



Office of the Commissioner
Environmental Services Department

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Erin Mahoney, M. Eng.
Commissioner of Environmental Services

Date: April 4, 2019

Re: Rouge National Urban Park – status update

This memo includes a brief background on the development of Rouge National Urban Park (National Park). In addition it provides an update on the status of work towards a Service Agreement to support payments from Parks Canada for the provision of municipal services.

Significant early investment by York Region contributed to environmental restoration, enhancements and improving the visitor experience in the park

During the early stages of development of the National Park the Region made significant investments through both Greening Strategy initiatives (e.g. reforestation), and delivered major environmental restoration projects as part of the Southeast Collector Enhancement. Between 2010 and 2015 the Region spent \$6.1 million on environmental restoration work in the Bob Hunter Memorial Park and other areas including: prairie creation, tree planting, and wetland restoration. In addition, supporting infrastructure was constructed including parking facilities, three pedestrian bridges, three parking areas, trails, signage and other access improvements.

In 2014 York Region endorsed a Memorandum of Agreement advancing the establishment of Rouge National Urban Park

The National Park was established in 2015 (see map Attachment 1). The park is situated in close proximity to 20 per cent of Canada's population, and provides significant opportunities for Canadians to connect with natural, cultural and agricultural heritage.

In February 2014, staff provided Council a report on a Memorandum of Agreement, which included preliminary information on the management of Rouge National Urban Park and outlined the process by which lands would be transferred to Parks Canada. The agreement enabled all parties (municipalities and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority) to transfer lands to Parks Canada and the Memorandum of Agreement was subsequently signed by the Regional Chairman. At that time, Council requested that staff report back on a supplemental agreement with compensation for municipal services.

Both the agreement and the *Rouge National Urban Park Act* (2015) provide a strong foundation for protecting a broad range of Regional interests including; growth management, infrastructure (e.g. water waste water and roads), agriculture, transit and utilities. The agreement provides for future infrastructure needs, protects easements and allows for maintenance activities including the ongoing rehabilitation of the York Durham Sanitary Sewer (YDSS).

Rouge National Urban Park Act was amended in 2017 identifying ecological integrity as a priority while protecting agriculture

The *Rouge National Urban Park Act* (the Act) came into force in May 2015. The National Park was established with the purpose of protecting the natural environment and cultural heritage, promoting agriculture, and providing lands for Canadians to connect with nature. In June 2017, amendments to the Act placed ecological integrity as the first priority.

Parks Canada continues to assemble core lands for the largest urban National Park in North America

Creation of Rouge National Urban Park is the culmination of more than 30 years of hard work by community leaders and organizations to protect 79.1 km² of land in perpetuity. Parks Canada continues to engage with stakeholders to assemble core lands needed to complete the largest urban National Park in North America. Parks Canada now directly manages or has interest in approximately 80 per cent of lands identified for Rouge National Urban Park. Key milestones in consolidating lands for the park include:

- April 2015 – Government of Canada announced the transfer of 19.1 km² of Transport Canada lands to Parks Canada (north end of park) – the very first lands to make up Rouge National Urban Park in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).
- July 2015 – Government of Canada committed 21 km² of new lands from City of Pickering and the Township of Uxbridge to Parks Canada (east side of the park) – increasing the land base of Canada’s first national urban park by over 36 per cent.
- October 2017 – Ontario government announced the transfer of 6.5 km² of land to Parks Canada, relinquishing rights to 15.2 km² of Toronto and Region Conservation lands as well as transfer of an environmental easement on 1.1 km² of valley land owned by City of Markham. Parks Canada now directly managed nearly 80 per cent (62.9 km²) of the 79.1 km² of lands identified or committed for the park by all jurisdictions.

- November 2018 – Toronto and Region Conservation Authority transferred 1.91 km² (472 acres) known as the Bob Hunter Memorial Park to Parks Canada, and continued the work on transferring their remaining land commitments.
- The remaining land transfers are expected to take place through 2019.

