



REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

FROM: Erin Burger, Community Development Supervisor – Special Events and Neighbourhood Engagement

DATE: June 20, 2025

REPORT NO.: CSE-2025-010

SUBJECT: Proposal for Construction of a Multi-Purpose Storage Building at Dominion Gardens Park

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. CSE-2025-010, dated June 20, 2025 regarding the proposal for the construction of a multi-storage building at Dominion Gardens Park, be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council endorse, in principle, and subject to the results of further community consultation, including with Dominion Gardens Park users, the proposal for the multi-purpose storage building to support the growing demand and programming of Light Up the Hills, recognizing alignment with the Town's Strategic Plan priority of creating a safe and welcoming community, as outlined in Report No. CSE-2025-010;

AND FURTHER THAT Council endorse the project in principle and conditional upon:

- Light Up the Hills securing necessary funding for the project; and
- Completion and results of community consultation;

AND FURTHER THAT Council authorize staff to initiate negotiations with Light Up the Hills to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the roles and responsibilities related to the construction, ongoing use, and maintenance of the proposed multi-purpose storage building at Dominion Gardens Park.

KEY POINTS:

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

- Light Up the Hills (LUTH) is a volunteer-led, non-profit organization that hosts an annual winter light festival across three Halton Hills parks, attracting over 15,000 visitors.

- LUTH currently relies on costly off-site storage that consumes 30% of its annual budget and limits growth.
- A permanent on-site storage building would reduce expenses, improve coordination, and support expanded programming such as a Christmas Market. The proposed building is a 35x27 ft, wood-framed structure with storage, repair and event hub space.
- Construction will be fully funded by LUTH through external sources, with no cost or maintenance required from the Town.
- The building would be built on a vacant green space near to the splash pad. This location was chosen to avoid disrupting existing park users or community activities.
- Town staff are seeking Council's approval to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining responsibilities for construction, funding, and maintenance.
- Proceeding with the MOU would be dependent on the completion of additional consultation and its outcomes.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

1.0 About Light Up the Hills

Light Up the Hills (LUTH) is a volunteer-led, non-profit organization dedicated to organizing an annual outdoor light festival that celebrates the holiday season in Halton Hills. Now in its 17th year, the festival has become a beloved community tradition, transforming three local parks - Dominion Gardens Park in Georgetown, Acton Sports Park, and Shelagh Law Parkette in Glen Williams - with over 100,000 decorative lights.

The event is entirely supported through community donations, sponsorships, and volunteer efforts, and it draws more than 15,000 visitors annually. As a free public event, LUTH provides an inclusive, family-friendly space that fosters community connections, seasonal celebration and civic pride. The festival continues to play a significant role in enriching the cultural and social life of Halton Hills during the winter months.

Each year, the festival begins with Ignition Night on December 1st - a popular kick-off celebration that includes free food, hot chocolate and a visit from Santa Claus. This festive evening has become a hallmark of the local holiday season.

Beyond its role in community engagement, Light Up the Hills has contributed to public infrastructure. The organization has funded and delivered key electrical upgrades, including the installation of distribution panels and underground electrical networks at both Dominion Gardens Park and Acton Sports Park. These enhancements support the festival and provide lasting value to the broader community.

2.0 Need for a Multi-Purpose Storage Building

LUTH is currently facing a critical and urgent need for a permanent, lower-cost storage solution near its primary display location at Dominion Gardens Park. At present, the organization relies on off-site rental storage, which has become increasingly costly and now represents its largest ongoing operational expense (30% of their annual budget). This growing financial burden is placing significant strain on the organization's volunteer-led operations and is limiting its ability to invest in new displays and upgrade existing infrastructure.

The lack of a dedicated, on-site storage building also presents logistical challenges, such as the transportation and handling of delicate light displays, which increases both risk of damage and reliance on volunteers with specialized vehicles or equipment.

A permanent storage building at Dominion Gardens Park would directly address these issues by providing a secure, accessible, and cost-effective solution that enhances operational efficiency. This would enable LUTH to redirect valuable resources toward event improvements, ensure better preservation of display materials, and continued delivery of a high-quality, community-driven festival.

