

Draft Trails Master Plan presented to council

By **Angela Gismondi**

The Committee of the Whole was given an update on the development of the draft Trails Master Plan at the meeting March 9. As part of the 2014 budget process, staff requested funding to develop a Trails Master Plan that would build off of the Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan Update and the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan. The intent of the Trails Master Plan is to explore the expansion of the current and planned trails system while considering the feasibility of overall inter-connectivity of trails in individual neighbourhoods, communities and the municipality as a whole, explained Mike Tocher, a consultant with Thinc Design, in a presentation at the meeting.

The plan is intended to assist in setting standards for trail types, infrastructure and roles/responsibilities of the various agencies, partners and organizations that participate in trail planning and construction in the diverse trail systems throughout King. Once completed, the document will establish the guiding principles for the strategic development of trails within the municipality. There are currently over 108 kilometres of trail in King under various ownership including private and public. Trails include the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, Cold Creek Conservation Area, Happy Valley, Centennial Park, Seneca, Jokers Hill, Thornton Bales, Cawthra Mulock and the Greenbelt Cycling Route.

The consultation process has taken several months and has involved discussions with key stakeholders, members of staff, residents and the general public to identify the short and long term opportunities and priorities for trail development in King, Tocher explained. Some of the stakeholders which were consulted on the project include the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the King City Trails Committee, the Cold Creek Conservation Authority, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Lake Simcoe and Region Conservation Authority, York Region and the Oak Ridges Trail Association.

‘This is an exciting project for King,’ said Tocher. ‘We are still looking for comments and we’re very much interested in feedback as we go through this process.’

According to Tocher, the survey results showed that the most used trails in King are the Oak Ridges Trail, the King City Trail, the Cold Creek Trail and the Happy Valley Trail systems. They are most used for walking and hiking, dog walking and equestrian activities and are most often accessed by car.

‘The one thing I take from this is that the existing trails are well used,’ said Tocher. ‘Another thing that is important is signage and wayfinding. If you could do anything on this program, that one thing could really help. In many ways, it’s about improving what you already have, you’ve already got a lot of trails out there and they are quite well used and interesting to visit. We’re looking for opportunities to enhance the existing trail network.’

The draft plan identifies short, medium and long term goals. As for the short term goals, in the next one to five years, the report recommends a signage strategy, marketing and promotions, operations and maintenance, repairs to existing trails and new trail connections within urban areas. For the medium term, in the next five to 10 years, the plan recommends trail connections between communities inside King and for long term goals, over the next 10-plus years, the consultants recommend new trails to link Kings trail network to trails outside of King.

In terms of budget, overall the plan identifies funding requirements in the amount of \$5,978,100 further broken down into short term (\$1,446,100), medium term (\$1,152,000) and long term (\$3,680,000) categories. The report explains the costs are primarily related to the construction of the projects and the costs associated with the plans, specifically for construction, may not be borne completely by the municipality as many require joint ventures and partnerships.

Councillor Debbie Schaefer was pleased to hear about the draft plan.

‘This is so very exciting,’ said Schaefer, adding it’s a great way for people moving into the community to explore their new home. ‘I love the big picture. It really helps to see how we can make progress on this.’

Mayor Steve Pellegrini was happy to hear that the consultants will be going back to the community for more input and feedback.

‘It’s music to my ears that we get to engage them more,’ said Pellegrini.

In terms of next steps, after receiving input from council, Thinc Design and staff will reengage key stakeholders and community groups and host one more public information session to gain feedback prior to finalization of the report. Following this exercise, staff will bring the finalized document back to council for approval.