

STAFF REPORT

THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG



Report to:	Mayor and Council Members	Priority:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Low
Submitted by:	Glenn McGlashon, MCIP, RPP Director – Planning & Development Division Planning Department gmcglashon@cobourg.ca	Meeting Type: Open Session <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed Session <input type="checkbox"/>	
Meeting Date:	April 19, 2021		
Report No.:	Planning and Development-009-21		
Submit comments to Council			

Subject/Title: Cobourg Municipal Land Inventory for Potential Affordable Housing Sites

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receive this Report for information purposes; and,

FURTHER THAT Council provide direction to staff should it wish to advance the review of municipally-owned properties for the purpose of potentially disposing of and/or using such lands to facilitate the creation of affordable housing.

1. STRATEGIC PLAN

PILLAR: People -- the Town supports and cares for the social and physical well-being of its citizens.

2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

This Report is placed on the Committee of the Whole Agenda 10 days in advance of the meeting and will be considered by Council in open session.

3. PURPOSE

This Report is intended to provide Council with an inventory of lands in the town that are owned by the Municipality for the purpose of assessing whether there is an opportunity to contribute and/or utilize surplus lands to assist in the provision of affordable housing units in the community pursuant to the County & Town Affordable Housing Strategies and the Town of Cobourg Affordable & Rental Housing Community Improvement Plan (CIP).

4. ORIGIN AND LEGISLATION

On November 16, 2020, Council passed a Motion to adopt the Affordable & Rental Housing CIP pursuant to Section 28 of the *Planning Act*. This Motion also included the following action:

FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to put together an inventory of potential municipal-owned surplus lands, buildings and/or facilities by March 22, 2021 for it to consider as potential support for Section 3.8.8 Donation or Sale of Surplus Lands of the Affordable and Rental Housing Community Improvement Plan;

5. BACKGROUND

Since 2019, the Municipal Council of the Town of Cobourg has implemented a number of initiatives and recommendations associated with the Northumberland and Cobourg Affordable Housing Strategies (AHS), including but not limited to:

- the provision of various financial incentives to affordable and rental housing providers, including Trinity Housing of Cobourg, Habitat for Humanity and Balder Corporation, in 2019;
- the consideration of an Affordable Housing Financial Support Policy and Strategy in April, 2019;
- a comprehensive legal review of legislation and options pertaining to affordable housing in May, 2019;
- enactment of legislative changes to permit waivers, reductions and/or deferrals of planning, building and development charges/fees for affordable and rental housing projects in September, 2019;
- approval of an agreement of purchase and sale of surplus municipal land to Habitat for Humanity for the development of an affordable housing project in September, 2019;
- the endorsement of the policy framework and recommended Actions contained within the County and Town Affordable Housing Strategies in January, 2020;
- the deferral of Development Charges and waiver of interest for a mixed affordable housing project at 82 Munroe Street in June, 2020;
- the waiver of interest on the Development Charge deferral for a mixed affordable housing project at 311-325 University Avenue West/387 William Street in August, 2020; and,
- the adoption of a town-wide Affordable & Rental Housing CIP in November, 2020;

Section 3.8.8 of the Affordable & Rental Housing CIP specifies that the Town may, in its discretion, donate, lease or sell any surplus property of the municipality at below fair market value for the purposes of redeveloping such surplus lands for the purposes of affordable and/or rental housing, and that the Town may, in its discretion, guarantee borrowing, or provide for a total or partial exemption from any levy, charge or fee for the purposes of affordable and/or rental housing.

6. ANALYSIS

Planning staff consulted with the Geomatics Department to obtain GIS mapping and data of municipally-owned properties in town. Based on this research, the Town of Cobourg owns a total of ~226 ha (558 ac) of land within the municipal boundary or just over 10% of the total land area of the municipality (@ 2,237 ha).

Table 1 below provides a consolidated summary of municipally-owned lands grouped by zone category and status:

Zoning Category	Status	Land Area (ha)	% of Total Municipally-Owned Land
Environmental Constraint/Floodplain	Physical/Environmental	58	26
Employment Lands*	Hazards, Land Use Policy	71	31
Transportation/Road Allowances	Constraints,	7	3
Development/Road Allowances	Unopened/Future Road	2	1
Glen Watford Road Tax Sale Lots	Allowances	3	1
		141	62
Parkland Open Space	Public Open Space System	60	27
Institutional	Existing Municipal Facilities,	15	7
Main Central Commercial	Parking Lots, Vacant	2	1
Industrial (Tannery site)	Industrial/Mixed Use, Place of Worship	3	1
		20	9
District Commercial	Road Allowances, Pumping Station, SWM Pond, Creek Lands, Future Road Allowance	3	1
Residential	Parkland, Walkways, Creek Lands, Dressler House	2	1
Total		226	100

Table 1 – Summary of Municipally-Owned Land

* Excludes the Tannery site

As the data indicates, almost 2/3 of municipally-owned land is undevelopable due to physical and/or policy-related constraints and should not be considered for residential use as part of the inventory moving forward.

