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The Master Plan design concept for Centennial / Couchiching Park is the product of collective input from City of Orillia staff, local residents, council members and key stakeholders. These dedicated individuals addressed important concerns and issues surrounding the development of a design concept for the Park on Orillia’s waterfront.

Those who made an effort to participate in the public meetings and focus groups will have a greater sense of community ownership and pride, as it is these individuals who have helped shape the Master Plan design concept and recommendations for Centennial / Couchiching Park. The future design of the Park is the ideas of local citizens combined with the design expertise of the consultants which has produced a practiced Master Plan design concept to be used to guide the future development of the waterfront Park.

Consultants

EDA Collaborative Inc. completed this study between May and September 2008. This document summarizes the consultation and design process which included focus groups, public meetings and presentations, and discusses the design framework, key themes and final recommendations for Centennial / Couchiching Park.

Water’s Edge Environmental Solutions Team provided a coastal engineering assessment for the Orillia waterfront area with particular regards to the boat launch ramp location.

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1.0 Introduction

Centennial Park and Couchiching Beach Park are strategically located on the Orillia waterfront and offer an important visual and functional gateway to Lake Couchiching. These Parks have the potential to be both an important recreational green space for the growing local community, and to act as a landmark destination on the waterfront, which enhances Orillia’s identity as a high-quality place to live, work and play.

Set on the lake’s shoreline, the need for a high quality waterfront recreational and tourism facility at Centennial / Couchiching Park, with a range of public amenities, is clear. The evolution of the Park into a place with a more urban quality is needed in order to create a unique identity that compliments the local community and waterfront. As Orillia continues to evolve, intensify and develop, a further challenge that faces the City, stakeholders and community, is uncovering the site’s natural and cultural history and character, while implementing landscape treatments that will best enhance the space and facilitate appropriate use of the site by the surrounding residents and visitors.

The Park must seamlessly integrate emerging recreational and tourism needs with the surrounding residential and commercial uses, while respecting and enhancing the natural waterfront open space context. As a waterfront park it must also address the open space needs of the greater community – a destination where others can find access and recreational opportunities on Lake Couchiching.

One of the major challenges that has been addressed in this Master Plan design concept is the possibility of relocating Centennial Drive. This Plan will review the alternatives which include - leave it in its existing location, move it further from the water or possibly relocate only sections of the road to create better frontage for the adjacent commercial land uses. These options, as well as others, have been carefully reviewed and assessed by EDA Collaborative Inc. (EDA) and Orillia City staff. The opportunity to create more waterfront parkland close to the water has the potential to establish a place with a more contiguous waterfront character and unique recreational amenity.

Using information from the Orillia Waterfront Framework Report (2003), the Official Plan of the City of Orillia (1999), focus groups and the two public consultation meetings, this Plan will include recommendations for optimal usages of this prime waterfront property and outline a final Master Plan design concept.
1.1 Purpose
The primary intent of this plan is to guide the design of the City of Orillia’s waterfront by addressing land use options and provide an updated Master Plan for the waterfront area around Centennial Drive from Mississaga Street to Canice Street. This Plan specifically addresses Centennial Drive relocation options, the boat launch ramp location options, the launch ramp parking lot function and location, the adjacent playground area options and location, trail linkages, and the former railway lands uses and functions.

1.2 Community Overview
The City of Orillia is situated in the heart of Ontario’s Lake Country, located on the shores of two beautiful lakes, Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching (see Figure 1). Home to approximately 30,000 residents and growing, Orillia has much to be proud of. Boat launches, sandy beaches, clean parks, historic monuments and even a miniature train ride compliment the beauty of its vast waterfront spaces. Orillia also boasts Canada’s premier national historic site, the Stephen Leacock Museum, an extensive trail system and a unique architectural heritage that can be admired at many locations throughout the downtown core. With an updated Official Plan currently being prepared, and all of these great characteristics, Orillia has the opportunity for a very bright and successful future.
Figure 1: Context Map of Orillia
2.0 Process and Methodology

EDA developed a strong vision and set of guiding principles for the planning and design of Centennial / Couchiching Park. It is believed that creative landscape development will revitalize and bring connectivity to the site, as well as integrate the various recreational and programming elements. The design of the Park establishes a strong urban waterfront park character framework and yet is flexible in such a way as to encourage and permit future initiatives, active and passive recreational uses, community programming and events, as well as educational and interpretive opportunities. This Plan’s design concept was achieved through an active consultation process and a strong methodology.

2.1 The Consultation Process

The design of Centennial / Couchiching Park has been community driven, particularly as the vision and guiding principles were refined and common ground was established; therefore, public consultation was an important basis for this approach to park planning and design. This Plan’s consultation process consisted of several initiatives:

- Focus groups with stakeholders, community leaders and key informants;

- Design workshops with Municipal Staff, stakeholders, and user groups dealing with conceptual and detailed design issues; and

- Formal public presentations / open houses.

During all phases of work, intensive design and brainstorming sessions were conducted with EDA design team members to develop alternative scenarios, options and a detailed Master Plan. Similar review sessions with City staff and key stakeholders were also conducted in order to ensure that views, priorities and long-term operation and maintenance concerns were fully incorporated into the final Plan. The dates of these meetings are as follows:

- Initial Start-up Meeting and Site Visit with Client: May 12th, 2008
- Focus Groups (Stakeholders / Community Leaders): June 11th, 2008
- Initial Public Presentation / Meeting: June 11th, 2008
- Workshop with Senior Staff: July 24th, 2008
- Options and Alternatives Public Presentation: September 9th, 2008

Feedback from the participants of the focus groups, as well as Council members and residents of the community, assisted in shaping the final Master Plan design concept. Through the initial analysis, site visits and review of the concept design alternatives, EDA combined research and expertise along with the everyday knowledge of community members to create a Master Plan that reflects the needs of the entire community and the ideas and wishes of local residents.
2.2 Methodology

The design process for the project included the following four (4) phases of work:

**Phase One: Background, Inventory and General Vision**

**Purpose:** This phase focused on carrying out a comprehensive context and site analysis, establishing goals, objectives and a preliminary vision, and developing a detailed background report based on thorough analysis and rigorous consultation.

