

SAUGEEN VALLEY CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday January 21, 2021 10:00 a.m.
Electronic

AGENDA

1. Adoption of Agenda
2. Declaration of Pecuniary Interest
3. Approval of Minutes – October 29, 2020 – **attached**
4. Matters Arising from the Minutes
 - a. Gates at Durham Upper Dam – **attached** – Jennifer Stephens
5. New Business

Adjournment

SAUGEEN VALLEY
CONSERVATION
AUTHORITY

Conservation through Cooperation

MINUTES

MEETING: PARKS COMMITTEE
DATE: Thursday October 29, 2020
TIME: 1:00 p.m.
LOCATION: McGowan Falls Pavilion, Durham Conservation Area

CHAIR: Cheryl Grace

MEMBERS PRESENT: Maureen Couture, Dan Gieruszak, Sue Paterson

ABSENT WITH REGRETS: Mike Myatt

OTHERS PRESENT: Jennifer Stephens, GM/S-T,
Donna Lacey, Manager, Forestry & Lands,
Janice Hagan, Recording Secretary

1. Adoption of Agenda

MOTION # PKC20-07

Moved by Sue Paterson
Seconded by Maureen Couture
THAT the agenda be adopted as presented.

CARRIED

2. Declaration of pecuniary interest

No persons declared a pecuniary interest relative to any item on the agenda.

3. Minutes of the Parks Committee Meeting – September 23, 2020

The minutes of the meeting held September 23, 2020 were approved as distributed.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

- a. Durham Upper Dam (DUD) Walkway Gates

Donna Lacey provided an update on the closure of the DUD walkway gates and informed the committee that the gates have been closed from dusk to dawn as per committee recommendations. She noted that there had not been any complaints from the public regarding the closure. Staff will be obtaining an opinion about locking the gates in the off season from the Municipality of West Grey.

- b. Review of Draft Terms of Reference

Donna presented the draft Parks Committee Terms of Reference. After discussion, the following motion was passed:

MOTION #PKC20-08

Moved by Maureen Couture

Seconded by Dan Gieruszak

THAT the Parks Committee recommends to the full Authority that the draft Terms of Reference be approved as presented.

CARRIED

5. New Business

- a. Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority Management Plan Outline

Donna presented a draft Park Management Plan outline. The plan would assist in future budget planning for SVCA parks. The Members directed staff to include Health & Safety in Section 5, Staffing.

MOTION #PKC20-09

Moved by Sue Paterson

Seconded by Maureen Couture

THAT the Parks Committee recommends to the full Authority that the SVCA Park Management Plan Outline be approved as amended.

CARRIED

6. Other Business

- a. Camping Fees

The committee members discussed the current camping fees and recommended that due to COVID-19, the 2021 camping fees should remain at the 2020 rates.

- b. Pamphlets

Donna advised the committee that there are 2 boxes of campground pamphlets and it would be prudent to continue to use them in 2021 rather than printing new ones. The members concurred with this recommendation.

7. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will take place in March 2020. The date and location will be announced.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 1:27 p.m. on motion of Dan Gieruszak and Sue Paterson.

Cheryl Grace
Chair

Janice Hagan
Recording Secretary

DRAFT



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TO: Chair and Members, Parks Committee; SVCA Directors, Municipality of West Grey
FROM: Jennifer Stephens, GM/S-T
DATE: January 21, 2021
SUBJECT: Gate Closure – Durham Upper Dam

RECOMMENDATION

THAT staff be directed to recommend to the Board of Directors that a new SVCA Water Resources Committee be formed to address concerns related to water and erosion control infrastructure, water quality, and flood forecasting & warning;

AND THAT staff be directed to advise the Board of Directors at their January 22nd meeting of the feedback obtained from the public with regard to the DUD gates being closed;

AND THAT the gates to the pedestrian walkway remain closed until such time as the Board of Directors or the Water Resources Committee (if formed), decide otherwise;

AND FURTHER THAT the Municipality of West Grey and the public be advised of this decision.

Background

At their September 19, 2017 meeting, the Parks Committee discussed closing the Durham Upper Dam (DUD) crossing between dusk to dawn to limit the number of visitors to the Durham Conservation Area (DCA) in the evening and overnight. Vandalism at the DCA has been an issue in recent years. The Motion (PKC17-05) recommending action pertaining to the DUD crossing was tabled.

