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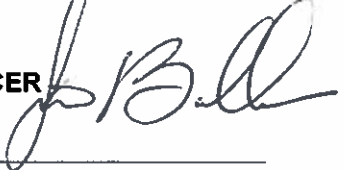
**TO:** GENERAL COMMITTEE

**SUBJECT:** NATURAL HERITAGE STRATEGY

**PREPARED BY AND KEY CONTACT:** C. TERRY, SENIOR PLANNER, EXT. 4430

**SUBMITTED BY:** S. NAYLOR, MES, M.C.I.P., R.P.P., DIRECTOR OF PLANNING 

**GENERAL MANAGER APPROVAL:** R. FORWARD, MBA, M.Sc., P. ENG.  
GENERAL MANAGER OF INFRASTRUCTURE, DEVELOPMENT & CULTURE 

**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER APPROVAL:** JON M. BABULIC, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER 

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**RECOMMENDED MOTION**

1. That a public consultation process, including an open house and public meeting, be held to introduce updated Natural Heritage System Official Plan policies and the related Schedule H to implement a Natural Heritage Strategy that provides a multi-level classification system for the protection, enhancement and restoration of environmental features.

**PURPOSE**

2. The purpose of this report is to recommend that a public consultation process be initiated to introduce a Natural Heritage Strategy (NHS) including Natural Heritage System policies and the associated Schedule in the City of Barrie Official Plan. The NHS is intended to preserve and improve the network of environmental features remaining in the City. The recommendation of this report relates to the establishment of a NHS for the area encompassed by the City boundaries as they existed on December 31, 2009.
3. City staff will be reaching out to the public by a website link, newspaper advertisements, an Open House and Public Meeting. In addition staff will make themselves available to attend and present the NHS to special interest groups and adjacent municipalities at their request.

**BACKGROUND**

4. As a first step in the creation of the NHS, staff worked co-operatively with the representatives of the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) and the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA) to graphically define environmental features at both provincial and local levels. Following the preparation of detailed mapping, an analysis was undertaken to establish levels of significance for these features. Using this information as a base, staff drafted guidelines for the degree of protection that should be provided for each environmental level through Official Plan policy.
5. The expanded policy provided through the implementation of the NHS is intended to aid in the identification of environmental features, with particular regard to assisting in the development review process. Current application processes involve the review and analysis of environmental features, and the implementation of environmental policy, but the process is not necessarily scoped to a level that identifies regional or locally significant features and connectivity linkages. The NHS will enhance the ability of staff to make an effective evaluation of a site specific project, as well as provide applicants and land owners with standardized environmental policy for the City.

## **EXISTING PLANNING POLICY**

### **Provincial Policy Statement (2005)**

6. The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) establishes policy direction for matters of Provincial interest. In accordance with the *Planning Act*, municipal Official Plans and decisions related to land use planning matters must be consistent with the PPS, including natural heritage policy direction. The Natural Heritage section of the PPS, Section 2.1, provides a policy context for municipalities to protect and enhance natural heritage features. It states:

#### *Section 2.1.1:*

*"...that natural features should be protected over the long term; and*

#### *Section 2.1.2:*

*"...that the diversity and connectivity of natural features in an area, and the long-term ecological function and biodiversity of natural heritage systems, should be maintained, restored, or where possible, improved by recognizing linkages between and among natural heritage features and areas, surface water features and ground water features.*

7. In addition, the PPS identifies restrictions on development and site alteration in, and adjacent to, significant features such as wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife habitat. To aid in the implementation of these policies, the Ministry of Natural Resources has released the Natural Heritage Reference Manual (March 2010) with specific recognition for each environmental and ecological criterion including a detailed explanation of why they are considered significant and how they should be protected.

### **Natural Heritage System for the Lake Simcoe Watershed**

8. Using the Provincial Policy Statement (2005) as a basis for policy development, the Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority in partnership with their consultant Beacon Environmental released the "Natural Heritage System for the Lake Simcoe Watershed – Phase 1: Components and Policy Templates" (2007) report which identifies a proposed classification criteria and policy framework for the Natural Heritage System for the Lake Simcoe Watershed. This report served as the preliminary basis for the structure of a Natural Heritage Strategy for the City of Barrie.

