



Significant Woodlands Policy Implementation

Working Group Terms of Reference

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This document outlines the Working Group Terms of Reference for the Significant Woodlands Policy Implementation. The project will begin in April and conclude with recommendations to Planning Committee and Council by December 31, 2017.

Project Purpose

- To update the City's Environmental Impact Statement Guidelines with a section on the evaluation of natural heritage system features in an urban and suburban context, particularly with respect to the provision of ecological and environmental services, and
- To bring forward an Official Plan Amendment to Planning Committee and Council on any necessary, related changes to the natural heritage system policies for urban expansion study areas and developing communities.

Background

On December 14, 2016, Ottawa City Council approved new policies in the Official Plan for the identification of significant woodlands, in order to implement updated requirements under the Provincial Policy Statement 2014 (PPS). Under the new policies (which are currently under appeal to the OMB), any woodland in the urban area that is 0.8 ha in size or larger and 40 years of age or older is defined as "significant" with respect to the PPS and Official Plan (OP).

The definition of significant urban woodlands assumes that any such woodlands meet the *economic and social functional values* criteria in the Province's Natural Heritage Reference Manual 2010, specifically, "a high value in special services, such as air-quality improvement or recreation..." and, "important identified appreciation, education, cultural or historical value..." This assumption is based on a growing body of research demonstrating the substantial social, economic, and health benefits of urban trees, the urban canopy, and urban woodlands.

Significant woodlands are subject to the *no negative impact* test under the PPS. This test states that, "development and site alteration shall not be permitted in... significant woodlands... unless it has been demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on the natural features or their ecological functions." In Ottawa, the *no negative impact* test is applied according to the Council-approved Environmental Impact Statement Guidelines. However, as currently drafted, those guidelines focus primarily on the assessment of biological, environmental, and ecological functions. They provide little guidance on the assessment of social, economic, and health functions. Furthermore, the guidelines provide little direction on the balancing of natural heritage system protection in the urban area against other PPS policies and direction concerning effective and efficient land use planning.

In response to this policy gap, Council directed staff to work with industry and community stakeholders to update the City's Environmental Impact Statement Guidelines to include a section on the evaluation of urban natural heritage system features in the context of other PPS policies for effective and efficient land use. Council has also directed staff to work with industry and community stakeholders on any necessary, related amendments to the natural heritage system policies for urban expansion study areas and developing communities.

Project Goals

1. To define the processes and services provided by natural heritage system features in Ottawa's urban and suburban environment.
2. To identify practical methods for measuring or estimating the magnitude of the processes and services provided by those natural heritage system features.
3. To identify practical methods for measuring the value of the processes and services provided by those natural heritage system features in the context of the surrounding community and the appropriate larger planning area (i.e., the urban area, or the City as a whole).
4. To identify criteria and a process for evaluating proposed modifications to those natural heritage system features against the *no negative impact* test of the PPS, including consideration of mitigation and compensation actions over the short and long-term.
5. To identify criteria and a process for comparing and evaluating the impacts to those natural heritage system features under different development scenarios, relative to other measurable objectives under the PPS (e.g. densification, efficient land use, active transportation, etc...).
6. To write a new section of the EIS Guidelines that accomplishes goals 1 – 5.
7. To write any required new policies for urban expansion study areas and developing communities to reflect and implement the new guidelines.

Working Group

Composition

The working group will consist of ten members representing City branches, the development industry, the environmental consulting industry, and community organizations. The working group will seek input from a broader range of experts and stakeholders as required.

The working group consists of the following ten representatives:

1. City Project Manager (Natural Systems and Environmental Protection).
2. City Planning Forester (Natural Systems and Environmental Protection).
3. City Environmental Planner (Natural Systems and Environmental Protection).
4. City Community Planner (Community Planning Unit, BBSS and Suburban Design Guidelines).
5. Ottawa Public Health (Environment and Health Protection Unit).
6. Greater Ottawa Home Builders Association.
7. Greater Ottawa Home Builders Association representative or nominee.
8. Environmental Consultant (to be nominated by GOHBA, subject to City agreement).
9. Federation of Community Associations Representative or nominee.
10. Greenspace Alliance or Ecology Ottawa Representative (TBD) or nominee.

Mandate

The working group members will advise and assist staff in drafting updated Environmental Impact Statement Guidelines with respect to the assessment of urban natural heritage features, and in drafting any proposed Official Plan Amendments for urban expansion study areas and developing communities. City staff will retain editorial control and responsibility for any draft documents. Participation in the working group does not imply that the members will support the final draft documents.

