



Subject: *Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy - Parks and Trails*
To: CAO for Planning Advisory Committee, May 21, 2024
Date Prepared: May 15, 2024
Related Motions: PAC23(59) and C23(383)
Prepared by: Debbie Uloth, Project Planner
Approved by: John Woodford, Director of Planning and Development

Summary

As part of the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy, Planning staff have identified common themes in the Uniacke Public Survey regarding parks and trails that respondents believe would improve the community. Staff have also consulted with staff from Parks, Recreation, and Culture. This report includes recommendations for Planning Advisory Committee's consideration.

Financial Impact Statement

Planning staff has budgeted for the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy as part of the 2024/2025 Budget Cycle.

Recommendation

Include the recommendations outlined in this staff report in the draft Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy Report.

Recommended Motion

Planning Advisory Committee recommends that Council:

- *authorize staff to include the recommendations outlined in the Uniacke SPS Parks and Trails Report in the draft Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy Report.*

Background

As part of the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy, staff have undertaken a review of parks and trails in the Uniacke area. This review has included identifying the number of parks and trails in the study area and determining from the survey results how the community foresees the development of future open space parcels. Planning staff have also met with Parks, Recreation, and Culture staff to discuss the Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy that was recently completed and to determine if changes to Planning policies and regulations can assist with the recommended outcomes of the strategy.

Staff recognize that a review of recreation in the Mount Uniacke area was undertaken in 2023 and further study will be done through the Recreation Facilities Master Plan anticipated to start in the summer of 2024. This background staff report is aimed at complementing the results of both strategies.

CURRENT ASSETS

Between the Municipality and the Provincial government, the Uniacke residents have a solid supply of parks, trails, and open space to use for their enjoyment. Below is a list of assets in the community and their ownership.

Provincial Government

- Bell Park - Provincially owned land, but operated by a community group
- Uniacke Estate Museum House - Provincial Heritage property and museum

Municipal Government

- Mount Uniacke Memorial Park - Municipally operated
- South Uniacke Playground - Municipally owned and operated
- Edmond Chater Memorial Skatepark - Municipally owned and operated
- Lewis Lake Public Water Access - Public dock for canoes and kayaks
- Open Space Parcels - Several open space parcels in the study area remain natural for conservation purposes
- Lakelands Open Space Parcel - 14 acre parcel with the development of a concept plan approved as part of the 2024/2025 budget
- Proposed East Uniacke Park - Playground construction to be completed fall 2024

Several large parcels of land within the study area are either in provincial ownership or the ownership of Halifax Water. Although these lands are not considered parklands, they do contribute to the rural feel of the community and enhance the community's natural assets.

SURVEY RESULTS

Respondents to the Uniacke Secondary Plan Survey indicated that they enjoy and appreciate the parks and trails in the Uniacke area. A few respondents felt that no new parks, trails, or other improvements were required; however, the majority of respondents did express new opportunities and features that they would like to have in the community. Below is a list of some of the ideas expressed by residents.

1. **Accessible walking trails and beach access:** Several respondents requested accessible trails that would accommodate seniors/wheelchairs/strollers. A few respondents requested that an accessible access to one of the lakes be created. PRC is aware of the desire for more accessible recreation assets and will monitor for opportunities, staff recommends adding a provision to the review of the Accessibility Plan indicating that staff will monitor for opportunities in the Mount Uniacke area.

2. **Recreation facility/gym:** Further investigation will take place as part of the Recreation Facilities Master Plan. PRC staff are aware of the desire for a recreation facility in the Uniacke area.
3. **Walking trails that make connections:** Some respondents mentioned new walking trails could be made that connect neighbourhoods to local amenities. In keeping with Recommendation 2.1 from the Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy, staff recommends creating a Required Future Pedestrian Connection Map for the Uniacke area. Currently, there is a pedestrian connection map for the Corridor attached as Appendix D to the Subdivision Bylaw. As land in Mount Uniacke is developed, the map will help guide the development of pedestrian walkways in the community. A rough draft of the map has been attached as Appendix A.
4. **Dog parks and off-leash dog trails:** Several respondents mentioned dog parks and off-leash dog trails as part of the survey responses. There is currently a dog park at the third ball field at the Uniacke Legion. PRC staff will continue to support community organizations interested in operating these facilities. Dog parks require the consideration of many issues, including but not limited to, issues of safety, health and hygiene, noise and disturbance considerations, maintenance, and costs of upkeep.
5. **Rails to trails:** The rail line that runs through Mount Uniacke is owned by Canadian National Railways and is not in municipal ownership. The Municipality continues to support the local trail group in planning for the development of the rail line into a multi-use trail. However, the Municipality also recognizes the future potential use of the rail line as a light-rail-commuter train connecting Windsor to Halifax and servicing Mount Uniacke. The Joint Regional Transportation Agency (JRTA) is currently developing a regional transportation plan, which may consider this route for light-rail.
6. **Bike parks and trails:** There are currently no municipally-owned parks that have pump tracks or mountain bike trails. There are trails in private ownership or on provincial land run by community groups. As the population increases in the Uniacke area, the Municipality may want to investigate options for a pump track that could encourage more young people to engage in mountain biking activities. East Hants will continue to explore future opportunities.
7. **Splash pads:** Locating splash pads where there are no Municipal services takes extra planning and consideration. For example, the water quality and quantity have to be continually monitored and issues addressed as required. According to the provincial mapping for Arsenic Risk in Bedrock Water Wells, the Uniacke study area has a high risk of arsenic being in bedrock water wells, which creates a greater need for quality control of the water. It is also important to plan for disposal of the excess water runoff from the splash pad. In addition, a community group would be required to operate the splash pad, similar to the Hants North Group at Findlay Park, as there are currently no staff based out of Mount Uniacke at a stand-alone location.
8. **Beach parks and access to lakes:** East Hants does not have a traditional public beach park anywhere in the Municipality. The Municipality has water access points that allow for non-motorized boat access, but none that encourage swimming. PRC staff are aware of the desire for beach access and will continue to monitor for opportunities. These options are dependent on future development in the community.
9. **Parks with sports fields:** The Mount Uniacke Recreation Strategy mentions under Recommendation 2.2 that the Municipality *“Identify and plan for the investments in improvements to existing outdoor facilities. In particular, promote discussions with CCRCE on feasibility of remediating drainage issues on Uniacke District School soccer field.”* Planning staff are not making further recommendations. In addition, Council has approved the development of a concept plan for the 14.3 acre parcel of Municipal

open space land in Lakelands that may provide an opportunity for multiple recreational assets like a future sportsfield, pump track, etc.

10. **OHV trail systems and/or multi-use trails:** The Municipality would consider OHV community requests as they are submitted to the Municipality.
11. **Bridle paths:** The Municipality would consider supporting multi-use trail use that would include horseback riding.
12. **Sidewalks:** Will be discussed as part of the transportation background report.

Recommendations:

Based on the results of the Uniacke Public Survey and consultation with PRC, staff have developed a list of proposed recommendations to be included in the draft Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy:

1. Add a provision to the East Hants Accessibility Plan requiring PRC to investigate opportunities to create accessible recreational assets in the Uniacke area.
2. Amend the Subdivision Bylaw by adding the draft Required Future Pedestrian Connection Map for the Uniacke Area to Appendix D of the Subdivision Bylaw.
3. Future study within the Lakelands concept plan to understand the potential recreational assets that could be located on the site that would align with both recreational needs and spatial arrangement.
4. Direct PRC staff to continue to look for opportunities to facilitate beach access.

Attachments

Appendix A - Draft Required Pedestrian Connections Map Uniacke