- Start-up Meetings with City of Orillia Staff (Recreation Advisory Committee, etc.)
- Initial site walk with City Staff
- Review all available background material
- Site analysis, inventories and context graphics and reports
- Base drawings to be used throughout the process
- List of constraints, opportunities and questions that need to be addressed
- Goals and objectives
- Preliminary outline of vision
- Programming needs and alternatives
- Establish preliminary design parameters

**Phase Two: Initial Community Consultation**

**Purpose:** Establish a consultation process in order to develop design principles and aspirations of the community prior to preparing the design concepts.

- Initial focus groups with City staff, key stakeholders and local land owners
- Public presentation of study goals and objectives and preliminary findings
- Summarize aims, needs, perceptions, trends, etc.
- Identify and discuss preliminary programming alternatives, facilities and functions
- List of preferred scenarios and principles for the development of the Park

*Public consultation is an integral part of the design process*
Phase Three: Schematic Design (Conceptual Options)

Purpose: Identify the potential uses for the property that are consistent with strategic principles identified in Phase Two, and illustrate potential development within a minimum of two preliminary conceptual land use options.

- Concept design alternatives
- Preliminary construction cost estimates for each option
- Public meeting presentation material (Powerpoint presentation)
- Review findings of Phase Two and discuss program / facility options

Phase Four: Preferred Land Use Concept and Implementation Plan

Purpose: Refine the findings of Phases One to Three into a finalized report with a proposed vision, land use design concept with full graphics and implementation plan, including cost estimates, phasing and potential partnership opportunities.

- Final Master Plan report and presentation to Council, with potential uses, programming, costs, timing and site plan
3.0 Context

3.1 Historical Background

Because of strong logging and rail links with Toronto and Georgian Bay, Orillia became a commercial hub and summer resort destination in the mid 1800’s. The Village of Orillia, known as the “Sunshine City” in the heart of Lake Country, was founded in 1867 (sharing the same birth year as Canada). It was incorporated as a town in 1875 and then became a city in 1969.

Orillia’s waterfront has a history like many other cities in North America. This land was previously used as a shipping base for the lumbering and fishing industries, interconnected to nearby railway tracks. In 1872 a saw mill stood on the present location of Couchiching Beach Park. Over the years, the land between Orillia’s downtown and the railway tracks became in-filled, and the shoreline continued to grow to its present location.

By 1900, Orillia was one of the most bustling towns in Ontario. The town boasted the best Opera House north of Toronto and industrial growth almost unparalleled in the province. With the expansion of the railways, thousands of people visited Orillia each summer for picnics and holidaying at Couchiching Beach Park. Orillia is as popular a vacation spot today as it was a century ago, and with the ever increasing value of waterfront land, Orillia’s stunning waterfront is becoming a centerpiece for the City.
3.2 Planning Framework

There have been previous initiatives for the development of the waterfront in Orillia establishing a context upon which this Plan was built. The two guiding documents for this Plan are briefly described as follows:

The City of Orillia Official Plan (1999) contains conditions that play a part in any future waterfront development and/or redesign. This document stipulates that public open space areas will continue to form an integral part of Orillia’s natural heritage system, and that protection and enhancement of these areas are a priority to meet the recreational needs of residents and tourists. This Plan also states that the provision of physical and visual access to the waterfront is important, along with adequate linkages for pedestrian and bicycle use.

In 2003, The Planning Partnership produced the “Waterfront Framework Plan” for the City of Orillia. This plan established Centennial / Couchiching Park as two different development areas that needed to be addressed. A demonstration plan for Couchiching Beach Park was developed to respond to resident concerns, the intent of which was to create a self contained park with immediate pedestrian access to buildings without having to cross roads. The other idea associated with the current project is for the terminus of Mississaga Street East. Where this street meets the water the Plan describes an urban terrace, a meeting and gathering place. Some of the overarching goals of this Plan are to expand and enhance the public open space system, provide increased access to the waterfront, protect and enhance views to the water’s edge and strengthen and extend the existing trail system.

A review of these documents highlighted the need for a comprehensive Master Plan design concept in order to enhance and protect Centennial / Couchiching Park as well as ensure a physical and visual connection with the downtown core.
3.3 Existing Site Features

3.3.1 Heritage Features

There are a number of public amenities and features within Centennial / Couchiching Park that are of great cultural and historical significance to the City of Orillia and its residents. Many aspects of Orillia’s history are associated with the waterfront and Centennial / Couchiching Park, therefore, many landmarks and commemorative features lie within the Park boundary. These features are shown in Figure 2.
3.3.2 Public Amenities

The Port of Orillia continues to be an important stop on the Trent-Severn Waterway for passing boaters as a place to dock their vessel and enjoy the waterfront and surrounding area, making the Park an important feature within the City. The public amenities (see Figure 3) that are found within the Park are as follows:

**Centennial Park Features**
Barbeques, flower gardens, boat launch ramp, picnic tables, walking path, washroom facilities, water fountain, marina and restaurant / kiosks.

**Couchiching Beach Park Features**
Aqua Theatre, ball diamond, swimming beach, concession stands, flower gardens, boardwalk / trail, outdoor rink, picnic shelter, picnic tables, playground equipment, walking path, washroom facilities, water fountain, change rooms.

