



Date: 2021-06-16

From: Zach Carson, Facilities Coordinator and Steven Dollmaier, Director of Operations

Subject: Sutacriti Heights Water Access

Report: OPS2021-26

Recommendation

That report OPS2021-26, Sutacriti Heights Water Access, be received, and

That Council hereby approves maintaining a public access point, open to vehicular access at the Sutacriti Heights water access point, for the purpose of launching small watercraft (i.e., Canoe, Kayak, etc.) and removal of water for agricultural purposes on the property adjacent to Sutacriti Park, and

That staff are hereby directed to complete the identified and required improvements / repairs, at an upset budget limit of \$10,000.00, to be funded from the General Roads Reserves, including clearly delineating a vehicle lane, separation stations to restrict vehicles from traversing onto pedestrian areas, installing appropriate signage, and improve sightlines.

Background

In response to public comments regarding public safety and direction received from report PL.2020.39, staff presented report OPS2020-38 to Council on September 2, 2020. From this, Council passed resolution number RES2020-241 directing staff to continue operating the water access point adjacent to Sutacriti Park as passive recreational greenspace and to implement methods of restricting vehicular access to the shoreline.

At the following meeting of Council on September 16, 2020, correspondence was received in opposition of this direction. Following a discussion by Council, RES2020-265 was passed, consequently, reconsidering the original direction to restrict vehicular access and directing staff to further investigate additional options. Additionally, Staff

have appended all correspondence regarding the access point that has been received to date, as per Council's direction.

To gather public feedback regarding the matter, staff created and advertised an online survey gauging the public's expectations of the water access point and their typical uses of the property. In addition to this survey, members of the public were invited to speak at a public meeting on May 5, 2021.

Operations staff have engaged the community to gather feedback regarding use of the Sutacriti Heights water access point. Staff created and advertised an online survey on March 28, 2021, which remained active through to April 26, 2021. A total of 184 responses were received online, with an additional 10 responses received in hardcopy.

Notice of the survey and public meeting was mailed directly to residents of the Sutacriti Heights area on March 31, 2021, published in local newspapers, uploaded to the Township website, and shared on social media (i.e., Facebook and Twitter).

Staff considered all input that was received from the public, through both the survey and public meeting, in consideration of making a recommendation to Council. Utmost consideration was placed on maintaining public safety.

Analysis

Section 1- Prohibiting Motorized Access

Prohibition of motorized vehicles to the access would remove the risks associated with mixed use of the property. Limited to foot traffic, users of the water access would not have to be cognizant of vehicles launching watercraft or pulling in to take water from the bay. Parents and other caregivers would not have to be on the lookout for vehicles entering the water access while kids are playing in the area.

In addition to the safety aspects, the Township would expect less requirements in terms of upkeep on the property. With no vehicles pulling in and out, there should be less degradation to the lands, resulting in lesser needs for repairing potholes and other damage left from the wear and tear and no need to upgrade and continually maintain a driveway. There would be minimal ongoing financial requirements.

Blocking vehicle access to the water's edge will effectively deter trailered small boats from launching but could also discourage others from launching other small watercrafts such as canoes and kayaks at this location. The current ease of access, by being able to drop off right at the water's edge is a benefit of this site that, if removed, could leave

some looking to take their activity elsewhere. Restricting access could prove to be a barrier for some looking to engage in what is often a low cost and low impact leisure activity that provides health, social, environmental, and a variety of other benefits.

Section 2- Maintaining Vehicle Access / Mixed Use Option

By maintaining vehicle access, staff advises that the use of the facility remains essentially the same, however steps will be taken to improve public safety on the property. Vehicles will still be allowed to drive to the water's edge to launch small watercraft (i.e., Canoe and Kayaks) or take water for agricultural purposes. The property will be clearly defined where this is permitted to raise awareness to other facility users as to where they can access the shoreline safely without having to worry about interacting with vehicles.

The water access is not intended to be a proper boat launching facility with the amenities seen at the Township's Facilities at Balmy Beach and Big Bay. There is no onsite parking or washrooms, nor will there be a permanent ramp, dock, tie offs, or other features. An adequately graded driveway will be constructed and maintained that leads to the water's edge on the southern portion of the property. This will allow continued public access to Georgian Bay for those wanting to launch canoes, kayaks, and other small watercraft, while at the same time deterring larger vessels and directing them to more suitable water access points, effectively preventing large gatherings at what is typically a small and quiet park not designed or outfitted to handle these types of leisure seekers.

By keeping the access open, it also remains a viable option for public safety, including water rescues, supplying water to fire department pumper trucks, and even safe harbour for watercraft in distress. This peace of mind was common in the comments received in the public survey and during the public meeting.

Section 3- Final Recommendations

The Township received 184 online surveys and 10 responses received in hardcopy were completed. As well, there were a few members of the public who chose to speak at the public meeting on this matter. Between the two public forums almost **65% of respondents were opposed to the original direction to prohibit vehicular access to the water**. Furthermore, 98 of the survey respondents expressed that no barrier (gate, boulders, etc.) would be their preference.

Some of the comments provided in opposition to the prohibition of vehicular access included access for marine emergencies and the lack of local public water access (Big

Bay and Balmy Beach being the closest). In contrast, those in support of preventing vehicle access, approximately 35% of survey and public meeting respondents, provided input such as lack of suitable space for parking (particularly for large vehicles used for launching boats), overcrowding, and safety for more passive park users.

While there are differing opinions regarding the intended purpose of this property, common ground can be found on some features and amenities that both sides would like to see implemented on site.

Most notably is repairing the water leak that spills from the clear water well casing and is the cause of some erosion on the slope towards the shore. Township staff are currently communicating with Ontario Clean Water Agency on a permanent solution for decommissioning or alleviating the problems it currently causes at the area. Until a permanent fix is decided later this year, the water coming from the clear water well will be temporarily redirected to the west of the property to minimize erosion and be directed to flow the bay.

Providing some detailed signage, including clearly marking the property boundaries and general guidelines while using the park and water access, will improve safety concerns. Clearly delineating a driveway for vehicular water access and restricting vehicles from entering pedestrian-friendly spaces will also improve safety. Implementing some basic amenities such as refuse containers and bike racks are also desired. There appears to be a consensus that all park and water access users want to keep the area from being too overcrowded and keep with the neighbourhood's quiet demeanour.

There does not seem to be a significant interest in development of a formal boat launching area, complete with features such as a concrete pad, docks, etc. - should this be desired, considerable planning and capital investment is required. While this may not be practical, at least for now, and considering the public feedback, implementing a strategy that takes the suggestions offered by all who participated, including permitting vehicular access while taking the safety of park and water users is preferred.

If vehicles are to continue accessing the water, a barrier and clear signage must be installed to improve public safety for the site. While the original purposes of the two blocks of land were once very different (passive recreation vs public utility) since the decommissioning of the pumphouse the water access has become repurposed by the public as a recreational asset. If use of the area is to remain the same as it has been used informally for several years, staff has put forward better measures to encourage a safer experience whether putting a small watercraft into the water or passively enjoying the shoreline.

Financial Impact

Proceeding with Staff's recommendations within this report to improve the site to allow for continued vehicle access, as well as supporting passive uses, there are some financial considerations:

- Improve surface and grading from roadway to water.
- Install cedar posts to protect passive users from vehicles (dividing the property).
- Implement basic park amenities such as refuse containers, bike racks, and picnic tables.
- Improve signage, specifically for providing guidelines to facility users.

This Park does not carry an adequate budget to cover these costs as the lack of amenities typically requires minimal financial requirements.

By allocating an upset limit of \$10,000 from the General Roads Reserves towards implementing site improvements, as recommended by this report, would allow for these items to be addressed. The park's operational budget going forward will have to be considered in the 2022 budget to ensure any new amenities and upgrades are kept up.

Strategic Priorities

Improve Communication, Collaboration and Transparency

The Township of Georgian Bluffs wishes to become more transparent and improve communication with all ratepayers, stakeholders, and neighbouring municipalities. Communication is key in all aspects of Township governance and service.

1.1 Improve communications to foster public engagement and participation.

- (e) Continually encourage stakeholder participation in public, Council and Committee meetings and host town hall style meetings on an annual basis.

Increase Available Community, Recreational and Social Opportunities

The Township of Georgian Bluffs is committed to building community through investment in recreation and community centres, and flexible use of community centres and playgrounds.

4.1 Provide enhanced recreational opportunities for residents.

- (d) Continually improve public/open spaces to ensure accessibility and safety.

Conclusion

On September 2, 2020, Council passed RES2020-241 directing staff to continue operating the water access adjacent to Sutacriti Park as a passive recreational greenspace and to implement methods of restricting vehicular access to the shoreline.

In consideration of public feedback following this decision, Council reconsidered and directed staff to get more thorough feedback from the public. Public input was received through an online survey and comments made at the public meeting held by Council. Staff has provided an alternative to a prohibition of vehicles on the water access property.

Staff is seeking final direction on this matter; Council wishes to proceed with the original decision to no longer permit vehicular access or to implement site improvements so vehicles can continue to access the water.

Staff recommend maintaining a public access point, open to vehicular traffic for the purpose of launching small personal watercraft and for removal of water for agricultural purposes, while making improvements to clearly delineate a vehicle access lane and take measures to improve the safety for all using this public amenity.

Supporting Documentation

Attachment A: Staff Report PL.2020.39

Attachment B: Staff Report OPS2020-38

Attachment C: Online Survey Results & Public Correspondence

Attachment D: Proposed Site Plan with Permitted Vehicle Access

Respectfully Submitted: Zach Carson, Facilities Coordinator and Steven Dollmaier,
Director of Operations

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	OPS2021-26 Sutacriti Heights Water Access.docx
Attachments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- PL.2020.39 Sutacriti Park.pdf- OPS2020-038 Sutacriti Park.pdf- Online Survey Results and Public Correspondence.pdf- Proposed Site Plan with Permitted Vehicle Access.pdf- Pat and Wayne Shutak - Cowell - Sutacriti.pdf- Christine and Greg Gard - Sutacriti Park - Concerns and Clarification.pdf- Mark and Kathy Vincent - Sutacriti Water Access.pdf- Scotty Glass - Sutacriti Water Access.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jun 10, 2021

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Jenn Burnett, Senior Planner

Tim Lewis, Chief Building Official / By-law Enforcement Officer

Kassandra Rocca, Director of Finance / Treasurer

Brittany Drury, Clerk

Al Meneses, Chief Administrative Officer