

Executive Summary

Topic and Purpose

This report aims at understanding how urban design features can be used to help create more livable and beautiful waterfront areas by focusing on the design of the Waterfront Trail running through Beachway Park in Burlington, Ontario. In June 2014, the Region of Halton released a Request for Proposals for consulting services to develop a new Master Plan, environmental management and restoration plan, implementation plan and communication strategy for the Burlington Beach Regional Waterfront Park. Amongst all these future changes and revitalization of the Waterfront, it will be important for planners to develop the most effective urban design strategies to improve the Waterfront Trail in order to meet the overall vision for this public space. The report will utilize a variety of research methods with the ultimate objective to provide recommendations for future trail design that will contribute to creating a more vibrant public realm and improve the Waterfront Trail to build a better, more attractive park.

The following research question will be addressed:

What design and planning interventions could be implemented to improve the Waterfront Trail running through the Beachway Park in Burlington, Ontario, to contribute to the creation of a vibrant and successful public space?

Study Area:

The study area is located at the Beachway Park in Burlington, Ontario, close to the downtown area. The park is located on the shore of Lake Ontario and features a 2-kilometre portion of the Waterfront Trail starting from the edge of Spencer Smith Park to the Burlington Canal Pier. In addition to the multi-use trail, the park also features green space, a sandy beachfront, a beach pavilion area and playground.

Methods

This report will first conduct a literature review of urban design manuals and waterfront strategies, focusing on best practices in design and planning strategies for walkways and public space. Information will be gathered concerning various design features and trail support facilities, such as signage, materials, access points, landscaping, parking areas and other amenities including benches and restrooms (Flink, et al., 2001). Collection of design guidelines will help to compile a literature review of best practices, which can then be used to guide the analysis of Burlington Beachway's existing conditions, analyses of each case study in Hamilton and Mississauga, and ultimately, inform the recommendations for improvement to the trail along Burlington's waterfront.

Evaluation

An evaluative index was adapted from a collection of design guidelines and best practices was used in this report to analyze Burlington Beachway Park's existing conditions and each case study. Ultimately, these evaluations will help to inform recommendations for improvement to the Waterfront Trail along Burlington's shoreline. The following urban design features were focused upon in the report:

1. Seating
2. Signage
3. Lighting
4. Landscaping
5. Trail Design
6. Access to Water
7. Parking Considerations
8. Trail Support Amenities

Recommendations

1. *Seating* – Provide additional seating along the walkway that is uniform in design and material.
2. *Signage* – Provide signage that is legible, clear and provides good information to help inform park visitors about available amenities, park features and how to navigate through the park system.
3. *Lighting* – Add lighting to allow park users to use the trail into the evening.
4. *Landscaping* – Introduce plantings, trees and flowers beds to create a more vibrant public realm.
5. *Trail Design* – Ensure a consistent and smooth multi-use pathway, and consider creating separated lanes.
6. *Access to Water* – Provide better access to the water by creating more paths down to the water and improving lookout points, especially at the Burlington Canal pier.
7. *Parking Considerations* – Ensure landscaped buffers between the trail and parking areas, and consider sustainable paving methods.
8. *Trail Support Amenities* – Introduce amenities such as picnic pavilions, a naturalized playground and interpretive elements to facilitate gathering, play and enjoyment along the Waterfront Trail.