



FORMAL REPORT

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| To: | Mayor Strathdee and Members of Council |
| From: | Jed Kelly, Director of Public Works |
| Date of Meeting: | 28 March 2017 |
| Subject: | PW 15-2017 Avon Trail Marker Placement Request |

PURPOSE

To approve the installation by the Avon Trail Association of trail blaze markers along the Avon Trail within the existing St. Marys trail network, and also two trail head information markers to be installed at the transition points from the Avon Trail to the St. Marys trail network.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT PW 15-2017 Avon Trail Marker Placement Request be received; and,

THAT Council authorize the Director of Public works to assist representatives of the Avon Trail for installation of trail blaze markers and trail head marker stones.

BACKGROUND

The Avon Hiking Trail was created by a small group of outdoor enthusiasts over 40 years ago. The Avon Trail has grown to include more than 110km across 93 different properties and is one of approximately 25 legacy trails in Ontario, linking the Thames Valley Trail to the Grand Valley Trail beginning in St. Marys and ending in Conestogo. Due to the length of the trail rural roads and urban pedestrian pathways are included as part of the system at some locations.

Ongoing maintenance is a voluntary non-profit effort with both land owners and volunteers working to maintain and improve the trail. They have created a foot path through woodlots, along the edge of fields, streams and river valleys stretching approximately 110km.

The Avon Trail begins where the Thames Valley Trail ends on the Riverview Walkway near the tennis courts on Water Street South. To complete the link through St. Marys, the Avon Trail directs hikers along the Riverview Walkway and crosses Queen Street to the east of the Victoria Bridge adjacent to the downtown core. North of Queen Street the Avon Trail follows the millrace heading north and crosses the Water Street bridge following the water course through Milt Dunnell park and finally connecting to the Grand Trunk Trail where it shifts direction to the east, extending to James Street North and then following Glass Street out of Town.

The Avon Trail has several established user guidelines, which include: no motorized vehicles; stay on path; no camping or fires; no climbing of fences; no littering; keep dogs on leash; and,, do not disturb vegetation. These user guidelines are keeping with the Town's own acceptable trail use guidelines.

REPORT

Representatives of the Avon Trail are requesting to have blazer markers along the Riverview Walkway and also a portion of the Grand Trunk trail. They are also requesting engraved trail head stone markers at some transition points. The blaze trail markers are a white painted rectangular shape approximately 2"x5". Generally markers are located at turning points and spaced so the next marker is visible from any other marker along the trail. Some legacy markers are still visible on various trees and sign post markers throughout the existing St. Marys trail network.

In discussions with staff, the logical location for trail blaze markers along the Riverview Walkway is on the existing light post standards. This also appears to be the best approach as trees along this section of the trail generally are not adjacent to the walkway in a consistent enough manner. Additional post installations would be required if existing lighting poles could not be utilized, representing greater capital cost and future maintenance concerns. Placement of trail blaze markers along the Grand Trunk Trail sections would be on trees adjacent to the trail. The trail blaze markers are passive in design and are intended to not interfere with or damage existing physical elements. Generally speaking trail blaze markers are often dismissed by local trail users unless they are following the Avon Trail and are actively monitoring their placement for wayfinding.

Placement of trail head marker stones at transition points are also requested. Until recently there was an Avon Trail head marker stone near the tennis courts identifying the connection link. This marker stone vandalized and will require replacement with a marker of another construction material. Representative are hoping to replace this marker in the existing location and place an additional marker in the Glass Street area.

SUMMARY

Avon Trail representatives are requesting the placement of engraved stone trailhead markers and installation of painted blaze markers to further enhance the Avon Trail visibility of linkage through St. Marys. All installation and future maintenance costs will be the responsibility of the group. Placement on existing Town infrastructure does not appear to represent any issues moving forward. Trail representatives will work with Town staff to ensure proper placements.

The group is organizing a multi-day 150km hiking event called Canada 150 Challenge in celebration of Canada's sesquicentennial. The event is scheduled beginning June 10th through June 16th with a terminus location of St. Marys. If approved the group would have all markers and trail head markers in place by June 10th prior to their own event and well before the sesquicentennial on July 1, 2017.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications to be noted; the trail sections detailed above are under the direct care of the St. Marys Public Work Department. Trails are maintained to a level beyond the Avon Trail standard, the costs having been included within the 2017 operating budget. All installation and maintenance costs of the trail blaze markers and the trail head marker stones will be covered by the Avon Trail Association.

The Avon Trail directs its users into the St. Marys downtown core area, potentially providing an indirect economic benefit to the downtown merchants.

OTHERS CONSULTED

John Hahn, Parks Operator A, Public Works Department
Terry Aitken, Landowner Relations, Avon Trail Association

Bernard Goward, President, Avon Trail Association

Strategic Plan: This program is supported by the following priorities, outcomes and tactics in the Plan:

- Pillar #1 A focused parks strategy
 - Outcome: St. Marys' parks are not only a prized asset, they are also a natural gathering place that can be optimized and incorporated into enhancing the cultural profile of St. Marys.
 - Tactic(s): Tie the Grand Trunk Trail to Milt Dunnell Park.
- Pillar #1 Waterways Integration
 - Outcome: Part of a recreation services master plan will involve and integrate the natural asset of the waterfront.
 - Tactic(s): Create seamless linkages between the downtown and waterfront.

ATTACHMENTS

Trail blaze marker sample pictures

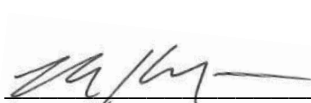
Sample trail head marker stone engraving

Avon Trail overview map http://www.avontrail.ca/hikes_canada150.html

Respectfully submitted,



Jed Kelly
Director of Public Works



Brent Kittmer
CAO / Clerk