Report to: Development Services Committee Date: January 27, 2020

SUBJECT: **Final Report: Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Study (Ward 5)**

PREPARED BY: Lilli Duoba, R.P.P, M.C.I.P, Manager, Natural Heritage, Extension 7925

REVIEWED BY: Marg Wouters R.P.P, M.C.I.P, Senior Manager, Policy and Research, Extension 2909

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the staff report entitled 'Final Report: Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Study', dated January 27, 2020, be received;

2. That the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Study Final Report be endorsed as a framework for the creation of a pedestrian-focused Gateway connecting Cornell Centre and the Rouge National Urban Park;

3. That the City engage Cornell landowners and agencies through the Markham Sub-Committee in a block planning and land use exercise for lands within Cornell Centre between Donald Cousens Parkway and Rouge National Urban Park to determine appropriate land uses, built form and streetscape design to achieve the Gateway vision;

4. That the City create a working group to include senior staff from the City, Ministry of Transportation, York Region and Parks Canada to review opportunities to advance streetscape improvements along Highway 7 and Reesor Road and explore a multi-year design, funding and implementation strategy for a pedestrian/cycling access bridge over Highway 7;

5. That the City work with senior staff from Parks Canada and report back on opportunities for tourism-related activities that will economically support the Gateway for the Rouge National Urban Park; and,

6. Further that staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides the final report of the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Study initiated in May 2018. The report provides a Gateway Streetscape Concept Plan and Implementation Framework to create a highly articulated public realm that functions as a gateway from Cornell Centre into the Rouge National Urban Park. The Gateway is generally located at the Highway 7 and Reesor Road intersection at the interface to

Cornell Centre and the Markham RNUP Welcome Area. The creation of the Gateway involves using urban design and built form, streetscape elements, landmarks, community facilities, infrastructure and park facilities to enhance the interface lands through a highly articulated public and private realm.

The Gateway objective is to create a lasting and memorable space for road users, residents and park visitors. The major components of the Gateway include:
1) streetscape improvements along Highway 7 and Reesor Road to incorporate centre turning lanes and landscaped medians, landscaping and multi-use pathways to improve non-vehicular access and connectivity;
2) a high quality pedestrian promenade along Highway 7 through Cornell Centre;
3) enhanced interface elements at Highway 7 and Reesor Road protecting viewsheds into the RNUP; and,
4) an iconic pedestrian/cycling bridge over Highway 7 connecting RNUP trails with the Welcome Area.

The report provides recommendations on engaging the project stakeholders in a regular and meaningful manner to move forward with implementation of the major study components. The report also recommends that through the Markham Sub-committee, the City engage Cornell landowners and agencies in a block planning and land use exercise for lands within Cornell Centre between Donald Cousens Parkway and Rouge National Urban Park to determine appropriate land uses, built form and streetscape design to achieve the Gateway vision.

PURPOSE:
The purpose of this report is bring forward the final report of the Cornell RNUP Gateway Study for endorsement and provide implementation recommendations.

BACKGROUND:
Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway Study
On May 1, 2017 Council directed that staff prepare Terms of Reference and retain consultants through a competitive bid process to prepare the Cornell Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) Gateway Study. In May 2018 the City retained SvN Consultants to undertake the prescribed work. The Cornell RNUP Gateway Study was led by an internal team comprising staff from policy planning, development, urban design, transportation planning and operations. Key milestones of the study were brought to Markham Sub-Committee for review and input.

The Cornell Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) Gateway is generally located at the Highway 7 and Reesor Road intersection at the interface to Cornell Centre and the Markham RNUP Visitor Area. The creation of the Gateway involves using urban design and built form, landmarks, community facilities and amenities, infrastructure and park facilities to enhance the interface lands through a highly articulated public and private realm with the objective of creating a lasting and memorable space for road users, residents and park visitors.

