

May 18, 2020

Via Email Only

Guelph City Council
c/o City Clerks Office
1 Carden Street
Guelph, Ontario N1H 3A1

Attention: Mayor and Members of Council

**RE: CLAIR-MALTBY COMMUNITY PARK SITE SELECTION PROCESS
AS PART OF THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM STRATEGY**

The citizens of Guelph and the future residents of Clair-Maltby, deserve **the best community level park possible**. The planning process to-date has not, and is not, achieving that goal. Decisions made now will determine how successful the proposed park is, for the next hundred years or more.....not a small or insignificant responsibility. Missteps at this stage can rarely be corrected, and even if they can, only at a great cost to the taxpayer. It is therefore of the utmost importance to ensure that the process is both as comprehensive and complete as possible, and that the rationale for decision-making is logical and transparent.

The single biggest flaw in the process to-date is **lack of a preliminary park programme**. Park programmes should be the foundation of any park site selection and preliminary design process. Play-fields, *pick-up* passive sport areas, playgrounds, picnic sites, trail systems, washroom/change-room facilities, horticultural/natural features, parking lots, park roads, all determine intensity of use, the need for infrastructure, the capital cost and potential impacts. Without a preliminary programme, the size and footprint of a park cannot be properly determined and criteria used to evaluate one site against another, cannot be successfully executed. An earlier submission by Monteith Brown Planning Consultants has already highlighted this issue. Their observation was:

*City "staff have repeatedly stated throughout the public engagement process that the function (programme) of the community park will be determined **after** the location had been chosen. The fact that the public was not privy to City analyses relating to the park's function nor was the public asked to prioritize locational criteria and sites with such knowledge **leads to a flawed approach to site selection** when compared to best practices employed in other communities".*

After a lengthy process, the City is remiss in not having had a programme distilled from the City's overall Parks and Recreation Master Plan well in advance of the Clair-Maltby planning process. This step should have been completed, long before the planning of a neighbourhood the size and importance of Clair-Maltby was initiated. In addition, the fact that Clair-Maltby is in a provincially significant landscape in the Galt/Paris Moraine, should have demanded that the City understand and acknowledge what potential impacts a park development of this scale would have on that environment. This could only have been accomplished, if a preliminary park programme had been in place. City Council and Staff

should step back..... utilize whatever existing data is available and employ best judgment to construct a preliminary park programme. Even if this programme is not perfect, some flexibility can be built into the process to ensure that changes can be made and unforeseen future needs can be accommodated, if required.

The second biggest flaw in the current process is **how to evaluate the best opportunities and constraints of the potential sites**. Option #3, has been correctly discarded, for a variety of common sense reasons..... most importantly, its lack of central location and its poor relationship to the Moraine Ribbon concept and the neighbourhood trail network. Option #1 and #2 were evaluated with a very limited number of criteria due to the lack of programme, and the inability to assess the actual park potential or feasibility of each site. The City made no effort to evaluate the potential impacts that a park development could have on their respective sites. The most comprehensive approach moving forward, would be to complete a preliminary programme and prepare very preliminary schematic designs for both Option #1 and Option #2. Schematic designs would help to define the park footprint, and clarify functional relationships both internal to the park and external to the surrounding open space and residential neighbourhoods. It would ensure that site opportunities are exploited to their full potential, and that possible impacts are understood and re-mediated in the best way possible.

Some of the criteria already utilized for evaluation have validity, but were not properly executed, due to the flawed process. It's important to add a number of criteria that evaluate both site and design potential, and assess the potential for environmental impact. The following list summarizes the existing criteria that were used in the first evaluation, as well as additional criteria that should have been utilized to evaluate site potential and alternative schematic designs:

- **external pedestrian accessibility (walkability)**
- **ease of access internally and pedestrian safety**
- **impacts from road access and traffic**
- **public transit access**
- **ease of park servicing and sustainability**
- **stormwater management implications**
- **visual impact of parking lots and nuisance activity associated with parking lots**
- **nuisance impacts on immediate neighbours and neighbourhoods**
- **natural buffers and separation from residential neighbourhoods**
- **visual and physical access to water**
- **impacts on landform**
- **impacts on vegetation**
- **ecological restoration and enhancement opportunities for natural areas**
- **potential for natural and cultural heritage interpretive opportunities**
- **importance of views and scenic resources**
- **operations and maintenance requirements**

