

Official Plan Policy Amendments for Infrastructure Projects in Parks and Open Space Areas and the Green Space System

Engagement Summary – March 2024

Engagement Activity

On March 7, 2024, the project team held a virtual public Open House from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm, to present updated draft Official Plan policies based on feedback received during the previous round of consultations last fall, 2023. These proposed policies are designed to facilitate conservation projects and essential underground public works and utilities within Parks, Open Space Areas, and Natural Areas without necessitating amendments to the City's Official Plan.

The meetings began with a presentation overview of the project and draft policies, followed by a Q+A and discussion. 25 attendees joined this meeting.

What we heard

Input by Theme

There were 2 main themes that arose during the discussion. Below are points that summarize the input, feedback, and discussion from the virtual public Open House.

- Policy Wording and Implementation
 - o Concerns regarding the operations of non-public utility companies given the proposed policy language.
 - o Questions about the process, exemptions, and permissibility outlined in the policies, such as above ground works and work in hydro corridors
- Environmental Conservation and Preservation
 - o Emphasis to ensure continued protections for Environmentally Significant Areas (ESA) and Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI), and endangered species in these areas given proposed policy changes
 - o Balancing recreational activities with the preservation of natural areas

Key Questions:

- Enbridge is not a public utility, how can the language in the policy be clarified to include non-public utility companies?

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- How are decisions made regarding the presence of recreational facilities in such spaces?
- Will above-ground Hydro One installations, such as transmission lines and towers on parkland, be permissible under section 4.3.9 if they require a permanent easement?
- How does the process work under section 4.3.2 if existing hydro installations, such as towers or cable lines in hydro corridors, need relocation due to reasons other than hydro use?
- Is the planning team for Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 528 aware of the recent city council decision on endangered species?
- How do planning rules account for designated nature areas, particularly considering the presence of at-risk species?

Summarized Question & Answer Discussion:

Question:

Public concern arose about the operations of non-public utility companies due to the policy language.

Staff Response:

The language in the proposed policy is derived from the existing language in the Official Plan, particularly from section 4.3, policy 2. This section states that development is typically not allowed in parks and open space areas, except for essential public works and utilities, which serves as the foundation for the proposed policy language.

Question:

Public concern arose over the prioritization of recreational activities in parks, potentially compromising natural areas. This pressure for recreational amenities often leads to infrastructure development, including utilities, in areas originally designated for natural preservation. High Park was used as an example, where proposals for non-nature-based activities like speed cycling or expanded roads have emerged.

Staff Response:

The focus of this discussion is to address utilities not required for a Parks, Forestry, and Recreation (PF&R) project. For instance, installing a splash pad in a park necessitates on-site utilities. The current OPA pertains to utility usage unrelated to supporting PF&R facilities, which are already permitted in parks as outlined in the Official Plan. Any new

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park infrastructure would undergo a park-specific engagement process during park redevelopment.

Question:

The public was concerned about the proposed section 4.3.9 and whether above-ground hydro installations like transmission lines and towers would be permissible on parkland if a permanent easement is needed.

Staff Response:

The process for installations requiring an OPA would remain unchanged, focusing primarily on underground utilities. Existing hydro easements wouldn't be affected by the proposed policies, and any new infrastructure by Hydro One wouldn't fall under the scope of the proposed section.

Question:

There was concern regarding section 4.3.2, particularly regarding hydro corridors. Given that development is prohibited except for hydro uses, there's uncertainty about the process if existing installations need relocation but their presence persists, such as in the case of shifting towers or cable lines due to other reasons.

Staff Response:

Parks, Forestry & Recreation staff responded separately to this inquiry following the meeting.

Question:

The concern raised by the public revolves around the exemption of Environmentally Significant Areas (ESA) and Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) from OPA 528, suggesting they warrant a special OPA. Are City Staff aware of recent City Council decisions on endangered species, as it seems relevant? Additionally, they emphasize the importance of protecting these designated natural areas, highlighting the presence of at-risk species and the necessity for planning rules to account for this.

Staff Response:

Existing Official Plan policies related to endangered species and other environmental protections still apply in these circumstances. All policies of the Official Plan must be adhered to when considering any type of proposal. The proposed policy focuses on

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exempting certain projects (conservation projects and essential underground public works and utilities) from requiring an OPA, emphasizing restoration and enhancement of lands while ensuring all other Official Plan policies, especially those related to the environment and endangered species, are applied.

Recent council decisions involving endangered species emphasize replacement habitat, tailored to the specific needs of each park space, allowing for negotiation with utility companies on a site-by-site basis.

All infrastructure proposals near ESAs undergo a rigorous review process to ensure the city's commitment to protecting these areas.