

Grand River Conservation Authority

Report number: GM-12-21-92

Date: December 17, 2021

To: Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

Subject: New Guelph Lake Nature Centre Update and Preliminary Redesign

Recommendation:

WHEREAS the GRCA remains committed to supporting the construction of a new Guelph Lake Nature Centre;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT staff proceed with obtaining revised detailed design plans, and seeking planning and permit approvals.

Summary:

The COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the provincial changes to the Conservation Authorities Act have had an ongoing impact on the GRCA's outdoor environmental education program, and consequently the new Guelph Lake Nature Centre (GLNC) project. The GRCA is currently reevaluating its outdoor environmental education program in order to develop a sustainable program model.

At the August 2021 General Membership meeting, an update on the new GLNC and the outdoor environmental education program was received as information. At that time, staff recommended that the new GLNC building be redesigned as a less expensive, multifunctional space that will meet the future needs of both the GRCA's outdoor environmental education program, as well as the Guelph Lake Conservation Area. Staff were directed to proceed with a preliminary redesign of the new building and to provide an update to the General Membership by the end of 2021.

Staff have worked with +VG Architects on a preliminary redesign to further decrease project costs. Staff recommend that the GRCA proceed with obtaining detailed designs and seeking planning and permit approvals, with the goal of proceeding with a tender for the project in the late summer of 2022.

Report:

The GRCA continues to gain insight about the operational impacts to its outdoor environmental education program resulting from the new regulations being implemented under the Conservation Authorities Act. The new regulations, coupled with the changes to the education sector brought on by the pandemic, have had a significant and ongoing impact on the GRCA's outdoor environmental education program. As such, a reevaluation of the GRCA's outdoor environmental education program is underway, and will include a complete assessment of the program, existing nature centre buildings and properties. While the review of the outdoor environmental education program is not complete, it has become evident that the new Guelph Lake Nature Centre building needed to be redesigned to align with the future needs of the program.

GRCA staff have worked with +VG Architects to redesign the proposed GLNC to further decrease projects costs, while ensuring it brings people together with nature from an early age - to learn, to experience nature and the environment around them, and to promote an ethic of stewardship in the Grand River watershed.

The new centre will immerse visitors into a dynamic, environmental learning experience from the moment they arrive on site and throughout their entire stay. The plan is a simple form to reduce construction costs and maintain energy efficiency, while its orientation and use of glass maximizes solar gain. Its articulation references the simple, yet elegant, rural architecture of the Guelph-Eramosa area. The building is made entirely of wood framing and primarily clad with wood siding materials, which along with a recycled metal roof, make it both environmentally friendly and durable. The orientation of the building has the sloping roof face south, making it ideal for the installation of future photovoltaic panels. This has been anticipated in the mechanical design, which is based on environmentally friendly electrical heating and cooling. The site chosen has already had an access road and granular parking lot installed, which will be upgraded and finished to suit the design of the facility and the building will connect to the septic system and well installed as part of the Guelph Lake Conservation Area maintenance shop construction.

The redesign of the new GLNC maintains an emphasis on accessible outdoor spaces and incorporates the importance of new technology and evolving trends in outdoor education. It also considers potential changes to building requirements due to COVID-19, and the needs of not only the GRCA's outdoor environmental education program, but also the needs of the Guelph Lake Conservation Area, in order to maximize the use of the building and GRCA funding sources.

Through the redesign, construction costs were decreased by reducing the building footprint, which includes the reduction of two classrooms. These two additional covered learning spaces will need to be considered as part of future fundraising efforts and completed as stand-alone projects on the vacant space surrounding the new nature centre building. Donor gift agreements have been considered and further discussions with the Grand River Conservation Foundation (GRCF) and respective donors will need to continue through subsequent phases to ensure donors are recognized for their generous contributions to this project.

The GRCA recommends that staff prepare detailed design drawings, and seek planning and permit approval from the appropriate authority. GRCA staff will also pre-qualify general contractors, tender the project and return to the Board for construction award approval.

Financial Implications:

The current estimated cost to complete the balance of the project is \$1,487,000.00. The balance of the GRCF funds for the project is \$1,667,720.15 (\$1,276,220.15 received + \$391,500.00 committed). In addition, there is \$45,000 remaining from the \$100,000 set aside by the GRCA in the Guelph Nature Centre Reserve that will be used to fund the redesign costs. Note a correction to report GM-08-21-62 New Guelph Lake Centre and Environmental Education Program Update, which indicated that the \$100,000 had not yet been accessed. In fact, \$55,000 was used to fund design costs incurred during 2020. Not all project costs are known, but in general, there is currently an estimated project-funding surplus of \$225,720.15, provided the committed funds are received. If committed funds are not received, the current estimated project-funding deficit is \$165,779.85. The GRCA and GRCF will continue to encourage all committed pledge donations to be received.

Two additional covered learning spaces will need to be considered as part of future fundraising efforts and completed as stand-alone projects on the vacant space surrounding the new nature centre building. If a project surplus is realized, funds will go towards additional grounds improvements and/or the addition of outdoor covered learning spaces as required.

Cost Estimate

Description of work	Approximate Cost
Estimate for a new Guelph Lake Nature Centre	\$1,120,000
Estimate to demolish the existing nature centre at a later date	\$50,000
10% contingency	\$117,000
Consulting fees, permits, furniture and equipment	\$200,000
TOTAL:	\$1,487,000

GRCA staff will continue to refine this estimate, as we work through detailed design, the planning approval process and required permits. Due to these design unknowns, fluctuating market conditions and supply chain issues as a result of COVID-19, the GRCA recognizes that there are ongoing risks to the budget.

To date, the GRCF has also contributed \$220,000 towards the following project costs: building studies, consulting fees, surveys, utility infrastructure and access roads.

Other Department Considerations:

This project has involved staff from many different departments at the GRCA and the Grand River Conservation Foundation Board has done considerable work fundraising for this project.

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