
Subject:	Natural Heritage Resources Study – Final Recommendations Report
Staff Report No.	DS-027-22
Department:	Development Services
Date:	June 15, 2022

Recommendation:

- 1) That Council endorse in principle the Natural Heritage Resources Study (Attachment 1 to this report) to inform the Town's Official Plan Review.**

1. Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the policy recommendations and mapping developed through the Natural Heritage Resources Study.

2. Executive Summary:

A Natural Heritage Resources Study has been undertaken by the Town to support the Town's Official Plan Review. It included a comprehensive review of mapping and policy including a review of the Growth Plan (2020), Greenbelt Plan (2017), Ontario's Invasive Species Strategic Plan (2012), Lake Simcoe Protection Plan (2009), Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2017), Provincial Policy Statement (2020), York Region Official Plan (2010), and Draft York Region Official Plan (2021). The Project Consultant has provided policy recommendations and updated mapping based on the comprehensive review.

The Natural Heritage Resources Study included a policy review, as well as recommendations pertaining to general Natural Heritage System policies, recommendations related to linkages between key natural heritage and hydrologic features, urban forests, ecological offsetting, invasive species management and requirements for environmental impact studies. Additionally, the mapping review included a technical desktop mapping exercise to confirm new and existing natural heritage features. The result of this comprehensive policy review and mapping exercise are presented in this report.

3. Background:

The Natural Heritage Resources Study was undertaken to support the Town's on-going Official Plan Review. The purpose of the Natural Heritage Resources Study is to guide policy development to help protect and sustainably manage the Town's natural environment. The Study identified and explored policy recommendations to support the natural environment, determined promotion of environmental protection and awareness, for which key recommendations and policies were developed.

A key objective of the Study was to address the existing policy constraints and opportunities with respect to the natural environment. The policy directions developed as part of the Natural Heritage Resources Study will help to inform the Town's Draft Official Plan.

The Natural Heritage Resources Study was initiated in November, 2021. Since the project initiation, Town Staff have been actively working alongside the consultant team in ensuring that the policy recommendations and technical review of mapping is completed in a comprehensive manner.

The Study has been completed in two phases. The Phase 1 – Natural Heritage Resources Background Review included a technical review of the policy and mapping and was completed in March, 2021. The Phase 2 – Policy Recommendations Report, includes the development of updated mapping and policy recommendations, and forms the basis and content for this report.

Consultation

Consultation has included a Technical Advisory Committee consisting of internal Town Departments, York Region, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority staff.

Furthermore, as part of Phase 1 – Natural Heritage Resources Background Review, Staff held a 2-week long online Public Open House from March 3 – 18. The online Public Open House format was selected in order to provide the public with sufficient opportunity to comment on the technical review. Through the dedicated webpage developed for the Public Open House, the public had an opportunity to review and provide comments on the policy papers and technical mapping (included as an Appendix to the Final Recommendations Report).

4. Analysis and Options: Policy Recommendations & Mapping

The consultant team has now prepared a Policy Recommendations and Mapping Report to complete Phase 2 of this project (See Attachment 1 to this report). The report is a result of a detailed technical review of relevant policy documents including the Growth Plan (2020), Greenbelt Plan (2017), Ontario's Invasive Species Strategic Plan (2012), Lake

Simcoe Protection Plan (2009), Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2017), Provincial Policy Statement (2020), York Region Official Plan (2010), and Draft York Region Official Plan (2021).

As part of the comprehensive review for the Policy Recommendations and Mapping Report, a technical mapping exercise was also undertaken whereby mapping of existing environmental features and constraints were reviewed and updated accordingly. Below is a summary of the key policies and mapping review found within the Policy Recommendations and Mapping Report.

4.1 Policy Recommendations

The Natural Heritage Resources Study was intended to determine key recommendations and policies to support the Official Plan Review by identifying and exploring policy recommendations to support the natural environment and promote environmental protection and awareness.

As noted above, the recommended policies also reconcile the policy direction provided in the Provincial Policy Statement (2020), The Greenbelt Plan (2017), the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2020), the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2017), the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan (2009) and the current and proposed policies of the York Region Official Plan.

The recommended policies for the new Official Plan have been divided into two sections (1) general Natural Heritage policies which apply to the entire Town, and (2) Natural Heritage System policies which apply to lands designated Natural Heritage System lying outside the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

Based on the identification of opportunities for the Town's Natural Heritage policies, key policy recommendations have been made pertaining to:

- Required boundary modifications to the Town's Greenlands and Natural Heritage System;
- Opportunities for connections/protection/enhancement of the Town's Greenlands and Natural Heritage System;
- Policy opportunities for enhancement of natural features on Town-owned lands;
- The protection/enhancement/restoration/expansion of natural areas and the urban forest;
- Sustainable development and management practices during the construction phase of development; and
- Requirements for wildlife habitat conservation/enhancement of natural forest cover/connectivity to urban forest cover, and tree canopy policies.

Further details can be found in the report with respect to natural heritage protection, restoration targets, tree canopy targets, identification of significant woodlands, damage to key natural heritage or hydrologic features, development or site alteration within key natural heritage features, linkages, urban forests, ecological offsetting, invasive species

management, environmental impact study requirements, and natural heritage policy implementation.

4.2 Mapping

As part of the comprehensive technical review of the mapping undertaken for the Natural Heritage Resources Study by the project consultant, significant mapping adjustments were required to accurately reflect key natural heritage and hydrologic features within the Town.

Using updated mapping from the Province, Conservation Authorities, York Region and all other applicable sources, refinements to mapping of key natural heritage and hydrologic features were produced to support the policy recommendations for the Natural Heritage System.

A total of 36 maps were produced as part of the detailed mapping exercise undertaken by the project consultant. The mapping, included in the Final Recommendations Report, reflects review and refinement to Town-wide key natural heritage and hydrologic features including the Town's Natural Heritage System, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, Lakes and Ponds, Watercourses, Wetlands, and Woodlands. In addition to this, mapping for the Town's Settlement Areas (Gormley, Vandorf, Community of Stouffville, Ballantrae, and Musselman Lake) was also refined to reflect the Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, Lakes and Ponds, Watercourses, Wetlands, and Woodlands.

Additionally, there is opportunity for the mapping for the Natural Heritage System to be further confirmed and refined through Environmental Impact Studies submitted through the development approvals process. The precise delineation of the Natural Heritage System may be undertaken thorough staking limits of the system which may be undertaken in co-operation with the Town, the applicable Conservation Authority, and the York Region.

4.3 Next Steps

The project consultant has completed the work program related to the Natural Heritage Resources Study. This report will be forwarded to the Technical Advisory Committee for final review and comments. Pending final refinements, the mapping and policy recommendations produced through the technical review will now inform the new draft Official Plan. The draft Official Plan will be presented to the public at an upcoming Statutory Public Open House.

5. Financial Implications:

None at this time.

6. Alignment with Strategic Plan:

1. Expanding the tax base through a growing, diversified economy
Building and maintaining a tax base that supports the highest quality program and service delivery.
3. Asset Planning, Maintenance and Development
Successful stewardship of the infrastructure and facilities required to support a growing community and vibrant economy.

7. Attachments:

1. Natural Resources Heritage Study – Final Recommendations Report

8. Related Reports:

None

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