

REPORT FROM THE SPECIAL PROJECTS MANAGER

DESCRIPTION

Re: Natural Infrastructure Fund – Westview Trail

RECOMMENDATION

That the report from the Special Projects Manager be received

and that the report be forwarded to Council for review following more research on costs and related funding application details.

BACKGROUND

A potential funding opportunity through the federal Natural Infrastructure Fund has emerged. This Federal fund offers 80% grant funding to municipalities, and has an intake stream that closes on September 27, 2022.

The fund supports projects that deliver one or a combination of the following community services:

- Climate change resilience: Adapting to or transforming to anticipated or experienced climate hazards.
- Increased access to nature: Enhancing the quality or quantity of healthy and safe natural systems to connect people to nature.
- Improved environmental quality: Enhancing the efficiency, productivity, and functionality of ecological processes to provide people with healthy environments (e.g., water, air, and soil quality).
- Enhanced biodiversity and habitat: Reducing fragmentation, loss, or destruction of important habitats and species.
- Climate change mitigation: Increasing the capacity of natural systems and processes to sink and store greenhouse gasses.

Consultation with affected Indigenous communities is a requirement of the funding, and the program outlines criteria for forming First Nations partnerships.

Interestingly, if active transportation (ie: trail development) comprises part of the project, the project cannot be wholly in support of active transportation. There must be additional components to the project that target additional community services listed above in order to be eligible for funding.

ANALYSIS

Staff is proposing that a submission to the Natural Infrastructure Fund be made for a project with the following intent:

1. Restoration of the existing Westview Trail that currently runs between the Boat Launch / Docks and continues through to Spine Beach. This restoration would include:
 - Treatment of the trail surface and/or realignment of the trail route to avoid or repair some existing problem areas as appropriate.
 - Reducing the number of boardwalk areas and bridges through realignment of the trail if possible in order to improve sustainability and maintainability.
 - Adding fully accessible portions to the trail, with an emphasis on the area between the boat launch and Westview Park.
 - These initiatives are aligned with the 'Increased access to nature' eligible community service identified in the Natural Infrastructure Fund's terms.

2. Selective naturalization of the shoreline riparian zone and portions of the park area at Westview Park, Spruce Beach Park, and Spine Rd. Beach Park.
 - This initiative is aligned with the ‘Improved environmental quality’ and ‘Enhanced biodiversity and habitat’ eligible community services identified in the Natural Infrastructure Fund’s terms, and adds additional components to the project beyond active transport initiatives in order to make the project eligible for the fund as a whole.
 - This work would entail reinstating native plant and shrub species in the area directly beside the shoreline in the grassed areas of the parks, as well as strategic native-species tree, shrub and planting bed areas being placed in those open grass areas.
 - Staff anticipates that these restorative measures will help to prevent summer beach closures due to high bacteria levels, and would help to curb Canada Goose nesting in these areas.
 - Staff has identified work done in the following jurisdictions that detail some of the design ideas and expected results of doing this restorative work.
 - North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority: www.restoreyourshore.ca
 - The Lakehead Region Conservation Authority: www.lakeheadca.com/stewardship/superior-stewards/naturalizing-your-shoreline
 - The City of Mississauga: www.animalalliance.ca/habitatmodification/
3. Potential partnership with First Nations to develop a comprehensive user experience strategy incorporating interpretive trail signage that reflects the indigenous heritage and cultural and natural significance of the trail path.
 - Existing interpretive trail signage along this corridor requires refurbishment, and staff identifies an opportunity to incorporate culturally significant messaging in order to share the history of the area with residents and visitors.

As a resource to this committee, this report is accompanied by a presentation from Bill Goulding Sr. of Sustainable Trails, who has a history of trail development and construction across Canada and around the globe. Mr. Goulding will be commenting in brief on projects that he has worked on in the past that have incorporated accessibility, restorative/naturalization work, indigenous partnerships and hybrid contracting.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The Natural Infrastructure Fund provides 80% grant support to approved projects.

Staff suggests that we address the allocation of funds to support the City’s required 20% contribution to the project under this funding program during the 2023 budget process.

LINKS TO STRATEGIC PLAN

As envisioned, this project would align with the following key sections of the City Of Elliot Lake Strategic Plan:

- Economic development and diversification, stabilization and investment readiness
- Continued investment into infrastructure
- Development of strong partnerships
- Environmental stewardship
- Support in the arts and culture community
- Health and community wellness

SUMMARY

Budget work is ongoing with respect to the above-proposed scope of work, and a definitive work plan is not yet ready to be proposed. Staff anticipates that the expense of restoring the existing in-place boardwalk and bridge structures could be significant, and in order to remain within the \$250,000.00 grant-funding limit, the scope of work will have to be reduced in terms of the square area addressed, or altered to find more cost effective ways of producing results. Staff is investigating potential hybrid contracting models where consultants can work with and train City staff, volunteer groups and or outside contractors to lessen the overall expense of the project.