

June 14, 2021 Deputation of Pauleen Home
Subject: Proposed Widening of The Georgian Trail

First, thank you to the Town of The Blue Mountains for the wonderful job done of grooming The Georgian Trail this past winter. Your good work made the Trail useable when it so often becomes unusable during the winter months.

The reason for my initial correspondence of May 8th is that I firmly disagree with any plan, beginning this year, to widen the Trail along its length to its original standard of 12 feet.

I did receive a reply from Don Degrandis, President of The Georgian Trail, reassuring me that no trees would be cut down or removed to accomplish this work project. However, I still cannot help but wonder about the focus of The Georgian Trail custodians. First, the name change to The Georgian Trail Cycle and Ski Association de-emphasizing its original focus and primary users: the pedestrians. Second, from The Staying OnTrack Spring Issue: "We noticed that the width of the Trail has narrowed as nature has encroached. The Trail, originally designed to be roughly 12 feet wide, now has numerous locations where this width has shrunk considerably – in some cases to only 5 feet". What a shame that nature has become a problem for the trail's custodians!

We cannot assume widening is needed anywhere on the Trail. Mostly, I remain unconvinced that going from 5 to 12 feet in some areas will not mean dramatic changes, including clearing trees, moving ditches, etc. Sadly, the objective appears to be more on turning this Trail into a road than a trail. Certainly, more widening will change the usage patterns from pedestrians to cyclists. Is this the real objective? The wider the Trail the greater the risk of creating an environment that encourages an ever-growing number of serious high speed cyclists using the Trail resulting in greater safety risks for the current mix of casual cyclists, walkers and runners.

Also, it is important to note the 34 kilometre Georgian Trail supports a variety of ecosystems, from wetlands to arid zones, each one hosting it's own wildlife and native plant species. Instead of the plans for widening the Trail surface area, the goal should be to protect what is there. Here is my proposal to Town Council and to the Board of the Georgian Trail Association:

1. Redirect the current recreational focus of the Georgian Trail to one of preservation and recreation; yes, both can safely coexist if done right;

2. Develop a holistic maintenance program that protects the Trail's natural environment end to end;
3. Educate the public on the Trail's ecosystems by featuring signage highlighting unique species and habitats along the Trail;
4. Reserve funds for a Trail "preservation program" to include, as an one example, the replanting of native trees as needed to replace diseased trees.

To achieve the above, you may also consider conducting a broader survey of users and residents as only a small sample of Georgian Trail subscribers were surveyed late last fall.

As we have observed, the number of Georgian Trail users has continued to grow and the increased usage will most likely continue due in part to the recent exodus from the GTA. The Trail supports a wide variety of user groups and each one has different needs but as experience has shown, they can continue to coexist into the future but only if trail use guidelines are observed for the safety of all.

I urge both the Georgian Trail Association and Town Council to adopt the preservation of the Trail as a natural environment as the priority, not on nature being the problem.

Sincerely,

Pauleen Home

Deputation of Pauleen Home, Resident
Re: Proposed Widening of the
Georgian Trail

June 14, 2021

The Georgian Trail is a precious and unique resource.

AGENDA

- Background and Standards Clarification
- Preserving the Trail
- Safety on the Trail
- Recommendations

Background and Standards Clarification

- The Georgian Trail Association Spring 2021 Newsletter
 - October 24, 2020 survey feedback on the condition of the Trail
 - Small Survey: 82 responses from a total of 283 subscribers - a response rate of 29%
 - 78% indicated their satisfaction with the surfacing of the Trail
 - Most respondents indicated satisfaction with the width of the Trail
- How we got here:
 - The Spring Issue: “The trail, originally designed to be roughly 12 feet wide (3.6 metres) now has numerous locations where this width has shrunk considerably in some cases to only 5 feet”
 - “We feel that it is essential that the Georgian Trail surface be widened to its original design standard”
- Where we are now:
 - Georgian Trail Recreational Trail Standards 2016 authored by the Georgian Trail Association states:
 - “The width of the travelled portion of Trail shall be 3 meters (9.8’) where possible. Sections that are not able to meet the 3 meters due to property and or drainage constraints shall have trail narrowing signs placed in advance of the sections to advise Trail Users”

Preserving the Trail

- The Georgian Trail is a precious and unique ecological resource
- Emphasis should be on preserving its natural look and feel where possible
 - Replanting of seedlings to replace diseased trees is welcomed and a positive step
 - Tree Bylaw (in the works)
 - Protecting tree canopy cover is important wildlife and to provide shade for users
- Current social media feedback is, for the most part, negative on widening the Trail (Collingwood Today, Citizens Forum)

Safety on the Trail

- Growing number of users of all types
- Pedestrians continue to be the largest user group using it daily to enjoy nature and improve their fitness outdoors
- The current naming of Georgian Cycle and Ski Trail Association leaves out the “biped” demographic
- New types of new users in this group include bird watchers, mothers with toddlers and children in strollers
- Safety issues exist for pedestrians of all types due primarily to long distance cyclists
 - travelling at high speeds in high residential areas (Trestle Bridge to Lora Bay Drive)
 - pedestrians often subjected to behaviour issues including being yelled at

Recommendations

- Proceed with addressing identified safety issues on the Trail in sections where the width has been reduced to 5 feet; evaluate expense versus addressing with signage
- Adhere to jointly approved TOC, TBM and Meaford standards in the Georgian Trail Recreational Trail Standards 2016; section 1.4 Clearance of Trail; *
- Develop and publish new Georgian Trail signage with speed limits for cyclists travelling through highly populated residential areas: Thornbury - From the Wooden Trestle Bridge to Lora Bay Drive);
- Include stronger emphasis on courtesy expectations towards pedestrians in residential areas;
- Redirect high speed and distance cyclists to Grey County roads where financial investments have been made to accommodate this class of rider;
- Rename Georgian Cycle and Ski Association to Georgian Trail Association

* Modification of existing standards requires a 3-municipality consultation process with the Association and should also include a broader survey of taxpayers;