

FORMAL REPORT

To:	Chair Stratthdee and Members of Strategic Priorities Committee
Prepared by:	Jed Kelly, Director of Public Works
Date of Meeting:	20 June 2017
Subject:	PW 34-2017 Sparling Bush Management and Information

PURPOSE

To update Strategic Priorities Committee as to current Sparling Bush conditions and to facilitate a conversation around development of best practices including steps forward for ongoing management to improve the integrity and health of the site.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT PW 34-2017 Sparling Bush Management be received for discussion.

BACKGROUND

Sparling Bush is a 2.4 hectare woodlot that was donated to the Town by a local resident, Mr. Herb Sparling, in or around the year 1980. This was part of a sub-division agreement, and the bush was to be used as parkland in lieu of a cash payment. Sparling Bush has residential development on its north, south, and west sides, with the cemetery property abutting the bush on its east perimeter.

Sparling Bush has two main entrance and exit points; one at the south end of Waterloo St., and the other from the south-west corner of the cemetery property. There is also an entrance off of Sparling Crescent, by way of thin strip of municipally owned land; however, this entrance is much less noticeable although it is utilized by local residents for loop trail access. The St. Marys Loop Trail uses a section of the bush trail to connect its north-south path.

Throughout the years, significant interest and activities have taken place with regards to the bush. In 2001, the Town commissioned a forestry expert, Mr. Warren Moore, to conduct an inspection and provide a report to the Town about the health of the bush as well as to identify issues and provide recommendations to improve the health of the site. As a result of this report, a meeting with neighbouring residents took place in late 2001, and out of that meeting a committee was formed (Friends of Sparling Bush) who would lead the activities to implement the recommendations contained in that report. The Rotary Club of St. Marys was also heavily involved in the activities surrounding the restoration and management of this area.

To better understand the current condition and risk associated with Sparling Bush, in late 2014 the Town of St. Marys requested that the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) complete an inspection, and prepare a report of the condition of the bush along with recommendations to improve its health and overall management.

REPORT

A complete copy of the UTRCA Report has been attached, and below are some of the key points highlighted the from UTRCA report:

- A detailed vegetation study and inventory of the existing native and non-native plants have been listed;
- The bush is comprised of 69 total species (44 native and 24 non-native);
- Although 14 years old, much of the Warren Moore report of 2001 and many of its recommendations are still applicable today;
- The woodlot is still relatively healthy, but is showing signs of pressure from surrounding development;
- The relatively good health indicates that the woodlot was well managed historically.

Several core issues have been identified which are the major risk factors in regards to the health of Sparling Bush. These are listed below along with some possible solutions Council is asked to consider if they wish to proceed with any of the management strategies recommended by the UTRCA:

1. **Encroachment:** A point of concern noted in both the UTRCA 2015 and the Warren 2001 reports is that, over the years, a number of properties have encroached upon the woodlot by cutting vegetation, expanding lawns, planting ornamentals as well as erecting building structures. It should be noted that extensive encroachment on cemetery lands was observed during the recent May 2017 site visit. Pictures representing the encroachment are provided as an attachment to this report.

Recommendation: To stop encroachment both an educational and regulatory component is required. The purpose is to ensure that neighboring homeowners understand how certain actions can negatively impact the woods over the long term. A formal information campaign is recommended for development, and implementation of permanent property boundary markers to delineate property lines should be considered. Possible options for delineation of the property boundary includes natural barriers, property marker posts and or fencing.

More broadly, a policy should be developed to consider how to address encroachment scenarios on town lands such as the cemetery, storm water management ponds, trails, and unimproved road allowances.

2. **Non-Native Invasive Species:** Of the 24 non-native species identified in the report, the majority are located around the edge of the bush, which indicates that encroachment (above) is one of the leading causes of the non-natives in the bush. Furthermore, the dumping of unwanted yard waste (grass clippings and leaves) has also been observed, and this reduces the potential of natural regeneration and increases the potential to introduce seeds of non-native vegetation.

Recommendation: An educational and control program should be implemented to help with this issue. A control program would consist of manually pulling the non-natives. Scheduled removal of non-native species using Parks staff resources will begin in 2017, this should be considered a moving target intended to slow the invasive species penetration into the interior.

