

**Ottawa East
Community
Association**



Old Town Hall

Sustainable Living Ottawa East



Vie écologique d'Ottawa Est

July 3, 2013

Robin Bennett
Cycling Facilities Coordinator
City of Ottawa

Rideau River Western Pathway - Recommendations of OOECA and SLOE

Dear Mr. Bennett:

The Old Ottawa East Community Association (OOECA) and Sustainable Living Ottawa East (SLOE) are pleased that the City of Ottawa is developing a functional design for the Rideau River Western Pathway (RRWP) and we welcome the opportunity to provide our suggestions and recommendations for the design work.

In 2010, City Council identified the RRWP as one of five high-priority missing links that would close gaps in the urban part of the City's cycling and pedestrian "off-road" network. Indeed, this work would have implemented a longstanding component of the Official Plan whereby a multi-use pathway was planned to run along the west side of the Rideau River all the way from Sandy Hill's Strathcona Park to Old Ottawa South's Linda Thom Park at Bank Street. However, because of budgetary pressures, funding was not allocated for the RRWP, much to the disappointment of the Old Ottawa East community.

Although for many decades there has been a rough path along the 2.5-kilometre stretch of the Rideau River in Old Ottawa East, it wasn't until 2006 that the community, though SLOE, began concerted efforts to make the pathway a critical part of the community and, really, Ottawa.

SLOE conceived the pathway as the "Rideau River Nature Trail," and its development was to "enhance the ecological integrity of the shoreline, maintain the existing sense of tranquility, improve amenities and provide better connectivity." In short, the pathway, in the view of the community, is far more than just "another piece of transportation infrastructure."

Under the leadership of SLOE, our defined goals are for a completed pathway that will:

- Help protect and promote the beauty and biodiversity of the Rideau River and its shoreline.
- Better connect OOE with Old Ottawa South, Sandy Hill, Overbrook and Alta Vista, giving residents, students and employees an appealing option for walking or cycling.
- Strengthen the identity of the Old Ottawa East community by enhancing its beautiful eastern "spine."
- Provide a quiet and largely natural refuge from the streets of Ottawa.

Progress

Over the years, we have contributed significantly towards the realization of these goals. Specific achievements include:

- development of an ecological profile of the shoreline through collaboration with scientists and the community
- installation of a set of six interpretive panels as well as feature signs and trail markers to raise awareness and promote stewardship
- design charettes (general and Brantwood Park)
- inclusion of a 10-metre strip for the pathway along the river with an adjoining 30-metre strip of greenspace for the Oblates' lands within the council-approved Community Design Plan
- awareness-building and input-gathering walks with community residents and others including Robin Bennett, Nelson Edwards, RVCA representatives, councillors, MP, City committees
- A lantern-lit shoreline performance walk (with the interpretive panels as a central feature) attended by close to 200 community members
- map of trail with priorities to guide large-scale work as well as ad hoc projects arising from various funding sources (attached)
- vegetation management plans, developed collaboratively with the City's Forestry Services, for the trail through Brantwood and Springhurst parks;
- plan for how the pathway should run through and into Brantwood Park (prepared by landscape architect Martha Lush)

- extensive tree / shrub planting as well as herbaceous planting to promote a naturalized riparian buffer (native species) and to combat invasive species
- ongoing removal of invasive plant species
- building and installation of amenities (dock at foot of Clegg Street, benches, sitting boulders)
- guardianship / "adopt a park" for Brantwood, Springhurst and Rideau River Trail (166 Lees) parks
- completion of the soft-path Springhurst and Rideau River Trail parks (166 Lees) segment of the trail (done in conjunction with the rebuilding of a major trunk sewer)
- completion of northern half of University of Ottawa segment of the trail and successful community-City-university collaboration to ensure this was near the river rather than by the Queensway (done in conjunction with the construction of the new playing field/stadium).

This extensive amount of work has been done in partnership and with the support of many groups and individuals, including numerous staff of the City of Ottawa. Over the last six years, SLOE applied for and obtained grants from a variety of funding sources so that specific projects could be completed. Examples include the extensive tree planting and naturalization at many locations along the river; design and installation of signs on the natural attributes of the river; the design of the pathway through Brantwood Park; and inventorying the natural environment along the river.

