

Proposal to Council for a new Nature Park

by Richard Pope as a private citizen.

The purpose of this proposal is to ask the Council to find a way to give **the West Harbour (the part west of the Centre Pier), the West Headland, the Ecology Garden, and the West Beach** some kind of joint **permanent protection**. The designation of the area in the OP as one of “Environmental Constraint” has turned out to be, in the end, meaningless.

2015 saw overwhelming community support for keeping this well-loved, iconic area as it is. Rarely have so many citizens of such varying interests and outlooks come together so strongly to let Council know their feelings – in this case their love for their waterfront. The whole area has great cultural value to this community. It is where people go for reflective walks and to just sit and view nature. It is a place for unstructured activity where people who do not belong to formal groups can just sit, relax and contemplate nature.

Because of this natural and heritage value, and because Cobourgers care passionately about the area, it deserves protection.

Let me begin with 2 points about this proposal:

1. It is totally in the spirit of the Parks Master Plan of 2013.
2. It comes with an unprecedented level of Community support.

The PMP states that “it is apparent that Cobourg should expand its supply of parks” (p. *i*). We know this can happen, as the Tremaine Valley Lands are already being transformed into a well-planned, ecologically sound natural park.

The PMP goes on to say that “The defining element in Cobourg’s park system is its waterfront” (p. *ii*), and the first of its twelve recommendations for implementation of the plan is to “Develop Waterfront Project Design Plans” (p. *ii*).

So, what is proposed here is that Cobourg expand its supply of parks by officially making the West Harbour (the part west of the Centre Pier), the West Headland, the Ecology Garden, and the West Beach into a single new park.

The new park classification system in the PMP includes six different types of park, one of which is “nature parks” (p. *i*).

Here is the way the PMP defines nature parks:

Nature Parks – are predominantly natural in character and exhibit landscape/environmental characteristics common to Cobourg or the surrounding area. The focus of these parks is conservation, nature appreciation, and interpretation. They provide a nature-based experience and environmentally compatible passive recreation activities. (26)

The PMP goes on to list shoreline, wildlife habitat, and low/no maintenance as characteristics of nature parks, which it says should be located in natural areas and environmental areas (p. 27, top).

The area included in my proposal fits this definition perfectly and exhibits all the main characteristics of a nature park.

Note, however, in particular that making the area an official Nature Park would *not* preclude “environmentally compatible passive recreation activities,” which could be defined to include sailing, canoeing, kayaking, dragon-boating, fishing, and other activities. There is *no* suggestion in this proposal that the area be made a nature preserve.

Nor is it suggested that we scrap plans for things in the harbor area like an improved boat launch, a disabled launch, a seasonal canoe/kayak launch, a more capacious storage area for boats, canoes, and kayaks, etc. These are all related concerns and their exact size and placement would have to be agreed upon before the boundaries of the new park could be firmed up. *It would also have to be decided what things would not be permitted in the new park.* But such concerns should not prevent immediate action to form and designate the new nature park.

The nature park proposed here will serve as a green corridor *connecting* the Peace Park to the Marina, Victoria Beach, and Victoria Park – something very important to the PMP concept (see p. 14, Connectivity).

In short:

1. People want this area protected. The Community supports this idea.
2. As this will be a passive use park, costs will be very low. We do not need any buildings like an ecocentre or concession stands, a nature boardwalk on the West Headland, bird blinds (one is already practically on top of the birds), and even shoreline habitat creation could be approached frugally.
3. It is utterly compatible with present and desired unstructured uses and self-directed activities (see PMP chart p. 9), such as walking (63% of users), nature hiking (48%), nature observation/bird watching (37%), picnicking (36%), dog-walking (32%), canoeing/kayaking (31%), boating/sailing (26%), running/jogging (21%).

This new park would be designed to answer all the objectives of Goal #4 of the PMP – Environment (p. 15):

- Maintain and preserve natural ecosystems and their functions
- Develop parks to enhance environmental integrity, productivity and diversity
- Protect riparian resources and enhance aquatic habitat
- Enhance appreciation and understanding of the environment through accommodating public access and providing interpretation/educational opportunities

This proposal seems unassailable. The whole PMP makes much of “Green Infrastructure,” and you can’t get any greener than this proposal, which addresses the expressed wishes of so many Cobourg residents. The PMP even proposes that the “West Beach Lands & Boardwalk” and the “Ecology Garden” be reclassified as nature parks (p. 27). I am simply proposing adding the West Headland and the West Harbour, which are contiguous properties and would make one unified park.

Recommendation for Action:

1. Council asks the Parks and Recreation Committee to formulate a proposal for the conversion of the said lands into a new nature park and to bring this proposal back to Council.
2. Council asks the Heritage Committee for input, comments and advice as to whether Council should designate this beloved area, which includes our Heritage Harbour, under the Ontario Heritage Act as a heritage landscape of cultural value, thereby conferring an added layer of protection.

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