

COMMUNICATION 132088

Received From: Niki Dwyer, MCIP RPP, Director of Development Services
Addressed To: Committee of the Whole
Date: June 22, 2021
Topic: Mississippi River Watershed Plan

BACKGROUND

The Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA) has released a draft of its new proposed Watershed Plan for the Mississippi River for public review and comment. This document will replace a Watershed Plan which was adopted in 1983.

The plan has been produced to assist the MVCA in fulfilling its provincial mandate to “*study and investigate the watershed and to determine programs and services whereby the natural resources of the watershed may be conserved, restored, developed and managed*”.

The purpose of this staff report is to provide Council with an overview of the plan as it pertains to operational and policy functions to the Town of Carleton Place. MVCA is a significant agency partner in many of the service delivery functions of the municipality and as such it is important to provide comment and recommendation on policies which may impact the municipality’s ability to operate and fulfil our own mandates.

COMMENT

The intent of the plan is to understand the functionality of the watershed including flooding and erosion hazards, drought forecasting, ecological functions, unstable soils, protection of drinking water (including Sourcewater Protection). Features within the watershed include both visible surface features such as rivers and wetlands but also the hydrogeological functions of the aquifer and movement of groundwater through substrates.

The MVCA’s mandate also includes taking an active role in controlling the watershed with water control structures (i.e. dams) to manage the storage and availability of water.

The development of the plan to date has resulted in the emergence of five (5) key priority areas:

- 1) Collaboration between the MVCA and residents, economic communities and partner organizations;
- 2) Robust water management infrastructure reflective of climate change management changes;
- 3) Resilience to flooding and drought by providing natural water storage functions;
- 4) Management of growth and development (including Sourcewater Protection); and
- 5) Sharing stewardship responsibilities with community partners

These priority areas were then used to help generate strategic actions to scope the services of the MVCA. A summary of the Strategic Actions can be found in Attachment 1 of this report.

ANALYSIS

In order to provide Council with context regarding the effect of the Watershed Plan on Carleton Place specifically, a copy of the plan was circulated to the Environmental Action Committee; Urban Forest and River Corridor Committee; Public Works, Parks and Recreation and Planning Departments for review and comment. The following represents considerations which were raised from the review of the document:

- The plan speaks very generally to the management of water elevations and the impact on the municipal water plant intake – no comments are made which cause concern for operations.
- There are comments on the value of Low Impact Development infrastructure which is encouraged but should be noted is not always desirable within the municipal Right of Way.
- While wetland areas are invaluable carbon and hydrological reserves, their importance should not trump the functional and safety requirements for the development of an integrated road network.
- The addition of climate change impacts is long overdue and will be helpful in generating regionally appropriate data based on current conditions.
- The role of the MVCA should be to ensure a consistent approach to managing natural heritage systems and functions across all jurisdictions. Compromising the protection of wetlands in an adjacent rural municipality could have significant detrimental effects on the water system within the urban areas. This oversight also transects County boundaries and is necessary to ensure that impacts from the upper watershed (i.e. Frontenac) are respectful of downstream communities.
 - The majority of growth within the watershed will be focused in the eastern (lower) section of the region. Acknowledgement should be given to the cumulative impact of development across these lower-tier municipalities.
- The MVCA should be the champion of climate change adaptation within the Watershed. Their leadership, research and informed recommendations can be implemented by the local municipalities where professional expertise on generating solutions is limited. This can be accomplished through a series of “best practice” manuals and standards.
- The role of the MVCA in collecting and qualifying high quality data is paramount to ensuring that municipalities can appropriately respond to the changing environmental conditions. In particular, the availability of groundwater science associated with the quality and quantity of the aquifers is important to understanding the limits of development within the region.

- MVCA should consider generating locally appropriate standards for the protection of Sourcewater protection areas. A one size fits all approach implemented through the Safe Drinking Water Act is not necessarily the best approach to protect and preserve the Town's water supply. Further studies post development should be undertaken to ensure that new development has not negatively impacted the intake as was predicted during development approvals.

Following the Committee's discussion and debate on the proposed Watershed Plan, staff recommend providing a consolidated comments letter to the MVCA for consideration in the final review of the Plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council directs staff to provide a letter to the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority outlining the Town's comments on the proposed Mississippi River Watershed Plan (dated May 11, 2021).

