



Guelph Hiking Trail Club
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“The Rapids” Sidetrail: Proposal for an *Existing* 1.4 Kilometre Footpath to be Managed by the Guelph Hiking Trail Club

Background

The original work for this proposal was one of the outputs of the River Systems Advisory Committee and the concept and details of the nature/foot trail were approved in May 15 2013 pending some minor tweaks and letters from Armtec and GRCA indicating they support the trail.

Unfortunately despite goodwill on all sides an actual agreement never materialised because GHTC were unable to secure an agreement letter from Armtec.

Armtec is now under new ownership and GHTC has restarted the proposal as a result of encouraging statements from Armtec that they would like an agreement.

Introduction:

The completion of the TransCanada Trail (TCT) through Herb Markle Park, and then along the Guelph Junction Railway (GJR) right-of-way from Marcon Street to Speedvale Avenue by the City of Guelph in 2010 brought into focus the need for an alternative return loop or sidetrail for pedestrians. Significantly, the TCT alignment does not permit a view of the Speed River, save for a single viewpoint at the end of Marcon Street. Yet the section of the Speed from Speedvale to Goldie Mill contains perhaps the most beautiful natural landscape within Guelph, featuring views of bedrock outcrops and low cliffs, islands, forests and above all, continual rapids. And despite public

ownership of the majority of the length of this proposal, this resource remains hidden and unknown to most Guelphites.

The intent of this proposal is to open up this attractive landscape to all residents of the City by improvements to make more accessible and widely used an *existing* riverside footpath that is hitherto used only by adventuresome neighbourhood kids and the more determined dog walker. Secondly, the proposal will provide for a most useful and scenic return route of 1.4 kilometres for walkers using the TCT, between Goldie Mill and Speedvale Avenue. And thirdly, GHTC's trail maintenance practices will minimize those inconveniences, obstructions and risks that are encountered by walkers along the route presently and that now deter much use of the trail.

The sole private landowner, Armtec, and the City park planner responsible for the area have both been consulted and have both been sufficiently supportive to call for this proposal to be produced for their further review, as well as that of the GRCA.

Summary of the Proposal:

The existing route runs along the west bank of the Speed River, and east of the TCT, over lands owned by the City, Armtec, and the GRCA (Herb Markle Park.) It would begin slightly south of the end of Mac Ave, where an earthen path splits off to the left of the TCT on City lands, and in about 40 metres, reaches the top of the riverbank. It would end at a junction with the TCT at the Goldie Mill.

GHTC would deploy its extensive volunteer forces, including certified chainsaw operators, to make a number of basic improvements to the trail and related access trails in order to increase its accessibility and attraction to all city residents. Agreements would be negotiated with the one private owner, Armtec, and the two public owners, the City and GRCA, to proceed with the work. GHTC would then agree to add the trail to its trail network, thereby applying its liability insurance to the trail, maintaining it to a standard on an ongoing basis through its trail captain and trail maintenance volunteer system, and publicizing it through signage and its trail guidebook.

A detailed description of the route and ownerships, and of a few site-specific trail improvement measures are listed in Appendix 1, Description of the Route.

Proposed Trail Improvement Measures:

Essentially, GHTC would be prepared to manage the trail as is, undertaking italicized site-specific improvement measures noted in Appendix 1. The following physical work would be undertaken along the entire length of the proposed trail:

- 1) removal of deadfall trees
- 2) removal of standing or wind-thrown hazard or dead trees and branches (save where any non-hazardous hollow trunks are being used as wildlife habitat)
- 3) trimming back of woody and weedy undergrowth to allow for a maximum 4 foot wide cleared area to provide for the pathway, where possible. Apart from buckthorn, removal of live trees over 2 inches diameter would be avoided wherever possible.
- 4) signing trailheads by GHTC at each end, and alongside the TCT or road allowances wherever useful side-access trails exist (e.g. from vicinity of Mac, Earl, John and Marcon Streets and within Herb Markle Park) with customized GHTC blue sidetrail signs (12"x12"). Signs would note the landowners and acknowledge their permission for the trail, and the owners would be consulted on appropriate sign wording
- 5) wayfinding blue blazes along the main route of the sidetrail
- 6) removal of litter and campfire rings
- 7) removal of scrap metal and glass on and adjacent to the path that are residuals from past dumps
- 8) removal of trip hazards from exposed roots, loose rocks and protruding cement rubble
- 9) placement of stepping stones at several ill-drained spots
- 10) creation of small viewpoints and "portals" alongside the rapids, and positioning sitting logs where possible

