York region, and 18% in City of Toronto over same time period and using the same data source. TRCA and other surveys indicate users of these countryside trails to south travel from beyond Uxbridge to use the trails and roads: from Pickering, Ajax, Whitby Oshawa, York Region and the GTA – all areas which are growing at a faster rate than Uxbridge.

The Ontario Trail User Survey 2014, commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport assesses the positive economic contributions of hiking trails and of day hiking to Ontario’s economy. The Survey also assesses views of non-users of trails, exploring reasons for not using trails. Responses included not having enough information about available trails. Such information supports the rationale for hiking maps GDA commissioned and is releasing for sale locally and more widely in the GTA over the coming years.

We believe this fast growing current and future use of countryside trails and roads, as well as the appropriate response from a Township trails and tourism perspective are crucial at this time. This is an economic development opportunity which should be seriously evaluated further. These countryside lands and roads are assets for recreation and tourism. Resolving the Provincial lands issue to the south of the Town will over time and along with other initiatives add to recreation venues in Uxbridge. The Moraine Plan has recently been modified to allow more expansive Bed and Breakfasts, which has raised the interest of some homeowners in taking advantage of this opportunity. All of this could have implications for the Parks Plan, particularly those aspects of the Plan focused on countryside trails.

4) Invest in existing parks and trails

The Interim Report mentions concerns around the level of maintenance on trails in Uxbridge. This is particularly acute with respect to TRCA-managed lands in Uxbridge where in the past few years, TRCA funding has dropped greatly. At the same time, controls have been introduced which may well be necessary, but which also significantly increase the costs of maintaining the lands. In fact other than covering off hazard tree maintenance costs along trails, absolutely no funding has been offered by TRCA for 2018 for trail maintenance on East Duffins Headwaters properties to the south of the Town – all the rest is provided by volunteer groups and grants.

It is true that the trail network is growing in some areas. However it should also be noted that after the last TRCA EDH Management Planning exercise was completed on these lands, many existing trails were closed. Revenue and volunteer support from users on TRCA managed lands which form the bulk of the countryside trails in Uxbridge (4000 acres) has been growing far faster than the trail system. The main problem in the southern part of the Township has been the significant reduction in funding for trails by the TRCA.

The Mayor of Uxbridge has been very helpful in efforts to encourage more funding to the five Conservation Authorities from the Region of Durham by transferring some of the Region funds set aside for matching funds for conservation land acquisition to conservation land maintenance. Early indications are that any such funds will in the short term be used to deal with the Ash dying tree problem and will not be available to help with trail maintenance. We suggest the solution involves getting some further assistance to the Conservation Authorities from the Region, as well as getting considerably more financial support from trail users. Money is not being requested from Uxbridge for countryside trails on lands managed by the Conservation Authorities but encouraging and fostering partnerships can leverage significant contributions. GDA looks forward to playing a role in any such partnerships.

5) Continue to see the acquisitionthrough the development process and other means for enhanced conservation, compatible public access and linkages to parks, open spaces and trails

An issue affecting the future of the south Uxbridge countryside is the few thousands of acres of licensed pits. The current average pit life is some 35 years and this interim use is diminishing as older pits begin to close. Recognizing the importance of this issue, in 2011 GDA provided financial support to a project led by Ontario Nature in which Ontario Nature partnered with the Townships of Uxbridge and Scugog, GDA, the TRCA, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation. The partnership received a Trillium grant to prepare a report entitled, “Bioregional Planning for Aggregate extraction in the Townships of Uxbridge and Scugog”. Since the report, local members of the Ontario Stone Sand and Gravel Association, (OSSGA), have met to discuss pits in Uxbridge and the benefits of looking at their future in what they called “Rehabilitation Clusters”: as aggregate pits approach end-use, a broader bioregional planning perspective is

used. Individual pit owners have also had continued discussions on issues including end-use with the township and conservationists and GDA members.

