

Township of Elizabethtown-Kitley

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REPORT

To: Mayor Burrow and Members of Council
From: Leslie Drynan, Administrator
Date: April 11, 2023
Re: REPORT NO. A-23-37: Opportunities for Rows Corners Fairgrounds

BACKGROUND

Rows Corners Fairgrounds is a 30-acre parcel of land located at 3823 County Road 6, for reference, a map of which is attached hereto as Schedule 'A'. The lands were purchased by the Township in 1965 for \$7K.

During the March 21st Community Development Committee meeting, staff presented two reports; 2023 Facility Bookings and an Overview of Township Parks. Although not captured in the minutes, a suggestion was made that the Township strongly consider options and opportunities for Rows Corners Fairgrounds, particularly as it relates to the current housing shortage and the recent delegation to Council from a local green technology company advancing an innovative manufacturing process for net-zero, cost-efficient modular housing. Direction was provided to staff to bring forward a report for Council's consideration regarding opportunities for these lands.

DISCUSSION/OPTIONS

History and Usage

Following assumption of the lands by the former Township of Elizabethtown, Rows Corners quickly developed into a rural community hub for residents and visitors alike, including regular horse racing, horse shows, an active ball diamond with grandstand, an enclosed canteen with washroom facilities and well-kept barn(s). The Township received a bicentennial grant in 1967 which was used to build the washroom / canteen facility. The large grandstand was deemed unsafe for use in July 1996 and was torn down along with some accessory buildings in 1997 due to unsafe conditions.

From 1966 to 1983, a driving club used the facility, which then transitioned to the Elizabethtown Horseman's Club. The Thousand Islands Kennel Club used the facilities for annual dog shows until the mid-1980's.

Over the years however, the popularity and use of the grounds diminished. Subsequently, many of the features either fell into disrepair or were vandalized - or both.

The washrooms were deemed unusable in 2015 due to large cracks in the floor, and mortar breaking down between the cinder blocks. The canteen was also in need of a great deal of work, however the building succumbed to fire in 2018 and was replaced by a pavilion.

Despite the reduced usage and popularity, Rows Corners Fairgrounds has been home to horse shows for several years and recently been re-established as the location of the international Thousand Islands Kennel Club dog show. Over the years the Fairgrounds have also had different events including relay-for-life, the model airplane group, car shows etc., and the lands are used regularly by individuals walking the track as well as exercising their dogs. The pavilion is also being used more frequently for lunch breaks, reading and small social gatherings.

There is 100-amp service at the pavilion and 100-amp service at the pole south of the track. The power needed to host larger events would require between a minimum 200-amp for sound equipment and 1000-amp service for entire events including food vendors with sound and lightshows. Currently there are no permanent washrooms, however, portable washrooms are brought in spring to fall, and event organizers bring in extra depending on the size of the event(s).

The Township maintains the grounds as far as grass cutting, general building maintenance and weekly garbage collection. User groups are responsible for cleaning up the grounds after each event including cleaning up after the horses. Larger events (TIKO Dog Show and Horse A Rama bring in a dumpster for the weekends as well as additional portable washrooms).

Barricades including a locked gate and ropes have been installed to deter non-authorized motor vehicles from tearing up the track. This has been very helpful in lengthening the times between the track needing grading.

To date, four separate days and two weekends have been booked between May and August for horse and/or dog show usage.

Rows Corners Ad Hoc Committee

The Rows Corners Ad Hoc Committee was established under By-law 11-58, enacted by Council in September 2011. The Terms of Reference included instructions to the Rows Corners Ad Hoc Committee to investigate and report to Council on the following areas:

1. Current use of the Rows Corners Park Land.
2. Potential future use of the Rows Corners Park Land, including possible alternative uses.
3. The Ad Hoc Committee shall:
 - a) Review, consider and make recommendation to Council on matters pertaining to the current and potential uses for the Rows Corners Park Land.
 - b) Engage in consultation with current users with regard to future potential of the lands.
 - c) Communicate with Township departments and other Committees to investigate possible future uses.
 - d) Communicate with provincial, federal and private organizations to determine what programs and opportunities could be available for the lands.
 - e) Make recommendations to the Township Council pertaining to the potential future use of the Rows Corners Park Land.