Specifically, Environmental Constraint areas (ie. floodplains, Lake Ontario shoreline, woodlots, sensitive lands, etc.) are undevelopable for any habitable use without comprehensive environmental and floodplain analyses and approval by the GRCA and/or MNRF.

Lands designated for employment uses are not permitted for residential use without an extensive employment conversion exercise being conducted in accordance with Provincial, County and municipal policies through a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR), in addition to land use compatibility and noise impact analyses due to residential encroachment into employment areas. Given the limited supply of employment land and the generous supply of designated residential land in the municipality, it is unlikely that a conversion would be justified. The only exception is the Tannery site – a 2.7 ha (6.6 ac) parcel in the Tannery District which is designated as a Mixed Use Area – Unique Site in the Official Plan and is currently subject to a master planning exercise to permit a mix of residential and non-residential uses.

Approximately 12 ha of land is comprised of small and/or irregular parcels forming unopened/future road allowances (Kerr Street, Roger's Road, White Street), stormwater management facilities, creek/floodplain lands, and sewage pumping stations. Just over 3 ha is comprised of municipally-acquired tax sale lots located west of Glen Watford Road that have no services, no road frontage or safe, secondary means of emergency access. A number of very small parcels, such as pedestrian walkway links, creek parcels and minor remnants were discounted due to their size and unsuitability and were not included in the inventory.

Based on the above, a net land area of approx. 82 ha remains available for further consideration in the inventory, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of which (60 ha) is comprised of public parkland/open space. Approx. 22 ha is occupied by existing municipal facilities and landholdings, such as the CCC, Memorial/Heenan arenas, CPS building, Victoria Hall, Dressler House, Cobourg Public Library, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, the vacant Tannery site and various municipal parking lots.

Attached as **Appendix "I"** is a table spreadsheet consisting of data on numerous municipally-owned properties extracted from the Town's GIS system. Based on a very preliminary 'high-level' review, a brief description of the existing site functions, features and facilities are included together with some general commentary regarding their potential for consideration as possible infill development from a physical perspective only. Further detailed assessments in a number of areas of expertise (land use compatibility, parkland needs, engineering, floodplain, environmental/natural heritage, noise impact, soils investigation, etc.) and public/stakeholder consultations will be required should any specific sites be shortlisted for consideration.

Appendix "II" contains a GIS map of the municipality divided into four (4) quadrants, or Areas, which illustrates the locations and various zone categories of municipally-owned lands. **Appendix "III"** contains the raw property data spreadsheet extracted from the Town's GIS system. It should be noted that the GIS system contains a certain degree of error and not all municipal properties may be listed based on search criteria, data matches and anomalies – every attempt was made to cross-check and ensure that all relevant data has been captured. Additional properties discovered subsequent to the completion of this report can easily be added to the database.

Public Parkland

As indicated above, there are numerous public parkland spaces spread throughout the municipality that form part of the Town's Greenland System, including many formal 'named' parks, natural open spaces, trails, parkland connectors and stormwater management facilities.

According to the Parks Master Plan (2013), Cobourg provides a parkland level of service (LOS) that is 4.3 hectares per 1,000 population, which is over 1.0 ha/1,000 population lower than five (5) comparator municipalities surveyed (Amherstburg, Collingwood, Midland, Orillia and Owen Sound). A key result of the Community Survey as part of the Master Plan was a desire by residents to *increase* parkland supply in the community. In this regard, a new level of service target of 6.0 ha/1,000 (approx. 19 ha, or 20%, more parkland) was recommended for the 10 year horizon of the Plan¹.

Public parks provide many positive benefits and value to a community. According to the Trust for Public Land, important benefits include: property value, tourism value, direct use value, health value, community cohesion value, stormwater management value, and reduction of air pollution. These benefits join forces to help build and maintain a healthy, sustainable and complete community.

Staff from the Community Services Division was consulted during the writing of this Report. As the data suggests, any number of municipal parks and open spaces could be considered for a modest affordable housing proposal. The implementation of this approach would serve to reduce the supply of parkland available in a neighbourhood and the community as a whole. This would be counter to the principles and recommendations of the Parks Master Plan which aim to *increase* the supply of public parkland (as opposed to reduce it) and foster a healthy, 'green' community. Municipal staff are hesitant to remove public park and open space land from the town's Greenlands System, but do recognize the intent and purpose of this undertaking and the importance of creating more affordable housing in the community.

If the use of public parkland is to be considered for an affordable housing initiative, it will be important that an examination of parkland supply, demand, and neighbourhood/community impact via a needs assessment, cost/benefit analysis or similar study be undertaken in order to ensure that an adequate supply of parks and open spaces remain available to residents in the neighbourhood and the community as a whole, and that no significant adverse impacts will be created as a result of the new development, public parkland loss, and/or displacement of municipal facilities. In addition, an assessment of the impacts that the loss of open space and natural heritage features may have on the environment may be warranted, depending on the circumstances.

