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# Chorley Park Trail Connection: Update on Accessibility Requirements

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**Memo from the Project Team**

The City of Toronto and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority are working towards the construction of a new recreational trail to connect Chorley Park (in Rosedale) to the Beltline Trail, Moore Park Ravine and Don Valley Brick Works Park. The existing footpaths, asphalt trail and timber staircase at Chorley Park are in a state of advanced deterioration and disrepair and as a result are considered unsafe for public use and will be removed.

## Originally Planned to Multi-use Trail Standards

The Chorley hillside trail was original conceived in 1999/2000 as connection to the Don Valley Brick Works Park. This plan was solidified as a multi-use trail connection, part of Toronto Transportation's Cycling Infrastructure program, as referenced in the Bikeway Trails Implementation Plan in 2012 and as part of the Beltline Master Plan Study in 2013. As a multi-use trail connection there are known standards and guidelines that directed design, for example a preferred width of 3m, a gradual slope and a paved surface (asphalt).

## Modifications to Design to Address Public Concern & Function

Over the summer of 2014, in response to community concerns about the asphalt switchback design, the project team re-evaluated the function and requirements of the trail in order to open up design options that might be more acceptable to the local community. The City builds and maintains many types of trails, including some with narrow natural surfaces. In this context, we entertained discussions of narrower widths, steeper grades, potential use of stairs, and alternative surface options.

## Recognition of Obligations to Accessible Design

The City had been endeavouring to design and build a trail that would accommodate a variety of users. We must adhere to recent provincial guidelines that direct the construction of a recreational trail to minimize barriers to access, which means less flexibility in the range of acceptable options for surface material and width and higher expectation for a gradual slope and other accessibility related design elements. Following are some of the key reasons why we must do our best to make this trail barrier free:

- This is not a wilderness trail. It is a recreational trail connection which serves as a unique point of access between a local community and public parks, trails and amenities.
- Other access points to the Beltline Trail and Moore Park Ravine (e.g. Milkman's Lane off South Dr. and the trail connection at Roxborough Dr.) are at too great a distance to be considered convenient alternatives to the Chorley trail connection.
- We are learning that accessibility requirements on slopes in recreational trails are not about meeting minimum ramp building standards, but rather designing to be as accessible as possible within the limits of feasibility and acceptable environmental impacts.
- City policies direct us to "to prevent barriers by designing inclusively…" (E.g. *Statement of Commitment on Disability Issues – City Council 2009*).
- Supporting Human Rights means providing all citizens with equal and universal infrastructure whenever possible.
- The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations should be followed, even if the trail could potentially be constructed prior to the 2016 deadline of its application on municipal recreational trails.

As a team we have not been clear on these points in the past few months. The AODA requirements for recreational trails are new and not clearly prescriptive and staff are developing an understanding as it relates to this project. We aim to rectify the lack of clarity going forward, including with this document

## AODA Standards: Technical Requirements

2014 saw the publication of new guidelines from the Province related to the AODAs application to recreational trails, such as *Pathways to Recreation* and the *Illustrated Technical guide to the Accessibility Standard for the Design of Public Spaces*. Staff are working to interpret the guidelines and to learn how to apply these in the natural realm where it is not always possible to follow prescribed criteria. Here are few of the key requirements for a newly (re)constructed recreational trail, as we currently understand them and how they relate to the Chorley Park Trail Connection.

| Technical Requirements | Comment from Chorley Project Team |
|---|---|
| Must have a minimum clear width of 1.0m<br><br>Must provide clear width at its opening | On this steep hillside where pedestrians are expected to pass, for safety and for comfort we recommend a much wider width, e.g. 2-3 meters. |
| Must have a clear height that provides a minimum head room clearance of 2.1m above the trail | This can be easily included in the planting and maintenance plan. |
| Must have a firm and stable surface | On this steep hillside, asphalt remains the recommended solution as it is less susceptible to rutting from storm water, or being slippery after rain. |
| Where the trail has openings in its surface:<br>• The openings must not allow passage of an object that has a diameter of more than 20 mm, and<br>• Any elongated openings must be oriented approximately perpendicular to the direction of travel. | This would apply to design feature ideas such as drainage ruts. |
| Must meet specifications on edge protection, except where a protective barrier is provided, where the trail is adjacent to a drop-off | Our consultants have suggested a design solution where fencing would only be required in segments where a down slope drop-off (retaining wall) is greater than 1m. These lengths can be minimized through cut-and-fill construction techniques within limits of stability and regulations.<br><br>A 50mm curb may be required in segments. Other design options can be explored. |
| Meet trail head signage requirements as outlined in the Standards | This would be included as part of a larger City wide PF&R way-finding strategy. |

We note that there is **no technical maximum limit for running slope (grade)** for recreational trails. Rather, we are required to advise trail users of the average and maximum running slope through signage, pressed to design a slope as gentle as possible, and required to address the topic of slope in public consultation with people with disabilities.

## AODA Standards: Consultation Requirements

The AODA Standards also include consultation requirements for municipalities (which we had not previously recognized on this project):

- **must consult with the public and people with disabilities; and**

- **must consult with accessibility advisory committee**

Staff are are continuing to engage the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Community Disability Steering Committee on the Chorley Trail project and we are in the process of requesting detailed feedback on updated potential designs.

To meet out requirements for broader public consultation with people with disabilities, we intend to host **an accessibility specific meeting in the new year**. This meeting will involve people with disabilities from anywhere in the City who have experience, insight and interest in using recreational trails.

## Integration of Community Stakeholders Input & Accessibility Requirements

Our team has been working hard to investigate feasible options for addressing some of the community concerns with the original design proposed for the switchback trail connection. These design elements include **minimizing fencing and visible retaining walls** and **reducing the asphalt footprint.**

The AODA technical requirements, the outputs of consultations with people with disabilities, City standards and regulations restricting impacts to the local ecosystem, will set some acceptable limits and required features of the trail design. In many ways these design limits support and compliment expressed preferences of the community, such as providing a **safe connection for families with strollers to enjoy a healthy ravine environment.**

Within the acceptable limits, we anticipate there will still be flexibility and a range of options to be explored and ideas that can be incorporated from stakeholders.

Following the accessibility specific public meeting in the new year, we intend to **reconvene the Chorley Park Trail Design Stakeholder Working Group** to address and recognize preferences and recommendations on any outstanding design questions and ideas.

We are confident that all the various inputs from our technical staff, consultants, accessibility experts and the public, will result in a creative solution for a trail design that is safe and comfortable for all users, and will be a valued long term addition to the ravine.

*Signed*

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