The Cornell RNUP Gateway location has been identified in the draft City of Markham Gateway Master Plan, being prepared by Community Services Commission to identify important gateways in the City and provide design direction for gateway development. The Cornell RNUP Gateway Study encompasses lands contained in the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan, Rouge National Urban Park and Locust Hill and builds on the Cornell RNUP Charrette held in November 2015 which are described briefly below.

i) Cornell RNUP Charrette November 2015

In June 2015, the Markham Sub-Committee directed that staff retain consultants to organize a charrette event to create a "gateway' to transition Cornell Centre into the Rouge National Urban Park along Highway 7. A 3-day Charrette was held in November 2015 in the Pan Am Centre. The summary findings of the charrette event identified themes and ideas for the creation of a gateway area focused on transportation and mobility, tourism and open space, and land use and urban design. In May 2017, Council received the Charrette report and directed that staff initiate a Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway study to engage landowners and stakeholders in the design process to prepare a long term vision for an enhanced and legacy gateway area to transition Cornell Centre into the RNUP.

ii) Cornell Centre (Cornell Centre Secondary Plan)

The western portion of the Gateway Study area is fully within the Cornell Centre community. Staff are finalizing a Cornell Centre Secondary Plan which will consider updated policies and land use designations for the key development area comprising a vibrant urban centre, regional employment node and regional rapid transit corridor along Highway 7. The lands between Donald Cousens Parkway and Reesor Road are currently designated employment lands and is largely undeveloped. The Cornell RNUP Gateway Study provides the design guidance to help establish the enhanced public realm, open space and mobility network to seamlessly integrate into the recreational and park facilities in the Rouge National Urban Park. Cornell Centre is the largest urban centre within walking proximity to the Rouge National Urban Park creating a unique opportunity to capitalize on the location and create a great urban space.

The Draft Cornell Centre Secondary Plan identifies the 'Gateway' by symbol and includes a specific policy to allow for the incorporation of recommendations arising from the Gateway Study into the Secondary Plan as may be considered appropriate by Council.

iii) Rouge National Urban Park

Since the late 1980's community groups, municipalities, conservation agencies and governments at all levels have been working in partnership to establish the Rouge Park in Markham, Toronto, Pickering, and Uxbridge. Markham has been an active partner in developing the park including taking a leadership role on many studies and initiatives over the past two decades. The Rouge National Urban Park, now under the management of Parks Canada, comprises 7,956 ha or 79.1 square kilometers. The RNUP lands generally comprise the eastern edge of the Gateway. In Markham, the Rouge National Urban Park comprises a significant landscape of approximately 3,475 ha. This represents 43% of the park as a whole and over 16% of the total land area of the City of Markham.

The park extends along the entire eastern boundary of Markham from Toronto (Steeles Avenue) to Whitchurch-Stouffville (north of 19th Avenue). The RNUP will be open and accessible through trails at many entry points throughout the park. The location of a national park within Markham's boundaries provides a significant public open space and legacy for Markham residents. Parks Canada has identified the primary Welcome Area for Markham at the northeast corner of Highway 7 and Reesor Road. Once constructed, the Welcome Area will become a focal attraction in Markham for the park visitors on a regional and potentially national scale. The RNUP provides tremendous opportunity for long term tourism opportunities for Markham.

