



**SUBJECT: Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System 2022-2026
Memorandum of Understanding**

TO: Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.

FROM: Engineering Services Department

Report Number: ES-36-21

Wards Affected: all

File Numbers: 502-02-54

Date to Committee: September 13, 2021

Date to Council: September 21, 2021

Recommendation:

Endorse the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System 2022-2026 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), attached as Appendix A to engineering services department report ES-36-21; and

Authorize the Executive Director of Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services to sign the MOU; and

Authorize annual contributions as indicated in Schedule B: 2022-2026 expenses and budget of the MOU to support the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System operating budget.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Support sustainable infrastructure and a resilient environment
 - Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture
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Background and Discussion:

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (EcoPark System) is a collaborative partnership of government and not-for-profit agencies that collectively protect and manage nearly 2,200 hectares of open space and nature sanctuary between Cootes

Paradise Marsh, Hamilton Harbour and the Niagara Escarpment. These lands are recognized for their significant biodiversity; and natural, cultural and recreational value. Approximately half of the lands in the EcoPark System, as it exists today are within the City of Burlington boundary.

The partners agencies include:

- Bruce Trail Conservancy
- City of Burlington
- The Regional Municipality of Halton
- The Halton Region Conservation Authority
- City of Hamilton
- Hamilton Region Conservation Authority
- Hamilton Naturalists' Club
- McMaster University
- Royal Botanical Gardens

The vision for the EcoPark System, is that it becomes a permanently protected natural lands sanctuary linking Cootes Paradise Marshlands with Hamilton Harbour and the Niagara Escarpment. While managing their lands individually, the partners have been working collaboratively for over 15 years toward implementation of the vision.

Key milestones that have helped to confirm the commitment to the partnership are outlined as follows:

Year	Item
2006	The idea of a collaborative partnership for the EcoPark System is introduced by the Natural Heritage Committee of the Bay Area Restoration Council.
2009	A Strategic Plan for the EcoPark System, outlining a vision, strategic goals, objectives and actions is endorsed by the Council and the partner agencies.
2013	The city and partners enter into a formal partnership to officially recognize the EcoPark System with a 3-year MOU (2013-2016), including annual funding contributions to support operational needs.
2016	The MOU is amended for an additional 5-year extension (2016-2021).
2021	An updated Strategic Plan for 2021-2030 outlining priorities and objectives is endorsed by Council and the partner agencies.

Strategy/process

Memorandum of Understanding

The MOU, initially executed in 2013 and extended in 2016 to 2021, formally recognizes the EcoPark System partnership and provides the framework for joint decision-making among the partners. It defines the governance structure consisting of a Governing Council to make strategic decisions, a Management Committee to make tactical level decisions and a Secretariat to carry out the day-to-day operations. The MOU defines annual payments required from each of the partners to support the Secretariat, which is managed by Royal Botanical Gardens as the implementing partner.

The current MOU expires on December 31, 2021. In order to facilitate ongoing progress of the EcoPark System through the partnership, a continuation of the current working model is proposed for a further five years. The 2016-2021 MOU was used as the basis to prepare the 2022-2026 MOU (attached as Appendix A) and includes the:

- Project Charter, outlining the purpose and scope of the EcoPark System
- Agreement, defining the responsibilities, roles and decision-making process of the partnership
- Expenses and Budget, indicating the annual payments required from each partner to meet budget requirements

It is anticipated that each of the partner agencies will endorse and sign the MOU by Q3 this year to confirm the continued commitment of the partnership for the next five years.

Options Considered

Not applicable.

Financial Matters:

Total Financial Impact

The required annual financial contributions from the city are identified in Schedule B: 2022-2026 Expenses and Budget of the MOU, attached as Appendix A. The city contribution in 2022 is \$15,937. The subsequent years include a 2% increase per year for inflation. The total contribution by the city over the five-year period is \$82,936.

Source of Funding

The funding will be allocated in the 2022 budget with further annual contributions to be allocated yearly to 2026.

Other Resource Impacts

The city will continue to provide in-kind staff time for the EcoPark System, including representation on Management Committee, Governing Council and subcommittees to support ongoing initiatives of the EcoPark System.

Climate Implications

The EcoPark System as it exists today, includes nearly 2,200 hectares of protected natural lands and open space, within the growing urban areas of Burlington and Hamilton. These lands contribute to mitigating the risks of climate change by helping to reduce flood risk, improve air quality and lower temperatures. The work under this MOU helps to support the city's Climate Action Plan- Climate Resilient Burlington.

Engagement Matters:

The MOU was prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the Management Committee. It was reviewed and approved by Governing Council on April 27, 2021 and a final review was provided by the city's Legal Department. All comments were incorporated to prepare the final version of the 2022-2026 MOU.

Conclusion:

The EcoPark System is a significant initiative to protect natural lands for the present and future generations. The MOU provides the necessary framework and funding commitment to the partnership, establishing how the partners will continue to collaborate to accomplish the priorities set out in the 2021-2030 Strategic Plan.

Respectfully submitted,

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Appendices:

- A. Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System 2022-2026 Memorandum of Understanding

Notifications:

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Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.