

Topic: Devonian Gardens Trail Concept Plan

**Introduction:**

Parkland County has three projects identified in the River Valley Alliance's Plan of Action. These include Prospectors Point Day Use Park Site Upgrades, Secondary Trail Development on the Imrie Property and a trail link to the Devonian Gardens. The necessary planning and approvals are in place for the Prospectors Point Park Site Upgrades and the Imrie Trail with development set to occur over 2014 and 2015. The Devonian Gardens Trail link is an idea that required further exploration and information in order for Parkland County to determine next steps with this project. Further planning was carried out to gather this information and Administration is seeking direction/decision as to whether or not it will proceed with development.

**Facts (Background Information):**

Parkland County is a shareholding member of the River Valley Alliance (RVA) whose mission is to preserve, protect and enhance the river valley to create one of the largest river valley parks in the world. They have developed a Plan of Action to guide the development of the park system. The RVA has secured funding from the provincial and federal governments as well as commitments from the shareholding municipalities to undertake a first phase of development with the Plan of Action. Parkland County has three projects identified as part of this first phase. Two projects, Prospectors' Point Park Upgrades and the Imrie Property Trail, have had the necessary planning and approvals completed and will be proceeding with development over 2014 and 2015. The third project, the Devonian Gardens Trail link, required further study as more information was required in order for Parkland County to make a better, more well informed decision about this particular project. The focus was on engaging the public to gather public opinion on the idea, identify potential alignment options, type of trail to develop, uses to accommodate and a better idea of costing.

The funding being made available by the Provincial and Federal Governments has specific requirements and timelines which must be adhered to. All projects must be completed by December 31, 2016.

If Parkland County is to proceed with this project detailed design must occur over the latter half of 2014, with project tendered in January of 2015 and construction to occur over 2015 and 2016 being completed by December 31, 2016.

## Analysis:

Parkland County has the opportunity to develop a trail connection between two significant regional assets in our municipality – the Devonian Gardens and the North Saskatchewan River Valley. Trails, in general, have the potential to provide numerous benefits to County residents.

Some of which include:

### Environmental:

- Expansion of active transportation opportunities
- Preservation of linear space
- Connection of contiguous green space for wildlife corridors

### Health:

- Decreased levels of inactivity health problems
- Stress reduction through recreation
- Improved quality of life
- Improved community social interaction

### Economic:

- Enhance tourism in the region

### Transportation:

- Improved mobility for community
- Improved connectivity of regional destinations
- Synergy with other regional assets ex. Bike culture in Devon, trails in Devon

### Education:

- Ability to bring students closer to nature
- Provides informal educational and interpretive opportunities

In addition to these general benefits, direction for considering this type of project can also be found in several of Parkland County's planning documents. These include:

### Municipal Development Plan (MDP)

- The MDP outlines direction on how land in the community will be used
- Several objectives are identified that relate to trails and park development
  - o The County will develop a strategic open space master plan, which will include guidelines for the locations, types of uses, and required improvements for parks and open spaces
  - o The appropriate locations for trail systems, a trail sharing protocol and trail ownership strategies should be considered in the strategic open space master plan
  - o County will continue to cooperate with the RVA in promoting and developing that portion of the North Saskatchewan River Valley and adjacent lands, as a component of the Capital Region River Valley Park.

### Recreation, Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan

- In terms of outdoor parks and open space priorities non-motorized trails ranked number one
- One of the goals identified states that the County will recognize, coordinate and develop regional and sub-regional open space systems and sites so as to avoid duplication of resources and provide greater connectivity in the open space system through trail; partnerships and trail development
- When considering trail locations in country residential developments criteria to be considered includes fostering interconnection between traffic generators, amongst subdivisions and to open spaces
- Recommendation that the County should continue to expand the supply of rural non-motorized trails on an opportunity basis, in consideration to trail systems in adjacent urban centres and in connecting County wide and district level open space resources within County boundaries
- The plan also speaks to the importance of all three river valleys in the County and lays out four guiding principles to help guide the County is managing these unique resources which include Diversity, Balance, Linkage and Access and Protection. A summation of these principles revolves around providing access for residents to the numerous benefits that river valley's offer in a responsible way that protects and preserves the natural environment

### River Valley Alliance – Plan of Action

- Parkland County is one of seven shareholding members that make up the River Valley Alliance
- The Plan of Action was developed in 2007 after extensive public consultation and outlines a plan for one of the largest connected park systems in the world, 88km long
- The RVA has secured funding to move forward with a first phase of development
- Parkland County has three projects identified in this first phase
- Two of the projects, Prospectors Point and the Imrie Trail, have had all the necessary planning and approvals completed and will move forward for development over 2014 and 2015
- The third project, the Devonian Gardens Trail Link, is an idea that required conceptual planning in order to gather the information necessary for Parkland County to make a decision about the future of this particular project.

