
Subject: Greater Niagara Circle Route – Welland Canal Parkway Trail Extension

Report to: Transportation Steering Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 27, 2021

Recommendations

That the Transportation Steering Committee **RECOMMENDS** to the Public Works Committee:

1. That an extension of the Welland Canal Parkway Trail north of Lakeshore Road **BE APPROVED**;
2. That wayfinding initiatives on the Greater Niagara Circle Route **BE APPROVED**, and
3. That the necessary budget amendments to undertake these initiatives **BE CONSIDERED**.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to address two (2) notices of motion made by the Greater Niagara Circle Route Sub-Committee to utilize \$250,000 of the GNCR Reserve funds for: the extension of the Welland Canal Parkway Trail north of Lakeshore Road; and, a wayfinding initiative to propose a consistent strategy for trail signage.
- The grant amount of \$200,000 to the City of St. Catharines for the extension of the Welland Canal Parkway Trail north of Lakeshore Road, is for construction-related costs associated with a stone path extension and two (2) terminal lookouts over the canal.
- The \$50,000 for the wayfinding initiative is to procure a consultant assignment, facilitated by Niagara Region's transportation department, that will review the current entire trail wayfinding and destination routing and propose a consistent navigation strategy.
- These proposed initiatives were not included in the Council approved Niagara Region 2021 capital or operating budgets.
- Any in-year use of reserves not included in the Council approved budget must comply with the Reserve and Reserve Funds Policy (Corporate Policy C-F-013) as

well as the Budget Control By-law, and are considered a budget amendment which requires 10 days' notice prior to council approval as per Public Notice Policy (corporate policy C-RC-005). There is no impact on the tax levy as a result of utilizing reserves to fund these initiatives.

- Staff will be seeking direction from this committee at a future meeting on criteria for the use of the unrestricted balance of GNCR Reserve for specified purposes while following the Regional budget process each year.

Financial Considerations

The GNCR Reserve current balance is \$1,382,681. It was funded from prior year surpluses and a \$10,760 donation restricted for use on the GNCR.

Staff is recommending a one-time amendment to the previously adopted 2021 Niagara Region Operating Budget in the amount of \$250,000. This consists of a grant of \$200,000 to the City of St. Catharines for the extension of the Welland Canal Parkway trail north of Lakeshore Road and \$50,000 for a consulting assignment to review the current wayfinding and destination routing throughout the entire trail. The initiatives are proposed to be funded from the GNCR Reserve. It is recommended that the restricted portion of \$10,760 (related to donations for the GNCR) in addition to a portion of the unrestricted portion be used to fund these requests. Any unspent amounts for the above noted initiatives will be returned to the GNCR reserve.

Any in-year use of reserves not included in the Council approved budget must comply with the Reserve and Reserve Funds Policy and the Budget Control By-Law. An in year use of unbudgeted reserves is considered a budget amendment which requires 10 days' notice prior to Regional Council approval as per Public Notice Policy (corporate policy C-RC-005). With endorsement of the recommendations included in this report by the Transportation Steering Committee and subsequently Public Works Committee, a report will be brought forth to Regional Council on May 20, 2021 seeking approval of the budget amendment in accordance with policy. There is no impact on the tax levy as a result of the utilization of reserves to fund these initiatives.

Analysis

- The extension of the Welland Canal Parkway Trail north of Lakeshore Road is directed towards creating a safe and convenient trail extension within the City of St. Catharines to be used by Niagara Region residents and tourists.

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- This project will address current operational and geometric deficiencies; while offering active transportation connectivity to the northern part of this trail along the Welland Canal.
 - This project will be led by the City of St. Catharines in collaboration with the Transportation Services Division at the Niagara Region.
 - There continues to be an increase in all forms of active transportation. This trail extension adds to the appeal of Niagara Region and the Circle Route being a cycling destination.
 - Staff will prepare the necessary agreements as required, including with the City of St. Catharines, in a form satisfactory to the Director of Legal & Court Services. The grant will be provided to the City of St. Catharines upon confirmation of the extension costs. If the cost of construction is less than \$200,000, the excess budget will be returned to the GNCR Reserve.
 - Staff will procure a consultant assignment that will review the current wayfinding and destination routing throughout the entire trail. A consistent navigation strategy will be proposed using signage and architectural landmarks. The proposed strategy will be reviewed with the Greater Niagara Circle Route Sub-Committee.
 - Following completion of the wayfinding consulting assignment, any recommendations for enhancements and/or improvements to the trail will be discussed with Transportation Steering Committee (TSC). Any cost implications associated with these recommendations will be considered as part of future budget processes.
 - Property ownership, maintenance and operations fall under the jurisdiction of respective local area municipalities; not that of the Region. As part of the GNCR workplan, roles and responsibilities of the Region and local area municipalities will be identified and brought forward to TSC for consideration and approval.
 - Staff will be seeking direction from TSC in Q3 2021 on parameters for future utilization of the GNCR Reserve for active transportation projects in alignment with the annual budget process.

Alternatives Reviewed

The decision to fund a grant to the City of St. Catharines and wayfinding consulting utilizing the GNCR Reserve could be deferred and considered during the 2022 Regional Budget Process in alignment with normal practice.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Alignment to Niagara Regional Council Strategic Priority

Vision:

Niagara Region is a mosaic of diverse communities. We strive to achieve a prosperous, safe and inclusive community that embraces our natural spaces and promotes holistic wellbeing and quality of life.

Mission:

Niagara Region will serve its residents, businesses and tourists through collaborative leadership, responsible policy and the provision of effective and efficient community-focused services, while maintaining environmental and economic sustainability.

Corporate Strategic Priorities:

Priority 2: Healthy and Vibrant Community - Foster a high quality of life through safe, healthy, and inclusive neighbourhoods through the delivery of quality, affordable and accessible human services.

Priority 3: Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning - Sustainable investments in Transportation, transit and infrastructure, while aligning infrastructure planning with preservation of the natural environment.

Other Pertinent Reports

- ICP 19-2013 March 6, 2013 Greater Niagara Circle Route – Asset Management and Management Issues
- Confidential PDS 4-2017 February 22, 2017
- CL-C 34-2018 June 14, 2018 Motion to Release Funds to Support Extension of the Welland Canal Parkway Trail

City of St. Catharines Concept Plans