



THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG

STAFF REPORT

TO:	Mayor and Members of Council	
FROM:	Dean A. Hustwick, Director of Recreation and Culture	
DATE OF MEETING:	Committee of the Whole – June 04, 2018	
REPORT TITLE/SUBJECT:	Waterfront User Needs Assessment and Detailed Design Plan	
REPORT #:		File #

## **1.0 STRATEGIC PLAN**

The Town of Cobourg Strategic Plan (2015-2018) established the community's vision to be a "progressive, vibrant lakeside community" and several important objectives including the implementation of the 2013 Parks Master Plan.

In February 2017, Council updated the Strategic Plan and established a separate objective related to a new Community Waterfront District:

Objective 1: Developing and implementing a Community Waterfront District Plan

1. Define the Town's community waterfront district and scope of the review
2. Conduct stakeholder engagement sessions to identify user needs and objectives
3. Develop detailed designs and options based on the priorities
4. Develop cost estimates, revenue opportunities and timeframes for implementation
5. Prepare a business plan for approval

Desired Outcomes:

- Unencumbered public access to the waterfront
- Public trust and confidence in waterfront development as a fair and positive process
- All user groups feeling welcomed by a waterfront that meets their needs
- The waterfront and facilities are maintained as a valuable Town asset
- Sustained waterfront operations
- Cobourg recognized as a model multi-use waterfront
- Cobourg continuing to receive the Blue Flag certification

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended:

WHEREAS the Committee of the Whole has received from consulting firm thinc design the Waterfront User Needs Assessment and Detailed Design Plan and presentation;

WHEREAS the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee supports the Waterfront User Needs Assessment and Detailed Design Plan as a framework for further planning and decision-making by Council and staff and recommends that the Plan be adopted by Council;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council adopt the Waterfront User Needs Assessment and Detailed Design Plan;

AND FURTHER THAT municipal staff consider the Plan and bring recommended projects forward to Council for its consideration.

### **3.0 ORIGIN**

Prior to the establishment of the Strategic Plan, on May 13, 2013, Council established the recently completed Parks Master Plan as the formal guide for future parks and waterfront development:

*WHEREAS the Committee of the Whole has considered a report from the Director of Public Works regarding the Town of Cobourg Parks and Waterfront Master Plan;*

*NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Council receive the Parks and Waterfront Master Plan prepared by peter j smith and company inc. dated April 2013 as presented and utilize the plan as a framework within which to guide the development of specific parks and waterfront projects.*

The Parks Master Plan identifies the waterfront as “the defining element in Cobourg’s park systems” and outlined many concepts for enhancing the waterfront. It recommended the development of Waterfront Project Design Plans in order to prepare for implementation:

*The concepts developed for the waterfront are preliminary and are intended to illustrate a range of ideas for enhancing the waterfront as a destination and an icon of Cobourg. Based upon the potentials captured in the concepts, it is recommended that more detailed studies, or Project Design Plans (PDP), be undertaken of the primary areas that comprise the master plan.*

On September 12, 2016, the Town of Cobourg Committee of the Whole considered a detailed report from the Director of Recreation and Culture that recommended proceeding with the first phase of implementation of the Parks Master Plan. On September 19, 2016, Council ratified the Committee’s motion:

*WHEREAS the Committee of the Whole has considered a Memo from the Director of Recreation and Culture regarding the Parks Master Plan Implementation: Phase I - Waterfront Use and Design;*

*NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council approve implementation of Cobourg’s 2013 Parks Master Plan in phases beginning with a waterfront user assessment and detailed waterfront design; and*

*FURTHER THAT the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee be asked to act as a Steering Committee for this planning process by providing input and advice to the Director of Recreation and Culture who will: procure expert services with considerable experience and expertise in the design of waterfront communities and stakeholder management; engage the public and all local stakeholders with an active interest in the design and use of the waterfront to develop a comprehensive user needs assessment; and create a comprehensive waterfront design to be presented to Council for its consideration by the spring of 2017; and*

*FURTHER THAT the \$45,000 allocated in the approved 2016 Budget for the West Harbour be re-allocated for this planning process; and*

*FURTHER THAT the Director of Recreation and Culture, in consultation with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, prepare a report to Council if additional funds are required to complete this phase of the implementation process.*

On January 30, 2017, Council approved the awarding of the Waterfront User Needs Assessment and Detailed Design Project to *thinc design*.

