

Grand River Conservation Authority

Report number: GM-06-23-49

Date: June 23, 2023

To: General Membership

Subject: Capacity Measures and Operational Improvements at the Elora Quarry

Recommendation:

THAT Report Number GM-06-23-49 Capacity Measures and Operational Improvements at the Elora Quarry be received as information.

Summary:

The Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) purchased the Elora Quarry in 1976 and opened it to the public the following year. The Quarry has proven to be one of the most popular attractions in the GRCA watershed with high attendance every year, particularly over the last 10 years.

Several challenges arose with the increased popularity at the Quarry, including increased pressure on staff for security, maintenance, and traffic control, and a negative impact on the environment in the Quarry and visitor experience.

After the 2017 operating season, GRCA staff began to implement operational improvements at the Quarry to help manage the challenges. The Quarry closed for the entire season in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. When it reopened in 2021, a pilot project was implemented to manage capacity that included an online reservation system, limited capacity, and designated paid parking requirements. This pilot was successful, and these parameters were permanently implemented at the Quarry.

Grand River Conservation Area membership cards are not valid at the Quarry so all visitors to the Quarry must pay for admission, and parking if applicable. This exclusion was implemented in 2021 and is identified on all promotional material and on the membership card letter that accompanies the card upon purchase.

Additional information about concerns and proposed mitigation measures were shared with the General Membership in the following reports: [GM-12-17-124](#), [GM-12-18-119](#), [GM-11-19-109](#), and [GM-11-21-83](#).

Report:

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Several challenges arose with the increased popularity at the Quarry, including increased pressure on staff for security, maintenance, and traffic control, and a negative impact on the environment in the Quarry and visitor experience. These challenges increased operational costs, including the addition of security, infrastructure, and external resources including off-duty Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) officers directing traffic on municipal roads.

The local municipality, the Township of Centre-Wellington, and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) began to share concerns about public safety and traffic issues related to the Quarry. People were trespassing into the Quarry through unauthorized access points, including through

other people's private property, to avoid long line-ups. There were significant vehicular traffic concerns on County Road 18 in Elora as the line-up to get into the Quarry would completely stop the flow of traffic on the two-lane road. This also created emergency access concerns.

In 2019, although measures implemented to that time had helped address some of the challenges at the Quarry related to capacity, traffic congestion accessing the park and trespassing issues persisted. Staff proposed to implement timed reservation access, and a modified user fee similar to that of other GRCA services in Conservation Areas such as tubing. Visitors would be limited to one of two four-hour timeslots through pre-registration and a limited number of visitors would be allowed entrance during each timeslot. This approach did not allow membership holders to use their pass for access and they would be required to pay for this additional service, similar to other programs within conservation areas. The plan was to implement these changes during the 2020 season.

The COVID pandemic halted these changes, and the Elora Quarry did not open in 2020. There continued to be significant trespassing concerns during the closure in 2020 and security costs were incurred to manage this issue. Perimeter fencing was scheduled to be installed in 2020 at the Quarry and that project was able to proceed, which has also helped reduce trespassing into the Area.

When the Quarry re-opened in 2021, the modified operations plan was implemented with positive feedback from municipal partners, the OPP, and Quarry visitors, including reduced environmental impact to the site, improved visitor experience, limited vehicle lineups on municipal roads, appreciation for efforts to eliminate parking at other businesses in the community, and the reduced reliance on paid off-duty OPP officers for support with traffic management and trespassing issues.

2023 is now the third season with the revised operations plan, and the Elora Quarry is still benefiting from the changes. Staff continues to receive positive feedback from municipal staff, the OPP, and visitors to the Quarry.

Currently, at the Quarry, the adult day pass is \$10.50, senior/person with a disability pass is \$7.50, child pass is \$5.50, and parking is \$15 for a four-hour time slot. There are two time slots available each day and visitors can pre-register online for any available timeslot. Grand River Conservation Area membership cards are not valid at the Quarry so all visitors to the Quarry must pay for admission, and parking if applicable. This exclusion was implemented in 2021 and is identified on all promotional material and on the membership card letter that accompanies the card upon purchase.

Financial Implications:

The Elora Quarry Conservation Area generates approximately \$450,000 a year in revenue.

Other Department Considerations:

Not applicable.

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