The Rows Corners Ad Hoc Committee consisted of the following members:

- Richard Hanna, Recreation Committee Representative
- Jim Miller, Economic Development Committee Representative (Chair)
- Lyle Pederson, Planning Advisory Committee Representative
- Susan Prettejohn, Council Representative
- Jim Pickard, Mayor

Over various meetings, the Committee compiled data/information and met with a variety of local groups who provided information on sports and sporting use, senior housing and housing concepts and mixed-use development (housing and recreation).

In mid-2013, the Committee presented their final report to Council, inclusive of a comprehensive summary of their information gathering and requested that Council consider a budget contribution of \$3K to engage a consultant to prepare a market demand analysis of seniors' affordable housing. Council subsequently denied the request and no further action was taken. The Committee was disbanded.

It is important to note that this Committee's work was done prior to the current Township Official Plan (2018) and the County Official Plan (2016/2017).

Zoning, Land Use and Possible Studies (if changing use)

The Rows Corners Fairgrounds property is zoned Open Space, which permits agricultural use, conservation use, a golf course, marine facility, park and one (1) accessory dwelling or unit. The property is designated Rural under the Official Plan and there are significant woodlands delineated in the north quarter of the property.

The Rural designation only permits limited residential development on the basis of one dwelling per lot. Second unit policies are not permitted; however these regulations do not apply in the OS zone. Limited development by severance is permitted, subject to other policies in the Rural designation, but plans of subdivision for residential use are not permitted.

Given the zoning and OP on the property, a proposal for a residential development would necessitate an Official Plan amendment and a rezoning and possibly a plan of subdivision/condominium (of course this would be dependent on the nature of any proposed development).

The property is also located within 120 m of a Natural Heritage-PSW (provincially significant wetlands and woodlands), which would require an EIS (environmental impact assessment/study). The mapping, as it exists today, also indicates that the site is within a distance of 300 m from the Natural Heritage-PSW and Mineral Resources Aggregate designation, requiring an archaeological assessment and a land use compatibility study.

Depending on the desired direction, other possible studies may be required to support a residential development, including a hydrogeological assessment given groundwater site servicing, lot grading/drainage/stormwater management on site, planning rationale study, etc. The extent/type of studies needed to support a change in use could be better determined if/when a draft was presented.

Financial Summary for the Period 2015-2020 (pre-pandemic)

The pre-pandemic financial summary for a five-year period (2015-2020), attached hereto as Schedule 'B', demonstrates the estimated annual costs incurred by the Township to maintain these lands as they currently exist today.

Housing Accessibility, Affordability and Vulnerable Populations

The housing shortage and affordability crisis in this country is well known and governments on all levels have released plans to bolster the supply. The Ontario government's recently passed More Homes Built Faster Act is a necessary step toward addressing the shortage of housing in the province, however it is not lost on us, that we all have a role to play in taking necessary actions to rectify these issues, not only for our most vulnerable population (low income and seniors) but community wide.

Housing is often cited as an important social determinant of health, recognizing the range of ways in which a lack of housing, or poor-quality housing, can negatively affect health and wellbeing. With the majority of properties in our predominantly rural community having no access to water/sewer services, and travel distance to the closest urban centre, the Township is faced with having to approach the housing crisis with an outside of the box mindset in contributing and developing potential solutions.

With Rows Corners Fairgrounds close proximity to the City of Brockville and potential that awaits at this site, whether it be from a recreational or housing perspective, it is an opportune time for Council to consider how to move forward in developing a plan for these lands.

2023 Capital/Operating Initiatives

The approved 2023 Township budget includes funds for the replacement of the interior dilapidated fence that spans the front of the track area, parallel to County Road 6, repairs to the barn, and upgrades to the power service. Staff will not take action on any of these initiatives until a decision by Council has been made.

Next Steps

Given the ample space at this site and opportunity for additional events and activities for our community, not to mention a potential source of revenue generation for the Township, the Community Development Committee recommended that Council consider opportunities for expansion including the possibility of shared recreational opportunities (eg: pickle ball, volleyball, soccer dome, etc.) and/or development on these lands.

The timing of this recommendation from the Community Development Committee aligns well from two perspectives; Township Strategic Plan and Federal Government (CMHC) Housing Accelerator Funding.