*Figure 3: Existing Public Amenities*
3.3.3 Trail System

The City of Orillia has many scenic recreation trails which are collectively known as the Lightfoot Trail System. The Millennium Trail, running through Centennial / Couchiching Park, is a 3.5 metre wide shared-use paved recreation trail, 9.5 kilometres in length. This trail significantly enhances the attractiveness of the region for tourists, as well as promoting a healthy lifestyle for local residents.

The Trans Canada Trail is 15,000 kilometres of connected pathways running through every province across the entire country. Through this Millennium Trail, Orillia now has a permanent link in the extensive Trans Canada Trail.

Figure 4: Orillia’s Trail System
(Source: City of Orillia Website – Leisure & General Interest Page, 2008)
4.0 Analysis

4.1 Key Community Values

While reviewing the information gathered during the research and consultation processes, many key community values emerged that were essential to be addressed by the Master Plan design concept. These values can be described as follows:

**Centennial Drive** – There was general consensus at the public meetings that the relocation of Centennial Drive to the under-utilized railway lands would be beneficial to the development of the waterfront. Centennial Drive should continue to provide residents with a safe route to and from the City centre.

**Enlargement of Park Space** – The possibility of realigning Centennial Drive, as well as the movement of eastern parking lots creating a larger green space was a value that was held quite highly by local residents.

**Enhancement of Park Facilities** – There was concern over the lack of water / power hookups, recycling bins and drinking fountains available within the waterfront park. Encouraging more activities in non-peak seasons, such as a greenhouse expansion and improvements to the play area were recommended. Another recommendation by residents was to incorporate bicycle racks / lock-ups into the design of the Park.

**Boat Launch Ramp / Trail Intersection** – This intersection, as well as the ramp’s proximity to the playground, causes concern among many residents regarding the safety of children. The realignment of the trail to avoid the dangers of trucks and trailers backing up, and the relocation of the boat ramp could both be possible solutions.

**Washrooms** – It was widely acknowledged that there was a great need for a more centrally located public washroom facility.

**Parking** – There was concern over the current location of parking lots within the Park. This land is highly treasured by residents and many thought there could be a better use for such valuable parkland. Movement of these lots or a portion of them, to the western portion of the Park would be acceptable in order to create more green space. Suggestions were made regarding changing the current design of the northern parking lot in order to deter speeding and “cutting through”. However, there was also a community desire to maintain some amount of parking near the waterfront to provide viewing for seniors and the disabled.

**Trail System Enhancement** – Because of the presence of the Lightfoot Trail System in Centennial / Couchiching Park there is a need to ensure that it is adequate for all types of users. Currently, there is conflict between leisurely riders and those that are more interested in fast-paced cycling which needs to be addressed.

**Boat Trailer Parking** – Suggestions were made at the public meetings regarding the design of the trailer parking lots and ramp queues so as to deter the launching of large boats on the ramp. There is also the possibility of off-site or remote parking for boat trailers.

**Park Security / Safety** – The Park is uncontrolled during the evenings and night which is conducive to speeding, noise and vandalism. These problems need to be overcome in order for residents to feel comfortable and safe in the park at night.
4.2 Community Linkages

4.2.1 Circulation Patterns

Understanding the circulation patterns and linkages that Centennial / Couchiching Park possesses is crucial in determining what is needed to strengthen, link or create new linkage possibilities for all modes of transportation. The following issues helped to develop the final Master Plan design concept:

- Currently there are a limited number of access points to Centennial / Couchiching Park. Increasing the number of gateway access points for pedestrians will ensure integration between the Park and the downtown.

- The existing recreational trails can be congested at peak times and are being used for a variety of activities. Creating a hierarchy of trails within the Park will enable each type of user to choose the appropriate path for their intended purpose.

- Creating an improved pedestrian realm within Centennial / Couchiching Park through enhanced intersections and other design details will enable pedestrians to feel more dominant within the Park, making vehicles secondary.
4.2.2 Transit Linkages

Promoting public transit, instead of private vehicular use, is one of the intentions promoted in the City of Orillia’s Official Plan. This priority is important in order to reduce vehicular traffic in established neighbourhoods, such as the downtown core.

The main bus terminal is located in downtown Orillia, at Peter and Mississaga Streets, which is within walking distance of Centennial / Couchiching Park (see Figure 6). The Laclie Bus Route (shown as a red line in Figure 6) comes within a close distance of Centennial Park, making it convenient for many people to access the Park.

The possibility of Orillia Transit running shuttle bus services from remote parking locations and / or points on existing bus routes during special events in Centennial / Couchiching Park should be explored and would aid in easing the parking problem and congestion that occurs during these times. Extending route times during special events could also be explored in order to accommodate visitors leaving Park events later than the regular last scheduled bus times and reduce automobile use.

Figure 6: Transit Linkages
4.2.1 Visual Linkages

One of the major advantages that Orillia has is that it is situated on two scenic lakes. Due to the fact that Centennial / Couchiching Park lies in between the downtown core and Lake Couchiching, there is an opportunity to improve the views of the Lake from downtown through the design of the Park. It is important to ensure that the view corridors from downtown Orillia to the Lake are not interrupted, but rather enhanced. This may be done through the development of improved gateways and entrances to the Park, with sitting areas strategically positioned to enjoy the view of the Lake.

These view corridors will be considered with high priority in the development of the final Master Plan design concept.

Figure 7: View Corridors

Scenic views of Lake Couchiching can be enhanced through the design of the Park
4.3 Summary of Key Findings

Through the various site visits, focus groups, and meetings with the public and City staff, many issues were identified. These observations have been summarized into three main categories that provide an overview of the downtown and park relationship, existing park land uses, as well as park conflicts and concerns that need to be addressed in the final Master Plan design concept.