The Devonian Gardens Trail Concept Planning process was initiated in December 2013. The main objectives being:

- Complete a trail corridor assessment, including ownership, land use, biophysical assessment, and built form, for the purposes of determining potential trail alignments and trail options
- Engage the community to gather feedback and input on the trail, including potential alignment options, types of non-motorized issues it should accommodate, and other concerns and issues

- Develop a plan and report, detailing project methodology, assessment findings, public engagement results, concept description, estimated costing, potential phasing, priorities and implementation recommendations
- Prepare a Alberta Cultural Historical Resources Act Clearance Application package
- Present the report to Council and Senior Administration

The process involved several opportunities for public input by stakeholders and residents alike. Methods used were not statistically relevant, but done more to gain some sense of understanding/direction from folks with regards to this idea of a trail connection. These were highlighted at the May 6, 2014 Governance and Priorities Committee presentation by Dialog and can be found in the attached report.

In general terms people seem to be supportive of the idea of trails as a whole, however when discussions turn to actually developing alignment options that support becomes less clear. Many people seem to like the idea of a trail, as long as it is away from their property. The feedback provided on the draft plan outlining the alignments saw the majority of respondents prefer no trail. Following that preference there is no clear second preference between the three potential options proposed. Common concerns identified centered on things such as OHV concerns and our ability to enforce and control non-motorized use along the trail, loss of privacy, crime and safety concerns related to those residents living along a trail alignment and concerns about property values. The concerns raised are not unique to Parkland County and can be found in almost any municipality entertaining this type of project. Provincial trail organizations, as well as other municipalities having carried out trail development paint trails in a different light. Studies identifying that trails have no net impact or a positive impact on property values, that crime does not increase with trails speaking to the notion that trail users displace trail abusers. In regards to OHV use and loss of privacy there are design activities that along with education and awareness of appropriate use and etiquette can help to minimize these concerns and issues.

Dialog developed several guiding principles built from information gathered through the public engagement process, stakeholder work along with additional research and assessment to develop three proposed alignment options. These principles include technical design, user experience, private property rights, safety and environment. Alignment options map is attached to this report. Each option is listed with the opportunities, constraints and costing (estimated capital and operating). Operating Costs includes estimates for the day to day maintenance and program related costs. Program related costs relate to focused trail enforcement, trail stewardship activities and potential winter trail supports such as grooming or removing snow on trails. Costing does not include any land acquisition costs.

Highway 60

Guiding Principle	Opportunities	Constraints
Technical Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>conceptually, there is sufficient width to provide for a trail along the eastern edge of the highway.</li> <li>there are few physical barriers to the trail (i.e. vegetation, water courses).</li> <li>Alberta Transportation provides specific technical guidelines for the implementation of this type of trail.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>it is understood that in the long term, the highway may be widened and the trail would have to be removed.</li> <li>the connection from Prospector's Point to the ROW is steep and would be challenging to construct and use.</li> <li>Given the shoulder width, it would be difficult to design barriers to block OHV use.</li> <li>Permission would be required from Alberta Transportation.</li> </ul>
User Experience		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>User experience would be negatively impacted by the proximity to a major highway.</li> </ul>
Private Property Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the route would have minimal impact on adjacent landowners, given the current usage of the adjacent parcels.</li> </ul>	
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High visibility of the trail would be a natural deterrent to crime or trail user safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safety of users would need to be provided through the use of a physical barrier from traffic.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a low likelihood of impact to habitat, given the adjacent highway.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is low opportunity for ecological restoration or habitat improvement, given the proximity to the highway.</li> </ul>
Other Unique Considerations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The future development of the highway may preclude the feasibility of this option.</li> </ul>

Type of Trail	Capital Cost	County Portion	Operating Cost	
			Maintenance	Program
Crusher Dust	\$1,338,163	\$446,054	\$34,848	\$40,000
Asphalt	\$1,881,792	\$627,264	\$34,848	\$40,000