iv) Locust Hill Hamlet

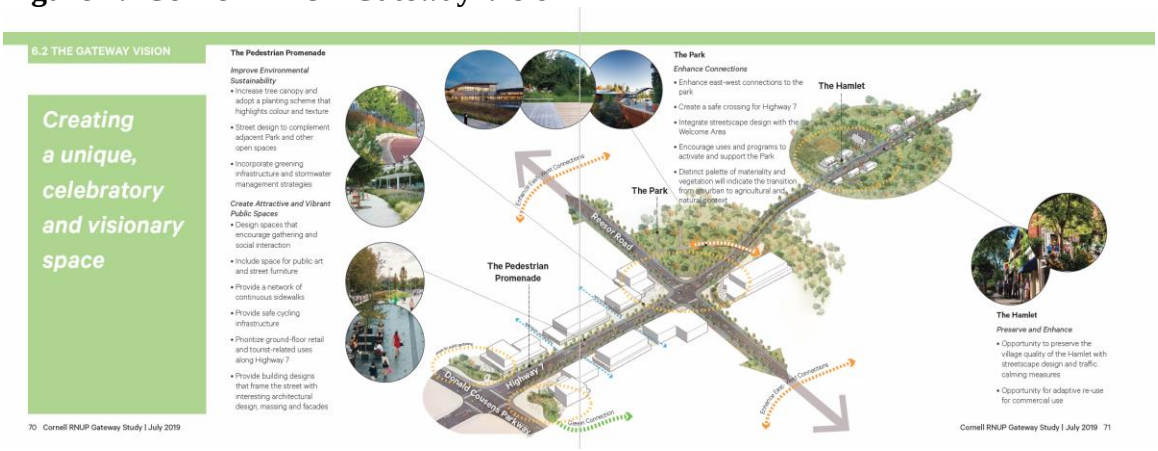
The Locust Hill hamlet is primarily a residential hamlet located on Highway 7 east of Reesor Road. The hamlet includes approximately 20 properties including a place of worship, cemetery and post office. The CP Havelock Subdivision Rail Line runs through Locust Hill and the RNUP. Hamlets are historic settlement areas with policies included in the Official Plan to protect and retain their rural residential character. The Official Plan 2014 includes a policy that directs the City to undertake review of the Cedar Grove and Locust Hill hamlets to address among other things protection of the countryside character, adaptive re-use and infill development, streetscape and landscape improvements and integration and interface with the RNUP. Given the location of these hamlets surrounded by the RNUP, the Official Plan provides for additional tourist and public uses in keeping with the rural character. The Cornell RNUP Gateway Study extends to the Locust Hill hamlet to identify opportunities to improve the streetscape and particularly pedestrian and cycling safety given the anticipated increase in visitor usage to the area with the park facilities.

DISCUSSION:

Cornell RNUP Gateway Study

The purpose of the Cornell RNUP Gateway Study is to provide a detailed streetscape concept plan and vision for an enhanced and highly articulated public realm connecting and transitioning the urban area of Cornell Centre through the Rouge National Urban Park connecting to the hamlet of Locust Hill. The overall vision is shown on Figure 1 and which is located in the Cornell RNUP Gateway Study Final Report (see pages 70 and 71).

Figure 1: Cornell RNUP Gateway Vision



The Final Cornell RNUP Gateway Study comprises nine chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction, study purpose and process.
Chapter 2: Background analysis
Chapter 3: Guiding Principles
Chapter 4: SWOT Analysis and Conclusions
Chapter 5: Summary of the existing conditions of the Gateway lands today
Chapter 6: Vision for the Gateway
Chapter 7: Streetscape Concept Plan
Chapter 8: Key public realm and built form considerations
Chapter 9: Implementation framework

A copy of the Cornell RNUP Gateway Study can be accessed through the link on Appendix 'A'.

The key design elements for the Gateway are describes in chapters 7 and 8 and are summarized below.

i) Highway 7 Streetscape Improvements

Highway 7 is the main thoroughfare connecting Cornell Centre to the RNUP. Within the Gateway area, the highway is under York Region jurisdiction until approximately 180 m east of Donald Cousens Parkway. From that point eastward, the highway is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transportation (MTO). York Region's Rapid Transit infrastructure is planned to extend just east of Ninth Line. The streetscape design exercise assumed the traffic volumes and vehicular lane requirements as identified in existing transportation plans at the local and regional level.

Streetscape improvements within the Gateway will improve the public realm to complement the RNUP, the hamlet and the development vision for Cornell Centre, while recognizing the street as an important natural and cultural corridor. By refining and enhancing the aesthetic identity and character of the streetscape, the area becomes more inviting, safer and provides economic opportunities. The existing Highway 7 right-of-way generally contains sufficient lands to achieve the streetscape design objectives, but

some space constraints exist within Locust Hill hamlet. The study recommends alternative road configurations to minimize rights-of-way requirements while maintaining certain landscaping and boulevard enhancements. Opportunities to further optimize right-of-way design will be completed as part of a detailed design exercise.

The recommended design provides for:

- Continuation of the urban cross section from Donald Cousens Parkway east tapering to a two vehicular lanes plus landscaped median/turning lane generally at Reesor Road (3.5 m each)
- 25.5 m right-of-way west and east of Locust Hill and 23.5 right-of-way through Locust Hill
- 4 m protected multi-use pathway on each side of the road from Donald Cousens Parkway except in Locust Hill hamlet where the multi-use pathway is only the north side of the Highway and a traditional sidewalk is located on the south side
- 3 m landscape buffer strip between the road and multi-use pathway throughout

Locust Hill hamlet is predominantly residential. In recognition of its location on Highway 7 and the surrounding Rouge National Urban Park, the streetscape plan provides guidance for landscape treatments and pedestrian/cycling mobility infrastructure needed in an area expected to be a tourist draw. The streetscape concept plan protects the hamlet and promotes adaptive re-use for complementary commercial land uses in the hamlet. Figure 2 identifies the cross section plans which can also be viewed in full size on page 78 of Cornell RNUP Gateway Study Final Report.

Figure 2: Highway 7 Preferred Right-of-Way

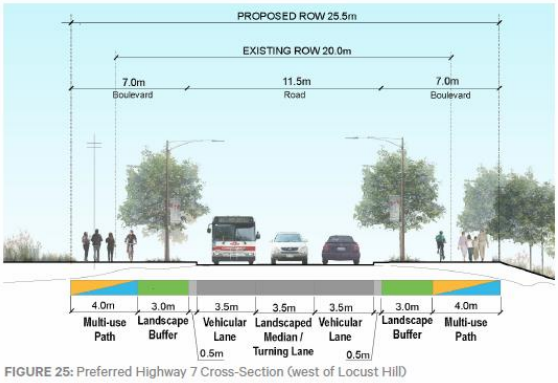


FIGURE 25: Preferred Highway 7 Cross-Section (west of Locust Hill)

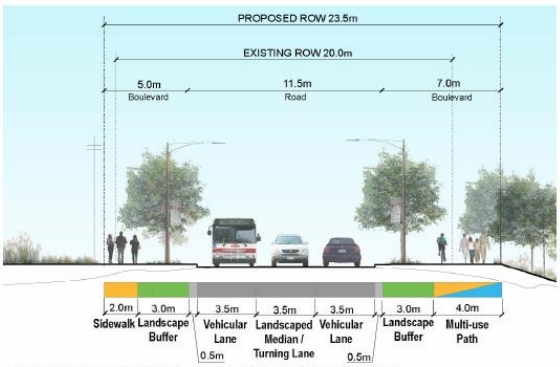


FIGURE 26: Preferred Highway 7 Cross-Section (within Locust Hill)

ii) Reesor Road Streetscape Improvements

The objectives for the Reesor Road streetscape improvements are similar to Highway 7 in creating a more inviting and safer environment, but with more attention to protecting its country heritage and rural character and ensuring a strong and well landscaped RNUP interface condition. Reesor Road is a City owned road. The recommended design provides for:

- proposed right-of-way of 29 m
- 2 vehicular lanes and a landscaped median/turning lane (3.5 m each)
- landscape buffer on each side (3.0 m)

- multi use pathway on each side (4.0 m)
- paved shoulder on each side to accommodate farm vehicles (1.2 m)

It is noted that full build out of eastern Markham may necessitate a widening of Reesor Road to four lanes from 2 lanes beyond 2031. This will have to be reviewed through any future Environmental Assessment process. There is an opportunity to further enhance the RNUP boundary in the gateway by designing an off road multi-use meandering pathway and additional landscaping utilizing both municipal right-of way lands and RNUP lands. This opportunity should be explored with Parks Canada prior to any Environmental Assessment or detailed design work on Reesor Road streetscape improvements. Figure 3 identifies the cross section plans which can also be viewed in full size on page 82 of the Cornell RNUP Gateway Study Final Report.