On September 23, 2020, the Parks Committee met for the first time in three years. At this meeting, the unresolved issue of the DUD crossing was discussed. Staff explained that locking the walkway gates at the DUD continues to be a matter of relevance since trailer break-ins remain a concern at DCA. Staff recommended that the walkway gates be locked during the camping season from dusk to dawn. By Motion PKC20-04, the Committee agreed that the DUD walkway gates would be locked from dusk to dawn during the camping season. The walkway gates discussion extended to the closing the walkway gates in the off-season, since trailers are stored on sites at the DCA. The matter of health and safety on the walkway was also mentioned. The Committee directed staff to consult with the Municipality of West Grey to determine the feasibility for closing the gates during the off season. During this discussion, staff communicated the potential negative response from the community with regard to not having access direct and convenient access to the DCA.



Watershed Member Municipalities

Municipality of Arran-Elderslie, Municipality of Brockton, Township of Chatsworth, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of Hanover, Township of Howick, Municipality of Morris-Turnberry, Municipality of South Bruce, Township of Huron-Kinloss, Municipality of Kincardine, Town of Minto, Township of Wellington North, Town of Saugeen Shores, Township of Southgate, Municipality of West Grey

At the October 29, 2020 meeting, the Parks Committee was advised that there were no complaints brought forward from the public regarding closure of the DUD walkway gates from dusk to dawn. At that time, staff confirmed that a discussion was held with the Municipality of West Grey and they were supportive of closing the walkway gates should this be the decision of Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority (SVCA). It was communicated that the health and safety of residents was paramount to the Municipality. The Parks Committee recommended to staff that the DUD walkway gates be closed in the off-season but would reconsider this decision should the public respond negatively to this action. No motion was made confirming this decision.

Analysis

The walkway gates at the DUD have been closed permanently since the end of the camping season (October 31, 2020). Between January 7 and 16, nine different pieces of correspondence were received by SVCA requesting access to the DCA through the DUD walkway. In this correspondence, the main concern communicated by the public is the inconvenience and safety of accessing the DCA from other locations (attached). Staff followed up with the Municipality of West Grey when the first piece of correspondence was received. Municipal staff have communicated that they are unaware of any safety issues related to the DUD pedestrian crossing, other than during extreme ice formations during previous winters.

A permanent fence has been installed around the Durham Middle Dam by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, therefore, pedestrians crossing at this dam is no longer possible.

From a liability perspective, no Public Safety Plan has been developed for the DUD. Therefore, an assessment of the risks and mitigating actions that could take place to address those risks, has not been completed. Given that the scope of this discussion goes beyond the issue of the DCA, staff recommend that a formal Committee of SVCA be created to review and contemplate issues related to water infrastructure.

Financial Implications

If a person or person(s) were harmed while accessing the DUD, an investigation would be carried out to confirm the cause of the accident. If it were determined that SVCA had not made every effort to prevent such an accident, the conservation authority would be held liable.

Communication Plan

Staff will follow up with those individuals from the public who have submitted correspondence pertaining to accessing the DUD. They will be informed of any decisions made by the Parks Committee and the Board of Directors.

Approved By:



Jennifer Stephens
General Manager / Secretary-Treasurer

CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE MUNICIPALITY OF WEST GREY:

From: Vance Czerwinski <vczerwinski@westgrey.com>
Sent: January 14, 2021 10:12 AM
To: Donna Lacey <D.Lacey@SVCA.ON.CA>
Cc: Jennifer Stephens <j.stephens@svca.on.ca>; Laura Johnston (West Grey) <ljohnston@westgrey.com>; Steve Ayerhart <sayerhart@westgrey.com>; Kodey Hewlett <khewlett@westgrey.com>
Subject: RE: Durham Upper Dam Gate

Donna,

The Municipality of West Grey is not aware of any safety issues on the upper dam pedestrian crossing, other than during extreme ice formations during previous winters. That being said, we respectfully have no further comment on the liability of SVCA infrastructure.

Regards,

Vance Czerwinski, C.E.T., CRS
Director of Public Works and Infrastructure

Municipality of West Grey
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The Municipality of West Grey is currently under a state of emergency due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Updates will be posted to our website (www.westgrey.com) and through our Facebook and Twitter accounts (@OurWestGrey).