Downtown and Park Relationship

While Centennial / Couchiching Park is centrally located adjacent to the downtown core, there is a disconnect between the City and the Park. This is only amplified by the under-utilized lands, currently being used as un-organized parking areas among other things, that lie on the west side of the former railway tracks. Some of the main issues related to this disconnect include:

- Existing development pattern is a result of changes over many years – railway and landfilling
- Backyard configuration – land adjacent to the Park is oriented towards the downtown, the waterfront is “Out of sight / out of mind”
- Limited access to the park and waterfront – only from Mississaga Street, Canice Street, and Tecumseth Street
- Flow-through traffic – functional role of Centennial Drive is conducive to higher speed traffic – does not function as park road
- Little integration between community and park
- Few pedestrian connections

Figure 8: Downtown and Park Relationship
Existing Park Land Use

During the analysis process some key issues were identified regarding the current land uses within Centennial / Couchiching Park including:

- Unorganized space on former railway lands (loss of valuable land)
- Paved parking lots at waterfront (loss of waterfront uses)
- Strong pedestrian link along waterfront – boardwalk
- Centennial Drive cuts park in two major pieces – “cityside” and “waterside”
- Two major character zones - Urban character between piers / green character along Couchiching Beach

Unorganized space on former railway lands

Figure 9: Existing Park Land Use Analysis
**Park Conflicts and Concerns**

There are a number of points of conflict (see Figure 10) within Centennial / Couchiching Park that will be addressed in the final Master Plan. These conflicts and concerns are listed below:

1. Off-road circulation (vehicular)
2. Confusing intersection
3. Narrow playground space at beach due to loop road location
4. Conflict between boat launch, playground, pedestrians and parking
5. Parking and pedestrian crossings at French’s stand
6. Narrow space boardwalk / parking lot
7. High speed bikes vs. slower pedestrians on narrow paths
8. Unorganized space at ice cream stand
9. Distance between washrooms (500m)
10. Berms in park limit flexibility of use
11. Lack of services for major events (water / electrical)

*Figure 10: Park Conflicts and Concerns Analysis*
4.3.1 Boat Launch Evaluation

A report was prepared by the City of Orillia in 1997 regarding the launch ramp location in Couchiching Beach Park. A second report, completed in 2007 by the Recreational Advisory Committee, evaluated a number of alternative locations. The findings from both of these reports were similar with the exception of one finding that is most problematic, the recent development of the Lightfoot Trail System. This trail system is directly impacted by the boat launch, as it crosses the area at the top of the ramp; therefore, a plan for trail crossings and space for vehicular / trailer parking will be included in this Plan.

For the purpose of this Plan, it was deemed necessary to undertake a coastal engineering assessment for Centennial / Couchiching Park regarding the boat launch ramp along the City of Orillia waterfront. Water’s Edge Environmental Solutions Team undertook the assessment in order to provide comments addressing the land use issues associated with the present location of the launch ramp. Alternative boat launch sites, located on Lake Couchiching and on Lake Simcoe were also reviewed in order to provide a comprehensive assessment. Some of the key findings of the report are listed below, the full report can be found in the attached Appendices.

Currently, the City of Orillia is in the process of undertaking a public consultation process in order to find an alternate boat launch site.

**Key Findings**

- Physical improvements required to replace deteriorated gabion baskets
- Conflicts among users at Tecumseth Street / Centennial Drive / Boat Launch
  - Playground and park users
  - Boardwalk trail users
  - Pedestrian circulation to / from snack bar
  - Parking lot users
  - Boat launch users – visibility, two ramps, large and small boats
Recommendations

From the assessment completed by the Water’s Edge Environmental Solutions Team two options for the boat launch location were created. They are as follows:

**Option 1 – Boat Launch to Remain**

In this option the boat launch ramp will remain in its present location, while making a number of improvements to the configuration, including:

- Dedicate an area to boat launch traffic only – remove parking lot function
- Provide remote boat trailer parking on private or municipal land
- Move children’s playground area further north and provide physical separation
- Fence the area – bollards and nautical theme to create a boat launch plaza
- Create pedestrian nodes on north side with viewing areas of the launching activities
- Pedestrian traffic across area redirected to inland trail

**Option 2 – Boat Launch to Relocate (provide alternate site for large boats)**

- No adequate site has been identified at this point
- Previous sites investigated and currently being re-evaluated:
  - Tudhope Park / Barnfield Point Area (Lake Couchiching)
  - Tudhope Park / Portage Bay Area (Lake Couchiching)
  - Collins Drive Area (Lake Simcoe)
  - Kitchener Park (Lake Simcoe)
- Other possible sites for future investigation include Kitchener Park – as an alternative launch site for small boats, and the south side of Trans Canada Highway to Lake Simcoe - where issues may include:
  - Boating demand / need
  - Land Ownership
  - Overall feasibility study needs to include: Economic, Social Environmental, Recreational, Community and Technical issues

![Boats being launched at current launch ramp location](image)
4.3.2 Centennial Drive Evaluation

In 2007, the City of Orillia prepared a report regarding the reconfiguration of Centennial Drive. The purpose of this report was to comment on the need or use of the parkland gained if Centennial Drive is realigned westward, as well as options for, and the cost of realignment. The outcomes of this report suggest that the relocation of Centennial Drive could contribute to a park design that would further enhance and maximize the potential for this downtown waterfront parkland. Some of the key opportunities and challenges established in this report include:

- Relocation of parking away from the water’s edge, while providing more parking spaces overall
- Connection to, or relocation of, existing parking lots at the Port of Orillia and the launch ramp
- Access for service vehicles, special event organizers and Chamber of Commerce staff into the park
- Improvements to trail layouts throughout the entire park

This Master Plan design concept will address the opportunities and challenges associated with the reconfiguration of Centennial Drive in order to maximize the use of space within the Park. The four options that have been developed for Centennial / Couchiching Park, each with a particular emphasis on the road realignment, are described in detail in Section 5.0.
4.3.3 Launch Ramp Parking Lot Location

It became quite apparent during the consultation process that there was public concern over the location and usage of the parking lot adjacent to the boat launch ramp.

