



Anna Baggio
Guelph resident

November 8, 2024

Via email: clerks@guelph.ca

Mayor and Council
City of Guelph
1 Carden Street
Guelph, ON
N1H 3A1

Re. Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District - Draft Plan and Guidelines, 2024-487

I write to you today in both my personal and professional capacities. I am a resident of Guelph and Conservation Director for Wildlands League.

Wildlands League is one of Canada's pre-eminent conservation organizations. We protect lands and waters. We collaborate with communities, governments, First Nations, scientists and progressive industry to protect nature and find solutions that work for the planet and for all. We are a not-for-profit charity that has been working in the public interest since 1968, beginning with a campaign to protect Algonquin Park from development.

We have a long track record working on protected areas in Ontario including Rouge National Urban Park and the proposed Ojibway National Urban Park in Windsor. We have been working with local and provincial groups and residents to support the establishment of a National Urban Park on the Ontario reformatory lands in Guelph.

Personally, it is a point of pride, living in Guelph, that the City has expressed an on-going and unwavering commitment to ensuring environmental health and climate resilience. And professionally, we work in southern Ontario because it has some of the most endangered ecosystems, the highest numbers of species at risk and the lowest levels of protection in Canada.

Particularly, I am fully supportive of Guelph's Strategic Plan 2024-2027, its vision: *An inclusive, connected, prosperous city where we look after each other and our environment* and, particularly, the Environment theme contained therein, including commitments toward increasing tree canopy cover (40 % by 2070) and protections for drinking water (by advancing the City's Stormwater Management Masterplan).

City Staff's Report 2024-487 identifies alignment with Guelph's Strategic Plan through the City Building theme. I believe there is also an opportunity to explore alignment with the Environment theme as well and exploring the ways in which the Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District can enhance Guelph's commitment to be a leader in climate action.

As Council reviews the draft plan and guidelines, are there more opportunities for integration of Guelph's Official Plan Natural Heritage Policies (long-term protection and restoration of natural

heritage features/areas) and the infiltration targets within the approved Guelph Innovation District Secondary Plan, by ensuring that greenspaces and natural features are preserved?

Designation of the Ontario Reformatory as a Heritage Conservation District is intended to allow Guelph the opportunity to recognize and commemorate the community's values and sense of place within those lands. Given that sense of place incorporates how those lands contribute to the Guelph community's quality of life and the experience of those who make use of the space, has sufficient study of the relationship between people and the Ontario Reformatory lands been completed and incorporated? Such relationships and values, particularly as it relates to those who have and continue to enjoy visiting the greenspaces and natural features, will need to be fully understood, to ensure the policies/guidelines will be adequate for managing the Ontario Reformatory lands in a manner that protects and enhances its character.

In addition to preserving and enhancing the character of the Heritage Conservation District, there are numerous other benefits to limiting the footprint of development and exploring opportunities such as establishing a national urban park in the future. We know that wetlands play a vital role in providing habitat for wildlife, soil stabilization, aiding in flood protecting, filtering pollution and cultural renewal and recreation. We also know that fragmentation of ecosystems leads to biodiversity losses and weakens nature's ability to help us stave off the worst impacts of climate change. By protecting remaining habitat patches and looking at habitat connectivity within the city and surrounding region, Guelph could make a significant contribution today to ensuring a high quality of life for today's residents and future residents. Our well being is inextricably linked to health of the natural world and dependent on meaningful access to nature within city boundaries and beyond (to the river, forests and surrounding natural areas).

Guelph's former Ontario Reformatory Lands provide valuable connectivity to nearby wetlands and river systems, offer a place for people to connect to nature in an increasingly busy urban landscape, and are home to a plethora of species. We re-learned how important having access to nature was to our mental, physical and spiritual health during the pandemic.

A national urban park in Guelph's Reformatory Lands could buffer the city from some of the worst impacts of climate change and protect and restore nature all while advancing Indigenous Reconciliation. Wildlands agrees with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council that this is "[a profound opportunity for Healing, Conservation, Restoration, and a Connection to Nature](#)". The Reformatory lands were formerly used by the Native Sons, a group of Indigenous inmates, as a place of healing and to share culturally significant activities.

It is recommended that Council request additional information about how the greenspaces and natural features can be preserved and enhanced through the Heritage Conservation District plans and guidelines, consistent with Guelph's strategic plan's environmental theme.



The city of Guelph is growing rapidly; opportunities to protect its unique natural areas are shrinking. Less than 2% of Southern Ontario is protected. It is vital we preserve the natural features and greenspaces in the Reformatory Lands for us, our families and all who will live here in 100 years from now and beyond. Proactive action today will provide dividends in the future. Let's not foreclose on this opportunity by eroding the natural features of this important site. Let's not foreclose on the opportunity to have a place of healing here.

Thank you for considering these comments. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Baggio', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Anna Baggio
Guelph resident
and
Conservation Director
Wildlands League