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND**

##### **Transparency and Objectivity**

Very little direction was provided to the consultants at the outset of the project, either by Council members, Town staff or the Steering Committee. This was to ensure independent and unbiased outcomes. The consultants were asked to use their professional experience and skills in waterfront planning and design to engage the community and to develop a plan that addresses the strategic objectives outlined above.

Staff, the Steering Committee and, ultimately, the public brought to the attention of the consultants issues that have generated community debate in recent years, including:

- potential future uses of the campground property;
- criticisms of marina operations; and
- a previous proposal for increasing the number of boat slips in the marina.

Staff provided the consultants with copies of the Cobourg Tourism Investment Opportunities Study and the Cobourg Marina Expansion Operations and Facilities Study, along with a great number of other documents, plans and reports (as outlined in the Waterfront Plan). No staff direction was provided to the consultants on how to address these issues outside of the stated objectives of the project. With respect to the marina, the consultants were asked to fully assess all aspects of the operation and to consider all future options for the marina, including retaining it, leasing it to a third party and closing it permanently.

## Steering Committee

The project Steering Committee, comprised of the individual members of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, had no decision-making authority and simply provided background information and advice predominantly to *thinc design*, a company hired for its expertise in waterfront planning. This advice related mainly to the following topics:

- Project timeline;
- Number and frequency of public engagement opportunities;
- Identification of community groups for engagement purposes;
- Waterfront issues that may need to be considered;
- Types of questions to be asked in surveys;
- Evaluation criteria; and
- Potential design concepts.

The Steering Committee held its first meeting on February 28, 2017, to meet *thinc design* and to formally begin the project. It met subsequently four more times: April 7/17, June 6/17, September 14/17 and May 4/18. The Town very much appreciates the time and contributions these individuals invested in this project, which certainly contributed to its overall success.

## Public Engagement

The project carried out the most transparent and extensive public engagement process in the Town's history to ensure that every individual and group interested in the waterfront had the opportunity to share their needs, wants and opinions. Public meetings had multiple sessions to accommodate individual preferences and schedules.

The significant and tremendously successful public engagement opportunities and activities were displays of democracy in action. Never before in Cobourg have so many residents become so deeply and directly involved in a community planning exercise. This level of engagement resulted in a clear understanding of what the majority of residents in this community want for their waterfront.

The following activities conducted as part of this project demonstrate the Town's commitment to a robust public engagement strategy:

- 8 Interactive Open Houses - 2017
  - #1: April 4
  - #2: May 10 – two sessions and a questionnaire
  - #3: June 27 – two sessions
  - #4: October 26 – three sessions
- 2 days of Interactive Pre-Charrette Workshops: April 10 & 11, 2017 (make-up sessions on May 3 and 16) – 30 organizations participated
- 1 Interactive Community Design Charrette: May 31, 2017
- Delivery of more than 8,000 postcards to residents in Cobourg promoting the individual survey and upcoming Open Houses
- Three Surveys:
  - Household (**2,000 responses**)
  - Community Stakeholder Organizations
  - Businesses

- Presentation of preliminary recommendations to Cobourg Council (open session): August 21, 2017
- Presentation of draft Final Report to Cobourg Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee: May 16, 2018
- Presentation of Final Report to Cobourg Council: June 4, 2018
- Additional Communications:
  - Regular newspaper ads
  - Ongoing updates to the Town's Website
  - Email blasts

### **Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee**

The draft Waterfront User Needs Assessment and Detailed Design Plan (Waterfront Plan) was posted publicly to the Town's CivicWeb site on May 14, 2018, as part of the agenda package for the May 16 Committee meeting. During that meeting, *thinc design* formally presented the draft Plan to the Committee, which passed the following recommendation to Council:

*THAT the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee supports the Town of Cobourg Waterfront User Needs Assessment and Detailed Design Report as a framework for further planning and decision making by Council and staff;*

*And FURTHER THAT the Committee recommends that the Report be adopted by Municipal Council.*

