



September 17, 2009

## **STAFF REPORT**

**RE: NEPOSS PARK MASTER PLAN  
COUNTRY HERITAGE PARK  
TOWN OF MILTON REGION OF HALTON**

### **Background**

Country Heritage Park (CHP) is a 32 hectare property located on Tremaine Road, just south of Highway 401, in the Town of Milton (see location map). It opened as the Ontario Agricultural Museum in 1979. In 1997, Country Heritage Experience (CHE) began leasing the property and in 2006, it was sold by the Provincial Government to CHE for "its continued use as a heritage park and agricultural museum ...". CHE has not for profit charitable status and its mission is "to operate and manage a public attraction which preserves the history and showcases the evolution of rural life and food production in Ontario (past, present and future) through living history, interactive exhibits and special events". It is within the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System (NEPOSS).

At the end of 2008, the Board of Directors of CHP, invited stakeholders to participate in a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to develop a Master Plan. The TAC included members of the Board of Directors, the General Manager of the Park, Mr. Cressman and the following municipalities and agencies:

- NEC
- MNR
- OMAFRA
- Ontario Heritage Trust
- Conservation Halton
- Region of Halton
- Town of Milton.

The TAC met several times over the course of 2008/09 to provide input to the development of a Master Plan which the NEC had been suggesting be undertaken due to concerns about the nature of some previous development proposals within the Park. The meetings were led by consultants Wayne Caldwell and Maurice Nelischer of the University of Guelph who were retained by CHP to draft the Master Plan. Through a collaborative process, Master Plan has been completed and has received support by the Board of Directors. The Plan is now before the Niagara Escarpment Commission for endorsement before it is sent to the Ministry of Natural Resources for final signoff.

## **Discussion:**

### **NEP**

CHP is located on land designated Escarpment Protection Area in the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP). Uses permitted in the Escarpment Protection Area designation include “Uses permitted in Park and Open Space Master/Management Plans which are not in conflict with the Niagara Escarpment Plan”. CHP is classified in NEPOSS as an Historical Park to recognise the use of the Park to protect resources that manifest the historical heritage of the Escarpment. The current uses of the Park include activities related to the display of historical buildings, equipment and other artefacts on the property and educational programs related to this, farm fields for seasonal crops and farm animals, commercial activities including weddings and banquets and special events with a rural theme such as country fairs and craft shows (see Concept Plan).

Section 3.1.6 of the NEP requires management agencies of NEPOSS parks to prepare a plan “to establish policy guidelines for long term protection, development and management of the park or open space area”. The Master Plan is then used to establish appropriate zones within the park which then, where deemed compatible, take precedence over the NEP designation once the Master Plan is approved.

For CHP, the goal of developing a Master Plan is to preserve the historical resources on the property by obtaining consensus from stakeholders and the public about the types of uses and activities that would be permitted in the future and thereby help to ensure the continued financial livelihood of the park to realise their mission and vision for the Park.

### **Master Plan**

The Master Plan document, August 2009, provides an overview of the relevant planning policies at the Provincial, Regional and local level. It describes all of the other studies of the site including heritage value, environmental site assessment, archaeological assessment and business assessment (balance sheet and business plans).

Heritage – The CHP artefact collection includes some 15,000 articles of national significance. While not all the historic buildings on the property have high heritage value, they are important in providing a representation of the heritage of the area and will continue to be an important attraction for the growing Milton urban area, just to the east of the Park. The property is subject to a Heritage Conservation Easement held by Ontario Heritage Trust which preserves the heritage resources on the site.

Archaeology - The study showed that no archaeological remains were identified.  
Environmental site assessment – Some contaminated soil was found on site in 2004 but this was removed prior to the sale of the Park to CHP.

Class EA - There are no significant environmental features on the property but the site was defined as an “Environmentally Sensitive Area” in 2005 by virtue of its NEP designation according to a Class EA completed by the Ontario Realty Corporation prior to the sale of the Park. The property lacks significant vegetation but enhancements to the natural setting are contemplated in the long term revitalisation of the Park to provide

screening and buffering along Tremaine Road from future urban uses, to enhance the visitor experience, to preserve views and to maintain the open landscape character of the site consistent with the objectives of the NEP.

Visual impact – The consultants retained by CHP will be making a presentation at the Commission meeting to explain how they assessed the visibility of the Escarpment in relation to the Park from different view points and how they determined the areas of visual significance on the property. Photos of the CHP attached to this report show the proximity of the Escarpment and its visual prominence from different vantage points on the site.

#### Visual Analysis:

The visual analysis of the existing site conditions and that associated with the impact of the Master Plan are generally consistent with the Visual Assessment Guidelines of the NEC.

- 1 The only component not adequately represented in the Google Earth Model utilized (images and video) is the vegetation. While the other components of the visual analysis do consider and document the vegetation, the images presented in the modeling would be improved with the inclusion of the 3 dimensional attributes provided by the vegetation, particularly the trees, present on the site.
- 2 Important viewsheds and cultural landscape components were identified by the authors and proposed planning initiatives assessed to ensure that these attributes were respected or enhanced within the proposed Master Plan.
- 3 The views from Highway 401 are the focus of the visual analysis and this is appropriate given the proximity of the highway to the Escarpment lands and the number of potential viewers.
- 4 Vehicular views from Tremaine Road are limited and will alter significantly with the future closure of the Tremaine Road overpass.
- 5 Views to the site from the Bruce Trail can also be found as there are three lookouts noted on the Bruce Trail guide at the top of the Escarpment overlooking Kelso Lake and the subject lands. The Master Plan indicates that the red barn on the property stands out but many other buildings are obstructed by vegetation and distance from the site. The visibility of the barn, according to the report, “creates a positive point of interest and provides a distinct contribution to the rural landscape”.
- 6 Views to the Escarpment from within the site are many as documented in the report. It is understood both vegetation management and planning initiatives are proposed to create additional views and enhance existing views to the Escarpment. Documenting and assessing visibility of the site from the Bruce Trail may be necessary at the stage where new uses, buildings and structures are contemplated for the property.