From: Donna Lacey [<mailto:D.Lacey@SVCA.ON.CA>]
Sent: January 11, 2021 5:07 PM
To: Vance Czerwinski <vczerwinski@westgrey.com>
Subject: Durham Upper Dam Gate

Hi Vance,

As I am sure that you are aware, there has been a letter of complaint sent to our office and your Mayor & Deputy Mayor. We are looking for feedback from you on your thoughts in regard to this issue. I would like to take your feedback, along with the letter of complaint to our Parks Committee of our Board of Directors. This Committee addressed the issue this past fall and will be responsible for looking at it again.

Thank you,
Donna Lacey
Manager of Forestry and Lands
Saugeen Conservation

CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE PUBLIC:

From: [REDACTED]
To: publicinfo@svca.on.ca, "Mayor WESTGREY" <mayor@westgrey.com>, "Deputy Mayor" <deputymayor@westgrey.com>, "Beth Hamilton" <bhamilton@westgrey.com>, "Geoffrey Shea" <gshea@westgrey.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 6, 2021 1:36:47 PM
Subject: gate closure

I am attaching a word document that I have written in regards to both dam gates being locked in Durham Conservation Area.

For the council, this is your town and I trust you will act on behalf of its constituents. And for the conservation authority, I also trust that you will understand how the 2 closures have severely limited accessibility and usage of the park at a time when it is needed most.

Together, I hope you can enact a quick resolution to benefit everyone.

This is my first-time approaching council and the SVCA and a response would be appreciated to let me know my voice has been heard.

WORD DOCUMENT TEXT:

Whenever I have walked or skied in the Durham Conservation area over the years, I don't think there has ever been a time when I haven't silently expressed gratitude at having such a beautiful, pristine area to explore and play in so close to my home. And now that seems to be changing.

Specifically, what I am referring to is the closure of the upper dam bridge at McGowan Falls. It has been permanently locked for weeks, the only signage up being from the fall stating the gates would be locked at 8 pm.

What this means is the conservation area is inaccessible from the middle. This now forces people to enter either from the gates on Durham Road, which is okay if you drive, but even still there is very limited, safe road parking. And what if you do not drive?

You scramble down a hill under the Heritage Bridge. Why do they have to enter down there? Because the Day Use parking lot is not plowed at all, no one can enter via car or by foot. Honestly, I find that shameful. How is a family with several children, sleds and toboggans supposed to get into the park? A friend I skied with today told me they park at the old Library and cross the street. How can anyone think that is okay? That now parents with kids and sleds in tow must cross a highway?

I live in town on [REDACTED], how am I to enter a big, magnificent conservation area just waiting for me? I go in on either side of the west end of the Heritage Bridge, down a path is not made for that. It's steep and it is slippery. And if I wish to ski? Well that's going to make it incredibly awkward and unsafe. I understand all about liability, and the whole town knows that is a big reason why the middle time was closed because of people diving off, and we accepted that. But we are in winter now and will be for months. And with the top gate locked as well, people have no choice but to either park on the side of a road at the east, or risk injury entering under the bridge, and/or crossing highway 6. As far as I know

there aren't any safety issues at the bridges, they have been unlocked for years in the winter, except in severe conditions, which is certainly not now.

As I write this, I am sincerely hoping that everything I have written after "the upper dam gates are locked" is moot point. Perhaps it just got locked one day and with the holidays and everything else someone has forgotten to unlock it.

And if that isn't the case, I want one of you to tell me why please. Tell me why in these troubled times when by order of the government the parks are NOT closed, why is it so difficult for people to enter? It is a proven fact, especially during Covid, that to be outside in nature has a tremendous positive effect on people's mental health. And I know all of you care about the well being of your fellow humans, as I also know perhaps you are simply not aware both are closed.

All I am asking is on behalf of myself and many others who I have spoken to who use the park, simply please open a gate, the middle or upper, it doesn't matter which. It makes a massive difference when there are both closed.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: January 8, 2021 3:14 PM
To: Jennifer Stephens <j.stephens@svca.on.ca>
Subject: Re: gate closure

Hello Jennifer,

Thank you for your swift and informative response to my letter.

