



Administration and Operations Committee Report

To: The Chair and Members of the Administration and Operations Committee
From: Stacey Ellins, Director of Parks & Recreation
Date: February 17, 2026
Report #: RPT-0001-26
Subject: North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan
Purpose: For Approval

Recommendation

That RPT-0001-26 North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan report be received as information; and

That the North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan be approved.

Executive Summary

The North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan establishes a bold yet pragmatic long-term vision that guides the development of a connected, sustainable, and accessible trail network across the North of the Nith over the next 20 years.

The Master Plan balances the protection and enhancement of the natural environment with enhanced recreational opportunities. The Plan is supported by an Implementation Strategy that outlines the steps, projects, and processes the County, in collaboration with Community and First Nation partners, can undertake in the short, medium, and long term to translate the vision into action.

Eight (8) Master Plan objectives have been developed with input from the public, Community Partners, and First Nation Partners:

- Enhance recreational opportunities.
- Incorporate Indigenous place-keeping and values.
- Help people learn about the cultural and natural history of the Nith River with interpretive elements and places for outdoor education and learning.
- Protect and improve natural areas.
- Reduce risks from natural hazards, such as steep slopes, flood-prone areas, erosion zones, and other landscape conditions that can pose safety risks.
- Restrict ATV and dirt bike use.
- Ensure North of the Nith remains a valuable and sustainable natural space for future generations through careful planning and ecological restoration.

Strategic Plan Priority

Strategic Priority 5 - Healthy, Safe, and Engaged Citizens

Impacts and Mitigation

Social Impacts

Recreational trails and open spaces profoundly impact social well-being by fostering community cohesion, reducing social isolation, and enhancing mental and physical health. They act as accessible, free, and inclusive hubs for recreation that strengthen neighborhood relationships, improve safety, and provide critical mental relief from stress and anxiety

Environmental Impacts

Community trails and open spaces offer significant environmental benefits, including biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, and natural cooling of urban areas. Proper trail management and design are critical to balancing ecological health with public recreation. The North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan balances the protection and enhancement of the natural environment with enhanced recreational opportunities.

Economic Impacts

Recreational trails and open spaces generate significant economic impacts by boosting local tourism, increasing property values, and supporting jobs in construction, maintenance, and hospitality. These recreational areas stimulate local economies through visitor spending and improve public health, which can lead to reduced healthcare costs.

Approved and completed North of the Nith capital projects to date include \$50,000 in 2023 and \$50,000 in 2024 for Master Plan and Archeology Stage 1 Assessment and \$100,000 in 2025 for CN fencing along Railway Street.

In addition, approved 2026 North of the Nith capital projects include \$100,000 to complete further studies/ design (i.e. Slope stabilization; Archaeology, etc.) and \$350,000 for perimeter fencing, signage, and gates for the County of Brant Operational Zone.

Future funding for the list of projects outlined in the North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan Implementation Strategy will continue to be the subject of future County operating and capital budgets.

Report

Background

The North of the Nith is a 344-acre (139 hectare) area of land owned by the County of Brant and the Grand River Conservation Authority, located along the north side of the Nith River near Paris and is largely forested with diverse natural features. Currently, the area is enjoyed informally by community members for recreation and includes natural features like wetlands, floodplains, and the Nith River, which supports species at risk.

The purpose of the Master Plan is to create a balanced vision for the future of North of the Nith that respects the natural environment, provides opportunities for education, enhances recreational opportunities, and celebrates the history of the Nith River.

The following benefits of the Master Plan aim to enhance the quality of life for residents while safeguarding the natural and cultural heritage of the North of the Nith lands.

Recreational opportunities:

- Utilize available lands for recreation and trails, offering activities like mountain biking, hiking, and more, close to the urban boundary of Paris.
- Provide safe, legal access to the property for a variety of groups and the public.

Environmental preservation and enhancement:

- Enhance and restore natural heritage features, including wetlands, tributaries, and ecological linkages.
- Mitigate flood risks by creating additional wetlands and planting erosion-reducing species where feasible.

Improved safety and accessibility:

- Foster a safer environment by managing unauthorized trail use and ensuring proper access points.

Educational opportunities:

- Provide educational opportunities that celebrate the cultural and ecological history of the Nith River.

Community and economic benefits:

- Promote sustainable ecotourism, enhancing the economic benefit in the County of Brant.
- Improve the mental, social, and physical well-being of the community by creating spaces that encourage outdoor activities and social interactions.

