



# A Vision for an Urban Eco Park

Hamilton, Ontario

URBAN  
STRATEGIES  
INC .

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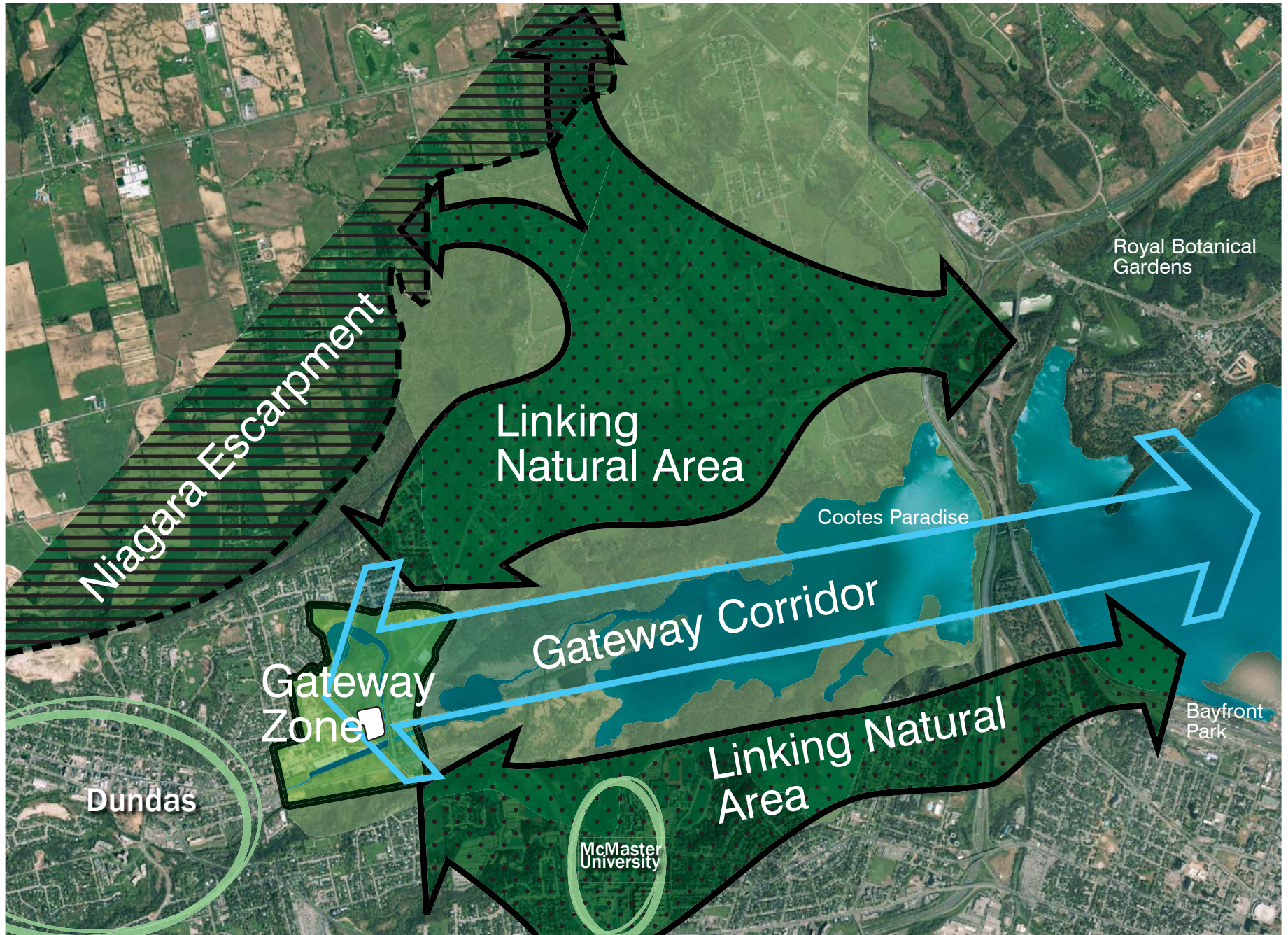
# Introduction

A significant amount of natural green space is in public ownership stretching from the Desjardins Canal and Cootes Paradise to the Niagara Escarpment in the community of Dundas, in Hamilton, Ontario. This ownership pattern presents an opportunity to physically span and connect these remarkable environmental and ecological assets into an Eco Park resource in the centre of a highly urbanized area.

A critical element of the proposed Eco Park is the corridor extending from and along the historic Desjardins Canal which, in this report, is referred to as the Gateway. This local area in proximity to the canal provides a concentrated wealth of natural heritage and recreation resources that form an appropriate Gateway to the larger Eco Park. A proposal has been made to locate a self-storage facility at King Street East and Olympic Drive in Dundas at the heart of the Gateway. For various reasons which will be outlined in this document, this proposal is considered an undesirable use of these important lands as it would compromise the potential for a preferred and beneficial use at both the local and broader scales.

