



STAFF REPORT
THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG

Regular Council

Report to: Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillors
From: Brent Larmer, Town Clerk/Director, Legislative Services
Report Number: LS-2025-020
Council Meeting Date: October 29th 2025
Subject: **Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA)
Lands Stormwater Fee Exemption Approval**

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1. Recommendation:

THAT Council enact By-law No.053-2025, being a by-law to amend the Stormwater Charges by-law to provide an exemption of the charge to the Ganaraska Conservation Area property located at 700 William Street, Cobourg, known municipally and within the Cobourg parks inventory as James Cockburn Park; and

FURTHER THAT the exemption remain in place only as long as the current MOU between the Town and GRCA is in effect for the use of the lands as a municipal park and open space operated by the Town of Cobourg.

2. Executive Summary:

This report is in response to a Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) Board report on the invoking of Clause 13 of the GRCA and Town of Cobourg MOU regarding the property located at 700 William Street known municipally and within the Cobourg parks inventory as James Cockburn Park.

3. Background

The Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) has a current agreement with the Town of Cobourg in place since May 29, 1990 for the use of the Cobourg Conservation Area for park, recreational, and related purposes in exchange for ongoing maintenance of the lands.

4. Discussion:

Staff discovered a report being presented at the September 18th 2025 GRCA Board meeting by GRCA CAO/Secretary-Treasurer regarding the Cobourg Conservation Area (James Cockburn Park) Agreement and a request that the Board direct GRCA staff to invoke the escape clause in the Memorandum of Understanding dated May 29, 1990 effective December 31, 2025. This recommendation would mean that the GRCA lands located at 700 William Street known municipally and within the Cobourg parks inventory as James Cockburn Park would be transferred back to the GRCA as of January 1, 2026 to transition the Cobourg Conservation Area toward a more naturalized state, consistent with the management of other GRCA-owned lands, and the Town of Cobourg would no longer have use of the lands for its recreational purposes.

The initiation of the escape clause recommendation from GRCA Staff has been noted in the GRCA report as a result of the Town's stormwater management charge that has been implemented in Cobourg as approved through By-law No. 065-2024 and the GRCA is not exempt from the by-law and having to pay a charge of \$93.36 in 2025. Staff at the GRCA believe that the principle of applying a stormwater fee to conservation lands is a concern and applying stormwater management charges to conservation lands sets a troubling precedent for Ontario. Additional reasoning for the objection to the stormwater charge is noted in the report attachments.

Staff met with the GRCA on September 18th 2025 immediately when discovering the recommendation that is being presented to the GRCA Board. At the meeting Town staff requested a deferral of the item at the Board level in order to notify Council of this Board direction and how it could affect the current Town/GRCA agreement regarding the recreational utilization and if there was some negotiation that could occur between both parties on an agreement to keep the lands within Town use.

As a result of the meeting, the GRCA Board CAO/Secretary Treasurer noted that if the Board was to be exempted from the Stormwater Charge through a by-law amendment, the recommendation on the invoking of clause 13 to terminate the agreement would be withdrawn and the 1990 MOU terms would remain in place. The GRCA requested a by-law exemption to the Stormwater Charges By-law.

Town Staff provided Council with an update and a review of the section 13 clause within the existing agreement in Closed Session, as permitted by the Act, with a recommendation that Staff present this report to Council in open session with a recommendation to approve an exemption to the Stormwater Charge By-law to the GRCA for the lands located at 700 William Street, Cobourg. This exemption could be considered in line with the current exemption for Town owned parks and recreational lands owned by the Town, which are exempt from the charge. Since the Town uses this GRCA owned lands for parkland, this could be a reasonable exemption to be applied. Additionally, it was recommended by Council to include a further that statement in the Staff recommendation that this exemption of the stormwater charge only be in effect as long as the MOU is in place and the property is used by the Town as a Town park known as James Cockburn Park. Once the land is taken back by the GRCA, the stormwater charge will be in place as was prior to the by-law exemption.

5. Financial Impact and Budget

If this recommendation is approved, there will be a \$93.36, loss of a contribution to the Stormwater fee reserve as a result of the charge exemption.

Additionally, as this land is used as part of the Towns parkland inventory and utilized for soccer fields the Town receives some revenues for fees collected for use of the lands. Between May 26, 2025, and Aug 29 2025, there were a total of 296 bookings, including games and practice, with a total revenue of \$2,989.53.

6. Relationship to Council's Strategic Plan Priorities 2023 to 2027 and beyond:

Thriving Community

Service Excellence

Sustainability

7. Public Engagement:

There has not been any public engagement related to this staff report.

8. Attachments:

Attachment 1 - GRCA Report- Cobourg Conservation Area Agreement.pdf

Attachment 2 - Town of Cobourg Exemption Request.pdf

9. Report Not Considered by Standing Committee Because:

Time Sensitive Issue (information received too late for Standing Committee consideration)

Urgent Matter (issue arose after this month's Standing Committee Meeting)

Other:

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) Lands Stormwater Fee Exemption Approval.docx
Attachments:	Attachment 1 - GRCA Report- Cobourg Conservation Area Agreement.pdf Attachment 2 - Town of Cobourg Exemption Request.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Oct 27, 2025

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

Tracey Vaughan, Chief Administrative Officer - Oct 27, 2025 - 11:40 AM