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Section I – Items for the Action of the Regional Watershed Alliance

TO: Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance
Wednesday, March 03, 2021 Meeting

FROM: John MacKenzie, Chief Executive Officer

RE: **CLAIREVILLE CONSERVATION AREA PUBLIC USE ACTIVATION PLAN**

KEY ISSUE

In response to feedback received by TRCA to improve the public use and access of Claireville Conservation Area, staff have undertaken a review of current uses and programs, and a needs assessment from the local community, stakeholders, and municipal partners in order to develop the Claireville Conservation Area Public Use Activation Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Regional Watershed Alliance endorse the actions and recommendations laid out in the Activation Plan;

THAT any additional input received by the Regional Watershed Alliance at its March 3, 2021, meeting be considered by staff prior to finalizing the Claireville Conservation Area Public Use Activation Plan;

AND FURTHER THAT TRCA staff continue to work both internally and externally with municipal partners and stakeholders to implement the recommended actions laid out in the Activation Plan.

BACKGROUND

Claireville Conservation Area (“Claireville”) is a unique, valuable, and desirable greenspace located within a highly urbanized setting. The 848-hectare park is located primarily in the City of Brampton, with a small portion (19 hectares) falling within the City of Toronto. Claireville is also located in close proximity to the City of Mississauga and the City of Vaughan. Claireville operates under a passive operating model, without regular staff, gate admissions, and supporting comfort services. The park, however, offers a multitude of recreational opportunities and attracts both regular and intermittent users. In the past, Claireville was predominantly agricultural land, with limited development nearby. In recent decades, significant industrial, commercial and residential development has occurred around Claireville, increasing the potential for public use of the site, as well as the importance of offering and properly utilizing a large greenspace in an urban area.

TRCA staff completed the *Claireville Conservation Area Management Plan Update* (“Management Plan Update”) in 2012, which lays out the most recent overarching priorities and direction for the management of Claireville. The Management Plan Update includes an emphasis on ecological restoration of the site and passive use. TRCA then endorsed the Claireville Conservation Area Land Management Implementation Plan (“the Implementation Plan”) in 2015 to further direct priority implementation projects.

Public interest has driven TRCA to explore how Claireville can be better activated to support the needs and desires of the community and current and potential users of Claireville, as well as to

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fulfill TRCA's mandate. At Regional Watershed Alliance meeting #3/18, the following resolution was passed in response to a delegation made by Iain Craig:

THAT TRCA staff provide an on-site tour and an update on the progress and planning for the Claireville Conservation Area to the Greenspace and Ecosystem Services Working Group of the Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) and other interested Alliance members;

THAT the Greenspace and Ecosystem Services Working Group of the Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) work with staff to investigate opportunities to animate Claireville Conservation Area and create programming and infrastructure that will promote greenspace engagement, ecosystem preservation and education, and outdoor activities to the diverse communities of the local community and GTA and report back in Quarter 2 2019;

THAT the RWA and staff should also investigate potential partnerships and involvement of municipal, provincial and federal governments, as well as other means of generating the sustained investment and funding that would be required to implement the proposed priorities.

As a result, TRCA staff have developed the draft Claireville Public Use Activation Plan ("Activation Plan") to lay out the groundwork for activating Claireville.

RATIONALE

The Activation Plan was guided by three goals:

- Activate Claireville Conservation Area through improved public perception and use of the site;
- Improve the public's connection to, and use of, Claireville through new and existing partnerships and programs; and
- Align the activation of Claireville with TRCA's strategic priorities and the existing Claireville Conservation Area Management Plan.

The term "activation" can be interpreted in multiple ways. To achieve activation, the recommendations in this plan seek to achieve that:

- Visitors feel that Claireville is an open, safe and welcoming site. The care that TRCA and relevant partners have for Claireville is evident, as is their efforts to both make the public comfortable and protect ecological values.
- The surrounding community becomes "active owners" of Claireville. This means that the community feels a sense of ownership of, and responsibility for, Claireville and is engaged in its care, management and programming.
- Existing and new programming is offered at Claireville. Programming fits the needs and desires of the local community and other visitors. Programming offered at Claireville aligns with TRCA's values and priorities.
- Programming, services and infrastructure can be offered by TRCA and/or other partners. Collaborating with partners should result in some, or all, of the following: innovative partnership structures; efficiencies of resources; more appropriate or interesting programming and events; reduced burden on TRCA staff time and resources; and economic, cultural, social or environmental benefits to the community and surrounding neighbourhood.

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- Appropriate facilities are available that complement the passive use focus of Claireville, while supporting visitors and programming
- It is acknowledged that activation involves both short- and long-term goals and actions

A subsequent investigation and cataloguing of all of the initiatives and programs historically carried out in Claireville, as well as an inventory of current and ongoing work and programs, was completed. Key stakeholders, including partner municipalities, internal TRCA staff teams, Peel Region Police, and community groups, were interviewed to determine their ongoing needs and/or desires for the conservation area. Results from those interviews informed the development of an online survey. A link to the survey was mailed to all residents in the postal codes surrounding the conservation area. The link was also included on signs that were installed temporarily at key points within Claireville. Environics data from the postal codes surrounding the conservation area was used to identify demographic trends within the local communities, and Google reviews and analytics were recorded as a means to better understand user experience and the popularity of Claireville. The results from this investigatory work are all included in the Activation Plan (**Attachment 1**).