Figure 3: Reesor Road Preferred Right-of-Way

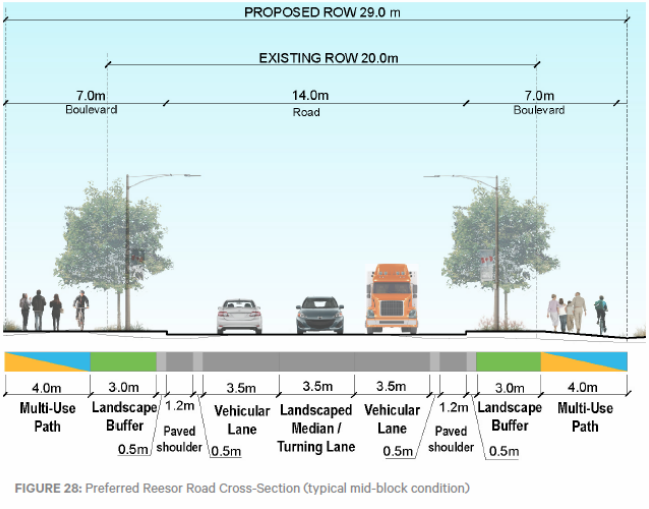


FIGURE 28: Preferred Reesor Road Cross-Section (typical mid-block condition)

iii) Enhanced Pedestrian Public Realm – Highway 7 – Donald Cousens Parkway to Reesor Road

One of key components of the gateway is the design guidance for a pedestrian promenade between Donald Cousens Parkway and Reesor Road and connecting into the RNUP. The pedestrian promenade provides for an enhanced public realm by:

- Increasing tree canopy through street tree plantings;
- Providing green infrastructure;
- Designing spaces that encourage gathering and social interaction;
- Providing opportunities for public art and public furniture;
- Providing a network of continuous sidewalks;
- Providing a safe cycling network;
- Prioritizing ground floor retail and tourist related uses along Highway 7; and,
- Providing building designs that frame the street with interesting architectural design, articulated massing and enhanced facades.

Figure 4 identifies the Pedestrian Promenade Vision from Donald Cousens Parkway to Reesor Road. The full size image and description can be accessed on page 92 of Cornell RNUP Gateway Study Final Report.

Figure 4: Pedestrian Promenade Vision



FIGURE 33: Highway 7 demonstration plan between Donald Cousens Parkway to Reesor Road

iv) Interface Lands – Reesor Road and Highway 7 Intersection

The interface lands comprise the intersection of Reesor Road and Highway 7 where the land uses change from an urban centre to a natural park. The streetscape conditions provide for an enhanced public space by:

- Enhancing the east west physical connections into the park;
- Improving visual access into the park through building setbacks;
- Providing safe crossing of Highway 7;
- Integrating the streetscape design with the RNUP Welcome Centre;
- Providing opportunities for public art;
- Encouraging uses and programs that support the RNUP; and,
- Proving a distinct palette of materiality and vegetation to transition the urban landscape to the agricultural and natural landscape.

Figure 5 identifies the Interface Lands at Highway 7 and Reesor Road. The full size image and description can be accessed on page 94 of Cornell RNUP Gateway Study Final Report.