## **5.0 ANALYSIS**

The Waterfront User Needs Assessment and Detailed Design Plan (Waterfront Plan) by *thinc design* is an innovative and comprehensive report that expands on the 2013 Parks Master Plan's goal to "enhance the urban waterfront as the primary attraction and premier destination in Cobourg." The Waterfront Plan identifies the community's priorities for a beautiful, accessible and sustainable waterfront and specifically addresses several important objectives, including:

- Enhancing access to the waterfront for all users
- Improving utilization of the community's assets
- Identifying revenue generating opportunities to help fund improvements and ongoing maintenance

The Waterfront Plan successfully addresses Objective 1 (Developing and Implementing a Community Waterfront District Plan) of the Town's Strategic Plan (2015-2018). Specifically, it:

1. Defined the Town's community waterfront district
2. Conducted stakeholder engagement sessions to identify user needs and objectives
3. Developed detailed designs and options based on the priorities
4. Developed cost estimates, revenue opportunities and timeframes for implementation
5. Prepared business plans to support its recommendations

The Waterfront Plan represents much more than achieving strategic objectives. It represents a defining moment for the community's future that should be celebrated. Residents of all backgrounds, ages, interests and abilities came together to help design a waterfront that will have profound and positive impacts on the community's physical attractiveness, quality of life and culture for many years to come. The decisions made today, may have the greatest impact not on ourselves, but on the next generation that will reap the true benefits.

At the end of every public and democratic process, there will be some groups and individuals who disagree with some of the findings and recommendations, but it is important that the Town focusses on what is best for the community as a whole.

Nevertheless, in this case it is important to address some of the issues most frequently raised by some groups and individuals.

### Harbour

Cobourg's history and growth have been intrinsically connected to boating and shipping. The Harbour was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to support the Town's evolution as an important provincial commercial centre. The Cobourg Yacht Club dates back to 1964. Since then, paddling sports have grown in popularity.

The main Marina Operations Area utilizes only 24% of the space within the Harbour but accounts for 58% of its total use. The 24% of the Harbour utilized by the Marina includes the west side of the Centre Pier and the boat launch. The west side of the Centre Pier has been rented for years by the Cobourg Yacht Club specifically for docking boats – more than 400 boat stays a year dock in this space, sometimes tied together several deep – bringing more than 600 visitors into the community. But there are no docks or services, which is an ongoing customer service issue. Almost 1,000 boats a year utilize the boat launch, making this space between the boat launch and the Centre Pier a high-traffic part of the Marina. It is this small space that the Waterfront Plan proposes for adding boat slips to manage more effectively and safely existing usage as well as to increase the profit of the Marina by accommodating additional boats.

Although nearly 76% of the entire Harbour is common space available for paddling sports and other activities, the Yacht Club programs account for only 18% of the usage and paddling clubs only 17%. Furthermore, the Marina is completely devoid of boats for six months each year.

User	Current Harbour Usage in Person User Days by User Group (%)	Harbour Space Available for Use
Marina Operations	57.5	23.5% (44,889 m <sup>2</sup> )
Safe Refuge Anchorage	0.5	75.6% (144,428 m <sup>2</sup> )
Cobourg Yacht Club	18.3	
Paddle Clubs	17.4	
Canadian Coast Guard	6.3	0.0% (1,619 m <sup>2</sup> )
Totals	100	100% (190,936 m <sup>2</sup> ) (difference due to rounding)

## Marina

As part of the Waterfront Plan, the Town asked the consultants to identify opportunities to enhance access to our waterfront, improve utilization of our assets and generate additional revenue to help pay for waterfront improvements.

After fully evaluating Cobourg's Harbour use and financial information as well as provincial and international boating trends and statistics, *thinc design* and its sub-consultant *Touristics*, an expert in the marine field, determined that Cobourg Marina is profitable, has been subsidizing taxpayers for years and is in the enviable position to capitalize on high demand for boat services in this region.

The report makes many recommendations to improve Marina operations and its profitability, including adding additional boat slips to the west side of the Centre Pier.

The Marina accounts for 100% of the revenue generated within the Harbour, as other users and clubs pay little to no user fees. This lack of revenue will become a more significant concern as the Town contemplates implementation of the Waterfront Plan and completes condition assessments of the Harbour's permanent infrastructure, including the East Pier.