From that investigation, several themes emerged that informed the development of recommendations that could be implemented to achieve the three goals guiding the activation plan. Actions to achieve these goals and objectives are outlined within the Activation Plan (**Attachment 1**). It should also be noted that the third goal of aligning actions with Management Plan goals and TRCA strategic plan was considered throughout all recommendations.

The objectives and recommendations within the Activation Plan are:

Objective 1: Reduce user conflict

The most common user conflict identified are the result of dogs off-leash. This was an issue that was repeatedly brought up in stakeholder meetings, on the survey, in the Google reviews and by TRCA staff more broadly.

- Recommendation 1a: Investigate non-TRCA off-leash dog area in partnership with City of Brampton, in conjunction with increased enforcement at Claireville.

Objective 2: Improve visitor's perception of safety

Concerns about perceived and potential real dangers due to illegal activity in Claireville was brought up at stakeholder meetings, in the survey, and was mentioned in Google reviews. An Emergency Action Plan will help to identify areas where safety can be improved in Claireville as well as procedures for emergencies.

An increased staff presence at Claireville can help deter individuals from carrying out unwanted activities. This staff presence should not be limited to enforcement but could also be in terms of maintenance or programming. The intent is to create a sense that there are more people watching and invested in the area.

- Recommendation 2a: Complete an Emergency Action Plan
- Recommendation 2b: Investigate partnerships to increase staff and public presence.

Objective 3: Improve Claireville's recognition in the local community.

Two major issues identified are: (1) a lingering perception that Claireville is not accessible/welcoming to all users and (2) an overall lack of awareness of the extensive

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programming and recreational opportunities already available in the park. One way of addressing that public perception is to create an identity for Claireville. This would help to create a sense of place for park users and provide an umbrella under which programming could be housed.

There was strong support across demographics for the development of a volunteer group to help Claireville. There have been similar groups developed in the past; however, the success of those groups have relied on consistent funding and staff capacity, in most cases linked to grants. Therefore, it is imperative that considerations for funding and staff capacity be assessed prior to the development of any new group. Alternatives to a formal group should also be considered. For example, an annual “Friends of Claireville Days” where stewardship opportunities are provided would give returning volunteers a chance to help Claireville, without the ongoing administration of a formal group.

- Recommendation 3a: Create an identity for Claireville Conservation Area through the development of a marketing and communications strategy.
- Recommendation 3b: Review and install clear wayfinding signage where needed.
- Recommendation 3c: Link existing education and engagement programs to the upcoming marketing and communications strategy
- Recommendation 3d: Investigate options for a volunteer group or network to help steward Claireville

Objective 4: Improve Public Access at Claireville

Public access to the park was identified as an issue with respect to access to washrooms and the lack of indoor facilities. That need for facilities will increase if additional programming and visitors increase. Construction of an indoor facility is not feasible, nor would it be consistent with the management plan, but there is an opportunity to investigate alternative uses of the Field Centre.

Trails are one of the most popular amenities offered at Claireville. As part of TRCA’s Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region, there is an opportunity to connect existing trails to the larger regional network, which will facilitate active transportation routes that connect communities to Claireville. That work has already commenced with plans to begin construction in Claireville North in Spring 2021.

- Recommendation 4a: Investigate washroom options
- Recommendation 4b: Investigate opportunities for the Field Centre
- Recommendation 4c: Complete inter-regional trail connecting the City of Brampton to the City of Toronto trail network.

Objective 5: Investigate new, and supplement existing, programs at Claireville

The investigation revealed strong interest in the expansion of existing programming at Claireville, specifically around community gardens, programs for newcomers, and the possibility of hosting festivals (where appropriate).

- Recommendation 5a: Consider programs for newcomers
- Recommendation 5b: Explore opportunities for urban agriculture, including the lease of community gardens
- Recommendation 5c: Investigate revenue generating opportunities
- Recommendation 5d: Continue to investigate festivals

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Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following strategies set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:

Strategy 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

FINANCIAL DETAILS

Work to undertake the development of the Activation Plan was covered by account 128-50.

Funding for actions identified in the Activation Plan will be identified on an ongoing basis.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Once review by the Regional Watershed Alliance is complete and any input considered by staff, the plan will be reviewed one last time by municipal partners and stakeholders who were integral in the development of the plan prior to finalization. Recommendations in the plan will be carried out through coordination with relevant TRCA divisions and project teams. Some recommendations will require collaboration and partnerships with external agencies, and staff will continue to seek out those opportunities as they arise. Once finalized, the Activation Plan will also be brought to the TRCA Board of Directors for endorsement.

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Attachments: 1

Attachment 1: Claireville Conservation Area Public Use Activation Plan