

Landscape and Trail Master Plan

During the Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) study, the community was consulted on what they wanted to see included in the Windsor-Essex Parkway's green space. Input received helped shape the Urban Design and Landscape Plan developed during the Environmental Assessment process.

The Windsor-Essex Parkway provides more than 300 acres of green space with landscaped areas, ecological protection and restoration areas, and 20 kilometres of multi-use trails. These general landscape components are now being further defined through the Windsor Essex Mobility Group's (WEMG) Landscape and Trail Master Plan and through the detailed design process.

Since January 2011, WEMG and Parkway Infrastructure Constructors (PIC) have consulted with key stakeholders and the public on landscaping through meetings, Public Information Open Houses and workshops. This consultation has helped move the plans from concepts to the current stage of detailed design and construction drawings. Comments related to the landscape treatment have been recorded and considered in the design process.

To date, more than 1000 residents have participated in the Windsor-Essex Parkway consultation events, with considerable interest in and support for the concept plans put forward for the trails, tunnel tops and other landscape features. Participants at these events were encouraged to comment on the following:

- landscape treatment of gateways and tunnel tops
- public art opportunities
- trail system (including lighting, bridges, connections and amenities)
- appearance of noise barriers, retaining walls and screening landscapes
- vegetation preservation and habitat enhancement measures
- opportunities for community involvement and partnerships.

Key comments related to the Landscape and Trail Master Plan components received so far include:

- generally positive support
- consideration of user safety
- importance of visual screening and noise mitigation
- endangered plant and wildlife species protection
- desire to connect the Parkway trail system to existing trails and community recreation facilities
- support for an aesthetic treatment for the noise barriers and retaining walls
- support for the integration of public art elements and interpretation/education opportunities.

Themes

A "Carolinian" theme, which received public support during the DRIC study, is being carried through as the primary theme for the green space. The Carolinian life zone is Canada's most diverse and most threatened ecosystem. The proposed landscape treatment merges ecological sensitivity with a contemporary approach that recognizes the urban context. The landscapes serve to protect and expand adjacent natural areas through the reinstatement of Tallgrass Prairie and Oak Savannah.

Aesthetic Treatment of Structures

The design of the noise barriers, retaining walls and tunnel parapets includes an aesthetic surface treatment that further evokes the prairies and oak savannah themes, while considering constructability and long-term maintenance issues. The design is stylized to represent grasses with a soft buff-coloured surface. The retaining walls located adjacent to the below-grade freeway are stylized to represent oak woodlands and grasslands.

Lighting

In accordance with commitments made within the approved DRIC Environmental Assessment Report, all illumination on the Parkway (Highway 401, Highway 3 and the trail system) will be full cut-off lighting. The lighting fixtures will meet dark sky compliant lighting requirements for ultimate highway and trail illumination as well as for the temporary roadway diversion illumination.

Vegetation Removal

Clearing and grubbing is ongoing as part of the work required to prepare the corridor for construction. This activity requires the removal of former landscaped areas, including trees that are in areas of the corridor being redeveloped as part of the Parkway.

Existing trees are being preserved, where possible, in specific areas where construction activities do not require their removal. Preserved trees must be native to the area, be in good health, and fit the proposed ecological landscape as described in the Landscape and Trail Master Plan.

Screening

In strategic locations, the Parkway plans provide for planting buffers to screen views of the freeway from residences and the trail system. These screening landscapes will be a mix of deciduous and coniferous trees and will include flowering and fruiting shrubs with vibrant fall colour that are native to southern Ontario. The plant material will be selected to be compatible with the adjacent ecological landscapes.

Next Steps

The Landscape and Trail Master Plan is continuing to move from themes and concepts through detailed design and construction drawing preparation. Ongoing public consultation on the Landscape and Trail Master Plan includes a series of neighbourhood meetings in June 2012 and a Public Open House in the summer of 2012.