Recently, with the approval of the new light rail transit system and the related transit-oriented development at Lees, the potential importance of the Rideau River Western Pathway has increased, given how active transportation routes contribute to TOD. Furthermore, the City's increased emphasis on active transportation now makes the completion of RRWP a City priority.

Recommended Attributes of Completed Pathway

Overall, SLOE strongly recommends that design of the pathway should result in the most natural, beautiful and comfortable pathway in the core section of the City. Unlike other pathways such as those along the Rideau Canal, the Rideau River Western Pathway is remarkably quiet and soothing - it really is possible to be in nature. Thus the pathway is a natural ribbon of green and blue, providing an oasis in the middle of the City.

In view of the progress that has already been made and the extensive consultation SLOE has conducted over the last six years, specific attributes that should be reflected in the functional design of the RRWP through Old Ottawa East are:

1. Make pathway environmentally and river friendly. Protecting the delicate river shoreline area is key given the abundance of wildlife, including many snapping turtles and other herptiles, as well as waterfowl and songbirds, along the route. Snapping turtles are a species of special concern provincially and designated special concern federally per the federal Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC); the turtles nest along the shoreline and the shoreline is a documented nursery area.

We specifically recommend that the pathway be "pulled back" from the shoreline so that the "riparian zone" is not disturbed by the construction and location of the pathway.

2. Prioritize the safety and comfort of pedestrians. A key desirable attribute of the pathway at present is that pedestrians can walk in comfort and safety and are not threatened by high-speed cyclists.

3. Respect neighbouring properties / land-owners / park users. Any adverse impacts of the completed pathway should be mitigated by careful design. For instance, as below, it is recommended that for the Rideau Gardens Drive segment the cycling route be made on the roadway while the pedestrian route would go behind the houses and along the river.

Similarly, the pathway going through Brantwood Park should ensure that there is adequate distance between the pathway and the play structures. The pathway through the Oblate lands should also be designed to enhance the foreseen site development and to ensure that the new residents can enjoy the beauty of the river while having wonderful walking and cycling accessibility to other parts of the City.

Moreover, SLOE is currently undertaking research to maximize the contribution that the shoreline buffer can make to whole-site stormwater management for the future development of the Oblate lands. Establishment of naturalized swales in the buffer area is likely to be a key feature in this regard.

4. Maintain a soft surface south of the University of Ottawa. Although City staff have said that they will recommend that the route have a hard surface, this is opposed by the Community Association and SLOE. While it is reasonable to complete the University of Ottawa segment as a hard-surfaced pathway, the rest of the pathway should be finished with stone-dust or some equivalent material.

As is clearly the experience with the completed soft-surfaced Springhurst segment of the pathway, cyclists, personal mobility vehicles, and baby strollers can readily traverse the stone-dust surface.

"Road bikes" are slowed down by the soft surface but this is a positive feature, demonstrating the priority for pedestrians.

The only "vehicle" that has difficulty with a soft surface is the in-line skate but the difficulty that their users have is vastly offset by the comfort and safety that pedestrians and runners have with a soft surface. (Note that a paved-surface pathway is available on the other side of the river, which is easily accessed by cyclists and rollerbladers via the Hurdman pedestrian or transitway bridges.

In 2010 at a Transportation Committee meeting Councillor Jacques Legendre suggested that certain new pathways should be soft-surfaced because they would be more economical to build. He specifically asked City staff if there was a policy on whether the multi-use pathways had to be hard-surfaced and was told that there wasn't. Key to the development of the RRWP is that it be pedestrian-friendly and, to this end, a soft surface is seen as critical.

5. Separate the pedestrian and cycling routes at Rideau Gardens Drive. The unique area between the rear of the houses on the east side of Rideau Gardens Drive and the river edge requires special treatment. Nearby residents and users of this stretch of the existing trail are concerned that if the trail were rebuilt as a wide pathway to accommodate high-speed bicycle traffic the beauty and tranquility of this stretch would be destroyed.

Furthermore, it is likely that a number of trees would have to be removed to create a "standard" multi-use pathway. Complicating things is the reality that this segment is low-lying and is flooded in the spring and at other times.