Long-term sustainability:

- Ensure the area remains a valuable and sustainable natural space for future generations through careful planning and ecological restoration.

The development of the North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan consisted of the following phases:

Phase 1: “Understand” - Existing Conditions Summary Report

- The first phase, “Understand”, focused on learning from the land and people, analyzing the existing conditions for its trail potential and ecological characteristics, developing a draft vision and set of guiding principles, and identifying opportunities and constraints which were summarized in the Existing Conditions Summary Report.

Phase 2: “Explore” - Draft Master Plan & Implementation Strategy

- The next phase focused on developing and design options for feedback and review by First Nation Partners, Community Partners, the public and County departments through meetings, workshops and Engage Brant.

Phase 3: “Decide” - Final development of the North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan

- The final phase focused on the development of the Master Plan and Implementation Strategy, ensuring alignment with feedback and project objectives.

Analysis

The North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan (Attachment 1) focuses on enhancing connectivity and access from Paris and the surrounding region, formalizing low-impact trails and amenities for outdoor recreation, enhancing the natural environment and supporting sustainable use of the existing natural environment.

The Master Plan has five primary chapters:

Chapter 01 – Introduction and Background. Describes the Master Plan’s purpose, context, engagement process, and key opportunities and constraints.

Chapter 02 – What We Heard. Overview of the engagement process and summary of key findings.

Chapter 03 – Vision and Guiding Principles. Defines the vision and guiding principles that underpin the Master Plan.

Chapter 04 – Master Plan. Illustrates the five Big Moves and design guidelines.

Chapter 05 – Implementation Strategy. Identifies projects and actions that the County will carry out to implement the vision.

First Nation, Community Partner and Public Engagement

The project team prioritized early and ongoing engagement with the First Nation and Community Partners to ensure the projects success and quality assurance. The development of the Master Plan included consultation with the below two (2) First Nation Partners and ten (10) Community Partners, along with public input. Engagement started in Q3 of 2024 and carried through until Q4 of 2026. The County of Brant received great interest, information and feedback from all First Nation Partners, Community Partners and the Public which helped shape the development to the Master Plan.

First Nation and Community Partners include:

- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation
- Six Nations of the Grand River
- Amrize
- Brant Cycling Club

- Brant Death Racers
- Brant for Nature
- Brant Municipal Enterprises
- Brant Tree Coalition
- Brant Waterway Foundations
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Freshwater Conservation Canada
- Grand River Conservation Authority

For full details on First Nation, Community Partner and Public Engagement please refer to appendices within Attachment 1 - North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan.

In addition to a strong interest in seeing mountain bike trails throughout North of the Nith, the community also expressed a desire in having a variety of trail types and experiences. Most of the primary trail network identified in the Master Plan already exists. The Plan focuses on upgrading most existing trails to current sustainable trail standards so they can better support these shared goals. The Master Plan recommends approximately 15 km of primary trails, broken down as follows:

- Shared trails: approximately 12 km (walking, running, biking)
- Pedestrian-only trail: approximately 1 km (Boardwalk and Discovery Trail)
- Mountain Bike Trail Park: approximately 2 km (10 acres dedicated to mountain biking)

At the final First Nation and Community Partner workshop on October 21st, 2025, the draft Master Plan was presented, which incorporated findings/feedback from Phase 1 and the proposed primary trail network. Overall, the partners' feedback on the draft Master Plan and primary trail network was generally supportive of the direction. It was discussed and agreed that the Master Plan would include a recommendation for the creation of a Trails Committee. This committee will be composed of Brant Cycling Club, Brant For Nature and Brant Waterways Foundation representatives to establish the secondary trail network in North of the Nith, with guidance from the County.

Since the October 21st, 2025 workshop, the consultant has determined that approximately 5 km to 7 km of potential secondary trails dedicated to mountain biking is anticipated within the areas identified within the Master Plan as the Dunes (43 acres) and the Oak Savannah (48 acres).

In summary, the proposed trail network (primary/ secondary) includes approximately 12 km of shared trails, 1 km of pedestrian trail and up to 9 km of dedicated mountain biking trails. Therefore, at build-out, cyclists will have access to between 19 km and 21 km of trail in North of the Nith. It should be noted that there are significant constraints within this site that limit trail development beyond which has been identified including: the County Operational Zone; Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI); conservation authority hazards; areas of high archaeological potential; areas with slope stability issues; and phasing constraints related to mineral extraction (Amrize).