Rouge National Urban Park Management Plan

Following extensive public consultation Parks Canada released the final Rouge National Urban Park Management Plan in January 2019. The plan provides a strategic framework to guide decision-making and provides a platform for launching initiatives that promote environmental protection and education. The plan includes a 10 year implementation period. Omar McDadi Acting Field Unit Superintendent, Rouge National Urban Park (replacing Pam Veinotte) thanked York Region for our significant contributions to the park and input to developing the plan. The full management plan can be reviewed at www.parksCanada.gc.ca/rouge-plan

Since 2010, a Landholders Table Working Group, consisting of York Region staff (Transportation Services, Environmental Services, and Long Range Planning), Parks Canada, City of Markham, and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority staff, has met to discuss park matters including operations (e.g. park signage installation), capital projects and other business.

In terms of management and governance, the plan speaks to collaboration with partners and stakeholders in park operations, access, infrastructure and planning. The plan proposes that inclusive and responsive governance will be achieved through advisory bodies such as a Park Advisory Committee including local government and Working Groups. With respect to park operations the plan identifies the commitment to enter into service agreements with third parties including governments.

Parks Canada provides annual Alternate Compensation Payment for municipal services which increase as lands are added to the park

As National Urban Parks are exempted from property taxation, Regional staff (Legal Services, Environmental Services and Finance) and City of Markham staff have been working with Parks Canada on an alternate compensation arrangement for municipal services (sometimes referred to as Payment in Lieu of Taxes). In 2014, City of Markham received correspondence from Parks Canada outlining draft guiding principles which would apply to calculate compensation to the municipality for municipal services. This payment is called the Alternative Compensation Payment. In addition Parks Canada suggested that they would consider paying for additional or special services (i.e. municipal services required for special events) as required.

Staff continue to update the property inventory and tax assessments as additional lands are added to the National Park. Since 2016 the Alternate Compensation Payment has been received annually by City of Markham and proportioned between City of Markham, the Region and School Boards. At this time, Finance staff are working with City of Markham and Parks Canada to confirm the payment amount for 2018 (approximately \$800,000). It is intended that

as the land assemblage is completed a Service Agreement will be developed between Parks Canada, City of Markham and the Region.

Staff are working toward securing a Service Agreement with Parks Canada

Regional staff and City of Markham staff have been meeting with Parks Canada to discuss the principles and details of a Service Agreement which would align the provision of base municipal services (e.g. emergency services, waste collection, animal control etc.) with the annual Alternate Compensation Payment. Any enhanced services will be covered by supplementary agreements as necessary.

Prior to City of Markham and York Region transferring their lands to Parks Canada, Markham needs to resolve a few remaining issues with Parks Canada including; ownership and management of community assets (e.g. Locust Hill School, Cedarena, Cedar Grove Community Centre etc.), preservation of buildings, recreational interests and trails. At this time York Region anticipates the transfer of five land parcels totalling five hectares (12.5 acres), which were small areas often associated with Regional capital projects e.g. road jog eliminations or other road realignments (see Attachment #1). City of Markham anticipates transferring approximately 13 parcels of land comprising 121 hectares (300 acres) once the Service Agreement is in place.

Staff anticipate final municipal land transfer following confirmation of Alternative Compensation Payments and finalization of Service Agreement in 2019

Parks Canada will continue to follow up and complete due diligence on land transfers to the National Park. City of Markham and York Region will continue to collaborate and align the timing of land transfers following the signing of the Service Agreement (likely to occur in 2019). During a recent meeting with City of Markham staff (February 11th), it was confirmed that City of Markham will convene a series of meetings through 2019 with Parks Canada and York Region staff. These meetings will confirm the Alternate Compensation Payment guiding principles, update the current compensation payment (reflecting addition of lands) and finalize the Service Agreement. Details on a Service Agreement will be provided to Committee and Council once finalized.

Erin Mahoney, M. Eng.
Commissioner of Environmental Services

Bruce Macgregor
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments (1)
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