Figure 5: Interface Lands Vision

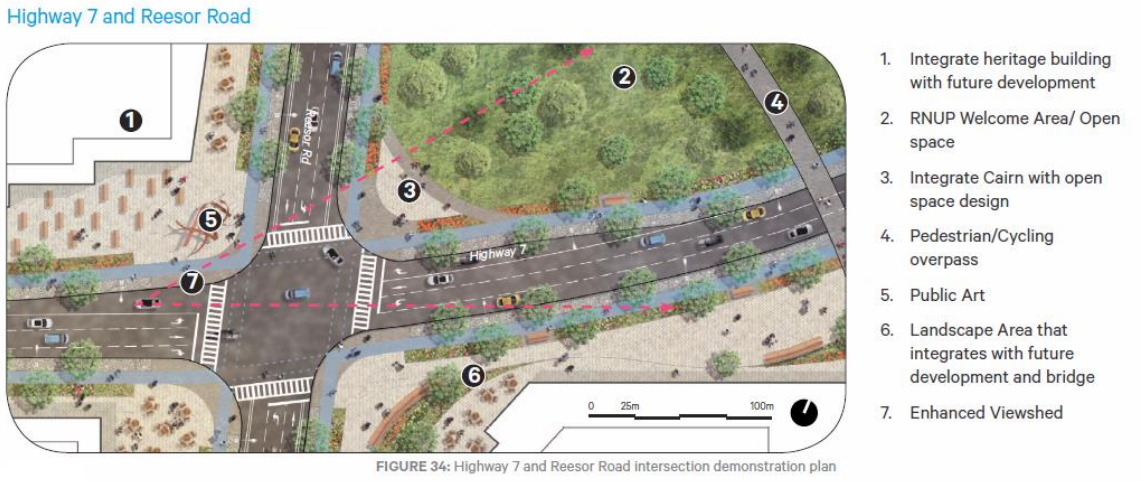


FIGURE 34: Highway 7 and Reesor Road intersection demonstration plan

v) Rouge National Urban Park

The RNUP will increase in popularity and usage on a regional scale as the park facilities continue to come on line. In Markham, trails have now been constructed in Bob Hunter Park area and in northern Markham from Nineteenth Avenue to Elgin Mills Road. Trail head/welcome areas have now been developed on Nineteenth Avenue east of Ninth Line, Reesor Road and Elgin Mills and 14th Avenue west of Reesor Road. The major Welcome Area for Markham is planned for the north east corner of Highway 7 and Reesor Road. It is expected that construction of the Welcome Area will be completed by 2021. The RNUP will be providing a continuous trail within their lands from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine. Streetscape improvements recommended in the interface lands include a potential pedestrian/cycling bridge spanning Highway 7 connecting the trails south of Highway 7 to the Visitor Area north of Highway 7. The bridge is contemplated to provide safe pedestrian/cycling access across Highway 7 and provide an iconic design element and entry feature into the RNUP.

Consultation and Engagement

The Cornell RNUP Gateway Study was brought to Markham Sub-Committee at each phase of the project for discussion and input with members of committee and invited guests including agencies and landowners. The study process also included one-on-one meetings with landowners, Parks Canada and Ministry of Transportation. A public information meeting was held in April 2019 and public input was received through the City's online engagement website 'Your Voice Markham'.

IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Implementation of the gateway streetscape concept plan will require the support and participation of several key stakeholders and will be implemented within varying timelines. Multiple stakeholder involvement creates both opportunities and challenges and the recommendations provided in this report are intended to bring the various interests together to support the vision and seek opportunities to implement and fund the major components of the plan. Appropriate policies to implement the Gateway vision will be incorporated in the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan.

Enhanced Public Realm (Pedestrian Promenade), Employment Land Review and Infrastructure Ontario

The pedestrian promenade and streetscape improvement along Highway 7 in Cornell Centre will require an integrated approach and the participation of the City, York Region, Ministry of Transportation and Cornell landowners. In particular, landowners have a significant role in bringing forward development plans which support the vision in creating a vibrant pedestrian environment.

Throughout the Study landowners have advocated for greater land use flexibility within the lands currently designated for employment uses within the Gateway, and certain landowners have made formal requests for conversion of their employment lands to non-employment uses to the Region as part of the Region's 2041 municipal comprehensive review (MCR). The employment conversion Subcommittee of Development Services Committee has recommended that the merits of conversion of these lands within the Gateway area be considered through finalization of the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan and further discussions through the Markham Subcommittee. Consistent with this direction, staff recommend that the affected Cornell landowners between Donald Cousens Parkway and the RNUP engage in a block planning and land use exercise through Markham Subcommittee to determine appropriate land uses, built form and streetscape design to achieve the Gateway vision articulated in the Final Report.

Infrastructure Ontario also has a key role in ensuring the development of their lands south of Highway 7 and east of Reesor Road is compatible and supportive of the RNUP and Cornell Centre. Of particular importance is ensuring a continuous and enhanced landscaped treatment along Reesor Road, protecting the viewshed into the Rouge National Urban Park from the southeast corner of the intersection providing a complimentary interface to the RNUP lands along Highway 7 through built form and landscape design and ensuring the rear lot condition which backs onto the RNUP is appropriated landscaped and in order to not detract from the Park. These lands should also be included in the land use, built form and streetscape design exercise referred to above.

Recommendation

That the City engage Cornell landowners and agencies through the Markham Sub-Committee in a block planning and land use exercise for lands within Cornell Centre between Donald Cousens Parkway and Rouge National Urban Park to determine appropriate land uses, built form and streetscape design to achieve the Gateway vision.