Tasks

Working Group members will be asked to:

- Represent their professions and/or stakeholders.
- Attend six to eight meetings between April 2017 and December 2017.
- Familiarize themselves with background materials prior to each meeting.
- Provide technical expertise and advice on the achievement of the goals of the working group.
- Review and provide constructive comment on draft documents between meetings, up to and including suggested text.
- Provide a conduit for information and comment to and from the groups that they represent.

Role of the Project Manager

The Project Manager will:

- Coordinate meetings of the working group.
- Prepare and provide agendas for the working group meetings in advance, with sufficient time for review, comment and revision.
- Provide background materials for each meeting in advance, with sufficient time for review.
- Prepare and provide minutes of each working group meeting, with sufficient time for review, comment, and revisions prior to the next meeting.
- Chair the working group meetings.
- Facilitate a constructive discussion between the working group members.
- Prepare draft documents reflecting and incorporating the contributions of the working group.
- Prepare the final draft of the EIS Guidelines and any necessary Official Plan Amendment.
- Prepare the staff report to accompany any necessary OPA.

Schedule and Timing

At the December 14, 2016 approval of the Significant Woodlands policies, Council directed that staff report back within 12 months with an update to the Environmental Impact Statement Guidelines and recommendations for any necessary changes to the Official Plan policies regarding natural heritage system features in urban expansion study areas and development communities.

Six working group meetings are currently anticipated for April, May, June, September, October and November. Additional meetings will be scheduled as necessary.

The schedule requires that some group work will occur between meetings.

Preliminary Guiding Principles

Staff have based the terms of reference upon the following guiding principles. These principles and the terms of reference will be reviewed at the first working group meeting.

- The concepts of *ecosystem processes* and *ecological goods and services* provide the framework for the evaluation of urban natural heritage system features (**see Appendix A**).
- Any evaluation system for urban natural heritage features must:

- be intuitive and simple;
 - use existing technologies;
 - be transparent;
 - be “open source”, i.e. capable of being accessed and carried out by a non-expert, with a reasonable level of knowledge and effort.
- Some natural heritage system processes and services can be replaced by non-natural heritage features, where technically and economically feasible.
 - Some natural heritage system process and services cannot be replaced and should not be lost.
 - Similar to an *environmental assessment approach*, any residual negative effects on natural heritage system features or functions must be justified in terms of *measurable* gains in other PPS-based objectives.
 - An Environmental Impact Statement must always remain a *decision support tool*, not a *decision making tool*. Final planning advice must always rest upon professional judgement, and final planning decisions must always rest with elected or appointed officials under the *Planning Act*.

Appendix A

Conceptual Framework: Ecosystem Processes and Ecological Goods and Services

The concepts of *ecosystem processes* and *ecological goods and services* provide the framework for the evaluation of urban natural heritage system features. Simply put, ecosystem processes are physical, biological and non-biological processes such as evapotranspiration, nutrient cycling, groundwater recharge, photosynthesis, etc... performed by the natural environment. Ecological goods and services are the benefits to humans provided by those processes. The distinction between ecosystem processes and ecological goods and services is important to understand. Ecosystem processes, regardless of their environmental importance, do not provide an ecological good or service unless they are also linked to human welfare.

“Until there is some person somewhere who is benefitting from a given [ecological] process it is only a process and not a service.” Tallis and Polasky, *Annals of the N.Y. Academy of Science 2009*, cited by Peter Boxall ([http://www.agpartners.ca/aepa/Portals/0/\(PowerShrink\)%20-%20Agri-Environmental%20Partnership%20Presentation%202013PeterB.pdf](http://www.agpartners.ca/aepa/Portals/0/(PowerShrink)%20-%20Agri-Environmental%20Partnership%20Presentation%202013PeterB.pdf)).

For example, the process of evapotranspiration may provide cooling benefits in an urban neighborhood; groundwater recharge in a forest may be important for provision of clean well water; pollination in an agricultural landscape may be important for crop production.

Both ecosystem processes and ecological goods and services are dependent upon their physical and geographic location. This factor is frequently overlooked in the evaluation of ecological goods and services, with natural features sometimes being assigned economic values for services that they do not provide. For example, some published economic valuations of rural wetlands assign economic values for stormwater management services derived from urban studies, even when those rural wetlands do not treat, manage or even receive urban stormwater.

As the Environmental Economist Peter Boxall points out, the concept of ecological goods and services is particularly useful because it leads to the identification of specific *endpoints* which can then become the basis for comparative evaluations or consideration of *tradeoffs*. In the context of an environmental impact statement for a planning study or development application, it provides a framework in which different development scenarios can be evaluated, taking into consideration opportunities for mitigation and compensation, as well as other important non-environmental goods and services.

The main challenges of applying this framework in urban planning are the identification of appropriate ecosystem processes and ecological goods and services, and the determination of practical methods for measuring and evaluating them. Any framework and tools must be simple to understand, simple to use, and simple to apply.