In addition, a meeting was held on January 20th, 2026 with members of the Brant Cycling Club and Brant Waterways Foundation to go over key terms (Attachment 2) that would be required in the Brant Cycling Club Draft Stewardship Agreement – Phase 1 (anticipated to

include the Mountain Bike Trail Park and Penman's Pass Trail Extension), subject to Council approval.

Significant milestones have been completed to date and staff have worked hard to ensure the project continues to progress and meet the timelines outlined in the North of the Nith Project Charter (Attachment 3), which was developed by County staff in collaboration with the Brant Waterways Foundation and Brant Cycling Club.

- CN – Railway Street Acquisition and Fencing
- Approval “in principle” of a Maintenance Agreement between the County of Brant and the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) re: lands within the North of the Nith project boundary under GRCA ownership
- Ongoing collaboration with Amrize and the Grand River Conservation Authority to progress the project
- Archaeology Stage 1 Assessment
- Pre-consultation with the MECP regarding land use changes and required ECA amendments
- Preliminary discussions for the development of the Brant Cycling Club Draft Stewardship Agreement – Phase 1

Implementation Strategy

Chapter 5 of the Master Plan outlines the implementation strategy in detail over the next twenty (20) years and can be summarized as follows:

A total of 30 projects and initiatives, totaling \$8.3M and broken into three (3) phases as follows:

Short Term (1-5 years) - \$2.1M

A1 - Agreements: Construction, Operations and Maintenance, and Access

A2 - Create the Trails Committee

1.1 - Paris Landfill ECA Amendment

1.2 - Operational Zone Fence

1.3 - Penman's Pass Trail Extension

1.4 - CN Fence

1.5 - Mountain Bike Trail Park

1.6 - Southern Peninsula

A3 - Invasive Species Removal Strategy

A4 - Environmental Impact Studies Scope

A5 - Habitat Preservation and Enhancement Study

A6 - ATV and Dirt Bike Enforcement Strategy

Medium Term (6-10 years) - \$1.4M

2.1 - Parking Lot (Railway Street)

2.2 - The Dunes Loop

2.3 - The Marshland and Boardwalk Loops

2.4 - Charlie Creek Restoration

- 2.5 - *Floodplain Trail Removal*
- 2.6 - *North of the Nith Entrance Signs*
- 2.7 - *First Nation Gateway Art Commission*
- 2.8 - *West Switchback*
- 2.9 - *Park Entrance: Gateway Hub*
- B1 - *Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage System*
- 2.10 - *Potential Future Park Entrance: Railway Lane*
- 2.11 - *Potential Future Railway Street & Railway Lane Improvements*

Long Term (11+ years) - \$4.8M

- 3.1 - *Education Centre Building*
- 3.2 - *The Oak Savanna Loop*
- 3.3 - *The Rivers Edge Trail*
- 3.4 - *Decommission Trails South of the Prairie Meadow Loop*
- 3.5 - *Park Entrance Stage 3: Parking Lot Expansion*
- 3.6 - *First Nation Ceremonial Spaces*

The Implementation Strategy is flexible so that projects can advance incrementally, independently, or sequentially, depending on timing, coordination and conflicts. Upon Council approval of the Master Plan, staff will develop and propose a capital program for Council's consideration, based on the Implementation Strategy and funding/ partnership opportunities. The Implementation Strategy identifies potential partners for projects that include the GRCA, First Nation and private or volunteer organizations.

Summary and Recommendations

Grounded in site analysis and shaped by community input, the North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan is the long-term roadmap for a connected, welcoming landscape that celebrates nature and recreation. The North of the Nith vision will be realized over time through coordinated collaboration among departments, agencies, First Nation, Community Partners and the public.

It is recommended that the RPT-0001-26 North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan be received, and the North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan be approved.

Attachments

- Attachment 1 - North of the Nith Trails and Open Spaces Master Plan
- Attachment 2 - Key Terms: Brant Cycling Club Draft Stewardship Agreement - Phase 1
- Attachment 3 - North of the Nith Project Charter

Reviewed By

Philip Mete, General Manager of Community Services
Alison Newton, Chief Administrative Officer

Copied To

Andrea Bazzard, Director of Environmental Services
Greg Demers, Director of Roads
Kathy Ballayntyne, Director of Facilities and Special Projects
Heather Mifflin, Director of Finance, Treasurer

By-law and/or Agreement

By-law Required	No
Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and /or Clerk	No