I appreciate being made aware of the reasons why, and also the opportunity to have my concern and request being considered in the general meeting held later this month.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: January 13, 2021 2:53 PM
To: mayor@westgrey.com; deputymayor@westgrey.com; Jennifer Stephens <j.stephens@svca.on.ca>; dgieruszak@brockton.ca; [REDACTED]
Subject: Attentions Chair and Board Members

Hello just writing this short note over my concern of both bridges being locked down during the winter months. I have lived here over 50 years, and this is the first that it has happened.

With both bridges being closed it makes it a lot more difficult for people to access the Conservation Park and all the wonderful things it has to offer. With Covid still affecting us, it is always great to walk somewhere a little more scenic than the downtown sidewalks. Many people like to ski and snowshoe there as well. For people in town, it is a much safer choice to use one of those bridges than cross the highway across from the old Library. Even one of those bridges being open would be much appreciated.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: January 13, 2021 4:52 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Gate closures at Durham Conservation Area

I'm writing to express my concern of the gates being locked at both the McGowan Falls dam in Durham and the one next to it at the mill. Living in Durham most of my life I have enjoyed many peaceful walks and great skies through the park using these entrances. This is the first time in over 55 plus years of using the park that these entrances have been locked. With both made inaccessible I now am driving to the east end and unloading into oncoming traffic to be able to ski. Not everyone drives and would enjoy the same opportunity to use our conservation park freely. I believe the taxpayers have the right to safe entrances. Parking at the old library and crossing the hi way with skies is unsafe and crossing with children to use the hills for sledding is dangerous!

Please consider re opening these crossings for the convenience of all those who wish to use the Durham Conservation Park.

From: [REDACTED]
Date: January 13, 2021 at 8:37:51 PM EST
To: mayor@westgrey.com
Subject: Gates closed McGowan Falls and Middle Dam

I am writing to ask why both gates must remain closed? In winters past the gate at the middle dam has remained open for people to access the conservation area from the east south side of town. It was great for skiers, walkers, families wanting to toboggan etc to access from parking at Heritage bridge.

I understand that in the summer kids were jumping off the bridge but that should not be a problem this time of the year.

With Covid 19 closing most activities this winter we need something safe to do and going to the park is one of those activities! Being able to cross over one of these bridges would be much more convenient for people.

I ask that you please consider opening one or both of these gates!

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: January 14, 2021 4:05 PM
To: mayor@westgrey.com; deputymayor@westgrey.com; dgieruszak@brockton.ca; Jennifer Stephens <j.stephens@svca.on.ca>; [REDACTED]
Subject: Attention Chair and Board Members - Safe Access to Saugeen Valley Conservation Grounds

As a resident of Durham, who much enjoys the privilege of wandering through the Saugeen Valley Conservation grounds, I must ask about why there are restrictions on access across both middle and upper dams.

In these dark days, when restrictions are the norm, having the opportunity to walk throughout the grounds is a much needed physical and mental tonic for many people. It is a respite from the confines that dictate most of our lives these days.

Of course, proper precautions and adherence to pandemic rules must be honoured and respected.

Current access via middle and upper dams (McGowen Falls) is restricted. Access, by foot only, is either the upper vehicle access (off Highway 4) or by descending the slopes on the Highway 4 end of the Heritage Bridge. Neither of these is suitable for people with mobility challenges or families trying to access the grounds for much needed recreation and revitalisation.

In discussions with other locals the speculation is that it is a liability concern. If so, could it not be mitigated by signage advising the visitor to assume their own risk – similar to swimming without a lifeguard.

My sons and I have enjoyed walking our dog around the middle – upper dam loop. It is a popular route. We would like the opportunity to resume that luxury.

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: January 14, 2021 8:08 PM

To: mayor@westgrey.com; deputymayor@westgrey.com; dgieruszak@brockton.ca; Jennifer Stephens <j.stephens@svca.on.ca>; [REDACTED]

Subject: Attention Chair and Board Members | re Accessing Durham Conservation Area, SVCA

Greetings from the wintry banks of the sinewy Saugeen!

Further to ongoing discussions in the community, I am following-up on Jennifer Hart's letter about access to the Durham Conservation Area. As an avid walker, I frequently run into fellow amblers who are dismayed that the bridge across the middle dam has been permanently closed. And now that winter is upon us, and the McGowan Falls bridge is also gated, it seems that access is restricted to the Day Use entrance and the Main Gate.