**Key Findings**

This large parking lot seems to be continually filled with trucks pulling boat trailers and parking in this location after launching. Providing trailer parking in proximity to the launch ramp is necessary, although it may not be in the ideal location at present.

This parking lot is also used frequently by seniors who enjoy watching the sunrise and waterfront activities from the comfort of their car, as well as providing easier access to the water’s edge.

**Recommendations**

- **Option 1** - remote or satellite parking lots for large trailers (approximately >8m).
- **Option 2** - restricting any trailer parking in the present lot adjacent to the launch ramp, and/or
- **Option 3** - moving small trailer (approximately <8m) parking to the under-utilized railway lands.

Consideration should be given to paid parking for trailer / truck parking in remote lots.
4.3.4 Playground Area Location

Currently, the large children’s play area is directly to the north of the boat launch ramp and parking lot. This causes concern among residents for the safety of those using the playground area.

Key Findings

- Swing sets near beach are too close to the road to be considered safe
- South children’s playground is in conflict with the boat launch – too close to each other without any type of physical barrier
- North and south playground areas are in need of an update in order to continue to meet CSA safety standards

Recommendations

Amalgamation of the two children’s playground areas into one large play area that is in a suitable location with appropriate surroundings is recommended. This playground may be tied into an expanded horticultural / heritage major park feature that would be suitable for people of all ages.
4.3.5 Trail Linkages

Trail linkages are a vital part of any active community. The trail system within Centennial / Couchiching Park has recently undergone improvements, although there is still some conflict among its users. This problem will be addressed in the final Master Plan design concept.

Key Findings
The trails and boardwalk within the Park should ultimately perform different functions because there is conflict in some areas due to variations regarding speed of riders and also pedestrians.

Recommendations
A hierarchy of trails is suggested as a solution for the congestion that is currently occurring within the Park.

Option 1 – Create a “bypass” trail link to ease congestion of current park trails. This could be situated on the under-utilized railway lands.

Option 2 – (interim) Create a “bypass” link on the existing Centennial Drive, integrating a bicycle lane into the new design of the road and intersections.

Option 3 – (long term) Move the “bypass” trail link with the relocation of Centennial Drive to the railway lands and incorporate its design into the redesign of the road.
4.3.6 Former Railway Lands Uses and Functions

Currently, the majority of the former railway lands are vacant and under-utilized. These lands are included within the boundary of the park, yet they do not serve as functional space. Some sections of this land are acting as unorganized parking areas, while other sections have no function at all, except as unused space.

**Key Findings**

During the consultation and analysis processes of this study it became clear that there is concern regarding the future of these lands and their uses and functions. The former railway lands act as a “dead space” between the waterfront park and the downtown core, creating a disconnect that is very apparent.

**Recommendations**

**Option 1** – Relocate selected parking areas (50%) to railway lands in order to increase the amount of usable park space.

**Option 2** – Realign Centennial Drive and relocate parking areas to vacant railway lands to improve the Park’s open space and provide adequate space for new park attractions.
5.0 Land Use Options Evaluation

A number of alternatives for the improvement of Centennial / Couchiching Park have been produced in order to create a land use design that ensures continuity between the design within the study area and that relate land uses of the entire park and the adjacent downtown and residential areas. Each of the following four options described below, has unique features that will ensure that these municipal lands are developed in an optimal manner.

Option 1 – Enhancement Strategy

Option 2A – Relocation Strategy

Option 2B – Relocation Strategy

Option 2C – Relocation Strategy
5.1 Option 1 – Enhancement Strategy Evaluation

This option (illustrated in Figure 11) is focused on enhancing the existing configuration of Centennial / Couchiching Park. Centennial Drive will remain in its present location with increased connection points to downtown streets in order to provide a more cohesive road grid pattern. Variations to the parking lot configurations on the east side of Centennial Drive will occur in order to provide more green space near the waters edge. This displaced parking will be added in an organized fashion to the currently under-utilized railway lands, which will include parking for small boat trailers. This option also boasts enhanced pedestrian gateways and connectivity to the Park to ensure the comfort of residents.

Features

- Centennial Drive remains in its present location with several improvements:
  - Establish connection at Neywash Street
  - Realign Tecumseth Street and rationalize intersection
  - Enhance pedestrian gateways and crossings
- Reduce pavement in existing parking lots (50%)
- Addition of a multi-use trail parallel to Centennial Drive on the east side
- Add organized parking lots on former railway lands (including trailer parking for small trailers approximately less than 8m)
- Entrance to Terry Fox Circle relocated to Brant Street
- Establish enhanced pedestrian gateways to include raised intersections, pedestrian paving, sitting areas, gateway signage and features at Mississaga Street, Coldwater Street, Neywash Street, etc.
- Add pedestrian connection through plaza at Coldwater Street
- Maintain existing boat launch (with controls on size of boat usage)
- Establish a major new park feature attraction (such as an interactive / themed horticultural / heritage display garden with children’s learning and play features and picnic areas) north of the boat launch
- Provide new water and electrical services to multi-use areas
- Add centralized washroom facility and food kiosk area

Enhancing pedestrian crossings can assist in calming traffic
Advantages

- Centennial Drive remains in its present location (major cost savings)
- Parking is located on under-utilized railway lands
- Key intersections / access points are simplified and improved
- Improved pedestrian access / connection to community and downtown
- New multi-use trail through park
- Paving is reduced in waterfront area
- Conflicts at boat launch ramp are addressed
- Through off-street traffic flows are addressed
- New park attractions added
- Park amenities / conveniences added
- Enlarged beach area (removal of playground)
- Potential to extend boardwalk to Veteran’s Park and Couchiching Beach.

Disadvantages

- Potential conflicts with traffic on Centennial Drive at pedestrian crossings (could be mitigated with traffic calming measures)
- Future waterfront-oriented developments do not have direct access to Centennial Drive
- Leaves some inherent conflicts
Heritage gardens can act as an educational opportunity for children.

Figure 11: Option 1 – Enhancement Strategy
5.2 Option 2 – Relocation Strategy Evaluation (applies to Options 2A, 2B and 2C)

Options 2A, 2B and 2C can all be described as a relocation of Centennial Drive to the former railway lands, each with unique variations. All of these options incorporate a multi-use promenade / trail on the existing alignment of Centennial Drive. Each of these options has distinct pedestrian nodes enhanced by traffic calming measures to ease the transition from the downtown core to the waterfront park.

Option 2A will realign Centennial Drive to the railway lands from Mississaga Street to Tecumseth Street, which is where the access to the boat launch ramp will be located. Access to Terry Fox Circle will be directly from Brant Street, while parking lots will be located along the east side of the re-aligned Centennial Drive.

In option 2B, Centennial Drive will be realigned to the railway lands from Mississaga Street to Tecumseth Street where it then turns east and joins with Canice Street, which is similar to the existing Tecumseth / Canice road configuration. In this scenario there will be parking lots on both sides of Centennial Drive, all lying within the under-utilized railway lands. Parking lots near the water’s edge will be relocated to these lands to establish a larger open space area.

Option 2C will realign Centennial Drive in the same manner as options 2A and 2B, from Mississaga Street to Tecumseth Street and then links to the Brant / Canice intersection. There will be distinct pedestrian nodes at each of the intersections where Centennial Drive meets the east-west streets downtown. The majority of parking areas will be on the east side of the realigned Centennial Drive easing pedestrian access to the park by eliminating crossing the road from the parking lots.

Themed gardens and enjoyable public spaces will be incorporated into the final Master Plan design concept.
**Features**

- Relocate Centennial Drive to former railway lands with emphasis on the design of a park-character road with integrated traffic calming and enhanced pedestrian spaces / crossings
- Establish enhanced park and pedestrian gateways to include raised intersections, pedestrian paving, sitting areas, gateway signage and features at each of Mississaga St., Coldwater St., Neywash St., etc.
- Establish a major multi use promenade / trail on the existing alignment of Centennial Drive (using existing road base)
- Reduce pavement in existing parking lots (50%)
- Add parking lots on railway lands on park side of realigned Centennial Drive
- Add trailer parking lot for small trailers (approximately <8m)
- Add pedestrian connection through plaza at Coldwater Street
- Maintain existing boat launch (with controls on size of boat usage)
- Establish a major new park feature attraction (such as an interactive / themed horticultural / heritage display gardens, children’s learning and play feature) north of the boat launch
- Provide new water and electrical services to multi-use areas
- Add centralized washroom and food kiosk area

**Advantages**

- Maximizes available parkland near the water
- Removes major circulation traffic from the centre of the park making it more pedestrian friendly
- Greater flexibility in future park uses
- Conflicts at boat launch ramp are addressed

**Disadvantages**

- Higher cost – to construct new road and overhaul existing road as park promenade

---

*Serene picnic areas offer a relaxed setting for park visitors*
Figure 12: Options 2A, 2B and 2C – Relocation Strategy
6.0 Park Master Plan

The Master Plan for Centennial / Couchiching Park combines design elements that improve pedestrian and vehicular linkages, enhance existing features within the Park, while incorporating a distinct overall theme, apparent in a proposed new major park feature. Each of the components analyzed during the course of this study are addressed in the final Master Plan design concept. This concept combines all of the issues and concerns regarding specific aspects of the Park and provides viable solutions that can be attained in both the short and long terms.

6.1 Park Design Features

The Master Plan design concept that has been created for this centrally located waterfront park possesses many unique and exciting aspects that will develop the Park into an extraordinary focal point within the City of Orillia. This design concept brings together the current and proposed features within the Park to creates a unified, cohesive open space that is sure to engage people of all ages.

Themed elements are an integral component of the Master Plan design
6.1.1 Urban Terrace

Mississaga Street East is the main street of Orillia and terminates at the waterfront where Centennial Drive commences. This is an important entrance gateway to the Park and must be celebrated with a unique feature, such as an urban terrace area, a place for residents and visitors alike to meet, gather, relax and enjoy the stunning view. This Plan reinforces the ideas set out in the Waterfront Framework Plan, of establishing a view corridor to the water from the main street while creating a public plaza area at the end of Mississaga St. East. This terrace area will be both visually pleasing and functional, and will entice visitors to the municipal dock and into the rest of the Park.

Create an important feature at the foot of Mississaga Street East where people can gather and celebrate the waterfront
6.1.2 Centennial Drive

Centennial Drive is one of the major issues that this Master Plan is intended to address. This Plan has set out two phases for the realignment of Centennial Drive, dependant on available funding, and are as follows:

**Short Term**

Redesigning Centennial Drive in the current location is the most cost efficient way to improve the road in the short term. However, the costs incurred in doing so should be weighed against the timing of moving to the long term solution. The road will be improved in a number of ways, including the following:

- traffic will be slowed down through the implementation of innovative traffic calming devices
- intersections will be improved to ensure the safety of all park users
- general road repairs and improvements will be made as a preventative measure

**Long Term**

The long term solution for Centennial Drive is to completely realign the road to the former railway lands at the western most edge of the site. This solution will integrate parking, possibly angled or parallel, into the design of the roadway, providing additional parking and slowing traffic. This will allow for the area of usable parkland to be considerably increased, and will provide the opportunity to create distinct pedestrian and vehicular gateways from the downtown area to the Park.

*Figure 13: Centennial Drive / Parking Lot Cross Section*
6.1.3 Parking Re-arrangement

Within Centennial / Couchiching Park there are numerous parking lots, some organized and others unorganized. In order to increase the amount of usable waterfront space, these lots will be relocated, at least partially, to the former railway lands on the west side of the site.

