



TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES *Staff Report*

REPORT NO: DS 2019-23

TO: COUNCIL

SUBMITTED BY: Harold O’Krafka, MCIP RPP
Director of Development Services

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PREPARED BY: Harold O’Krafka, MCIP RPP
Director of Development Services

REVIEWED BY: Grant Whittington, CAO

DATE: September 23, 2019

SUBJECT: Wilmot Carbon Sink Update

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council approve the request of Mike Schout to allow him to proceed with the engineering design, approvals and construction of the naturalization and rehabilitation of Township owned lands having frontage on Smith’s Creek Drive in New Hamburg; and further

THAT staff be directed to provide assistance as required to advance the design and approvals in accordance with Township Official Plan and Wilmot Trails Master Plan with reporting back to Council on the progress of the project at regular intervals; and further

THAT in recognition of the commitment, of up to \$1.5 million towards the design, approvals and implementation of the project, Council approve the naming of the project as the Mike Schout Wetlands Park.

SUMMARY:

Council approved the design of a Carbon Sink on Township lands fronting Smith's Creek Drive as part of the 2019 Capital Budget. The Carbon Sink concept was originally predicated on the two fold objective of utilizing the site to sequester carbon through the planting of trees and the development of recreational trails.

At that time staff advised that a Community Champion had shown interest in becoming involved in the project and those discussions have resulted in a proposal from Mike Schout that he be given permission by Council to proceed with engineering design and approvals and construction of a plan for the naturalization and rehabilitation of the lands.

Mike's vision is to design a multi-faceted recreational and naturalization project which will provide enhanced stormwater management for a significant portion of the New Hamburg community, improve the river quality, provide habitat for birds and aquatic life, provide flood storage opportunities to potentially offset smaller flood events and possibly help minimize the downstream effects in the core area, and to provide recreational and educational opportunities for the community in addition to the beneficial aspects of carbon sequestration.

Staff strongly and enthusiastically support the granting of permission for this project to proceed and recommend that the Council acknowledge the significance of the proposal and the \$1.5 million financial commitment by naming the project the Mike Schout Wetlands Park.

BACKGROUND:

The Township owns lands having frontage on Smith's Creek Drive in New Hamburg which are currently rented for agricultural purposes. The lands were acquired by the Township at no cost as a condition of approval of the Smith's Creek (Sunvest Holdings) subdivision. Appendix A attached highlights the location.

The lands are wholly within the flood plain of the Nith River and contain an existing stormwater management facility that discharges via a ditch system directly to the Nith River.

The Wilmot Trails Master Plan (WTMP), approved in November of 2013, identified trail development within the property as a priority within the 0 to 5 year time frame. The development of an RFP for trail design services was initiated earlier in 2019 but was put on hold pending the outcome of this negotiation.

Additionally the Township successfully made application to the Community Environmental Fund (RMOW) in October of 2019 for funding for design activities on the subject lands as a planned Carbon Sink / Naturalization Area. Again the progression to an RFP for that project was delayed pending the outcome of this negotiation.

REPORT:

In addition to the potential to sequester a significant amount of CO₂, through reforestation opportunities, the original project envisioned that the naturalization of the lands would have an added benefit of improving water quality in the Nith River by eliminating a source of fertilizers, pesticides and siltation through the removal of agricultural activities adjacent to the river.

Through the incorporation of trails, walkways and lookouts the project was deemed to have the opportunity to provide recreational and educational opportunities as well for the local and regional community.

At the time of the 2019 Capital Budget staff advised of a potential partnership with a Community Champion. Over the last several months Township staff, GRCA staff, Ducks Unlimited staff and Mike Schout of Schout Communities toured not only the subject site but also toured other Ducks Unlimited project sites in the Woodstock area to develop a concept of how a design and implementation partnership between Mike Schout, Ducks Unlimited and the Township of Wilmot (as landowner) could be developed to advance the project.



Site Meeting – July 2019

Staff are pleased to advise that through these discussions Mike Schout has confirmed that he would like to proceed with the engineering design, approvals and construction of the project utilizing the design expertise of Ducks Unlimited and working with Township staff as necessary to facilitate the construction of what promises to be a very special and unique project for our community.

Upon completion of the design and approvals exercise an implementation plan will be developed to leverage and supplement the estimated \$1.5 million investment by Mike Schout through a variety of funding mechanisms including government and private grants and donations.

In recognition of Mike Schout's generous donation and investment in the future health and well-being of both the community and our natural environment staff recommend that the project be named the Mike Schout Wetlands Park.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT STRATEGIC PLAN:

This project has the unique potential to incorporate all of the four goals of the Wilmot Strategic plan by protecting and enhancing our natural environment, supplementing our enjoyment of our quality of life, engaging our community in the implementation of the project and promoting a prosperous economy which balances the protection of the environment with economic growth.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Allowing Mike Schout to proceed with engineering design and approvals would have no immediate fiscal impacts on the Township of Wilmot beyond the staff resources required to provide support to the exercise. Indeed it would eliminate the approved capital budget allocation of \$50,000 and allow the CEF funding to be potentially deferred to support implementation of the plan.

Future implementation and operational stages may have fiscal impacts which would be brought forward through normal budgetary processes.

The existing lease of the subject lands expires in 2019 and has had an annual value of \$3000. Limited extension of the lease for the 2020 season subject to the limitations of design requirements (soils testing etc...) would be possible.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Aerial photo of the subject lands.

APPENDIX A