Trail Management:

- A) application of GHTC's \$5 million liability insurance coverage to the trail, by motion of GHTC executive committee to include the proposed trail within the GHTC trail system;
- B) inclusion of the trail within the published GHTC Trail Handbook;
- C) assignment of a dedicated GHTC Trail Captain(s) (one or more of our members from the local neighbourhood) to maintain the trail and its signage in its improved state by regular inspections, on a minimum monthly frequency, and as required.
- D) securing of City and GRCA technical approvals for the 13 steps
- E) execution of agreements with the landowners as may be individually requested

Other Benefits of the Proposal:

- 1) Application of GHTC Liability Insurance – all 3 landowners will benefit from the overriding presence of GHTC's \$5 million liability insurance policy as their first line of defense in their protection from any claims of trail users
- 2) Increased Property Values – many studies have shown that access to managed trails can enhance the value of nearby properties by 5-15%. The Dufferin neighbourhood, and particularly any redevelopment of the Armtec property would realize this very tangible benefit.
- 3) Creation of A Tourism Asset – the entire length of this riverside trail as it exists appears (most improbably, given its unsafe and unmanaged condition) on the maps distributed at the City Hall counter by the City's Tourism Services. The work proposed by GHTC will transform it from its unsafe condition into an attractive feature that will be actually quite worthy of being pointed out to visitors to the City as well as local residents seeking scenic walking opportunities.
- 4) Enhanced Public Safety – the improvements to the existing trail by GHTC will mean it becomes safer for all users to walk over than it is with the existing dangerous conditions such as large overhanging dead "widow-maker" branches, broken glass and scrap metal shards, trip hazards, and eye level thorns and branches hanging over the path.
- 5) River Systems and Royal Recreation Trail Enhancement – the City will benefit from a tangible achievement toward the vision of its approved River Systems strategy by increasing appreciation of and access to the river systems within the City.

Appendix 1: Description of the Route (North to South):

Several proposed site-specific minor improvement projects by GHTC are noted in italics within the description that follows.

The path begins on City lands slightly south of the end of Mac Ave, where an earthen path splits off to the left of the TCT on City lands, and in about 40 metres, reaches the top of the riverbank of the Speed on Armtec lands, adjacent to Armtec's chain link fence.

Here, the trail gradually ascends onto a level area of old fill lying outside of Armtec's chainlink fence. After about 40 metres, a *new trail would be brushed out along the top of bank* for a "short block" in order to avoid several difficult and eroding grades along the riverbank until reaching the end of Earl Street, (*and over this section, the difficult riverside trail below the bank and an overgrown trail running next to the fence, would be physically closed off.*) At the end of Earl, the trail would descend the bank on the north side of a storm sewer outfall, with the outfall's hand railings perfectly assisting the needs of trail users in making the grade. (*The path down the much steeper grade on the south side of Earl would be closed off.*) Turning south, the trail would continue along the riverbank, soon rising up *five proposed new earthen steps, and down eight*, to be cut into the existing trail in order to manage a steep grade, also occasioned by old fill.

At the end of John Street, the trail leaves the Armtec property and passes over unmanaged City lands to gradually emerge atop curving low outcrops bordering the river rapids at the end of Marcon Street. At the north end of the City's Herb Markle Park (owned by GRCA, but licensed to the City) trail users can be directed onto a reasonable grade to descend again to river level. The trail continues alongside the river, accessed also by several sidetrails rising gently up to the tablelands of Markle Park. After the most southerly sidetrail, a rougher trail continues alongside the river through Wolfond Park West, made rougher largely due to broken cement dumped long ago over the riverbank (*protruding cement edges to be removed*). One passes by a one metre high weir across the river. On approaching a cement retaining wall, a grade up to a low bedrock sill allows one to easily step atop the north end of the wall, part of the ruins of the Goldie Mill complex. A 20 metre walk atop the wall, mostly behind railings, leads to a junction with the TCT at the mill itself.

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