

# Grand River Conservation Authority

**Report number:** GM-10-23-77

**Date:** October 27, 2023

**To:** Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

**Subject:** New Guelph Lake Nature Centre Update

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## **Recommendation:**

WHEREAS the Grand River Conservation Authority remains committed to supporting the construction of a new Guelph Lake Nature Centre;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT staff proceed with tendering the construction of the new Guelph Lake Nature Centre and report back to the General Membership for construction award approval.

## **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 Grand River Conservation Area (GRCA) has reevaluated its outdoor environmental education program in order to develop a break-even operating model.

At the December 2021 General Membership meeting, an update on the new GLNC was provided and received as information. At that time, staff recommended that revised detailed design drawings be obtained and that planning and permit approvals for the new GLNC building be obtained followed by a tender.

Staff have worked with +VG Architects to revise detailed design drawings and have received a Site Plan Agreement with the Township of Guelph Eramosa and are currently seeking a building permit. Staff recommend that the GRCA continue to proceed with obtaining permit approvals, with the goal of proceeding with a tender as soon as possible.

## **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 program 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 has been conducted, and includes an assessment of the existing nature centre buildings and properties. Even prior to the program review, as reported to the General Membership in 2021, it became evident that the new Guelph Lake Nature Centre building needed to be redesigned from earlier more expansive versions of the building to better align with the anticipated future operating budget and needs of the program.

GRCA staff have worked with +VG Architects to redesign the proposed GLNC to decrease project 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. The building design 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 a potential future photovoltaic panel installation. 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 integrates the importance of ventilation, 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. 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 once staff receive permit approvals from the appropriate authority, they tender the project and report back to the General Membership for construction award approval.

### **Financial Implications:**

The balance of the GRCF funds for the project is \$1,765,944.00 (\$1,335,444.00 received + \$385,500.00 committed). In addition, there is \$45,000 remaining from the \$100,000 set aside by the GRCA in the Guelph Nature Centre Reserve. The GRCA and GRCF will continue to encourage all committed pledge donations to be received.

The remaining project costs are estimated and the actual construction cost of the new GLNC will be known after the tender. Additional remaining project costs include consulting, security infrastructure, planning and permit approvals, furniture, equipment, and a donor recognition installation.

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.

### **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.

#### **Prepared by:**

Brandon Heyer  
Manager of Central Services

Lisa Stocco  
Manager of Strategic Communications  
and Environmental Education

#### **Approved by:**

Samantha Lawson  
Chief Administrative Officer