Despite the fact that the Marina produces annual surpluses, like other municipal recreational programs and services offered to its citizens, there is no requirement for it to do so. The municipality offers a wide range of programs and services to all demographics in the community, including:

- Special Events (e.g., Christmas Magic, Canada Day Celebrations, Sandcastle Festival, First Night, etc.)
- Swimming (Centennial Pool)
- Hockey/skating (Memorial Arena and Cobourg Community Centre)
- Seniors Centre programs and activities (Cobourg Community Centre, Market Building)
- Registered recreational programs (Cobourg Community Centre)
- Curling (Jack Heenan Arena is municipally owned)
- Tennis
- Baseball, softball, slow-pitch
- Soccer
- Rugby
- Lawn bowling (Victoria Park property is municipally owned)
- Walking, jogging, running, bird watching (parks, trails and paths are municipally owned and maintained)
- Concerts, musicals, plays and speakers (Concert Hall and Bandshell are municipally owned and maintained)

Most of these programs and services involve user fees of one type or another and all are subsidized by the taxpayers – despite some appealing only to certain demographics. But that's the nature of municipal government as it attempts to promote active lifestyles, a vibrant culture and a high quality of life for its citizens.

The Marina and Campground are the only municipal recreational services that generate annual surpluses.

The Waterfront Report also explains in considerable detail the economic impact of the Harbour and the Marina on the community. For example, from 2010 to 2016 the Marina contributed \$4,148,820 in direct spending while transient (visiting) boaters spent an estimated \$5,721,580 at grocery stores, restaurants, marine supply outlets, other retail outlets, events and tourist attractions. Direct, indirect and induced gross domestic product expenditures in Cobourg as a result of the Marina operation during this same period totaled \$7,570,710. The Marina is an important economic engine for this community and its transient slips are an important component of the local tourism industry.

### **Tourism**

Our tourism industry can often generate interesting debates locally about its value and benefits. The Waterfront Plan provides considerable insight into that industry, including many invaluable statistics including the following:

*80% of residents indicated that tourism is or will be important to the Town's economy*

*46% of businesses that responded stated that they either depend on the trade from tourists/visitors or benefit from it*

*76% of residents agreed that tourists should contribute a larger share of improvement costs through enhanced revenue generating opportunities*

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION**

In 2016, Council approved reallocating \$45,000 from West Harbour capital improvements to the Waterfront User Needs Assessment and Detailed Design. These funds were not spent in 2016 and were carried forward into the 2017 Budget for a total project budget of \$145,000. The project was not completed in 2017 but the funding has been carried forward into 2018. Once the project has been fully concluded, a financial reconciliation will be completed. Nevertheless, the final expense total will be well under the \$145,000 budget.

The cost of this project is within the range of other similarly complex public planning exercises. When one considers the long-term community benefits that this plan will deliver to Cobourg taxpayers in the years ahead, the value of this investment can be easily justified, especially when compared with other capital expense items like a Zamboni for \$95,000 or a service truck for \$120,000.

The Waterfront Plan recommends 24 projects with estimated costs of approximately \$26 million and a proposed implementation schedule of 24 years. Two of those projects, a new downtown parking structure and a new community waterfront building, account for more than \$13 million.

If the Waterfront Plan is adopted by Council, staff will bring forward recommended projects for Council's consideration at the appropriate time.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

Every organization and municipality requires a long-term vision and leadership to deliver that vision. The combination of vision and leadership in the 1980s and 1990s transformed Cobourg's waterfront, helping the community to establish itself as an even more popular destination for visitors, residents and businesses. But that was not an easy process and there were opponents, but Council and the community stayed focused, persevered and achieved tremendous success.

Today, we have been presented with a new Waterfront Plan – a new vision to guide the next phases of waterfront improvements that will help to achieve Council's strategic objective to establish Cobourg as a progressive, vibrant lakeside community, a destination of choice and a community with an exceptional quality of life.

The Waterfront Plan is an opportunity to celebrate the beauty of our community and its vast potential, to build new partnerships and collaborations and to focus on community building.