3. **Trail and Tree Management:** There is a recommendation for continued development of existing trail paths. This involves wood chip placement improving the surface, and blocking of improvised trails. It should be noted this practice has noticeably improved the overall interior health of the woodlot in recent years. Trees that represent a significant risk to users of the internal trails should be removed and recycled. Trees that do not represent a risk to users will left for their full life cycle. Also, there should be no harvesting of trees from the bush.

Several properties were observed to have created improvised individual trail access points from abutting rear yards. This was mostly observed stemming from properties fronting Sparling Crest. The town trail access from Sparling is not clearly marked or defined from Sparling Crescent. Creating a more visible access point from the municipal road allowance could deter the creation of private access points from rear yards. Furthermore recycling waste wood from removed trees can be placed along existing trails to deter users from creating additional paths which in turn damage the interior through soil compaction.

Recommendation: Annual application of wood chips to the approved existing trails to improve surface condition is currently occurring. This is done with chip material from the tree program and placed by internal parks staff resources.

Annual inspection of trees adjacent to internal trails. Only trees that represent a significant risk to users of the internal trail will be removed and waste wood material placed along existing trails to deter users from creating additional paths which future damage the interior.

4. **Signage:** There is a recommendation to improve local signage at trail entrance points to Sparling Bush with uniform signage for all three bush access points. Signage could include trail map, and acceptable & non-acceptable uses: such as: no illegal dumping of yard waste material, no fires or smoking, stay on path, etc.

Recommendation: It is recommended the Town work with the local Rotary service club to improve entrance point signage including approved activities and an official trail map of the bush interior. The Service Club has expressed an interest in this project. Clearly displaying the acceptable uses and approved trail mapping could assist in improving the overall woodlot health.

Piecing all of this together, the following table lays out a proposed schedule and budget for future consideration based on possible recommendations:

	Task	Description	Cost
2017 (fall)	Tree planting	Augment bush perimeter on East / South sides to ease pressures from development	(Partner with Rotary and internal staff)
2018	Survey Work	Complete Survey of abutting properties on bush perimeter	\$12,000
2018	Signage	Partner with Rotary club on informational entrance signage	\$3,000
2018	Trail connection	Installation of stone dust trail connection to cemetery loop trail link	\$3,000 (Material & Internal staff resources)
2018	Information Campaign	Work with UTRCA to develop information for local residents	\$1,000 (printing & internal staff resources)
2019-2020	Post Markers	Installation of post markers to delineate property boundaries	\$15,000
2019-2020	Sparling Trail Access	Create a more visible access point from Sparling Crescent to the towns trail network	\$5,000 (Fencing installation)
Annual	Tree Inspection	Inspection of tree adjacent to trails and perimeter properties	Internal staff resources
Annual	Trails	Apply wood chip	Internal staff resources

		material to trail paths, block and discourage additional path creation	
Annual / Periodic	Invasive Species removals	Manual removal of invasive species to control spread	Internal staff resources

SUMMARY

Sparling Bush is an important part of the Town's urban forest, and one in which the residents of St. Marys, especially those living close to the bush, have an appreciation for and sense of connection to. To assist with the long term health of the bush, it's important that the Town work in conjunction with the UTRCA as well as neighbours and concerned citizens to re-establish communication with the intent of implementing the control measures as identified in both the 2001 report, as well as the most recent (2015) report.

In preparation for this report Town staff, Rotary and UTRCA representatives completed a site visit in May of 2017. UTRCA concurred with the Town's efforts to date and noted that the over health of the bush interior has improved since last visiting the site. This can be attributed to improved trail delineation and adoption of the conversation authority's woodlot management practices into Town operations in recent years.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

At this time there are no specific financial implications for the town, the UTRCA report did recommend developing a budget for the implementation of recommendations.

Woodlot management practices that have low cost implementation have already been incorporated into the standard operation and associated Public Works operating budgets.

OTHERS CONSULTED

Vanni Azzano, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
Jonathon Hahn, Parks Team Leader
Ron Aitken, St. Marys Rotary Club

Strategic Plan: this initiative is supported by the following priorities, outcomes and tactics in the Plan:

Pillar #4 Culture and Recreation: Strategic Priority for a "Focused Park 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): Investigate implementing a forestry and tree management policy for the Town.

ATTACHMENTS

Sparling Bush Management Recommendations
Sample Informational Messaging

REVIEWED BY

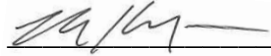
Recommended by the Department



Jed Kelly

Director of Public Works

Recommended by the CAO



Brent Kittmer

CAO / Clerk