



TOWN OF
HALTON HILLS
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REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

FROM: Danica Quinn, Senior Landscape Architect
Parks, Community Development & Environment

DATE: May 5, 2025

REPORT NO.: CSE-2025-016

SUBJECT: Glen Lawson Lands Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. CSE-2025-016 dated May 5, 2025, regarding the Glen Lawson Lands Master Plan, be received;

AND FURTHER THAT the Project Charter, attached as Appendix B to Report CSE-2025-016, be approved;

AND FURTHER THAT staff be directed to undertake the Master Plan for the Glen Lawson Lands, as outlined in the Project Charter;

AND FURTHER THAT staff be directed to advance the development of a Master Plan for the Glen Lawson Lands, as outlined in Report CSE-2025-016;

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back on the development of a Master Plan for the Glen Lawson Lands, as required.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The Glen Lawson Lands were acquired in July 2021, with a lease agreement secured until 2035 for two Fourth Line parcels to facilitate access to the site.
- There are a number of technical reports and permit considerations that need to be addressed in order to open the site for public use.

- Input from the public and various stakeholders will inform the Master Plan which will outline the preservation and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage areas and identify opportunities for recreational programming.
- This is the initial step in a complex multi-year plan for the strategic advancement of the Glen Lawson Lands as a recreational site over the next 10 years.
- The pace of progress in developing the Master Plan is subject to budget review and approval, and resource availability.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval of the Project Charter (Appendix B) in order for Town staff to proceed with the Master Plan for the Glen Lawson Lands and neighbouring Town-owned parcels.

1.0 Background:

In July of 2021, Council approved RP-2021-0008 Acton Quarry – Glen Lawson Lands Acquisition. The lands are located between Third and Fourth Lines, south of Glen Lawson Road and north of the Canadian National Railway (which is also the former Radial Railway alignment in this area).

As part of this acquisition a lease agreement was secured until 2035 for two Fourth Line parcels of land not included in the Conveyance Agreement, to facilitate access to the property for ongoing operations/maintenance and/or future recreational facilities (i.e. parking).

As approved by Council, a condition of the land acquisition was the undertaking of a public master planning exercise to formalize plans for the park, including preliminary costs to be incorporated into the 10-year capital forecast and long-range financial plan. This report focuses on taking the initial steps to advance the development of a Master Plan.

The original Glen Lawson Lands (A), the Fourth Line parcels (B&C) currently being leased, and two neighbouring Town owned parcels (D&E) are all proposed to be included in the Master Plan. See Appendix A for the project study area.

The full history and rationale for acquisition of the Glen Lawson Lands and details of the conveyance agreements can be found in numerous past staff reports.

In 2018, Council approved RP-2018-0014 Acquisition of Open Space Lands – Churchill Road South. This aligned with the Corporate Strategic Plan objectives to establish a greenspace network for the recreational use of residents that complements the Natural Heritage System, recognizing that a healthy community is made up of an interconnected system of open spaces and natural heritage features. The two parcels are shown in Appendix A (D&E).

2.0 Master Plan Process & Considerations:

The Master Plan for the Glen Lawson Lands will confirm the long-term vision for the recreational use of the site, as well as the preservation and/or management of the site's key natural areas. The site has potential for trail linkages to the Bruce Trail and Guelph Hiking Club trails as well as an overall trail network. There has also been interest expressed in the creation of an off-road bike trail park for mountain bike use. Other recreational uses will be considered in exploring the master plan. Additionally, there are the significant natural heritage features of the site: Black Creek and valley lands.

Key considerations that will guide the development of the Master Plan, as identified by previous site works and investigations, will include:

- Record of Site Condition requirements;
- Liability for a closed landfill;
- Access limitations for ongoing maintenance and public use;
- Natural heritage features, opportunities and constraints;
- Cultural heritage and historical context;
- Niagara Escarpment Plan requirements for development of recreation facilities and potential partnerships; and
- The requirements to open the property for public recreational use.

