

## **TOWARDS A PLAN for the new WATERFRONT NATURE PARK**

All materials are drawn from the following sources:

**PMP** = Parks Master Plan (2013).

**WUN** = Waterfront User Needs Assessment (May, 2018). To some degree this supersedes **PMP**.

**BRI** = Plan B Natural Heritage by Brad Bricker, an Appendix to **WUN** (May, 2018).

**BEA** = Beacon Natural Heritage Stewardship Report (December 2021).

**ZUZ** = The Zuzek Report: Lake Ontario Shoreline Management Plan prepared by Peter J. Zuzek (June 10, 2020). See Appendix A: Summary Conditions and Recommendations by Shoreline Reach. Reach 7 – Port Hope to Cobourg.

**Note:** All of these reports were based on wide public consultation, and the recommendations of the reports take public consultation into account. We do not have to go back to the public yet again. The town spent hundreds of thousands on these reports; it is time to act on their advice.

**WBFN** = Willow Beach Field Naturalists.

**Background Parameters: Parks By-law Number 022-2016 definition of a Nature Park:** “Nature Parks” shall mean parks that are predominantly natural in character and exhibit landscape/environmental characteristics common to Cobourg or the surrounding area. The focus of these parks is conservation, nature appreciation, and interpretation. They provide a nature-based experience and environmentally compatible passive recreation activities.” [same as **PMP** p. 26]

**Four keys:** Conservation, nature appreciation, interpretation, passive activities. (See also **PMP** pp. 26-7). **All reports** call for preserving the whole area as a naturalized area and enhancing environmental quality in the whole area. We should “minimize intervention, as it [the West Beach and Headland area] already possesses key desirable attributes” (**WUN** p. 37).

**NAME** to be used in all Primary and interpretive signage. We recommend: **Cobourg Waterfront Nature Park**. (Note that Alderville First Nation did not think it necessary to be included in the naming process).

**SIGNAGE:** Few citizens realize that the West Headland, the West Beach and the Ecology Garden are now all part of one Nature Park. Nor do they know where it begins and ends. The area should be indicated with appropriate signage probably at both ends and perhaps at the north entrance at the bottom of Bagot Street.

## **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS for the park as a whole:**

--**No off-leash Dogs: All Signage** should include “Dogs only on leash” plus an indication of the location of the Cobourg [Leash-free] Dog Park at 777 Ontario Street.

--**No storage** of dredging pipes and maintenance equipment in any part of the Nature Park (now piled in most visible part of the park). Formerly the pipes were brought to and from the site by truck and stored elsewhere. **WUN** p. 40 Key Consideration: “Ensure maintenance and management protocols are conducive to encouraging a healthy ecosystem including respecting requirements of wildlife (i.e., nesting and roosting locations).” They doubtless will not be stored on the new East Pier either. The existing rule against parking on the Old Field/Meadow will, of course, apply to the heavy

equipment used to restore the West Breakwater. This field is to be enhanced by plantings (see below). It is important that Public Works do their best to conform to the needs of the Nature Park, the more so since all these needs were generated by wide consultation with the citizens of Cobourg and recommended in the various expensive studies.

- No restrooms**, no enviro washroom. **PMP** p. 27 and 48 would “allow” them. However, **WUN** pp. 38-43 significantly does not suggest them. Moreover, the Town does not wish to encourage use of the West Beach as a swimming destination. This would also be an **unnecessary expense**. The nearby Marina Building has public washrooms. *If desired*, a Portalet could be maintained (as now) at the east end of the boardwalk beside the Canoe and Kayak compound. It should not be right beside the Ecology Garden as this led to the garden being used as a washroom for children.
- No change rooms**. **PMP** p. 48 suggests them. **WUN** pp. 37-42 does not recommend them. Keep these to east beach. Swimming is prohibited in the harbour and as above the Town does not wish to encourage use of the West Beach as a swimming destination.
- No eco centre**; cf. **PMP** pp. 38-9, 43 and 48 and 52, where it is recommended. **PMP** p. 38: “An iconic building on edge of the harbour ... a signature interpretative facility ... .” This idea is rejected because of the **great expense**, the small size of the area, and because the **Pavillion** (see below) will provide most of the benefits of such an eco centre.
- No bird blinds** on the Headland or the West Beach Boardwalk; cf. **PMP** p. 48 for the Headland and p. 38 for the West Beach. Though well intended as a concession to the naturalists and in recognition of the diverse bird life, blinds are completely unnecessary in such a small area where the birds are already practically underfoot; also, such blinds elsewhere get used by smoking teens and homeless people. Birds can be identified in signage. **WBFN** in agreement.
- Connectivity and Accessibility** must be kept in mind where possible. However, full connectivity (see **PMP**, p. 42, for example, Waterfront Goal #3: Connectivity), which is always stressed in the documents, is out of the question since the Nature Park stops at the west end of the boardwalk where the private property begins. Access from the north (Ontario, Bagot, and Durham Streets) and east (Hibernia Street) and west (Ontario Street) is already adequate. Also, private property under parts of the boardwalk is a further hindrance. That said, we **recommend** that the Town ensure that the easement across the School Board property south of the playing field remain in place. **WUN** (pp. 30 and 33) suggests that the Town should attempt to acquire an easement over the property connecting the west end of the boardwalk to the Peace Park should the occasion ever arise. This seems unlikely since such an easement could be seen to lower the value of the properties.

**WEST HEADLAND RECOMMENDATIONS:** (naturalizing a ruined area; this work could be done after Shoreplan’s work on the breakwater in 2024)

**Preliminary:** The West Headland must be cleaned up. Note that **WUN** p. 39 recommends: “Clean up headland to remove concrete debris and miscellaneous waste.” Note also that **BEA**

6.2.6 recommends Shoreline Clean-Up, “specifically the western pier [the West Headland] and breakwall” (p. 15). **BRI** explains that “The west headland exhibits a long history of disturbance. Various types of rock and debris have been deposited in this area to reinforce it and to help to protect the harbour. The lack of native topsoil in the headland constrains the establishment of plants. From an aesthetic standpoint, this area of the waterfront would benefit from clean-up and restoration, and on-going maintenance.” The edges of the Headland have exposed wire fencing and metal all over the place. The end is composed of chunks of cement and rebar.

However, before deciding how to do this, we need a geo-technical study of the composition of the West Headland, particularly its soil, so that we can make informed recommendations as to how to improve it and make it safe. This would involve core sampling by augur and analysis. We need to know what we are dealing with before making recommendations for proper naturalization. This kind of sampling was beyond the scope of the **BEA**. It is all the more necessary because there have been several dumpings of contaminated soil over the past years – some of it dredging from around the old creek mouth and little will grow on it. Even the grass seed which was strewn by the Town all died. Many suspect some of the soil removed back when the oil and coal was cleaned up was added to the Headland.

**Recommendation:** that Staff approach the Fleming College Environmental Technician Program to see if they could assist us, and if not, that Council fund such a limited-scope geo-technical study.

#### **Recommendations:**

--**Pedestrian walkway along Headland** – a primary initiative of **WUN** p. 37; Trail/maintenance access. Limestone crush **wide enough for Public works vehicle access**. Not a straight line. **WUN** p. 37 recommends “Minimum 3 metre wide compacted stone dust walkway, alignment to meander slightly to sensitively integrate pathway to landscape, seating nodes at key locations.” **BRI** recommends: “Establish a meandering pathway along the headland.” Such a pathway would be **wheelchair accessible**. Port Hope has a granular path recipe they use along the Ganaraska River which includes crushed lime. Donated **benches** could be distributed on either side. Connection of this walkway to the little beach area west of the boat launch, as recommended by **WUN** p. 39, would continue to be along the sand beach on the east side or along the designated pathway on the west side of the boat-storage area.

--**Pavillion and Overlook** (at end of West Headland; **PMP** p. 48). **PMP** on education, small group gatherings and outdoor classroom (p. 27). **PMP** p. 43 recommends “Expand gathering space at harbour.” Viewing area at breakwall a “primary initiative” of **WUN** p. 37 and p.1.6, 39 – design to be slightly elevated and construct from natural materials ... to sensitively integrate into headland aesthetic.” This will really establish the place as a park and a destination. It need not be elaborate: hard floor, waist high walls, open sides and a cedar-shake roof would be excellent. But even a circle of rocks or stumps could serve as a classroom for young children. A public telescope *could* be installed here.

**NB:** **WUN** p. 40 re **REVENUE GENERATION** opportunity for location to be used for weddings and photography ... .”

--**Habitat enhancement and naturalization**; see **WUN** 1.2 p. 39: “Clean up headland to remove

concrete debris and miscellaneous waste.” **BRI**: “Clean up existing debris.” “Augment selective portions of the headland with sufficient topsoil to facilitate plant establishment and restoration plantings. Locally indigenous plant species should be used to supplement the existing vegetation. Include thicket-forming shrubs (red-osier dogwood, willow, bramble, serviceberry, viburnum) to provide additional cover/food for birds and other wildlife species.” “Incorporate additional riprap/armour stone at south end of headland to create small coves or embayments for shorebirds and waterfowl.”

**WBFN** strongly endorses all this.

**NB. Community partnership** with **WBFN** and the Cobourg Garden Club and the general public should be encouraged here.

**NOTE: TIMING**: This should begin after the repair of the West Breakwall which will entail heavy equipment moving over the Headland.

- Interpretative stations/signage** (all plans stress this; see for example **WUN** 1.3 p. 39). **WBFN** could assist with this if asked. It is important that this signage be readable by someone in a wheelchair. Examples of such signage (designed by the former Committee for Art in Public Spaces) are located near the pond and skating rink.
- Dredging**: Dredging of the west side of the Harbour will remain necessary, but excess sand should not be dumped on the Headland. **WUN** p. 40: “Discontinue dumping and alteration of soils and plants on the headland”. It is not necessary when dredging that: “Some shallow areas should still be protected for waterfowl” (**WUN** pp. 40 and 43).
- Invasive species removal**: **BRI** recommends: “Remove aggressive, non-native plant species.” In the Willow Mineral Thicket Swamp [this is the little wet area immediately southwest of the parking lot stretching over to the east side of the boat storage area] there is a colony of European Reed. See **BEA** 6.2.5, p. 15. This should be addressed, although there is no hurry. The reed will not expand much beyond its present position because it needs wetland which is severely limited. There is also some Dog-Strangling Vine on the Headland, but this can be addressed after the Headland is cleaned up.
- Canoe/kayak launch** or floating dock near north end of the West Headland beach (**PMP** p. 48), if deemed desirable, is not precluded by the Nature Park rules. It would be best if it were seasonal and removed when not in use.

#### **Recommendations Rejected:**

- Shoreline habitat creation** (east side of West Headland), **PMP** p. 48 – unnecessary, too little space, impacted by mandatory dredging and varying water levels. **WBFN** in agreement.
- Nature boardwalk** on east side of West Headland **PMP** p. 48; see also p. 52 for a pie-in-the-Sky plan for such a boardwalk – unnecessary, wildly expensive and not enough space. **WBFN** in agreement.

**WEST BEACH RECOMMENDATIONS: conserving** and improving what we already have is the main idea)

**NB. BEA** breaks this area down into smaller ecological communities: Wormwood Gravel Open Beach, Mineral Shrub Beach-Sandbar Willow, Willow Mineral Swamp Thicket, Dry-Moist Old Field Meadow. Unfortunately, it does not distinguish the man-made West Headland proper

from the Old Field. **The area that most needs immediate attention is the Wormwood Gravel Open Beach**, which the Report calls “a rare vegetation community” (p. 13).

--**Build Pathway Fingers from Boardwalk.** See **WUN** 1.4 p. 39: “Provide new pathway fingers to extend access from existing boardwalk south, closer to water.” “Install a toe rail on both sides [of boardwalk, provide seating opportunities at end of fingers.” And “Provide seating opportunities at the end of fingers ... .” **BRI** recommends “Establish boardwalks (with railings) to discourage creation of ‘informal’ paths and trails to the beach, and to protect remnant vegetation.” **WUN** 6.2.2 re Formalized Beach Access Pathways recommends only 1 or 2 pathways and recommends they be restricted to the Old Field meadow community “with no pathways in the sensitive Wormwood Gravel Open Beach Community” (p. 14). **BEA** p. 13: A fence of natural material (i.e., wood or rope) could be installed along the southern limit of the boardwalk easement ... to deter human encroachment into the community ... .”

**Recommendation:** When the Boardwalk is being replaced, install a rope railing (relatively cheap, easily replaced, less intrusive on the part of boardwalk the town does not own) on both sides of the boardwalk with one opening south of Bagot Street and a ramp (wheelchair accessible) on the south side of the boardwalk, plus a winding (not a straight line) limestone pathway from the ramp to the beach. Limestone paths with off ramps from the boardwalk should also be made at both ends of the boardwalk. Donated benches at the beach end of all pathways. For Trail/maintenance and access, fingers should probably be limestone crush wide enough for Public works vehicle access.

--**Enhance the environmental quality of native beach vegetation (PMP pp. 43 and 48) and p. 52:** “planted with native beach vegetation to mitigate sand migration, the boardwalk is sensitively integrated into the West Beach Environment ... .” See **WUN** 1.2 p. 39 for suggestions and **BEA** 6.2.1 Gravel Beach enhancement Planting of native species like Field wormwood, Seaside spurge, Sea rocket, Marram Grass, and Sand Cherry. **BRI** recommends “Augment the beach with locally indigenous plant species.” **ZUZ** Appendix A, Reach 7, p. 4 recommends: Cobourg West Beach: maintain boardwalk and continue with naturalization with dune vegetation and shrubs.

**NB. Community partnership** with WBFN and the Cobourg Garden Club and the general public should be encouraged here.

--**Meadow Enhancement and Maintenance** (in the Old Field) **BEA** recommends enhancement with native species like Common Milkweed, Butterfly Milkweed, Wild Bergamot, Hairy Beardtongue, Purple Coneflower, Arrow-leafed Aster, Early Goldenrod, and Round-headed Bushclover” (p. 14). There is benefit to maintaining this cultural meadow community on the landscape” (p. 15). **BRI** recommends: the “open meadow area provides an important opportunity to restore the vegetation and wildlife habitat function of the west beach.”

**NB. Community partnership** with WBFN and the Cobourg Garden Club and the general public should be encouraged here.

--**Interpretation and signage** – enhance boardwalk with Interpretative Stations (**PMP**. 48). **BEA:** “Interpretive signage could be installed along the boardwalk to educate users on the

ecology of the beach and the various communities present” p. 14. **BRI** recommends “Encourage public stewardship of the west beach through interpretative signage and controlled access [boardwalks].” **WBFN** could assist with this if asked. It is important that this signage be readable by someone in a wheelchair. Examples of such signage (designed by the former Committee for Art in Public Spaces) are located near the pond and skating rink.

**SOUTHWEST BREAKWALL:** In the **WUN**, Among the “key considerations” we find: Maintaining the west breakwall as an inaccessible area to allow it to function as a safe roosting location for migratory birds (**WUN** p. 37). **BRI** recommends this strongly: “Establish a fence at the end of the headland to discourage pedestrian access to the west breakwall (important bird habitat function).” This is desirable also for safety reasons, but it could be negotiable according to season; for example, closing it between April 15 and June 15 for the spring shorebird migration which is significant.

**ZUZ** Appendix A, Reach 7, p. 4, recommends: “Upgrade the south-facing portion of the west breakwater and implement living shoreline restoration concepts to enhance habitat in the marina basin.” **BRI** recommends: “Incorporate additional rip-rap/armour stone at the south end of headland to create small coves or embayments for shorebirds and waterfowl,” and further “Augment the breakwall with stone to create additional habitat for birds – variable height and width of stone, scalloped edge.”

**This southwest breakwall is to be fundamentally rebuilt in 2024-5 but Shoreplan should be instructed to consider the recommendations of WUN, BRI and ZUZ.**

**ECOLOGY GARDEN:** The Ecology Garden was a separate Nature Park for 25 years, though now it is a part of the Waterfront Nature Park. In its 26<sup>th</sup> year it is functioning as we would wish it to in an exemplary manner. Its use of volunteer labour could be imitated for projects like planting south of the boardwalk.

**Recommendation:** Extend the current accessible path westward to the Durham Street boardwalk entry. The same type of limestone crush as used in other pathways should be used here. Could this be done in conjunction with the boardwalk replacement?

**CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT. This is a project that could be led by citizens** if the Town provided the heavy lifting like removing the debris from the Headland and rebuilding the Boardwalk. There are plans to form a **STEWARDSHIP GROUP** along the lines of the Friends of the Spit which have provided such amazing stewardship for the management of the Leslie Street Spit in Toronto. Beach neighbours could be involved.

A **website** for the Nature Park similar to the Ecology Garden website would be useful and could be initiated by citizens in the **Stewardship Group**. This would help give the Park a presence and move the Park towards person status since plants and wildlife cannot advocate for themselves.

This website could/should involve a 5-minute **video** with an interesting story board which would be useful for information and for fund-raising purposes.

Several reports (including **WUN** and **BRI**) suggest involving Willow Beach Field Naturalists in naturalizing and replanting efforts.

The Cobourg Garden Club should also be kept in mind as a potential knowledge Resource and possible source of volunteer help.

**Fund-raising partnerships:** Raising money from the public (buying a shrub or plant or a bench, for example) and using volunteer labour should be considered.

Highschool science classes could also help with things like planting.

The Cobourg Library has a Seed Library.

Perhaps the Town Greenhouse could grow some of the necessary native plants. There are a number of nurseries in Northumberland where native plants can be purchased.

#### **For Prompt Action:**

- The park name (**Council**).
- Signage with the name to be put up (**Staff**)
- Boardwalk rope walls and pathway fingers project to be completed together with the Boardwalk replacement (**Public Works**)
- Instruct **Shoreplan** about desired features of the West Breakwater
- The geo-technical study of the soil of the West Headland (**Council and/or Staff**)
- Begin to plan for the enhancement of the environmental quality of the West Beach  
Augmenting native vegetation (**PRAC and WBFN**)

#### **Actions recommended:**

-- **PRAC recommends** that Council approve the name "Cobourg Waterfront Nature Park" for the new nature park and instruct staff to create the appropriate signage for the park and place signs at least at the east and west ends and perhaps at the entrance at the bottom of Bagot Street.

-- In as much as the Waterfront User Needs Assessment Plan, the Natural Heritage Report by Brad Bricker, and the Beacon Natural Heritage Stewardship Report **all** call for pathway fingers to restrict access to the West Beach as well as some form of wall on both sides of the boardwalk, **PRAC recommends** that when the Boardwalk is being replaced, Council instruct Public Works to install a rope railing (relatively cheap, easily replaced, less intrusive on the part of boardwalk the town does not own) on both sides of the boardwalk with one opening south of Bagot Street and a ramp (wheelchair accessible) on the south side of the boardwalk, plus a winding (not a straight line) limestone pathway from the ramp to the beach. Limestone paths with off ramps from the boardwalk should also be made at both ends of the boardwalk. For Trail/maintenance and access, paths should probably be limestone crush wide enough for Public works vehicle access.

-- In as much as the **West Breakwater is to be fundamentally rebuilt in 2024-5, PRAC recommends** that Council instruct Shoreplan to plan to keep the rebuilt West Breakwater inaccessible from the West Headland according to the recommendations of the Waterfront User Needs Assessment Plan, the Natural Heritage Report by Brad Bricker, and The Zuzek Report: Lake Ontario Shoreline Management Plan prepared by Peter J. Zuzek – to wit:

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-- **PRAC recommends** that Council instruct Public Works to extend the current accessible path in the Ecology Garden westward to the Durham Street boardwalk entry. The same type of limestone crush as used in other pathways should be used here. Could this be done in conjunction with the boardwalk replacement?