The visual analysis component of the Master Plan report, in concert with Section 1 to 4 of the report, largely provides an appropriate level of visual investigation for the Master Plan study level.

The visual interpretation exercise resulted in overlays that will determine which parts of the Park can support greater or lesser activity. The report recommended that more passive activities be conducted in the northern part of the Park (south side of the 401) so that the focus would be on the historic buildings and landscape to support the views of the Escarpment. Seasonal and active events would be centred on the south west and south east parts of the Park which are less visible from the highway. Special events, parking and the administrative functions of the Park would occur in these areas. Further to the comment above, as part of the management strategy for the Park, NEC staff has recommended that views from the Escarpment down to CHP also be examined so that future development can be assessed from that vantage point.

Park Zones – In evaluating which Park Zones would be appropriate in the Master Plan, the consultants have had regard for the protection of significant viewsheds and the existing uses on the property. Dividing the property into Access, Development and Historical zones was considered by the consultants, but because of the existing arrangement of the buildings on the site, and the intermingling of the uses, the Master Plan proposes a new “Country Heritage Park” zone which blends all the permitted uses and establishes “overlays” to direct the location of on-site activities based on visual significance and views of the Escarpment. The NEPOSS policies allow the establishment of specialized zones to accommodate unique planning or management issues in certain parks.

Uses – There have been occasions in the past where CHP has sought Development Permits for uses that the Commission has deemed not to be appropriate to the site. The Master Plan exercise has given considerable thought to clarifying the existing permitted uses (those existing at the date of the NEP and on-going today) as well as uses contemplated for the future development of the Park, in order to reflect the historical classification and to continue to attract visitors.

The Master Plan groups the uses for CHP into Special Events of a Commercial and Non-Commercial Nature, Seasonal Events and New Buildings or new permanent uses in the categories of Rural, Fairgrounds, Agriculture and Escarpment related uses. Examples of these uses include:

- Rural – displays of rural life through events, buildings and artefacts
- Fairgrounds – fairs have been a focal point of rural life and could include entertainment, displays, competitions and events relating to the country theme
- Agriculture – crops, farm animals, demonstration gardens, farm equipment and educational activities related to these
- Escarpment related uses – Escarpment viewing areas, displays with an Escarpment education theme

NEC staff and other stakeholders have emphasised the importance of better reflecting the relationship with the Escarpment through the use of interpretive displays as well as lookout opportunities and these elements have been incorporated into the Master Plan as well as focussing the events on those which are related to and support the core rural heritage theme of the Park.

It is understood by CHP and reflected in the Master Plan that other approvals including Development Permits, building permits and permissions from Ontario Heritage Trust may be necessary for new uses, new construction and development on the property

where these are contemplated in the Plan. This is reflected in flow charts within the Master Plan document which assist in determining whether a use is appropriate and in accordance with the Master Plan and what approvals must be sought before initiating any changes to the Park.

The proposed uses, as generally set out in the Master Plan, are not inconsistent with a Historical Park and the underlying Escarpment Protection designation provided that the uses continue to focus primarily on the protection, enhancement and interpretation of the historical resources on the property and events which typify the rural theme. CHP is encouraged to pre-consult with NEC staff for any new use, buildings or activities prior to initiating any development.

The Master Plan should prove very helpful in guiding the operation of the Park and its future uses so that there are fewer issues related to compatibility of recreational/commercial activities occurring on the lands.

Public consultation – the public was given two opportunities during the development of the Master Plan to provide input. Neighbouring property owners, park volunteers, staff, visitors and local and area politicians were invited to attend workshops before the Master Plan was developed in October '08 and after it was drafted in June '09. Participation at both events was small but the consensus was that the public endorsed the directions in the Master Plan.

Municipal positions – We have been advised that Town of Milton staff will be taking a report to their Council on September 21 to endorse the Master Plan.

The Region of Halton supported the draft Master Plan in principle, but requested further clarification regarding some of the proposed uses. At the time of writing of this report, the Region had not had an opportunity to review the final Master Plan. The Region recommended that a traffic impact study be undertaken for the Park. CHP has responded by indicating that since no new development is immediately being contemplated for the Park and there are no Development Permit Applications being processed, the more appropriate time to do such an analysis would be when development is proposed. No traffic issues have been identified associated with the current Park operation nor have any road improvements been required by the Town. Future improvements to Tremaine Road, including a major widening and realignment are scheduled for the future and these will improve the access to the Park.

The Region also indicated in their comments that urban services would not be available for the property and that all development would have to continue to use the existing private services.

Lastly, the Region indicated that the new Natural Heritage system policies being developed as part of Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 38 would apply to the property once they are approved. The proposed policies allow existing uses and uses in an approved NEPOSS Master Plan.

**NEC Action:**

In consideration of the foregoing, NEC staff recommends that the NEC:

- a) endorse the Master Plan for Country Heritage Park as it is in conformity with the Niagara Escarpment Plan, and
- b) send a copy of this report to the Ministry of Natural Resources to inform their decision and signoff on the Master Plan.

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