Attachment A – Strategic Goals proposed in the Mississippi River Watershed Plan

1. Theme: Integration & Collaboration

Goal: To collaborate with watershed partners in promoting an integrated and consistent approach to the health and management of the watershed and water resources.

- Extend the role of the MVCA Public Advisory Committee (PAC) for the implementation and updating of the Watershed Plan.
- Undertake meaningful engagement and establish new relationships with Indigenous partners through implementation of an Indigenous Engagement Plan and through ongoing engagement in watershed initiatives.
- Continue to collaborate with and promote collaboration among lake associations through networking groups and direct partnerships.

2. Theme: Climate Change

Goal: To increase our resiliency and adaptive response to climate change.

- Apply a climate change lens to all strategic directions within this Plan.

3. Theme: Growth & Development

Goal: To support environmentally sustainable growth and economic development.

- Work with all partners to continue to support environmentally sustainable growth and development objectives on a watershed basis for the protection of watershed values and features.

4. Theme: Water Management

Goal: To use and manage both surface water and groundwater wisely to meet current and future needs under normal and extreme conditions.

- Prepare a Mississippi River Watershed Model incorporating historical, near real-time, and projected future hydro-climatic data, based on up to date information and science.
- Update the Mississippi River Water Budget to better evaluate water needs and use by completing the recommendations of the MRSP Tier 1 budget assessment and incorporating climate change considerations.
- Undertake a Water Storage Capacity and Management Study of both man-made (dams and reservoirs) and natural storage (wetlands) options and capacity.

- Update the Mississippi River Water Management Plan to build on modeling, water budget and storage assessments completed under the previous three actions to assist in rebalancing the competing interests for the watershed's water resources where needed.
- Develop and implement an Asset Management Plan for the water control structures.
- Improve the MVCA hydrometric (water level and flow monitoring) network, to enhance automated monitoring capabilities and overall efficiency.
- Work with municipalities, agriculture and development communities, landowners and other partners to quantify, value and protect wetlands as hydrologic and natural assets.
- Work with municipalities, agriculture and development communities, and other landowners and partners to enhance on-site retention and infiltration of water.
- Enhance response planning and readiness through the Low Water Response Team to address low water response and to ensure it includes representation from all key water use sectors. (CA responsibility falls under Ontario Low Water Response Strategy).
- Support Hydro Producers and municipalities in undertaking an Ice Risk Assessment if deemed beneficial.

5. Theme: Natural Hazards

Goal: To minimize risks to human life and property due to flooding, erosion, and unstable slopes and soils.

- Maintain up to date hazard mapping to identify and map flood and erosion risk areas, including effects of climate variability and change.
- Work with MNRF to assess and update current floodplain standard (100 Year), policies, and floodproofing measures to address conditions under typical and extreme events.
- Work with municipalities to undertake a roadway flood vulnerability assessment to: identify flood prone roadways; and properties potentially impacted by unsafe access; and to develop a strategy to address properties potentially impacted by unsafe access.
- Develop a methodology to identifying and mitigating potential risks associated with unstable slopes and unstable soils throughout the watershed.

- Support waterfront property owners in implementing adaptive management measures to address potential impacts of variable water levels.

6. Theme: Natural Systems

Goal: To maintain, enhance, or restore natural features and systems for all users.

- Develop a Land Conservation Strategy to mitigate flood, erosion and other natural hazards, and to support the ecological services provided by natural systems.
- Encourage and support studies to determine environmental valuations for the ecosystem services and climate resiliency provided by natural asset features and functions (wetlands, woodlands, etc.).
- Work with municipalities and public agencies to improve the application and coordination of regulatory tools for the protection of wetlands, woodlands and natural systems.

7. Theme: Education & Outreach

Goal: To support learning and environmental stewardship.

- Develop and implement a 3 Year MVCA Stewardship Program Pilot for protection of water quality, wetland cover, forest cover, and other environmental features.
- Work with the Indigenous Communities to understand and educate the greater public the interconnectedness of the Indigenous Communities and this land and importance of their inclusion in protecting and preserving it.
- Develop and implement an MVCA Education Strategy.