In March, Council undertook a Strategic Plan re-refresh for the Township, of which a draft copy will be shared in the coming weeks and although Council has yet to review, identify timing of established priorities and approve the Plan, two priorities which appeared at the top of the list were affordable housing and potentially undertaking a recreation master plan during this term. It is important to note that the Township has an existing Recreation Master Plan, completed in 2009, however may be deemed outdated at this time. In addition, the group discussed the future of Rows Corners, and opportunities to enhance use and potential development.

Recently the Federal Government, through CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) announced the Housing Accelerator Fund, launching in summer 2023, providing incentive funding to local governments to boost housing supply across Canada. More specifically, the Housing Accelerator Fund provides incentive funding to local governments encouraging initiatives aimed at increasing housing supply. It also supports the development of complete, low-carbon and climate-resilient communities that are affordable, inclusive, equitable and diverse.

Based on the timing of the above noted opportunities, and without committing to undertaking a comprehensive recreation master plan at this time, Council does have the ability to entertain the option of proceeding with an RFP for development of a scoped master plan specifically for Rows Corners to determine best use of these lands.

OPTION ONE (Immediate Action):

Authorize staff to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP), being a Master Plan for Rows Corners Fairgrounds that will guide planning and decision making for these lands over the next ten (10) years. The Plan, inclusive of community engagement will help the Township manage future development of the lands and offer potential options to enhance its use (eg: recreational, housing, split use partnership, sale of lands, etc.).

OPTION TWO (Longer-term Approach):

Establish a sub-committee (similar to that of the 2011-2013 Rows Corners Ad Hoc Committee) to prepare and present Council with potential future uses of the Rows Corners Park Land, including possible alternative uses.

OPTION THREE:

Take no action at this time and await outcome of final Township Strategic Plan.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Costs associated with Option One could be funded from the Strategic Initiatives Reserve. RFP results would be presented to Council for approval prior to proceeding with the project.

OTHERS CONSULTED

Director of Finance
Director of Public Works
Recreation Coordinator

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Report A-23-37: Opportunities for Rows Corners Fairgrounds be received;

AND THAT the Council of the Township of Elizabethtown-Kitley proceed with Option One, authorize staff to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP), being a Master Plan for Rows Corners Fairgrounds;

AND THAT the Rows Corners Fairgrounds Master Plan be funded from the Strategic Initiatives Reserve.

Respectfully submitted,
LD

Schedule 'A'







Schedule 'B'

ROWS CORNERS	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals
G-714-000-0771 PARK RENTALS	1,200.00	1,600.00	1,200.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	0.00
REVENUE	1,200.00	1,600.00	1,200.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	0.00
G-714-101-1110 FULL TIME SALARIES & WAGES		1,090.45	0.00	336.82	0.00	214.23
G-714-101-1113 PART TIME SALARIES & WAGES		3,682.79	0.00	169.28	0.00	0.00
G-714-101-1120 OTHER PAYROLL COSTS - OVERHEAD		839.16	0.00	88.89	0.00	44.29
G-714-104-2511 BUILDING MAINTENANCE	1,517.98	1,535.59	223.89	469.02	3,599.49	112.82
G-714-104-2512 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE	0.00	1,388.94	2,063.19	558.63	8,165.07	850.07
G-714-104-3110 HYDRO ENERGY	1,207.22	0.00	785.01	764.54	835.18	771.44
G-714-104-4119 GRASS CUTTING CONTRACT	1,386.83	0.00	1,879.80	2,161.72	5,335.44	5,335.44
G-714-104-5010 GENERAL INSURANCE	1,002.74		0.00	1,509.84	1,575.72	1,750.68
G-714-405-1111 HONORARIUM	0.00		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
G-714-405-2590 SUNDRY	0.00		0.00	0.00	0.00	274.55
EXPENDITURES	5,114.77	8,536.93	4,951.89	6,058.74	19,510.90	9,353.52
NET OPERATING	(3,914.77)	(6,936.93)	(3,751.89)	(5,058.74)	(18,510.90)	(9,353.52)
G-714-915-7410 TRANSFER TO CAPTIAL FUND	0	0	0	0.00	0.00	94,066.94