

Attachment-4 Planning Recommendation Official Plan Amendment Memo

The preferred alternative meets the intent of the natural heritage system

A key objective of natural heritage system (NHS) policy is to protect, maintain, enhance and restore the NHS 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. Essential transportation infrastructure is limited as a permitted use in the NHS to minimize fragmentation and impacts to natural heritage features and areas and their functions. The preferred alternative for the Emma Street to Earl Street pedestrian bridge meets the intent of Official Plan NHS policy. To accommodate the Emma Street to Earl Street Pedestrian Bridge, a site-specific Official Plan Amendment (OPA) is needed to address a technical inconsistency between the objectives and intent of the NHS and a permitted use.

The site-specific OPA would permit essential transportation infrastructure in the NHS in support of the preferred alignment. A scoped Environmental Impact Study (EIS) 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.

The preferred alternative will result in an overall benefit

The preferred alternative follows the alignment of an existing hydro corridor and area of impact within the NHS. 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 metre 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 for the NHS.