**Port of Orillia parking Lot**

The parking lot adjacent to the Port of Orillia building will be combined with the parking for the Ossawippi Express Dining Cars Restaurant in order to better utilize the land near the water’s edge. A majority of this parking will be relocated to the rail lands, while a small amount of parking will remain at the present location. The lot will be developed to a high standard with trees, lighting and good pedestrian links to the Park.

**Boat Launch Parking Lot**

The parking lot adjacent to the boat launch ramp will be separated entirely from the launch area to create a sense of order in this very busy node. This lot will be substantially reduced in size and parking restrictions will be implemented to include only short term parking (ie. less than 30 minutes). This configuration would continue to accommodate those who enjoy viewing the sunrise / sunset as well as the disabled. The boat trailer parking will be relocated to new parking areas on the west side of the site able to accommodate small and medium sized boat trailers.
6.1.4 Boat Launch

From the context analysis, the conflict between pedestrians / cyclists and the boat launch ramp is a major problem in creating a safe, enjoyable pedestrian environment. Concerns about the proximity to the children’s playground area are also addressed in this Plan. The boat launch will be segregated from the parking area so as not to congest the parking lot with trailers waiting to load / unload boats.

**Short Term**

In the short term the boat launch ramp will remain in its current location, while making enhancements to its configuration and design aimed at improving safety and function.

**Long Term**

If the launch ramp is to stay in its present location in the long term restrictions will be put into place with respect to size (less than 8m only) and / or type of vessel that will be permitted. An alternative location could be sought for those boats that are restricted from launching at this site in the future. If it is deemed appropriate, the launch ramp may potentially be moved to a superior location. In this case, possible alternative locations could be Tudhope Park or Kitchener Park, as recommended by the Recreation Advisory Committee. A thorough analysis and feasibility study is currently underway to evaluate these sites.

*Residents and visitors in Orillia take part in numerous boating activities*
6.1.5 Reorganized Intersection

During the analysis phase it was determined that the intersection of Tecumseth Street and Centennial Drive needs to be simplified in order to have improved traffic and pedestrian circulation. Currently, there are many routes that converge at this point, making it quite confusing for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians.

**Short Term**

Simplifying this intersection in the short term, by realigning the entrance to the Terry Fox Circle and the entrance to the boat launch, will make it less dangerous for all modes of transportation to pass through. Incorporating enhanced pedestrian crossings and traffic calming devices into this intersection will slow traffic down considerably and make pedestrians feel safe when crossing this currently fast-moving road to access the Park.

**Long Term**

With the realignment of Centennial Drive in the long term, there will also need to be a reconfiguration of this currently confusing intersection. Tecumseth Street will terminate at the new Centennial Drive where the boat launch roadway and entrance to the adjacent parking area will begin. Canice Street will terminate at Brant Street, where the new access to Terry Fox Circle will be located, meaning that the current intersection will no longer exist.
6.1.6 Pedestrian Gateways

Centennial / Couchiching Park is an important element within Orillia and therefore its relationship with the rest of the city is crucial for its success. Ensuring that the Park has strong physical and visual links with the downtown core is one of the key features of this Master Plan design concept. These links can be created and strengthened through the implementation of entrance gateways. Pedestrian entrance gateways will provide a sense of arrival for visitors to the Park, and act as smaller meeting and gathering places along the western edge of the Park while providing view corridors from downtown to the water.

These pedestrian gateways will be positioned at five intersections in the downtown core:

- Centennial Drive and Mississaga Street
- Centennial Drive and Neywash Street
- Centennial Drive and Tecumseth Street
- Centennial Drive and Brant Street
- Jarvis Street and Bay Street

Clear intersections and gateways make pedestrian crossings easier.
6.1.7 Trail Linkages

The key to developing an extensive trail system is to build a trail hierarchy. This will be done in Centennial / Couchiching Park with a relatively small amount of modification to the Park’s current trail configurations. At present, the Park consists of a boardwalk, mainly used by those walking at a leisurely pace, and a paved trail, which is used by both pedestrians and cyclists travelling at varying speeds. Due to the fact that the paved trail winds through the Park, there is a need for a “by-pass” type trail for those cyclists wishing to travel at a faster rate. This new trail will be a realignment of the Millennium Trail to Centennial Drive. An expansion of the paved trail through the north end of the Park will also help to lessen the current conflicts. The pedestrian boardwalk will remain in its current location with potential extensions to Veteran’s Park and Couchiching Beach in the future.

Short Term

There are two proposed solutions for the location of the fast link trail in the short term. One is to locate it on the west side of the Park making use of the former rail lands and easing the congestion occurring on the current trail. The other solution is to construct the fast link on the existing Centennial Drive, integrating bicycle lanes into the newly designed roadway and intersections.

Long Term

The long term solution is to move the fast trail link to the former rail lands with the future relocation of Centennial Drive, incorporating it into the redesigned roadway. This would ensure adequate space for the bicycle lane and proper integration into the new pedestrian gateways and intersections.
6.1.8 Major Park Attraction

Centennial / Couchiching Park is the most essential park in Orillia because of its strategic situation within the downtown core and on the waterfront. Because of its important location, this park requires a major focal feature to ensure continuity of use at all times of the year.

This new park feature will draw visitors of all ages and interests. It will be both interactive and interpretive, combining the natural, human and horticultural heritage of the site with discovery and learning. Within this feature area there will be an interactive children’s discovery centre, an expansion of the existing greenhouse horticultural centre, as well as a family picnic area.

This attraction will also ensure that the Park is used during all seasons of the year. The interactive play and interpretive heritage feature offers an expanded indoor greenhouse area which can be visited during all months of the year. A natural skating path / rink can also be incorporated into the Master Plan design concept in order to ensure that the Park is functional throughout the year.