Uxbridge Township has a history of good productive relationships between the industry, the Township and other stakeholders including conservationists. An almost entirely off-road route for the Trans Canada Trail travelling south from the Town to conservation lands south of Durham 21 would have been impossible to secure without a land exchange being made with one pit owner, and another pit owner agreeing to enter into a trail easement through their land. Any Master Trails and Conservation Plan update would be remiss if it were not to recognize the importance of this same kind of co-operation in future in order to meet the vision of creating off-road nature/trail linkages connecting conservation lands and communities.

6) Promote physical activity; Embrace the natural environment of Uxbridge

The Interim Report discusses demographics and the ageing population of Uxbridge. The Interim Report “indicates an immediate need to maintain the interests of this population at the forefront with the provision of parks and recreation services and facilities”. The Report also discusses in a number of areas the importance of walking, and the importance of the trails to support walking for health, but these were not highlighted in the Options for Recommendations.

A higher proportion of seniors resides in Uxbridge when compared to the Provincial average, and this proportion is forecast to increase. The attractiveness of trails and nature serve as a wonderful low-cost resource for health for local residents. Walking is consistently reported as most frequent activity in health and physical activity research. ORTA runs regular one to two hour trail walks which are well-attended but perceived by many as “advanced”.

A gap exists locally in programming to support introductory walking programming which targets those who are not currently accessing trails and walking. The indoor “walking trail” at the local high school during winter months is hugely popular. The Healthy Kids Community Challenge currently funds an introductory walking program for families with young children and the numbers accessing this weekly program have been high. Offering opportunities to walk with a leader builds confidence in using the trail system, helps develop a habit of walking regularly and fosters social connectedness. In 2016 HKCC helped fund Outdoor Council of Canada training of outdoor walking leaders and to date these potential walk leaders have been an untapped resource. The Township could play an important role in facilitating local and shorter walks with these trained leaders.

In summary, a scan of local real estate listings and agents, of letters to the editor in local newspapers, of local shops, and speaking with everyday folks on the main streets of Uxbridge will demonstrate that individuals who have chosen to live in Uxbridge, who have created jobs for

themselves and others here choose to live here because of the trails and close availability of nature in the surrounding rural countryside.

The Parks Plan and updating the Master Trails and Conservation Plan represent an important opportunity to tie the many threads and opportunities associated with these countryside and town properties and trails together into a cohesive plan and seize the enormous potential which lies in this spectacular part of the world.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely

Elizabeth Calvin President, GDA

Brian Buckles Vice-president, GDA

Appendix: We have the following comments on the commentary on countryside trails that mainly occurs on page 50 of the Parks Master Plan Interim Report.

- 1) While the Glen Major Forest and Walker Woods, Brock Tract and North Walker Woods areas are mentioned within the East Duffins Headwaters, there is no mention of the TRCA's Wilder Forest and Wildlife Tract, the Skyloft Tract and the Dagmar tracts.
- 2) There is no identification on a map or mention in the narrative of the 1300 acre provincial land holding finally acquired by the Province in 2007, lands which the Province in 2011 stated they intended to have managed by LSRCA, (1,000 acres) and TRCA, (300 acres). These lands could provide very important potential trail connects and stepping-stones directly from the Town, south across the Moraine, to the Rouge National Urban Park. They are also shown on the 2009 Uxbridge map referenced above. The Township is currently involved in working with stakeholders in an effort to finally resolve the future of these lands.

These lands could also be very important to Uxbridge in future because due to their closeness to town itself they could encourage the many trail users who use the countryside trails south of Durham 21, to access the town for services.

- 3) The commentary states that the South-west Uxbridge / West Duffins Headwaters area does not currently have any formal trails. However the ORTA trail traverses this area, crossing the West Duffins in the TRCA's Goodwood tract. ORTA also has a side trail running south from their main trail to access Webb Road, which abuts the northern end of the Federal lands
- 4) Some years ago now, with help from the GDA, the TRCA was able to acquire a strip of land running south connecting the TRCA's Good wood tract to Webb Road. Earlier this year 5200 acres of Federal Lands in Durham, which run north to Webb Road, were transferred to the Rouge National Urban Park and some 800 acres are now part of Uxbridge Township
- 5) A small point but the Report states, "The North East Uxbridge area has a number of opportunities for trail development ...", then confusingly references lands south of the Preserve as being "in this area."