2.1 Record of Site Condition Requirements:

A Record of Site Condition (ROSC) is required under Section 168.3.1 of the Environmental Protection Act, and O. Reg 153/04 due to the change in land use from industrial to parkland (i.e. a waste disposal site to "parkland use" including use for outdoor recreational activities). The process of obtaining the ROSC is largely dependent on the proposed use and varies in complexity and time required to complete. In the most likely case, it will take at least 3-6 years to complete all the studies, investigations and Ministry approvals, as well as the physical sitework required before the property can be formally opened for recreational use. In the interim, the Town is liable for any unauthorized use of the site and will continue to keep the site "closed" to the public until such time as the ROSC is obtained. The Master Plan outcomes will provide key inputs into determining how to advance the ROSC process.

2.2 Liability for Closed Landfill:

The key environmental liability associated with the Glen Lawson Lands is the historic landfill. There are no other significant areas of concern on-site that have been identified in studies to date. Based on the relatively small size and age of the landfill (closed since 1974), it is reasonable to expect that potential impacts from the landfill have reached a stable level and are likely to now be decreasing.

With respect to the future development, the existence of the landfill also poses liability from both the logistical and regulatory perspective. It is assumed that no future

development including structures, trails, servicing, or roadways would be permitted within the landfill footprint, so the recreational Master Plan will have to be developed with consideration of the limits of the landfill. The limits of waste as confirmed on site may also have to be fenced (approximately 600 sq.m). Some of the existing trails may be within the limits of the existing landfill and therefore require decommissioning. The Master Plan will include commentary on the requirements for mitigating risks associated with the former landfill and a strategy for implementation.

2.3 Property Access Limitations:

The acquisition of the Glen Lawson Lands did not include the Fourth Line property which has vehicular access to the road, or the internal property just east of it, both of which were historically used as residential lots. These two parcels are currently being leased by the Town until 2035. A portion of the acquired Glen Lawson Lands does have frontage on Fourth Line; however, the topography may limit the construction of a new driveway access into the property. Historically, when the landfill was operating, the Township of Esquesing had leased the property with existing vehicular access as part of the landfill operations. The lands also have frontage on Third Line, but there are minimal opportunities to create any sort of formalized access or parking facilities due to constraints at those locations. Beyond the end of the lease agreement the Town may need to secure permanent access across or ownership of these Fourth Line parcels to guarantee vehicular access for ongoing maintenance requirements and public vehicular access to parking facilities for any recreational use. The need for these properties as part of the ultimate recreational use of the site will be confirmed through the Master Plan process.

2.4 Natural Heritage Features:

The Glen Lawson lands are located within the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area, with unevaluated wetlands surrounding Black Creek running southwest to northeast through the centre of the property. The site is classified as an escarpment protection area and an escarpment natural area on the south side of Black Creek, and as greenlands on the north side of Black Creek. Ecology and environmental protection and enhancement will be key considerations of the Master Plan.

2.5 Cultural Heritage and Historical Context:

Glen Lawson, a once-thriving industrial settlement southeast of Acton, was established by Graham Lawson in 1836. The hamlet was named after him and the valley ("Glen") it was situated in. Lawson set up a grist mill and shingle factory, leveraging the waterpower from Black Creek. A log-constructed schoolhouse was built, where John Newton, who later became Limehouse's first postmaster, taught in 1842. The Grand Trunk Railway passed through the hamlet in 1856, attracting more entrepreneurs and spurring the construction of the lime kilns at Dolly Varden in 1872. The Tolton brothers operated a grist mill from 1875, and a small tannery was established by A.T. Arnold in 1882. In 1917, the Toronto Suburban Railway introduced an electric radial railway line,

providing passenger and freight services until 1931, the same year the Dolly Varden lime kilns ceased operation. The decline of Glen Lawson began as industries moved to the larger communities of Acton and Georgetown. A significant challenge came in 1946 when a dam at the Beardmore Tannery broke, flooding the area with tanning effluent. Today, only a stone house built by Lawson and the name of the road connecting the Third and Fourth Lines remain as reminders of the once-prosperous settlement. The Master Plan will outline key cultural heritage elements to be highlighted and celebrated, including input from First Nations, who may have had a presence on the site.

2.6 Niagara Escarpment Plan Requirements and Potential Partnerships:

The lands are subject to the Niagara Escarpment Plan and are designated Escarpment Protection Area and Escarpment Natural Area. The formalization of public use of the land under Town ownership would be viewed as development under the Niagara Escarpment Plan and would therefore require a development permit from the NEC. There is also an opportunity to request that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry designate the property as part of the Niagara Escarpment Parks & Open Space System (NEPOSS), as the Town plans to develop the site for recreational use. The Master Plan will address the recommended approach to integrating the property into the NEPOSS system.