### **City of Barrie Official Plan (April 2010)**

9. The NHS policies outlined in the City's Official Plan reflect the intent of this project as follows:

#### **3.5.2.4 NATURAL HERITAGE STRATEGY**

- a) *It is recognized that the City has additional natural heritage features and areas beyond those currently identified and designated as Environmental Protection Area in Schedule A. The City shall further identify significant features and areas, including, but not limited to, significant woodlands, significant valleylands, and significant wildlife habitat, recognizing the linkages between and among the natural heritage features and areas as part of a Natural Heritage Strategy that will be part of an Official Plan amendment.*
- b) *The City will implement appropriate policies for the protection and enhancement of significant heritage features and areas into a system which recognizes linkages between and among natural heritage features and areas that will be part of a future Official Plan amendment.*

- c) *Where practical the City will work with adjoining jurisdictions to join together the natural heritage features and areas.*

## **ANALYSIS**

10. A working group was established with representatives from the LSRCA, NVCA, and City staff to discuss the development and implementation of updated Natural Heritage System policies. The primary objective of the NHS is to ensure that features of environmental significance are identified and policies developed to promote the preservation, conservation and rehabilitation of the Natural Heritage System in the City.

### **Proposed Policy Framework**

11. The proposed NHS establishes criteria and development requirements for three defined levels of significance in the Natural Heritage System. These levels are proposed to be mapped to replace the existing Schedule H – Natural Heritage System of the Official Plan. The Natural Heritage System policies have been drafted to replace section 3.5.2.4, the Natural Heritage Strategy. The proposed text is attached as Appendix "A".
12. The LSRCA, NVCA and the City worked cooperatively to create the policies, criteria and mapping for an updated Natural Heritage System. The proposed strategy has also been reviewed by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Natural Resources.

### **Natural Feature Criteria**

13. The LSRCA and NVCA used the criteria established in the 2007 LSRCA Natural Heritage System report to identify features of environmental significance in the City. The criteria were further modified to better reflect the urban environment and identify features specific to the City of Barrie. The scoped criteria are divided into three levels of significance:
- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Level 1: | includes provincially significant wetlands, habitat of endangered and threatened species, watercourse and vegetation protection zones. |
| Level 2: | includes significant valleylands, rare vegetation communities and woodlands greater than 4 hectares in size.                           |
| Level 3: | includes regionally significant life science ANSI's, and supporting woodlands, cultural thickets and meadows.                          |
14. A detailed explanation of the criteria established by the Conservation Authorities for categorizing the features identified for protection and enhancement is provided as Appendix "B".
15. The intent of the NHS is to afford different levels of protection to each of the three levels with Level 1 being afforded the greatest level of protection and Level 3 being afforded some level of protection but with some flexibility as follows:
- i. **Level 1** represents critical components of the Natural Heritage System. No development should be permitted.
    - Environmental Protection policy 4.7.2.2 would apply to all properties designated as Level 1.

- Through study and refinement of zoning and feature development, the City will strive to designate all properties within the Level 1 natural system as Environmental Protection.
  - An Environmental Impact Study (EIS) will be required for any development or site alteration within 120m of an area designated as Level 1 on Schedule H.
- ii. **Level 2** represents significant components of the Natural Heritage System. The features and function of these areas should be retained; however, there is a limited opportunity for development if no negative impact can be demonstrated or moderated.
- An EIS will be required to be completed for any development or site alteration in or within 50m of an area designated as Level 2 on Schedule H.
- iii. **Level 3** represents significant and supporting components of the Natural Heritage System. There is potential for flexibility for development if the proposal ensures the protection and buffering of the significant feature and/or retains the supporting function of this designation.
- An EIS will be required to be completed for any development or site alteration in or within 30m of an area designated as Level 3 on Schedule H.