The proposed multi-purpose storage building will serve three main purposes:

- Consolidation and storage of LUTH displays
- Create a display repair and maintenance space
- Provide an event hub space open during festival operations for a Christmas Market and refreshments

3.0 Design and Construction of the Multi-Purpose Storage Building

The proposed multi-purpose storage building would be designed to harmonize with the existing landscape of Dominion Gardens Park and contribute positively to the visual character of the site.

In keeping with the rustic, festive ambiance of the LUTH event, the preliminary building design, as submitted by LUTH (subject to further review and community consultation) is proposed to feature a design reminiscent of a traditional log cabin, enhancing the park's year-round appeal.

The structure is proposed to be constructed with a slab-on-grade foundation and built primarily from wood, achieving a natural aesthetic aligned with the surrounding environment. It is proposed to have a footprint of 35 feet by 27 feet and rise to a height of 17 feet, with a design that supports both functionality and visual interest.

To meet operational needs, the multi-purpose storage building is proposed to include:

- A loft for additional storage.

- A side garage door to accommodate large displays and festival infrastructure.
- Shatterproof, vandalism-resistant windows and doors to deter unauthorized access.
- A key locking system and CCTV cameras, integrated with an alarm system for security.
- Hydro service to power lighting, switches, and the alarm system.
- A phone line connection to support remote monitoring and communication.

Construction is proposed to be completed by Hickory Dickory Decks, with the building components supplied by True North Log Homes, which provides pre-built structures and engineered drawings. The final building blueprints and construction specifications will be reviewed and submitted to the Town for approval prior to commencement, including compliance with the Ontario Building Code based on the use of the building. LUTH will provide construction oversight to ensure compliance with the Town's quality standards.

It is important to note that the final building design will be finalized with LUTH to ensure it complements the existing park structures and fits with the overall character of the park (i.e. existing shelters, stone walls). The building is also subject to the applicable municipal reviews.

The construction of the proposed multi-purpose storage building at Dominion Gardens Park is not expected to disrupt regular park use. All construction activities would be conducted in compliance with Town regulations, including contractor requirements for insurance and Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) coverage. Work would begin only after project funding is secured, and the final design, blueprints, and construction specifications have been reviewed and formally approved by the Town.

The full cost of construction would be covered by LUTH, using external funding sources which the organization is currently working to secure. As such, the project is not expected to have any budgetary impact on the Town. LUTH would also take the lead in coordinating the construction process, while Town staff will provide oversight to ensure compliance with municipal standards and requirements.

The proposed building site is located on land already maintained by the Town's Parks Operations team, so no additional maintenance responsibilities would be required from Town staff. LUTH would assume full responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the building itself, ensuring it remains safe, secure and functional. The Town's involvement in the project would be limited to advisory support and design review, enabling the project to proceed with minimal demand for municipal resources while still upholding quality and regulatory standards.

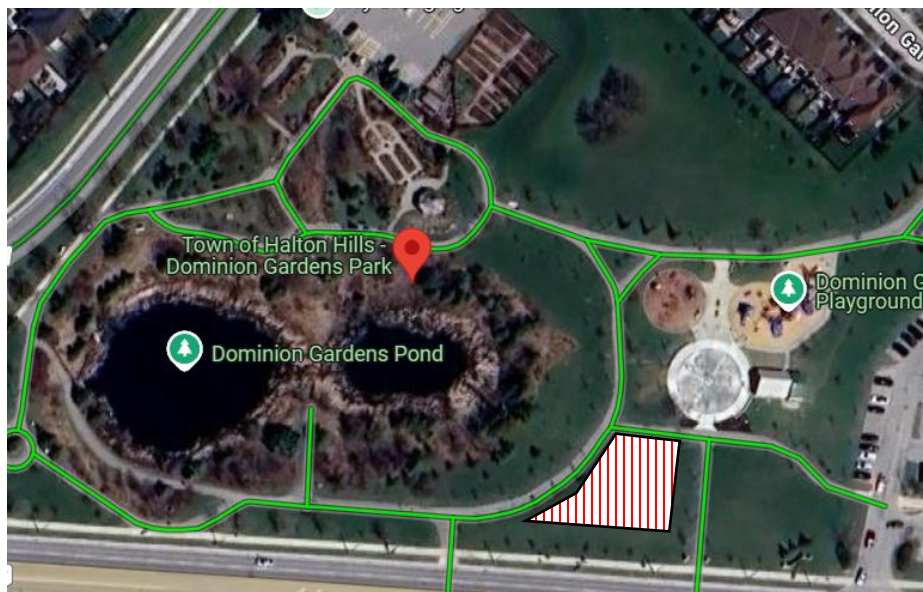
4.0 Location of the Multi-Purpose Storage Building

Light Up the Hills proposes that the permanent building be located at Dominion Gardens Park, near to the splash pad. The suggested site is a vacant green space, generally located between the splash pad and Guelph Street as outlined in Figure 1 below. The

precise location will depend on the verification of stormwater and utility line placements and outcomes of public consultation.