- **high level comparative capital costs analysis**

What follows is a high level use of these criteria to evaluate Options 1 and 2 **only**. This is preliminary, and neither complete or detailed enough to make a defensible decision. It does however, demonstrate some of the arguments that can be made for site selection and jump-starts the process of coming up with a better answer for a preferred park site:

- **external pedestrian accessibility (walkability)** – the staff report provides an evaluation of the walkability of each location and gives priority to Option #2 over Option #1. This conclusion was based on Option #2's centralized location, when in fact, Option #1 is more geographically central to the entire Clair-Maltby development. As the Staff Report states the Community Park designation should serve multiple neighbourhoods and transcend the Secondary Plan boundaries. The City's calculations show that Option #1 reaches 8,900 people within 800 metres (a 10 minute walk) and 4,400 people within 400 metres (a 5 minute walk); both of these calculations are greater than those shown for Option #2 which reaches 4,150 people within 400 metres and 8,700 people within 800 metres. Based on this criterion, it is my opinion that the City staff's selection of Option #2 was incorrect. The Montieth Brown Planning Consultants submission reached a similar conclusion.
- **ease of internal access and pedestrian safety** – separating pedestrian and vehicular movement within a park is important for obvious safety reasons. Without a schematic design for each site, it is difficult to conclude that it would be easier on one site vs the other. The flatter topography of the golf course site would suggest greater flexibility in where parking lots can be located, therefore giving an advantage to Option #1 in terms of meeting safety requirements. With less grading required it would suggest reduced capital cost. The flatter site would also indicate that barrier free access would be more feasible in Option #1. The functional relationship to a stormwater management system is also an important consideration when evaluating parking, but this cannot be understood without complete comparison of schematic designs.
- **impacts from road access and traffic** – any community park option has the potential to create conflicts with nearby residential streets due to traffic and other impacts resulting from the park's ultimate function. Any developer and/or future resident would be concerned about access to a Community Park if that access had to be provided directly through potential new neighbourhoods that she or he intended to develop or live in. The Staff Report immediately discounts Option #1 on the basis that it does not allow adequate dispersal of traffic after special events. Given the lack of rationale supporting the need for a special event space, this is probably a premature if not irrational conclusion. It is likely that the potential for traffic impacts is similar for both Option #1 and Option #2, as both require points of access to arterials by way of their associated collectors, thereby having similar effects on adjacent housing. In my opinion, Option #1 should not have been eliminated from consideration until the City determines whether the Community Park would generate unacceptable traffic impacts from its, as-yet-to-be-defined park programme. A more detailed understanding of where park entrances will be located and how these relate to the road system and potential traffic patterns is required.
- **public transit access** – both park site options appear to have the potential to be serviced by public transit. A schematic design would confirm this and maybe demonstrate some nuanced reason why one site would provide better service by public transit over the other.

- **ease of park servicing and sustainability** – it is likely that both of these sites can be accessed by municipal services given the preliminary street layout. Again, without schematic designs it is difficult to evaluate if there would be special topographic or other site issues that might make servicing feasibility more difficult in Option #2 vs Option #1 and/or more costly.
- **stormwater management implications** – protecting the water quality of Halls Pond and other surface water and groundwater features will be extremely important on this site. Achieving a “0” balance of run-off will likely be required. Location of SWM and secondary treatment facilities will require space and will be influenced by the inclusion of LID initiatives that might reduce the extent of storm facilities. The potential for this on each site would be better understood if schematics demonstrated how SWM facilities would interact with park features such as buildings, playfields parking lots and other park features with impervious surfaces. There are substantial cost implications associated with these decisions.



Illustration 1: Flat topography of Springfield Golf Course with forested perimeter screening.

- **visual impact of parking lots and nuisance activity associated with parking lots** – the location of parking lots in relation to residential homes is of particular importance in park design particularly if a park has a city-wide role and purpose. The hummocky, rolling topography of Option #2 will make it more difficult to provide centralized parking than in Option #1. Extensive grading will be required to create flat areas for all sizes of parking lots in Option #2. The golf course site is generally flatter and has an area on its north side that is surrounded by woodlot, which would further screen a parking lot from residential areas and other park activities to the south and east. There is more

vegetation associated with existing fairways, that if preserved would provide immediate screening for park features. Option #2 is more open, lacks existing vegetation, and will require considerable new buffers and planting which can be costly and takes considerable time to become effective for screening adjacent homes.