Natural Heritage System - Schedule H

16. To implement the NHS, the three levels of the Natural Heritage System will be represented on Schedule H of the Official Plan. The updated Schedule, if approved, will be used in concert with the NHS policies drafted for the City's Official Plan. A draft of Schedule H – Natural Heritage System, updated using the classification criteria developed by the Conservation Authorities, is attached as Appendix "C".
17. A GIS profile of the City was used to visually identify the defined natural features that form the City's Natural Heritage System. In addition any existing significant feature mapping, such as provincially significant wetlands, was incorporated into the model. Each of the features was layered over the City to create the multi-level system previously described. Any areas that identified more than one feature, and therefore met more than one of the natural feature criteria, were potentially subject to more than one level of significance. The areas identified for conservation as part of the Natural Heritage System have been designated at the Level with the greatest protection for the features.

Existing Zoning

18. Where the existing zoning on a property could permit development, such as residential or employment for example, it is proposed that those development rights not be discontinued and that development may proceed subject to the policies of the Official Plan, Zoning By-law and the appropriate application process as stated in the proposed policy 3.5.2.4 d):

"Notwithstanding the land use limitations stated for Levels 1, 2, and 3 in this Section, where existing zoning permits other forms of development, such development may proceed subject to the policies of this Plan and appropriate planning application processes. The development shall be subject to an EIS which shall set out (i) measures to mitigate the negative impact of development on the Natural Heritage System and (ii) methods of promoting the sustainability of the natural heritage features and functions which are identified for the property and adjacent lands, such as buffers and rehabilitation programs."

19. It is not the intent of these policies to remove individual development rights. The policy provides for development to take place on lands zoned for uses other than environmental protection if the proposed use is in conformity with the City's Official Plan and Zoning By-law, and the appropriate studies are completed, including an EIS to ensure the identification and protection of environmental features to the greatest extent possible.

Active Development Applications

20. It is unlikely that development applications that are currently in process will be directly impacted by the implementation of the NHS. The current process does require a detailed analysis of proposed development in coordination with the associated conservation authority as necessary. It is anticipated that in most cases being reviewed by staff, the basic natural feature identification has triggered an EIS or an environmental assessment as part of the complete submission.

**ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS**

21. The following environmental matters have been considered in the development of the recommendation:
- a) The implementation of a NHS for the identification of natural heritage features provides a policy framework for the long term protection and enhancement of the City's environmental resources.

**ALTERNATIVES**

22. There is one alternative available for consideration by General Committee:

**Alternative #1**

General Committee could maintain the existing Official Plan policies with respect to Natural Heritage and Resources.

This alternative is not recommended as it does not recognize the required implementation of the Natural Heritage Strategy as outlined in the City's Official Plan.

**FINANCIAL**

23. There are no immediate financial implications for the Corporation resulting from the proposed recommendation.
24. The Planning Services Department has allocated 225 hours for public consultation and approval of the NHS as part of the 2011 Work Program.

**LINKAGE TO 2010-2014 COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN**

25. The recommendation(s) included in this Staff Report support the following goals identified in the 2010-2014 City Council Strategic Plan:
- ☒ Manage Growth and Protect the Environment
- ☒ Improve and Expand Community Involvement and City Interactions
26. Implementation of current and progressive Natural Heritage System policies is not only an environmental consideration, but is also an important component of balanced growth. These policies are to be considered in coordination with economic development, social and cultural

enhancements, and intensification of development. Public input regarding natural heritage conservation will help to achieve policy goals and generate proactive support from citizens.

Attachments:   Appendix "A"   Proposed Official Plan Policies  
                  Appendix "B"   Natural Heritage System Classifications  
                  Appendix "C"   Draft Schedule H – Natural Heritage System



**APPENDIX "A"**

**Proposed Official Plan Policies**

**3.5 NATURAL HERITAGE, NATURAL HAZARDS AND RESOURCES**

**3.5.2 POLICIES**

**3.5.2.4 NATURAL HERITAGE SYSTEM**

- a) The Natural Heritage System for the City of Barrie is depicted on Schedule H. Through the implementation of the following policies, Schedule H can be used as a tool for the protection, enhancement, and restoration of the City's and natural heritage features and functions.
  - i. **Level 1** represents critical components of the Natural Heritage System. No development should be permitted.
    - Environmental Protection Area policy 4.7.2.2 would apply to all properties designated as Level 1.
    - Through study and refinement of zoning and feature development, the City will strive to designate all properties within the Level 1 natural system as an Environmental Protection Area.
    - An Environmental Impact Study (EIS) will be required for any development or site alteration within 120m of an area designated as Level 1 on Schedule H.
  - ii. **Level 2** represents significant components of the Natural Heritage System. The features and function of these areas should be retained; however, there is a limited opportunity for development if no negative impact can be demonstrated or moderated.
    - An EIS will be required to be completed for any development or site alteration in or within 50m of an area designated as Level 2 on Schedule H.
  - iii. **Level 3** represents significant and supporting components of the Natural Heritage System. There is potential for flexibility for development if the proposal ensures the protection and buffering of the significant feature and/or retains the supporting function of this designation.
    - An EIS will be required to be completed for any development or site alteration in or within 30m of an area designated as Level 3 on Schedule H.
- b) A standard Terms of Reference for an EIS will be established by the City in consultation with the appropriate conservation authority, and may be scoped through the development process to reflect a specific feature or function at the discretion of the City in consultation with the applicable conservation authority. Additional features or functions identified through an EIS will be categorized by Level and will be subject to the policies of this section. An amendment to the Official Plan is not required for minor amendments to Schedule H.
- c) To ensure the effective management and retention of the Natural Heritage System, identified features and functions will not be reclassified to a lesser Level

of protection if the system is damaged or destroyed after *the implementation of the Natural Heritage System policies*, without due consideration of the significance of the feature. The restoration and rehabilitation of the Natural Heritage System to the satisfaction of the City and applicable conservation authority may be required.

- d) Notwithstanding the land use limitations stated for Levels 1, 2, and 3 in this Section, where existing zoning permits other forms of development, such development may proceed subject to the policies of this Plan and appropriate planning application processes. The development shall be subject to an EIS which shall set out (i) measures to mitigate the negative impact of development on the Natural Heritage System and (ii) methods of promoting the sustainability of the natural heritage features and functions which are identified for the property and adjacent lands, such as buffers and rehabilitation programs.
- e) Where practical the City will work with adjoining jurisdictions to provide connectivity and protection for the natural heritage features and areas identified on Schedule H.



**APPENDIX "B"**

**Natural Heritage System Classifications**

**SCHEDULE H - NATURAL HERITAGE SYSTEM**

**Level 1** features contain critical components of the Natural Heritage System within the City including:

- a) Provincially significant wetlands
- b) Non-Provincially significant wetlands greater than 0.5ha
- c) Significant woodlands greater than 10ha
- d) Significant habitat of endangered and threatened species
- e) Watercourses and minimum vegetation protection zones
- f) Features deemed to be significant through the site specific planning and development process

**Level 2** features contain significant components of the Natural Heritage System within the City including:

- a) Significant valleylands
- b) Provincially significant life science ANSI
- c) Core winter deer yards
- d) Colonial water-bird nesting sites
- e) Rare vegetation communities (i.e. tall grass prairies)
- f) Woodlands greater than 4ha and less than 10ha
- g) Significant areas of vernal pools

**Level 3** features contain significant and supporting components of the Natural Heritage System within the City including:

- a) Regionally significant life science ANSI
- b) Woodlands greater than 0.5ha and less than 4ha
- c) Woodlands within 30 metres of a Level 1 or 2 feature
- d) Cultural thicket or cultural meadow communities contiguous with woodland or wetland patches

APPENDIX "C"

Draft Schedule H

Schedule H- NATURAL HERITAGE SYSTEM  
DRAFT ( APRIL 2010)