¹ New parklands in developing subdivisions such as West Park Village, New Amherst and Parkview Hills were included in the Parks Master Plan inventory.

Furthermore, an amendment to the Official Plan and/or Zoning By-law would be required in most cases to permit residential uses on municipal park lands. Finally, a comprehensive community/neighbourhood engagement and communications plan should be implemented, along with consultation with relevant municipal staff and agencies (Parks, Public Works, Community Services, Planning, LUSI, GRCA, etc.) and Council Committees (General Government, Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee, Planning & Development Advisory Committee, Heritage Advisory Committee, Accessibility Advisory Committee, etc.).

Municipal Facilities

Approximately 16 ha of municipally-owned parcels contain existing municipal facilities (not including employment lands and capital infrastructure facilities ie. sewage plants, pumping stations, etc.), including the following:

CCC complex	– 11.96 ha
Memorial/Heenan arenas	-- 1.16 ha
Cobourg Public Library	-- 0.67 ha
Victoria Hall	-- 0.53 ha
Cobourg Police Station/parking lot	-- 0.37 ha
Dressler House	-- 0.15 ha
Municipal Parking Lots	-- 1.24 ha

As outlined in the Appendices, similar to public parks, there are a number of municipal facilities that have some level of potential for infill development. Again, if these sites are to be considered by Council for infill development, it will be important to carefully examine the pros and cons, and costs and benefits, of reducing public spaces and facilities, and of creating affordable housing. The use of these parcels may be limited by servicing, floodplain, land use compatibility and/or other physical constraints, and could have the effect of reducing land available for other municipal services, such as parking, facility expansion and so on. An amendment to the Official Plan and/or Zoning By-law and various supporting studies would be required in most cases to permit residential uses on these municipal lands. As with park lands, a public engagement and communications plan will be an integral component of this review.

Next Steps

In accordance with Council's direction, this Report is intended to provide Council with an inventory of municipally-owned land in the municipality, and offer some background and general commentary on the physical suitability of the site for possible further development or intensification. It is not intended to provide a shortlist, detailed examination, or recommendation on potential infill sites.

Council may wish to receive this Report for information purposes and retain for possible consideration at a later date. However, should Council wish to advance the review process and examine potential sites for consideration for disposal

and/or use as affordable housing, it is suggested that an ad-hoc Working Group be established to undertake a shortlist exercise and formalize an implementation plan moving forward. The Working Group could be comprised of 2-3 members of Council and a member of each of the Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) and the Planning & Development Advisory Committee (PDAC), with staff from Community Services/Parks, Public Works and Planning Divisions acting as a resource.

Given the importance of public lands to the community and the potential sensitivities that may be derived from utilizing any number of municipal lands for residential development, an integral part of the implementation process will be to develop a comprehensive public engagement and communications plan to provide residents with an opportunity to review options and provide feedback prior to a decision being made by Council.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/BUDGET IMPACTS

There are no financial implications as a result of this Report, however future actions and decisions of Council on this issue may impose some degree of cost to the Municipality.

8. CONCLUSION

The Town of Cobourg owns a considerable amount of land within the municipality, almost 1/3 of which consists of employment lands that are not suitable for residential development without significant study, cost and time. In addition, another ¼ of municipally-owned properties is comprised of environmentally-sensitive and/or hazard lands that are not developable. The remaining landholdings consist primarily of public parks and various municipal facilities.

These public parks and facilities serve important functions in their own way and are considered valuable assets to the community. The removal of one or more of these landholdings, in whole or in part, can have an adverse impact on the health and wellness of the community, not to mention service levels. Conversely, the use of these landholdings for affordable housing can have the effect of assisting in the provision of much-needed housing for low-moderate income households and improve the well-being of residents and the community as a whole. Striking a balance between ensuring a healthy, vibrant and 'green' community and satisfying an important societal need (ie. providing housing that is affordable to low-moderate income households) in a methodical, open and consultative manner will be critical.

Moving forward, it will be important for Council to carefully examine potential infill sites, consider the many opportunities and impacts, weigh the costs and benefits, and effectively consult with and engage the community prior to arriving at a decision.

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Cobourg Municipal Land Inventory - Planning and Development-009-21.docx
Attachments:	- Appendix I - Municipal Land Inventory Table_FINAL_Apr 9 2021.pdf - Appendix II - Municipal Land Inventory Map_FINAL_Apr 9 2021.pdf - Appendix III - TownParcel_Intersect_ZoningClip_1to1_v6_FINAL.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Apr 9, 2021

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

Tracey Vaughan, Chief Administrative Officer - Apr 9, 2021 - 4:31 PM