I am fit and healthy and can manage a long loop without needing to take the car out, but my feeling is that the status quo does not serve the larger community, particularly during winter lockdown. I have moderately active septuagenarian and octogenarian friends who, nevertheless, mourn the extra mile. Rather than up the ante, they stay home.

Is there any possibility that SCVA would consider restoring access to the bridge at the middle dam, at least until determined swimmers re-emerge into the late-spring air? Even Durham's finest daredevils are not generally inclined to take a winter plunge*. Which brings me to the second request, which is to open the gates to the bridge at McGowan Falls. The height of the railings is sufficient (at all three pedestrian crossings) to prevent slips and falls in any given season.

I understand that the initial purpose of our currently threatened Conservation Authorities was to protect human habitation and infrastructure downstream, but surely that mandate has expanded to include the health and welfare of our natural environment and those who choose to people it? Current thinking around mental health and work/life balance affirms my belief that everyone, including the residents of

Durham, could benefit from a little more time in the woods.

Thank you for your continued efforts to enhance lived experience for all of our fellow constituents, especially those with limited mobility and slender means. I appreciate how fortunate I am to live in a place where everything I need is within walking distance.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: January 14, 2021 9:04 PM
To: mayor@westgrey.com; deputymayor@westgrey.com; dgieruszak@brockton.ca; Jennifer Stephens <j.stephens@svca.on.ca>
Subject: Restore pedestrian access at bridge sites

I am a citizen of Durham and love the fact that I live in a town with access to beautiful trails a short walk for my home. As a frequent visitor to the Durham Conservation Area, I am amongst those who wish to petition the SVCA to restore pedestrian access at the bridge sites.

From: [REDACTED]
To: "Mayor WESTGREY" <mayor@westgrey.com>, "Deputy Mayor" <deputymayor@westgrey.com>
Sent: Saturday, January 16, 2021 10:17:02 AM
Subject: middle dam

Hello. We'd like to inquire if the Middle Dam in Durham could be open to pedestrians. We understand the bridge at MGowan Falls is locked for the winter due to possible icy conditions. However, a safe access across the Middle Dam would be greatly appreciated. As town residents, we would like to be able to walk thru the park.

From: [REDACTED]
To: "Mayor WESTGREY" <mayor@westgrey.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 14, 2021 9:29:14 PM
Subject: Access to conservation area

I am a concerned citizen and avid walker. During the covid restrictions I have taken to walking an hour or two every day. Access to the Durham conservation area has been limited to the two entrances furthest from my home. This discourages me from making it part of my route, or I am compelled to drive to one of the access points. One of Durham's most precious assets is limited to the fit or those who don't mind driving. If one of the dams could be opened, more people would use the trails and it would feel, like in the summer, it is an easily accessible part of Durham's appeal. Thank you for your consideration.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: January 15, 2021 12:00 PM
To: mayor@westgrey.com; deputymayor@westgrey.com; Jennifer Stephens <j.stephens@svca.on.ca>
Subject: SVCA Annual General Meeting re: gate closure

I hope this email finds each of you in good health and spirits despite these new challenging times.

I am trying to navigate the various councils and authorities, being completely unfamiliar with them and the processes involved. It is my understanding that I should ask the Mayor or Deputy Mayor to request for this matter of the gate closures at Saugeen Conservation area to be discussed at the Annual General Meeting held on January 22, 2021.

By now all of you will have received emails from other residents of Durham who have also expressed their dismay with entering the conservation area currently being so difficult.

Again, I understand safety is a concern, but I and others have crossed those bridges for years and years without incident. There are handrails if needed, and if it is icy, a few shovelfuls of sand could be helpful and not affect the river below, and/or a Use at Your Own Risk sign as another citizen has suggested.

In my humble opinion, giving people no alternative but to scramble down a steep hill by the Heritage Bridge is far more treacherous and a bigger safety concern than the dam bridges will ever be.

Mayor Robinson and Deputy Mayor Hutchinson, could I please ask on behalf of myself and other residents of Durham whom you represent, to request that this concern be discussed at the Annual General Meeting on January 22, 2021.

And for everyone involved, in these extremely unsettling times in which likely none of us have ever lived through, could we please just take a breath and remember what is truly important in life, health, which in this case is entwined with nature. Please.