- **natural buffers and separation from residential neighbourhoods** - Option #1 is flanked on three sides by natural heritage lands with the potential of a proposed built-up area to the west. Many urban parks are separated from neighbours by a simple fence, which is less than ideal in many cases. Halls Pond is surrounded by wonderful mature treed vegetation that not only screens adjacent housing, but in conjunction with landform, acts as an acoustical barrier at the perimeter of the proposed park site in Option #1. Creating landscape buffers like these in 'greenfield' situations is an expensive capital cost that is already built into the Option #1 site. The fourth side of the park in Option #1 can be easily buffered from future residential by re-grading some of the existing fairway landform to create a substantial and visually appealing barrier along the park's western boundary. Option #2 is primarily open field and does not have this same potential. Option #2 would require substantial capital costs to achieve the same objective and the loss of land area to achieve a similar screening effect.
- **nuisance impacts on immediate neighbours and neighbourhoods** - any Community Park option could create conflicts with nearby homes due to parking lot and sports field lighting, spectator noise, and other impacts resulting from the park's ultimate use. As described above, Option #1 has more natural screening already in place that will assist in ameliorating the typical nuisance impacts associate with park activities. Having a preliminary park programme and schematics, would assist greatly in understanding how park layout and activities might affect nearby housing.



Illustration 2: Water views and perimeter screening across Halls Pond.

- **visual and physical access to water** – water features, ponds, and small lakes as core features of parks are an instant formula for the success of any park design. One does not have to travel far from Guelph to understand this phenomenon. Victoria Park in Kitchener, the collection of parks around Victoria Lake in Stratford, Lake Aquitaine Park in Mississauga, to name a few, are excellent examples of successful park design founded on small bodies of water, similar to Halls Pond. Other examples further afield include Deer Lake Park in Burnaby BC, High Park in Toronto, and the Public Garden in Halifax. Like these other parks, views from the shores of Halls Pond are spectacular and photogenic, in all seasons and in all directions. Passive water uses such as paddle boats, model boating could be programmed into park activities. Passive shoreline activities such as picnicking, winter skating, walking/bicycling and small special events would all benefit from Halls Pond as a visual backdrop. Option #2 has very limited potential for access to Halls Pond and not without substantially disturbing sensitive environmental areas to achieve the equivalent degree of water access that golf course site has..... by doing nothing.
- **impacts on landform** – original grading for the Springfield Golf and Country Club has already disturbed most of the original landform. Because of the fairway design, the topography is much flatter requiring less grading to create flat sites for passive/active playfields or other large scaled facilities like parking lots and building sites. Less grading means less cost. Existing fairway landforms can be easily graded out to create new landforms and none of this activity will have any impact on moraine landform. The Marcolongo farm would require more grading to create flat areas for parking, building sites and passive play areas, at great cost. Grading would negatively impact the moraine landform, so there are a number of reasons why Option #1 is more suitable for park development than Option #2 with respect to existing topography.



Illustration 3: Rolling hummocky landform on Marcolongo farm Option #2.

- **impacts on vegetation** – Option #2 is largely open field and has very little random vegetation to consider, that isn't part of natural heritage areas and unlikely to be impacted by park development. The golf course has a variety of landscape areas associate with fairways that already provides the site with a park-like character. There are some wonderful specimen trees both native and exotic. Some of this non-native plant material will have to be relocated or removed to allow for park features. Some of this plant material may be movable. Tree-moving is expensive, but there may be cost effective trade-offs in terms of the capital cost of new landscaping that would make salvaging trees on the golf course site very feasible.



Illustration 4: Random specimen trees on Springfield Golf Course, Option #1.

- **ecological restoration and enhancement opportunities for natural areas** – both Options #1 and #2 likely offer a variety of opportunities to do restoration work. Schematic designs would assist in determining the total potential area of restoration, thus allowing for a better understanding of capital cost and potential success of restoration work.
- **potential for natural and cultural heritage interpretive opportunities** – both sites have amazing potential for public education. Possible themes could include early pioneer settlement activities, the success and failure of early agriculture, glaciation, hydro-geology, ie. the importance of aquifers, habitat restoration, to name a few. Option #2 with its significant Cultural Heritage Landscape probably has an advantage

here. A comparison of schematic design would confirm the interpretive potential of each site.