Combining these stimulating, exciting and inspiring features will provide for an unique attraction, enabling families to spend an entire day at the Park engaging in various activities.
Horticultural Garden Area

A horticultural component will be integrated into the new park feature. This will include an expansion of the existing greenhouse as well as the development of an outdoor garden. This new indoor / outdoor feature will have beautiful botanical gardens and a children’s teaching garden with an emphasis on native plants and flowers from the region.

The botanical garden areas will become an educational tool for people of all ages, and will act as a scenic focal point within the northern portion of the Park for people to walk, enjoy the gardens and relax during all seasons.

The children’s teaching garden will include unique signage and interactive elements enabling children to learn about a wide variety of plants and flowers. The children’s garden will possess a number of different tools that will be used to teach children about horticulture. These will include:

- Sensory garden – where the senses come alive. Children will explore plant life with unique scents, textures, and appearances.
- Butterfly garden – this garden boasts plants that are known to attract butterflies. Children will learn about plants and the graceful butterfly species simultaneously.
- ABC garden – this garden will walk visitors through the alphabet with plants that start with each letter.
**Interactive Discovery Area**

The two children’s playground areas currently in Centennial / Couchiching Park will be amalgamated into one significant and accessible interactive play feature sized appropriately for a major city waterfront park. This element will be uniquely integrated into the major intergenerational feature for the Park, tying into the horticultural activities and heritage features.

This discovery play area could include a water play area and a dry play area with themes around the heritage of the site, such as fishing and logging. Children will be able to engage in unique play features from which they can learn about Orillia’s human and natural history. The feasibility of another water play area in the City will require further confirmation.

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**Enhanced Picnic Area**

As an integral part of the major park feature, the new enhanced picnic area will work in harmony with the horticultural area and the interactive children’s play area. It will improve upon the heritage structure that is currently present in the Park, and provide a place to rest and enjoy a peaceful lunch or snack after taking in all the exciting elements that the Park has to offer.
6.1.9 Park Concession

From the analysis process it was clear that a distinct restaurant kiosk area with washrooms, centrally located in the Park was a feature that would be embraced. At present, food kiosks are situated at various locations throughout the Park. These will be amalgamated into one key area. This grouping, consisting of the present food kiosks within the Park and possibly new ones, is likely best suited to be centrally located on Tecumseth Street, integrated with French’s hot dog stand. This restaurant kiosk area will consist of food service, concession stands, a common patio seating area and washrooms in order to simplify the park into key nodal areas.
6.1.10 Improved Park Services

During the consultation phase it was apparent that there was a growing need for additional park utilities and services. Electrical outlets and water hook-ups are located throughout the Park, although there is a need for more as these outlets are not adequate during large festival celebrations. Additional utilities and services will be incorporated into various locations throughout Centennial / Couchiching Park, for particular use during the many festivals that occur in the waterfront Park. Additional drinking fountains and bicycle lock-ups will also be strategically placed throughout the Park.

Note: Specific location of additional utilities and services will need further investigation and analysis.
Figure 14: Final Master Plan Design Concept Diagram

LEGEND
1  Urban Terrace
2  Centennial Drive
3  Parking Re-arrangement
4  Boat Launch
5  Reorganized Intersection
6  Pedestrian Gateways
7  Trail Linkages
8  Major New Park Feature
9  Park Concession
10 Improved Park Services

*not shown on Plan (throughout Park)
# 7.0 Implementation Strategy

## 7.1 Order of Magnitude Cost Estimates and Phasing Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Preliminary Cost Estimate</th>
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<td>Short Term</td>
<td>Boat Launch – upgrade existing ramp</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Additional site development – re-route trail</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dedicated large boat ramp at new site</td>
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<td>Medium – Long Term</td>
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Note: Costs above are order of magnitude capital costs with design to be determined.
7.2 Other Related Issues

The following issues, while not strictly within the terms of references for this project, were raised at various meetings and can be addressed through the implementation of the Master Plan design concept.

**Baseball Diamond**

It is apparent that the baseball diamond currently located in Centennial / Couchiching Park conflicts with many of the other park uses. This type of recreational use is not necessarily consistent with those uses appropriate for a waterfront park. Relocation of this baseball diamond to another park nearby would be beneficial to the overall aesthetic of the Park and provide more open space usable for waterfront related activities.

**Connection to Veteran’s Park Parking Lot**

The parking lot serving Veteran’s Park and the Legion is currently accessed at the foot of Mississaga Street where Centennial Drive begins. Due to the fact that the configuration of this road will be changed, there is a need to assess the parking lot entrance location. This entrance could possibly be relocated to the south end of the parking lot, at Elgin Street, in order to reduce vehicular traffic at the entrance to Centennial / Couchiching Park. This would enable the urban terrace area to be a central focal point at the foot of Mississaga Street and create a pedestrian-only zone at the main entrance to the Park.

**Security Issues**

One major concern that was apparent during the public consultation process was security within the Park. The Master Plan concept addresses these concerns through various design measures.

The relocation and design of Centennial Drive, moving it closer to the downtown and adding traffic calming measures, will help to deter speeding making it more people-friendly and safer route within the park. Controlling access to the Park through the implementation of pedestrian entrance gateways at all park entrances will also bring greater safety for pedestrians. Enabling the closure of some parking lots at night may also help to increase the security of the Park. An appropriate lighting system along the roadways and parking areas and other site design approaches consistent with CEPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles will also help to address this situation successfully.

**Future Uses of Bermed Area**

Currently the bermed area, near the Port of Orillia building, is under utilized and blocks some views to the water. To make the most of this area, the berms will need to be modified, possibly through re-grading, some new pathway links between the relocated parking lots and the waterfront as well as the addition of landscaped gardens throughout. Care should be exercised however in the preservation of the numerous semi-mature trees.