Previous plans for the park included a Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce building fronting on Guelph Street, but that building is no longer required, making the space available for this new proposed use. This location is considered the most suitable within the park, as it allows for the addition of the building without disrupting or impacting on the activities of other user groups and allows the building to be integrated with the lighting displays. Subject to further review, its placement will ensure continued enjoyment of the park's existing features and amenities by the broader community. Should an alternate location be identified through community consultation, it will be confirmed as part of the MOU and final approval.

Figure 1: Multi-Purpose Storage Building Location



5.0 Town of Halton Hills - Light Up the Hills Memorandum of Understanding

Town staff are requesting Council's approval to authorize the negotiation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Town and LUTH - outlining the framework for collaboration in the construction, use, and maintenance of a new multi-purpose storage building at Dominion Gardens Park.

Under the terms of the agreement, LUTH will be responsible for funding the project, managing construction in accordance with Town standards, and ensuring the ongoing upkeep and functionality of the building. The MOU will clearly define the roles and responsibilities of both parties, supporting a cooperative approach to delivering this community-enhancing initiative.

Council's endorsement is a critical step in advancing this project, as it will strengthen the group's ability to secure grant funding and contribute to the overall success of the initiative. Formalizing the partnership with the Town will help address existing storage limitations, enhance the group's capacity to expand event programming, and support the continued delivery of their annual event. With Council's endorsement, staff will be able to prepare the MOU and proceed with the next steps for implementation of the project.

It is important to note that proceeding with the finalization of the MOU and the project will be dependent on the completion of the additional community consultation, including with park users, and the outcomes from the consultation. Town staff will provide Council with the consultation results as part of the review and final approval of the MOU.

6.0 Next Steps

Pending Council endorsement in principle, Town staff will begin work to prepare the MOU with LUTH, outlining the respective roles and responsibilities related to the construction, use and long-term maintenance of the proposed multi-purpose storage building at Dominion Gardens Park.

The next phase will also include public consultation, where staff will share project details with the broader community, address questions or concerns, and gather input to help ensure that the multi-purpose storage building reflects community needs and expectations. This engagement will strengthen community collaboration throughout the process and may result in modifications to the preliminary designs.

Following the completion of community consultation and preparation of the MOU, staff will return to Council to seek formal approval of the MOU and any other required agreements – which may include a Land Lease Agreement. If approved, LUTH will proceed with securing the necessary project funding.

Upon confirmation of funding, LUTH will advance to the design and permitting phase, after which construction will commence. The construction will be led by LUTH, in close coordination with the Town and in accordance with applicable municipal requirements, standards and guidelines.

It is important to note that, in addition to Council approval, proceeding with this project is still subject to LUTH confirmation and funding.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report identifies a safe and welcoming community as one of the Town's Strategic Priorities. The addition of this multi-purpose building will help foster a safe and welcoming community by offering an inclusive and accessible space where volunteers can gather and residents can build social connections while participating in the annual light festival.

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.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

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

LUTH have engaged with Friends of the Seed House Garden and Georgetown Horticultural Society who also use Dominion Gardens Park for storage and/or their group's activities. The proposed location of the multi-purpose storage building does not impede either groups' activities or the space they use for their activities.

Should Council endorse this proposal, additional public consultation will be conducted to engage the general public.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Staff within the Parks, Community Development and Environment division and Public Works (Parks Operations) were consulted during the preparation of this report, and the development of the agreement to ensure alignment with operational requirements and standards for the proposed multi-purpose storage building project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report is administrative in nature and does not have any financial implications.

While the preliminary estimated construction cost of the multi-purpose storage building is approximately \$250,000, LUTH will be responsible for covering all construction expenses, as well as any ongoing operating costs, with no financial obligation to the Town.

Reviewed and approved by,

Kevin Okimi, Director of Parks, Community Development & Environment

Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer