

CEAC Report 2006-01

Report to: Mayor and Members of Council

From: John Abbott, Chair, Caledon Environmental Advisory Committee (CEAC)

By: Cheltenham Village Study Sub-group: John Abbott, Neil Morris, Don Webb

Date: March 22, 2006

Re: **Review of the Cheltenham Community Design Guidelines**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Caledon Environmental Advisory Committee (CEAC) recommends to the Corporation of the Town of Caledon:

1. That Council receive CEAC report 2006-01
2. That Council consider for adoption the recommendations for modification of the Cheltenham Community Design Guidelines.

INTRODUCTION

Under Caledon's Official Plan, Village Studies are required for each of the Villages in Caledon. The purpose of the Village Studies is to establish long-term guidance for the growth and evolution of each village. In 2004, the Cheltenham Village Study was jointly initiated by the Town of Caledon, the Region of Peel, and the Credit Valley Conservation Authority.

The Cheltenham Village Study incorporates three distinct, but interrelated components: the Planning Component; the Servicing Component; and the Environmental Component.

The Study has been completed in a phased manner. Phase 1 (completed Nov. 2004) involved a comprehensive review and analysis of background issues and existing planning, servicing and environmental conditions within the Study Area boundary.

Phase 2 (completed June 2005) consisted of the development and evaluation of future planning and servicing alternatives for the village, culminating in the identification of preferred planning and servicing alternatives.

Phase 3 (completed in October 2005) involved the preparation of a draft Village Plan which includes draft conceptual Community Design Guidelines, a draft Servicing Plan

and a draft Environmental Management Plan. These draft plans have been based on the preferred Structural Concept and Planning Scenarios generated in Phase 2. Included in the appendices to the Phase 3 report is the draft Official Plan Amendment 201, and also Community Design Guidelines.

Phase 4 of the Study is currently in progress. The general purpose of this last phase is to review and finalize, with public input, the Draft Plans presented in the Phase 3 Report.

BACKGROUND

Members of CEAC have participated throughout all phases of the Study through participation in the Cheltenham resident's Liaison Group and through the review of the various reports generated at the conclusion of each phase of the Study.

On November 8, 2005, Caledon Council endorsed the release of the *Cheltenham Village Study Phase 3 Report – Draft Village, Servicing and Environmental Management Plans* to the public and for circulation to committees, agencies and Town departments. The release of the report was followed by the statutory Public Information Meeting on November 30, 2005. Based on public input and further work by Town Planning staff, the draft design guidelines contained in the Phase 3 Report have been further refined. This report addresses the environmentally relevant design guidelines contained in the document entitled *Cheltenham Community Design Guidelines*, and dated February, 2006.

REPORT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this report are:

- To provide Council with an independent review of the Community Design Guidelines regarding issues of relevance to the Environmental Component.
- To assess the completeness and effectiveness of those guidelines in addressing environmentally relevant aspects of the Village Study.
- To provide recommendations to Council and Town Staff as to how the Guidelines might be improved from the perspective of achieving environmental objectives.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the Community Design Guidelines is to ensure the achievement of municipal goals for the overall layout and character of Cheltenham Village. To this end, the Guidelines provide information that will facilitate an understanding of the community design concept promoted in the Secondary Plan. In essence, the Guidelines are a generalized and concise synopsis of the Phase 3 Report.

The Design Guidelines are intended for use by developers, builders, and the Town. The Guidelines will be a resource to developers to ensure that their applications for development are consistent with the Municipality's expectations with respect to the character, quality and form of new development. The guidelines will also be used by the Municipality in the review and approval of development applications. For these purposes, the Design Guidelines have been prepared to:

- strike a balance between control and flexibility;
- be realistic and implementable;
- be easily understood; and,
- be generally accepted.

In this current review of the Design Guidelines from an environmental perspective, the desired characteristics (flexibility, realism, acceptability) have been respected.

Principle #1 – Be Green

From an environmental management perspective, the inclusion of “Be Green” as the first of five principles is highly commended. This emphasizes that environmental stewardship is a priority to the Town of Caledon. It also indicates that environmental features and functions are not a secondary detail in the development process, but rather a primary consideration. CEAC strongly supports this message.

To help ensure that the big-picture message of Be-Green can be understood and implemented, the following suggestions are provided regarding some of the specific elements of the Guidelines.

The first tenet (a) under the “Be-Green” Principle reads:

- a) “Significant natural features and systems should be protected, conserved and enhanced, and incorporated into the community structure as open spaces and green corridors with appropriate setbacks and public access”.

This clearly identifies the need to protect natural features. This need is fully supported by CEAC. However, to strengthen the statement, several suggestions are offered. First, it is suggested that the term “significant” be omitted. The traditional approach of protecting only those natural features that are designated as “significant” has tended to result in a net decline in total vegetation cover, wetlands, woodlots, and other key components of overall environmental integrity.

It is also recommended that along with natural features and systems, natural “function” be identified for protection. A feature may be afforded individual protection, but it is possible that its function can be impaired if environmental linkages are impaired. For example, a woodlot that functions as habitat may receive direct protection, but that habitat function can be impaired if access to that habitat by certain species of biota is

impaired. This may be implicitly captured in the use of the term “systems”, but it is suggested that the protection of “function” be explicit.

Also, high accessibility by the public may in some cases be detrimental, leading to potential damage of rare or sensitive vegetation, disturbance of nesting birds, etc. This is noted in the stated objectives of the Environmental Management Plan outlined in Section 3.3 of the Phase 3 Report. Objective 6 reads:

“To offer opportunities, if possible, for additional public access to the Credit River without impacting its ecological features and functions, and while respecting private land ownership.

The notion of limiting access to avoid potential damage should be brought forward in the Community Design Guidelines.

Lastly, for the opening statement in Principle # 1, it suggested that the natural features be the prime determinant in the statement rather than community structure. That is, the structure of the community should work around the natural features, rather than those features being incorporated into the structure. This may be considered the same notion, but it denotes a different priority and perspective.

Suggested wording is as follows:

Natural features, systems and functions should be protected, conserved and enhanced. Community structure should respect these features and generate opportunities for their appreciation in an undisturbed state.

Tenet “b” of Principle # 1, reads as follows:

- b) New development should respect and work with the natural topography of the area and significant topographic features (e.g. valley slopes, ravines) should be protected and incorporated into the community structure.

It is suggested that the statement be expanded to recognize the role that topography may play in drainage and hydraulic recharge, and to protect that functional role.

Principle # 2 – Be Accessible

Under Principle # 2, tenet “b” reads as follows:

- b) Opportunities should be identified to provide more public access to the Credit River and the Caledon Trailway, consistent with environmental management objectives and while respecting private land.

For reasons stated previously on the issue of public access under Principle # 1, it is recommended that this be amended to read “..while respecting private land and protecting environmentally sensitive features”.

Principle # 5 – Be Well Serviced

From an environmental perspective, Principle # 5 (“Be Well Serviced”) is perhaps the most critical.

Water taking and wastewater disposal have the potential to have significant environmental impact. To ensure adequate protection of groundwater and surface waters, future changes in the Village of Cheltenham must occur in accordance with well-defined requirements regarding water supply and waste water disposal. As written, the Community Design Guidelines identify this need. However, to enhance the effectiveness of Principle # 5, several suggestions are offered.

First, it is suggested that there be stronger linkage to the sections of the Phase 3 Report that address water-related issues in detail. Without consideration of the specific detailed guidance, it is not likely that the basic objective can be met.

Under tenet “b”, it is suggested that wording be expanded to read “natural features and functions” in terms of protected endpoints.

Also, explicit mention of stormwater and residential septic/sewage wastes as two specific elements of “wastewater” may be of benefit. It is suggested that the wording of the relevant main objective stated in Section 3.3.3 of the Phase 3 report be considered for use in the Design Guidelines:

“To ensure that new water services do not negatively impact groundwater and surface water resources and related biological communities”.

One of the key concerns is the Guideline element calling for the respect of “carrying capacity of the local ecosystem”. While this notion is wholly supportable from an environmental perspective, the use of the term “carrying capacity” may not meet the call for the guidelines to be understandable. Carrying capacity could be restated as “assimilative capacity” so that it is consistent with the terminology in the Phase 3 Report. In either case, the term should probably be defined, and linkage to the relevant section of the Phase 3 Report should be added. This is a potentially limiting issue given that the assimilative capacity assessment reported in Section 7.3 of the Phase 3 Report suggests that there is no capacity for further loadings of metals that are likely to be associated with stormwater management ponds.

Section 6.0 Natural Features

Under Section 6.0 (Natural Features) of the Design Guidelines, guideline NF2 calls for physical access to natural features. As mentioned previously, this is not necessarily

appropriate for all natural features. It is suggested that this Guideline be removed, or modified so that it indicates that access should be appropriately restricted in cases of sensitive features.

General

In addition to the suggested revisions of the existing contents of the Community Design Guidelines, it is suggested that the Guidelines identify and perhaps briefly summarize by-laws and regulations that may be of relevance to the development and building process. This could include the fill regulations, recently updated by CVC, and the Town of Caledon's Woodlands Conservation by-law.

It is also suggested that the notion of stewardship be given more attention. Stewardship, a concept which embodies individual and collective responsibility, should be part of the design and development of the community. The community design should also be such so as to maximize opportunities for stewardship at the time of development and in the ongoing use of the community by future residents. While various specific elements of the Community Design Guidelines do work to this end to some extent, it is suggested that the stewardship notion receive explicit mention, perhaps as an additional guideline item under Principle # 1.

Furthermore, it is suggested that in the various instances where public access to natural features is identified as an objective, perhaps the terms "appreciation" and "stewardship" could be substituted for the term "access". Further along the lines of the role of the future residential community, the Community Guidelines could include direction to developers to facilitate the provision of information to prospective buyers that would serve to promote environmental stewardship. Information of this nature (e.g. green maps) and the notion of stewardship, could be included in the promotional material prepared by developers or made available at open houses. This should not function as, or be perceived to be, a restriction to developers. It may in fact be identified as an added selling feature.

CONCLUSION

The Cheltenham Community Design Guidelines provide an effective summary of the Community, Servicing, and Environmental Management plans presented in the Phase 3 Report. Considering that these Guidelines are meant to be understandable, they are largely adequate from the environmental perspective. To ensure that the users of the Guidelines have sufficient knowledge to meet the general direction of the Guidelines, stronger linkage to the relevant detailed sections of the Phase 3 Report is recommended. Some changes to the Principles and the specific guidelines have also been proposed to increase the effectiveness of the Guidelines in addressing and enhancing awareness of environmental issues.