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Item No. 2
Transportation Standing Committee
June 7, 2017

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Amanda Whitewood, CFO/Director, Finance & Asset Management

Original Signed

Bruce Zvaniga, Director of Transportation & Public Works

DATE: June 1, 2017

SUBJECT: **Halifax Urban Greenway Association (HUGA) Trail License or Easement**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This report originates with:

- 1) Transportation Standing Committee's July 21, 2016 request for a staff report regarding the possible acquisition of a license or access easement in support of an active transportation trail along the aprons of the CN rail line from Inglis Street to the former Chester Spur (now the Chain of Lakes Trail).
- 2) The approved HRM 2016-17 budget included funds to conduct a functional planning study on how to extend the Halifax Urban Greenway northward.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Halifax Charter Subsection 61(1) "The Municipality may acquire and own property granted or conveyed to the Municipality either absolutely or in trust for a public or charitable purpose."

The Halifax Charter Subsection 322(1) states that "Council may design, lay out, open, expand, construct, maintain, improve, alter, repair, light, water, clean, and clear streets in the Municipality."

BACKGROUND

The South End Rail Cut was constructed in the early 1900's to accommodate the rail connection between the Fairview rail-yard in the north end, to the newly constructed Ocean Terminals in the south end of Peninsular Halifax. The rail corridor consisted of two rail lines at the bottom of the cut, with steep slopes to the top of the cut; the top of the cut being used over the years as an informal walking path/trail.

A continuous open space Active Transportation Greenway (3 to 4 metre wide asphalt multi-use pathway) corridor is desired to ensure safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle passage between Point Pleasant Park and the Chain of Lakes Trail as established upon the former Chester Spur rail line. The 2014 Active Transportation Priorities Plan identifies the Halifax Urban Greenway as a key north-south walking and bicycling corridor on the west side of the peninsula and a key "on ramp" for commuters from mainland Halifax to access the peninsula from the Chain of Lakes Trail. The Chain of Lakes Trail is a 7.5 kilometre trail commencing on Joseph Howe Drive and it continues through Bayers Lake Business Park and the Lakeside Business Park where it connects to the Beechville Lakeside Timberlea Trail. Such a facility would also connect key origins and destinations on the peninsula such as Saint Mary's and Dalhousie Universities, Quinpool Road, the West End Mall and higher density residential areas and would also connect with existing and planned active transportation routes.

HRM purchased the former Chester Spur rail line from CN in 2009 for approximately \$2.8 million. At the same time that HRM was negotiating the acquisition of the former Chester Spur rail line from CN, HRM had undertaken an appraisal (May 2009) of the then proposed South End rail cut trail alignment which estimated a market value of the trail along the rail cut at \$3,345,000. The appraisal was for fee simple ownership, and mainly looked at "over the fence" values. The calculated areas used were for sections of the trail between the CN property line and the top of the slope. A defined trail width was not used for the appraisal.

The concept for an urban greenway using the CN right-of-way was first assessed and proposed in 2002 in the report "Halifax Urban Greenway Proposal" by the Halifax Urban Greenway Association and Gordon Ratcliffe Landscape Architects.

A section of the Halifax Urban Greenway was built in 2010 along Beaufort Avenue, and within the right of way, for the section between South Street and Marlborough Wood/Bellevue Avenue. This section is the first segment of the Halifax Urban Greenway.

Preliminary planning has taken place on extension of the existing Greenway south to connect to a new bridge over the CN Rail cut, connecting to Franklyn Drive and eventually to Point Pleasant Park. This requires property permissions, including from CN. Currently, there is no work taking place to develop this segment.

The HRM 2016-17 budget included funds to conduct a functional planning study on how to extend the Halifax Urban Greenway northward.

DISCUSSION

The 2002 "Halifax Urban Greenway Proposal" Plan for the Greenway envisioned a completely off-road multi-use pathway for shared pedestrian and bicycle use that would be built above the CN rail cut. While most of the CN property through here is in the depressed area, the company does retain property along the top of the cut. The greenway envisioned in 2002 would have been built mostly on CN property, but there were a number of other property owners implicated, including Dalhousie University, Saint Mary's University and HRM.

In 2015, HRM AT staff conducted a number of site visits to develop a better understanding of the proposed corridor. For a number of reasons, it was determined that the full envisioned corridor was not feasible due to terrain, space limitations, street crossings and other factors. It was then determined that a more detailed planning exercise was required that would ground-truth staff perspectives that would identify a more viable alignment that would combine using the CN rail cut, HRM Parks and HRM right-of-way. This study will take place in 2017.

The above study would identify potential property requirements from CN and other land owners. It would also provide preliminary cost estimates, consider implementation phasing and also incorporate public and stakeholder perspectives on the project. The study would also clarify whether there would be any impact to rail cut operations. The assumption is that because the envisioned facility is at the top of the rail cut, there would be no impact. However, the study would confirm this and also consider safety, security and measures to mitigate any risk that might arise from a greenway on lands above the rail cut.

HRM Real Estate has contacted CN to make them aware that this study is expected to begin shortly and once completed, HRM will look to negotiate the required property rights for the proposed alignment.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The approved 2016-17 budget includes funding for the study and related appraisal work to come from project account CTU00420.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There was community engagement involved in the 2002 planning study and there will be further engagement in the proposed 2017 planning study.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/index.php> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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