We are recommending that bicycles be diverted from the pathway onto Rideau Gardens Drive, then to Centennial and along Brantwood Drive. It is also recommending that the design of the pathway along the river be carefully conceived to reflect the unique factors at play in this segment.

6. Implement vegetation management plan for entire pathway. The City prepared extensive vegetation management plans for the Brantwood and Springhurst Park segments of the trail. These should be revisited and updated and a vegetation management plan should be produced for the entire pathway. The community will, of course, continue its extensive volunteer efforts alongside the City to implement these plans.

Recommended Priorities

Recognizing that budgetary limitations are very much in play, the OOECA recommends that the City complete the Rideau River Western Pathway over the upcoming three years and do so in "bite-sized" chunks that connect already-completed portions of the pathway. A key factor will be to complete the pathway work along the OOE shoreline at and under the transitway bridge over the Rideau River at the same time as the bridge is being rebuilt for LRT.

Phased priorities from the community's perspective are as follow:

1. Acquire from the Oblates the necessary lands to complete the pathway through the Oblates lands. The Oblates segment is the only section of the pathway route that is comprised of privately-held lands, but as noted above, lands along the river are to become public property as per the approved community design plan. The sooner negotiations begin with the Oblates the sooner planning and construction of this segment can begin. During the course of the CDP discussions it was suggested by several parties that the transfer of the river pathway corridor and the adjacent greenspace could satisfy some or all of the requirement for the developments to contribute five percent of the subject lands for parkland.

2. Complete the University of Ottawa section. This short section could be completed relatively easily but needs to be done to accommodate future changes to the University of Ottawa campus. However, the University is likely to be prohibited from building with 30 metres of the shore so there should be plenty of space for the pathway.

3. Construct the link by / over / under transitway bridge (grade change). The connection of the University of Ottawa pathway segment to the existing pathway on the other side of the transitway / LRT bridge requires careful consideration. The current sets of stairs will not be sufficient to allow easy access so the design of ramps or a very short bridge over the transitway should be considered.

4. Construct the pathway through Brantwood Park with reference to the Martha Lush plan. Considerable effort and community consultation resulted in the proposed plan for the segment through Brantwood Park. These plans have already been provided to the City and could be refined and refreshed.

5. Construct Rideau Gardens Drive segment (pedestrian/cyclist separation). Note discussion above.

6. Construct Brantwood Drive segment: This segment is relatively short and there is the potential for it being on the existing roadway.

7. Construct ramp between Brantwood Drive and Brantwood Park (grade change): The ramp that exists is too steep and muddy for pedestrians with limited mobility

8. Construct ramp from Clegg / Brantwood Park to Oblates segment (grade change). This is the biggest obstacle on the trail and makes it difficult for even walkers to get onto the Oblate segment of the pathway. Various options are suggested in Martha Lush's Brantwood Park plan.

9. Construct Oblate segment. This should be done in conjunction with related stormwater management work and shoreline restoration – taking into account related research that SLOE is currently spearheading -- and dealing with the potentially contaminated soil / fill of this section. The Community Association and SLOE are of the view that the completion of the Oblate section should not wait for completion of the development of the institutional lands because this development could take a very long time and, secondly, the completion of the pathway will contribute to the value and accessibility of the development.

The priority of completing the section from McIlraith Bridge to Belmont in OOS will have to be determined in consultation with OOS residents and OSCA.

Conclusion

The City of Ottawa is to be congratulated for moving forward on developing a plan for the completion of the Rideau River Western Pathway. It is a key missing link in the central "active transportation" network and will provide critical connectivity at the Lees TOD development and with both existing and proposed routes (e.g., Clegg-Fifth Canal and Somerset-Donald footbridges).

But this pathway has a natural component that distinguishes it from other City core routes and this natural component must be enhanced - not diminished - by the pathway. Community members of Old Ottawa East have consulted extensively and worked very hard to plan and implement the pathway. If their perspectives and work are reflected in the completed pathway, the City of Ottawa will have superb new parkland and natural corridor that will help people move around the City in a healthy and enjoyable manner.

We look forward to the successful completion of the pathway design and City Council approving funding for some of the construction in 2014.

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Attach.