

# Staff Report



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To	<b>City Council</b>
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Enterprise Services
Date	Monday, February 8, 2021
Subject	<b>Statutory Public Meeting: City Initiated Official Plan Amendment for the Emma Street to Earl Street Pedestrian Bridge</b>

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## Recommendation

1. That the statutory public meeting report for the City-initiated Official Plan Amendment for the Emma Street to Earl Street Pedestrian Bridge be received.
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## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

To provide information about the proposed City-initiated Official Plan Amendment to implement the Schedule B Municipal Class Environmental Assessment preferred alternative for the Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge.

### Key Findings

The evaluation process for the Schedule B Municipal Class Environmental Assessment identified a Two-Span Bridge (Hydro within Structure) as the preferred alternative for a pedestrian bridge. Construction of the preferred alternative for the pedestrian bridge requires a site-specific Official Plan Amendment to address a technical inconsistency between the objectives and intent of the Natural Heritage System policies and a permitted use.

Key findings of the Statutory Public Meeting for the City-initiated Official Plan Amendment for the Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge will be reported in a future Infrastructure, Development and Enterprise recommendation report to Council.

### Financial Implications

There are no financial implications as a direct result of the proposed planning matters. Financial implications of the pedestrian bridge were communicated to Council through the [Emma Street to Earl Street Pedestrian Bridge Schedule B Municipal Environmental Assessment Report](#) (2020-121) presented to Committee of the Whole on September 8, 2020.

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# Report

## Background

At their Committee of the Whole meeting of September 8, 2020, City Council directed staff to initiate a site-specific amendment to the Official Plan to implement the preferred alternative for the Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge. This report presents the proposed amendment to the Official Plan.

City staff completed a Schedule B Class Environmental Assessment study to investigate opportunities to provide a pedestrian connection between Emma Street and Earl Street. The goal of the Environmental Assessment was to strike a balance between public transportation needs, safety, and impacts to the natural environment by evaluating alternatives for a pedestrian bridge that could connect Emma Street to Earl Street and the TransCanada Trail over the Speed River.

The evaluation process for the Environmental Assessment identified Alternative 2b – Two-Span Bridge (Hydro within Structure) as the preferred alternative that balances tradeoffs between cost / complexity and environmental impacts. Construction of the preferred alternative for the pedestrian bridge requires a site-specific Official Plan Amendment to address a technical inconsistency between the objectives and intent of the Natural Heritage System and a permitted use.

## Location

The proposed Official Plan Amendment policy modifications apply to the lands and river crossing from the western end of Emma Street to the eastern end of Earl Street; the location of the planned Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge.



Figure 1 Location Map: Emma Street to Earl Street Future Pedestrian Bridge

## **Description of Preferred Alternative**

The preferred alternative follows the alignment of an existing hydro corridor and area of existing impact within the Natural Heritage System. Minimal tree removals are required to achieve the alignment because vegetation has historically been cleared throughout the hydro corridor, which has resulted in an approximate ten-meter gap in tree canopy cover. The footing required to support the double span steel truss bridge will replace an existing hydro pole footing, and hydro infrastructure will be incorporated within the bridge. Since construction will occur within the Speed River valley to construct the footing, there is an opportunity to restore riparian wetlands up stream of the bridge, which were historically filled and impacted, in addition to restoring the areas impacted by construction.

Native vegetation will be planted on the valley walls in areas impacted by construction; historic fill will be removed from upstream riparian wetlands and restored with appropriate native vegetation; and, the preferred alternative follows an existing corridor of impact. Following construction and implementation of the restoration plan, there will be a net ecological gain in tree canopy cover, woodland quality, and increase in wetland area and quality. The preferred alternative will result in an overall benefit to the Natural Heritage System.

A scoped Environmental Impact Study would be required at the time of detailed design to ensure that permitted development and site alteration will result in no negative impact on the natural heritage features and areas or their ecological and hydrologic functions. A Tree Inventory and Preservation Plan would also be required at the time of detailed design to minimize tree loss and accurately account for tree removals and compensation required to accommodate the bridge design. Detailed design would also proceed based on policy guidance for minimizing the area of construction disturbance and re-vegetating or restoring disturbed areas with site-appropriate indigenous plants wherever opportunities exist.

## **Existing Official Plan Policies**

The Official Plan limits Essential Transportation Infrastructure as a permitted use in the Natural Heritage System to minimize fragmentation and impacts to natural heritage features and areas, and their functions. A key objective of Natural Heritage System policy is to protect, maintain, enhance and restore the Natural Heritage System to the greatest extent possible, while providing for compatible development and activities, as identified, that do not negatively impact natural heritage features and areas, and their ecological or hydrologic functions, now and in the long term. The preferred alternative for the Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge meets the intent of Official Plan Natural Heritage System policy.

To accommodate the Emma Street to Earl Street Pedestrian Bridge, a site-specific Official Plan Amendment is needed to address a technical inconsistency between the objectives and intent of the Natural Heritage System and a permitted use. The site-specific Official Plan Amendment would permit Essential Transportation Infrastructure in the Natural Heritage System in support of the preferred alignment.

## **Proposed Official Plan Amendment**

This City-initiated Official Plan Amendment proposes to add a site-specific policy to Section 4.1.2 of the Official Plan to implement the Schedule B Municipal Class Environmental Assessment preferred alternative for the Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge. This policy would permit Essential Transportation Infrastructure

within the following natural heritage features and areas and their established buffers for the purpose of implementing the preferred alternative:

Significant Wetlands

Significant Woodlands

Significant Wildlife Habitat (including Ecological Linkages)

In proximity to the Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge, the Natural Heritage System also supports Surface Water Features and Fish Habitat and Significant Valleyland. Official Plan policy currently permits Essential Transportation Infrastructure within these feature types and their established buffers. An Official Plan Amendment is not required for these feature types.

Additional information on the study area and preferred alternative is located on the [Emma Street to Earl Street Bridge improvements](#) page on the City's website.

## **Next Steps**

Following the statutory public meeting, we will review any comments received and assess them against the Provincial Policy Statement. A recommendation report will be presented to Council in Q2 2021.

## **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications as a direct result of the proposed planning matters. Financial implications of the pedestrian bridge were communicated to Council through the [Emma Street to Earl Street Pedestrian Bridge Schedule B Municipal Environmental Assessment Report](#) (2020-121) presented to Committee of the Whole on September 8, 2020.

## **Consultations**

Notice of the Public Meeting was mailed on January 14, 2021 to local boards and agencies, City service areas, to property owners within 120 metres of the bridge location, and the project mailing list for the Schedule B Municipal Class Environmental Assessment for the Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge. The Public Meeting was advertised in the Guelph Tribune on January 14, 2021 and on [guelph.ca](http://guelph.ca).

## **Strategic Plan Alignment**

The Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge will align with the following strategic plan priorities:

Sustaining our Future: Protecting the green infrastructure provided by woodlands, wetlands, watercourses and other elements of Guelph's Natural Heritage System.

Navigating Our Future: Improving connections to workplaces in Guelph, investing in and promoting active transportation.

Building Our Future: Continuing working to develop new assets that respond to Guelph's growing and changing social, economic and environmental needs.

## **Attachments**

Attachment-1 Proposed Official Plan Amendment

Attachment-2 Staff Presentation

## **Departmental Approval**

Melissa Aldunate, MCIP RPP, Manager, Policy Planning and Urban Design

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## **This report was approved by:**

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## **This report was recommended by:**

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