- **importance of views and scenic resources** – the visual and scenic resources of a park site are extremely important in differentiating a quality park experience from an ordinary or *garden variety* experience. As an example, parks along the Speed and Eramosa Rivers tend to be more interesting than parks in tableland or in former agricultural sites. Both park Options are visually interesting, but Option #1 with its greater exposure to water and its long views across water would likely be the preferred park landscape choice of most people. Additional landscaping in Option #1 would help frame important and existing views and give the new park site an immediate mature quality. These landscape settings would be immediately memorable for generations of park users to come.
- **operations and maintenance requirements** – both park sites will need an in-park maintenance facility and it is likely that there are opportunities for such a requirement in both park options. Schematic designs would assist in determining the feasibility of such a facility, its integration into the park and a comparison of potential costs.
- **high-level capital costs analysis** – park programme and schematic designs are required to prepare capital cost estimates. A comparison of high-level costs would certainly assist in determining which park site is most feasible and which park option provides the best park experience in the most cost effective way.

Four closing observations:

- **re-purposing a golf course as an urban (community) park** - the east end of the Springfield Golf and Country Club, Option #1, is..... in many ways, already a '**park**'. Many of the physical conditions/requirements necessary to achieve a spectacular and successful park development are already embodied in Option #1. Park sites like this are rare finds in 'greenfield' expansions of our cities, so it is paramount that the City make the right choice.
- **the Marcolongo Foundation Gift** - following a meeting with City Staff on February 3, 2020, the Marcolongo farm Foundation's Board of Directors communicated their commitment to working collaboratively with the City to maximize the public good with respect to the Foundations lands. The Foundation also indicated a willingness to bequeath the majority of lands within the designated Cultural Heritage Landscape (CHL) to the City of Guelph to augment the proposed area for the Community Park. This was an amazing gesture on the part of the Foundation. It would result in publicly-owned lands being added to the park area without compromising the potential of an affordable housing project, proposed on adjacent lands. It would consolidate the park lands centred around the beautiful water features of the site with amazing potential for park activities and natural restoration works, while at the same time reducing the amount of land that might have been taken away from the developable area of the golf course to achieve the minimum park requirement of 10 ha. It would bolster the amount of open space in the Secondary Plan area over and above parkland dedications, **without the City having to purchase additional lands.**
- **The Hail Mary Option** – assuming continued and stubborn resistance from the owners of the Springfield Golf and Country Club to a park development on their lands, the City could offer to purchase the golf course outright. Several municipalities in the area own public golf courses as part of providing city-side recreational opportunities, Kitchener's,

Rockway and Doon Valley golf clubs and Mississauga's, Brae Ben and Lakeview courses are four good examples. With ownership, the City could then create the community park in the most efficient and optimum way possible. With the support and cooperation of the Foundation for the Support of International Medical Training that owns the Marcolongo farm, this would allow greater flexibility in meeting the community park programme requirements, solve both vehicular and pedestrian accessibility issues and reduce potential environmental impacts of both the park and residential development. When complete, the City could either sell off the remaining lands for residential purposes or alternatively, operate a smaller reconfigured golf course as a potential revenue centre.

- **lack of programme and incomplete selection criteria** – City Staff made a site selection decision for a very significant and complicated park with a limited amount of information which ultimately lead to a poor choice between the two most suitable sites. The limited criteria used to make this selection tries to give legitimacy to a process, but ultimately disguises a poor decision. The Committee of the Whole rejected this recommendation and concluded on the limited information available that Option #1 has the greatest potential to achieve a successful park development. I agree with that conclusion. The City needs to step back and complete a park programme and schematic designs for both Options #1 and #2 to properly evaluate and confirm which site has the foremost potential to created the best Community Park for the Clair-Maltby community.

To summarize my position, the citizens of Guelph deserve the best park option possible. With the available information, Option #1 appears to be the best choice by far, and this can be verified by developing a park programme and implementing a more complete, comprehensive analysis of comparative schematics. Proceeding with Option #1 at this point in time is likely the correct decision. Proceeding with Option #2, without a more detailed process of evaluation and site selection would be nothing short of foolish, and could have permanent and detrimental consequences for all future generations of Guelphites, who will ultimately use and hope to enjoy this park!

Sincerely,

Rod Mac Donald, OALA, FCSLA
Landscape Architect