The maintenance of land, buildings and structures for the Bruce Trail are exempt from the requirement to obtain an NEC development permit under an agreement with the Bruce Trail Conservancy. It may be possible to avoid the requirement for an NEC development permit by entering into an agreement with the Bruce Trail Conservancy. This potential partnership will be explored as part of the Master Plan process.

3.0 Project Charter:

Staff have prepared a Project Charter to serve as a foundational document that outlines the Master Plan's objectives, budget, stakeholders, scope, timeline, design considerations, and key deliverables. It provides a roadmap for the successful completion of a Master Plan that will be incorporated into the 10-year capital forecast and long-range financial plan, pending approval by Council. The Project Charter is attached as Appendix B.

Key elements of the Project Charter include:

- Focus of the project is to develop a comprehensive Master Plan for the site, supported by public input, and the resulting requirements and next steps to open the property to the public for recreational use.
- The project will be led by Parks & Open Space section staff, supported by a cross departmental staff team.
- External stakeholders will include key agencies such as Credit Valley Conservation (CVC), Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC), Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP), trail clubs, First Nations, CN Rail, and various community organizations.

- Town staff will retain consultant experts in key disciplines to inform the Master Plan (Ecology, Archaeology, Environmental).
- A comprehensive communication and consultation plan will be developed.
- The project timing is anticipated to take from 24 to 30 months due to the complexity of the ecology work (4 season field work), as well as the extensive public consultation that is planned, and limited existing staff resources.
- Project to commence (background work and retaining consultants) in Spring 2025 with completion anticipated by Q3 2027.

The Project Charter provides a roadmap for the successful completion of the Master Plan, ensuring it meets the needs of all stakeholders and is implemented effectively.

It is important to note that, as outlined in Memorandum CS-2025-001 (Appendix A), dated January 20, 2025 regarding the 2025 Budget and Business Plan, the pace of advancing the Glen Lawson Lands Master Plan (a multi-year and complex undertaking) is delayed as the Landscape Architect resource was not approved in the 2025 Budget. The timelines outlined in the attached Project Charter are subject to change, pending resource availability and allocation to other competing priorities.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report identifies natural areas and heritage as one of the Town's Strategic priorities by providing increased access to parks, open spaces and trails. The Town takes great pride in its natural assets, such as trails, forests, and waterways. These areas provide recreational benefits, urban cooling, stormwater diversion, and flood reduction. The Town is dedicated to preserving and enhancing natural areas, recognizing the importance of biodiversity and key watershed and land features.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

However, implementation of the Master Plan will potentially help to achieve the Towns' objectives surrounding Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation through opportunities associated with the development of the property or preservation of key natural features.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public Engagement will be required; consultation with Communications staff to follow.

It is expected that a comprehensive design and public consultation process will be undertaken to finalize a Master Plan for the property to ensure that the vision for the property is created with community input. Public consultation will be carried out throughout the project in alignment with the Corporate Public Engagement Charter.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Staff consulted with members of the following Divisions/Departments, who are key internal stakeholders, during the preparation of this report:

- Environment & Climate
- Public Works
- Transportation
- Recreation & Cultural Services
- Economic Development
- Community Development
- Corporate Communications
- Planning & Development
- Finance

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report will be funded through an existing approved budget source.

A budget of \$75,000 has been allocated for the development of a detailed Master Plan and consultation process for Glen Lawson Lands (Project 8500-22-2301) and will be used to fund the consultant studies required for the Master Plan (ecology, archaeology, environmental). The Master Plan will be reported back to Council for consideration and will include a full-costing review and update for the project to be included in the 10-year capital forecast and long-range financial plan, subject to affordability. Costs for consultants to complete additional detailed studies required for the development of the park will be requested in future budgets.

Staff note that the total costs for implementation as well as the ongoing operating costs are not currently considered in the Town's 10-year capital forecast or long-range financial plan and are subject to future review of affordability as part of the Budget review process and updates to the long-range financial plan.

Additional staff to carry out the workload involved in this multi-year plan or re-prioritization of other Parks & Open Space projects may also be required subject to budgets and staff capacity at the time.

Reviewed and approved by,

Kevin Okimi, Director of Parks, Community Development & Environment

Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer