



Staff Report

Community Services – Parks and Trails

Report To: COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services
Meeting Date: April 13, 2026
Report Number: CS.26.021
Title: Parks, Trails, Open Space Master Plan, Overview
Prepared by: John McMullen,
Manager of Parks & Trails

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report CS.26.021, entitled “Parks, Trails, Open Space Master Plan – Overview”;

AND THAT Council approve a budget request of \$100,000 to complete the Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan and to refresh the Leisure Activities Plan, with final deliverables anticipated in early 2027;

AND THAT Council recognize this work as a foundational step in guiding the coordinated planning and long-term management of the Town’s parks and trails system.

B. Overview

A Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan will provide a clear, long-term framework to guide how the Town plans, connects, improves, and manages its parks and trail system.

The Plan will identify existing assets, gaps, and future needs, while establishing priorities for investment, system connectivity, and consistent design standards. It will support coordinated decision-making and ensure that future improvements align with community needs and municipal objectives.

The Master Plan will be completed through a series of key phases, including:

- Review of existing plans, policies, and background information
- Inventory and mapping of current parks, trails, and open spaces
- Community engagement to identify priorities and opportunities
- Assessment of gaps, needs, and service levels
- Development of a long-term vision, guiding principles, and concept plan
- Preparation of implementation strategies, standards, and final recommendations

C. Background

Initial steps toward the development of the Master Plan have included collaboration with the University of Guelph's School of Environmental Design and Rural Planning. Faculty are currently using the Town of Blue Mountains project as a case study for first-year graduate students in the Master of Landscape Architecture program. As part of the winter semester course *Integrated Landscape Planning*, the project's initial "kick-off" phase is being utilized as a learning opportunity, with completion anticipated by early summer 2026.

While this phase is still in progress, it is expected to provide valuable input in the following areas:

- A review of previously completed plans to identify existing recommendations, goals, and objectives relevant to parks, trails, and open space;
- Analysis of how parks and trails contribute to, and intersect with, tourism, economic development, sustainability, and overall community livability;
- Development of a long-term vision for the parks and trails system, including a vision statement and supporting goals and objectives;
- Identification of key elements required to achieve the vision, along with identifiable constraints or challenges.

D. Analysis

The Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan will provide the structure needed to manage the Town's parks and trails in a coordinated and strategic manner and making key contributions to the community's character and livability.

While the Town continues to invest in these assets, decisions are often made on a project-by-project basis. This Plan will establish a clear understanding of the existing system, including what is in place now, how it is used, and where gaps exist. It will then define priorities for improvements, connections, and future acquisitions.

A key outcome will be a more connected and consistent system. This includes improved linkages between parks, neighbourhoods, and key destinations, as well as safe and accessible routes for pedestrians and cyclists. The Plan will also introduce consistent standards for design, materials, signage, and amenities, supporting a recognizable and well-maintained system across the Town.

The Plan will provide a practical approach to implementation and be coordinated with a refreshed Leisure Activities Plan. Improvements can be delivered incrementally, but within a clear framework that supports informed decision-making, cost efficiency, and ongoing maintenance.

Parks and trails are essential municipal infrastructure. They support recreation, active transportation, environmental functions, and overall quality of life. They also contribute to tourism and economic activity by enhancing how residents and visitors experience the Town.

In The Blue Mountains, a connected, high-quality parks and trails network supports year-round use and encourages visitors to explore the broader community thereby contributing to the economic vitality of the Town.

The proposed work plan combines staff knowledge, academic input, consultant expertise, and community engagement to deliver a practical and implementable Master Plan. The requested funding of \$100,000 will support completion of this work and assist in providing a clear roadmap for future investment.

Completing this plan now is important due to growth, increased usage, and rising expectations for accessible and connected public spaces that are placing greater demands on the Town's parks and trails system.

Completing this Master Plan now will ensure that future investments are coordinated, gaps are addressed proactively, and the system continues to support community needs, tourism, and overall quality of life.

Final recommendations will include a phased and targeted approach to investment and improvement projects providing important information to the yearly budget process and allowing for strategic and targeted investment.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

This undertaking supports a range of positive environmental outcomes while enhancing overall community livability. The protection and expansion of parks and open spaces contribute to natural habitat preservation, improved biodiversity, and strengthened ecological connectivity. Trail development and active transportation linkages help reduce reliance on vehicles, supporting lower greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, well-planned green spaces assist with stormwater management, urban cooling, and climate resilience, while providing residents and visitors with increased access to nature and outdoor recreation.

G. Financial Impacts

The Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan is considered eligible under the “Provision for Other Studies” category within the Development Charges Background Study, as it will establish a long-term framework to identify growth-related needs, service levels, and future infrastructure requirements for the Town’s parks and trails system. The Plan will directly inform future capital planning and development-related infrastructure investments by identifying gaps, priorities, and standards required to support growth. As such, it is appropriate to allocate 50% of the study costs as Development Charge eligible, reflecting the proportionate benefit to growth-related planning.

The DC Reserve Fund associated with studies is expected to end 2025 in a deficit position of (\$307K), as discussed a balance of internal borrowing within the DC reserves as a whole will form part of the updated capital plan.

The remaining 50% is proposed to be funded through the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) fund.

H. In Consultation With

Ryan Gibbons, Director of Community Services

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to John McMullen, Manager of Parks & Trails parks@thebluemountains.ca.

Any comments regarding this report should be submitted to John McMullen, Manager of Parks & Trails parks@thebluemountains.ca

J. Attached

1. Attachment 1 – DRAFT Project Workplan and proposed Timeline

Respectfully submitted,

John McMullen
Manager of Parks & Trails

For more information, please contact:
John McMullen Manager of Parks & Trails
parks@thebluemountains.ca
519-599-3131 extension 353

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	CS.26.021 Parks, Trails, Open Space Master Plan, Overview.docx
Attachments:	- Att-1-PTOS-Gantt-Chart.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Apr 2, 2026

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

John McMullen - Apr 2, 2026 - 1:35 PM

**No Signature - Task assigned to Ryan Gibbons was completed by delegate
Debbie Young**

Ryan Gibbons - Apr 2, 2026 - 1:58 PM