

To Mayor Guthrie and Guelph City Council,

Urban Park Guelph was looking forward to seeing a robust Conservation Plan and Guidelines for the Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District.

In the words of Infrastructure Ontario's Strategic Conservation Plan, the "level of protection should be **appropriate to the cultural heritage value of the GCC property.**" (Infrastructure Ontario Strategic Conservation Plan N00249 Guelph Correctional Centre 2018 4.4 and 5.2)

and Heritage Guelph recommended to staff that

- **"Passive voice should be replaced by active voice throughout the Objectives and Guiding Principles. Replace "should" with "must" or "shall" and "encourage" with "require".**
- **In the Draft Guiding Principles, "when restoration is not feasible" should be replaced with "when restoration is impossible".** (Heritage Guelph minutes, Aug 14, 2023.)

With that in mind, Urban Park Guelph anticipated a plan that established heritage protections that eliminated wishful thinking regarding heritage protections and instead, *required* them.

We did not anticipate a plan that was filled with "*encourage*", "*seek to*", "*recommend*" and similar well-intentioned words that offer no real protection.

This site is fantastically rich with history, heritage, natural features and most of all opportunity and we all need to ensure that the Heritage protections here protect not only the features, but the future.

This is the most significant heritage, and natural conservation opportunity Guelph has ever had. Ever had.

We can all point to a legacy of destruction of our own Heritage assets over the last 80 years. This is your chance to say, “Yes! We need to ensure we have strong protections here that take full advantage of every mechanism available to protect nature, cultural heritage and the opportunity of this site.”

We can say yes, change may be necessary, but when change is required, there will be oversight. Always. This needs to be a requirement of the plan.

Change can be good or necessary, but when dealing with public assets, change must be done in the public eye through the Heritage permit process.

There can be no blank cheques nor delegation of authority. Council themselves need to always maintain oversight when degradation has such far reaching consequence.

The Urban Park Guelph proposal leverages this remarkable landscape to advance healing, understanding and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

We propose a place that will do more than pay lip-service to mitigation of climate change, and will help Guelph meet its park and tree canopy needs.

We will ensure accessible public access to all of this land, not just as a natural sanctuary but as a place for discussion and education around climate change, habitat protection, and the history of Indigenous incarceration here and throughout the country.

To accomplish these things and more, the strongest heritage protections possible need to be in place.

We encourage city staff to hear the feedback from the community before presenting a final version of this plan to Council and we ask Council to ensure that they only accept a conservation plan that is “*appropriate to the cultural heritage value of the GCC property.*”

Neither this letter, nor the Council chambers, are the place for a line-by-line distillation of the Conservation Plan; but we want Council to know that we are looking for more.

Urban Park Guelph has requested standing in the Community and Stake Holder group, to provide the opportunity to discuss the plan with staff as they prepare the final version.

In closing I will quote Chief Claire Sault, of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, in whose treaty territory Guelph lies:

“This place offers a profound opportunity for Healing, Conservation, Restoration, and a Connection to Nature.”

Please do not squander this opportunity.

P. Brian Skerrett

For Urban Park Guelph

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