## Off Road Option

Guiding Principle	Opportunities	Constraints
Technical Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For the off road sections of this trail, design is relatively straightforward.</li> <li>The width of the road allowance would permit gates to restrict OHV use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For certain sections, the trail would travel adjacent to a County road, and could be challenging given the rural road cross section.</li> </ul>
User Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trails users would benefit from the semi-primitive, natural focus of this trail route.</li> </ul>	
Private Property Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design strategies for buffering should be applied for all sections bordering residential development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern from specific neighbourhoods regarding the trail's potential impact on their property.</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formalizing trail use provides the opportunity to restrict and enforce OHV restrictions.</li> <li>Increased trail traffic naturally deters undesirable uses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CPTED principles for visibility should be provided to encourage eyes on the trail.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trail has the potential to preserve a green corridor connecting existing large open space blocks.</li> <li>Trail is proposed in an alignment that already experiences non-formal trail use, therefore impact is minimized.</li> </ul>	
Other Unique Considerations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>limited land acquisition / land agreements required.</li> <li>strong but focused community opposition.</li> </ul>

Type of Trail	Capital Cost	County Portion	Operating Cost	
			Maintenance	Program
Crusher Dust	\$1,087,516	\$362,505	\$28,374	\$40,000
Asphalt	\$1,532,260	\$510,753	\$28,374	\$40,000

## Westridge Option

Guiding Principle	Opportunities	Constraints
Technical Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unknown and requires further study.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unknown and requires further study.</li> </ul>
User Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unknown, but would anticipate to be similar to the off-road trail option.</li> </ul>	
Private Property Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design strategies for buffering should be applied for all sections bordering residential development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited public land for this connection would require extensive land acquisition / land agreements.</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formalizing trail use provides the opportunity to restrict and enforce OHV restrictions.</li> <li>Increased trail traffic naturally deters undesirable uses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CPTED principles for visibility should be provided to encourage eyes on the trail.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trail has the potential to preserve a green corridor connecting existing large open space blocks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patterns of use and sensitive of habitat are unknown and would require further study.</li> </ul>
Other Unique Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An alternative route that provides a connection from Devonian to the River Valley, which could link into future RVA projects along the north shore.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unknown connection that requires further study, given the private land along the proposed alignment.</li> <li>There is no second node or destination for this link, and future RVA facilities along the north shore are not presently identified.</li> </ul>

Type of Trail	Capital Cost	County Portion	Operating Cost	
			Maintenance	Program
Crusher Dust	\$2,177,280	\$725,760	\$64,800	\$50,000
Asphalt	\$3,499,200	\$1,166,400	\$64,800	\$50,000



### **Conclusion:**

In general residents support the idea of trails in Parkland County and see the many benefits trails can provide for communities. Unfortunately when it comes time to investigate potential alignments for this type of development there is a much different public response, primarily from those living within or owning land within the areas close to the alignment options. In terms of the response shown on the surveys around alignments with this trail connector the majority of those respondents preferred the no trail option. This type of response is not unique to Parkland County as it is quite common amongst many municipalities working on trail developments. It makes for difficult decisions being made trying to balance out the needs of the many vs the needs of the few.

If Parkland County chooses to develop the trail connector Administration supports the Off Road Alignment Option with an asphalt trail. In addition to the opportunities identified additional rationale includes:

- Lowest estimated costs
- As per the Recreation, Parks and Open Spaces Master plan it connects subdivisions in area with each other, connects traffic generators/regional nodes with Prospectors Point and the Devonian Gardens, as well as open space/park connection with Tuckers field.
- Use of asphalt a design mechanism to minimize the attractiveness to OHV's
- Cost of doing asphalt now offset by 2/3 funding from RVA, as opposed to phasing at a later date when 100% of cost would be Parkland County's responsibility.

### **Alternatives:**

1. No trail development, consider an alternate project for consideration by the RVA.
2. No trail development, allow RVA funds reserved for this project to be used by other RVA shareholding municipalities.
3. Highway 60 Alignment Option

### **Summary:**

The Conceptual Planning process has been completed and the plan along with public engagement results, alignment options and costing has been presented to Council. Given the defined time limits within which to meet the federal funding requirements set out for phase one RVA Plan of Action projects a decision regarding this project is required.

Author: Dave Cross

Department: Community and Protective Services

Date written: May 9, 2014