Engage Transportation Agencies and Parks Canada in support of Reesor Road and Highway 7 Streetscape Improvements and Implementation Program for Pedestrian Bridge

The Cornell RNUP Gateway streetscape concept plan provides recommendations for cross section and streetscape options based on existing transportation plans and input from agency staff. The objective for streetscape design is to create a functional, safe and

beautiful street that allows for all modes of transportation. Highway 7 is considered in the context of an urban cross section recognizing both the intensification area and hamlet context. Reesor Road is intended to function as a collector road but retain its country heritage and rural character. Streetscape improvements can be implemented through the development approval process in Cornell, but will generally require an Environmental Assessment process for the non-urban portions on Highway 7 and Reesor Road.

The Cornell RNUP Gateway Streetscape Concept Plan identifies a pedestrian/cycling bridge option crossing Highway east of Reesor Road connecting the RNUP trails south of Highway 7 to the trails north of Highway 7. Bridges play multiple roles in the built environment. As functional infrastructure, they facilitate the transportation of people, but they can also be architectural marvels, cultural icons and tourist attractions. Globally, bridge designs can become the most celebrated infrastructure features in communities especially where associated with entry into a major public space and as such, cities have shifted the focus to treating streets not only as places for mobility and access, but also places for social interaction.

Given the opportunity to create world class iconic infrastructure, it is recommended that the Policy and Transportation Planning staff lead an engagement process with Parks Canada, York Region and Ministry of Transportation to explore a multi-year design, funding and implementation strategy to explore how this opportunity could be realized.

Recommendation
That the City create a working group to include senior staff from the City, Ministry of Transportation, York Region and Parks Canada to review opportunities to advance streetscape improvements along Highway 7 and Reesor Road and explore a multi-year design, funding and implementation strategy for a pedestrian/cycling access bridge over Highway 7.

Continue to work with Parks Canada Visitor Centre, Gateway Fringe Opportunities and Trail Planning
Delivery of park infrastructure is the sole responsibility of Parks Canada but coordination with the City, Region and MTO would be needed for road crossings, access to parking facilities and appropriate RNUP interface conditions. The Final Report also recommends that the City and Parks Canada not overlook opportunities in the fringe area of the gateway to provide additional visitor enhancement activities and opportunities which celebrate the RNUP. The RNUP has tremendous potential to create unique tourism opportunities and the City should engage with Parks Canada to explore those opportunities. Parks Canada is also encouraged to provide enhanced landscape treatments within their land holdings (outside of the municipal right of way) along Reesor Road to help define the RNUP boundary.

Recommendation
That the City work with senior staff from Parks Canada and report back on opportunities for tourism-related activities that will economically support the Gateway for the Rouge

National Urban Park.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:
Not applicable.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:
There are no financial impacts associated with the endorsement of the Cornell RNUP Gateway Study Final Report. We note however, that the implementation of some of the recommendations and projects over time may require municipal resources. Any funding sought to implement components of the study will be reported to Council separately.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:
The Cornell RNUP Gateway aligns with the Safe and Sustainable Community priority in the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan. The streetscape concept plan provides for integrated cycling and pedestrian access through pathway and trails, provides for improved road infrastructure, provides for a great streetscape and supports and leverages the Rouge National Urban Park. The Cornell RNUP Gateway streetscape concept plan also aligns with Engaged, Diverse and Thriving City by creating and enhancing a significant destination in Markham to support economic growth and leisure activities.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:
The Cornell RNUP Gateway study included the participation of a technical steering committee comprised of staff from Engineering, Development Planning, Urban Design, Operations, Heritage and Economic Development. This study also consulted widely with external agencies including Parks Canada, York Region and Ministry of Transportation.

RECOMMENDED BY:

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Arvin Prasad, R.P.P., M.C.I.P.
Commissioner, Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix ‘A’: Cornell RNUP Gateway Study Final Report, July 2019

File Path: Q:\Development\Planning\MISC\MI578 - Cornell Rouge National Urban Park Gateway\2. RNUP Gateway - Gateway Study (2018)\Reports\DSC Staff Report Jan 2020 Escribe.docx