This document details the Eco Park and Gateway opportunities and spells out the reasons why the application at 201 King Street East should be refused by the City.





Map 1: Urban Eco Park - a regional opportunity

# The Urban Eco Park: A Remarkable Opportunity

Right now, at the western end of Lake Ontario, there exists an opportunity to create an Eco Park comprised of unique natural features only minutes away from the significant population base of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

*Cootes Paradise - Desjardins Canal - Niagara Escarpment:* these are three unique, remarkable and inexorably linked elements that demand to be experienced as such. There is a rare opportunity in this particular place to protect and promote the natural and cultural heritage of a large swath of Dundas reaching from the Escarpment to Cootes.

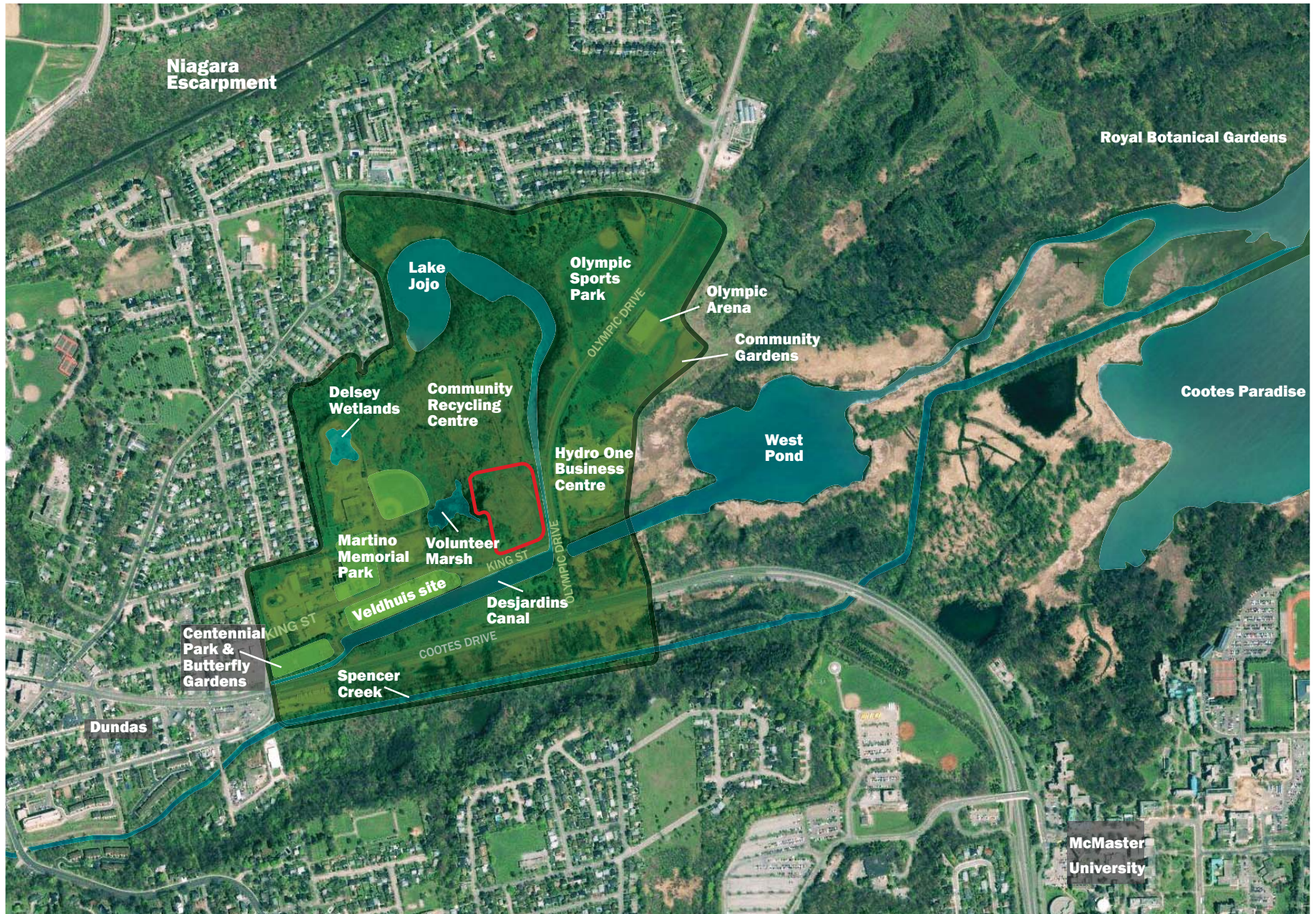
Together, these elements form a dramatic and beloved landscape of undeveloped land that is unique in the Greater Golden Horseshoe and has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Biosphere Reserve. These lands have the potential to be an Eco Park in the heart of Southern Ontario. Such a special place can be realized by preserving viewsheds, formalizing connections and linkages, and embracing the public use of this resource.

What is needed for this entire area is a broader vision that can direct urban growth and development in ways that enhance its unique natural setting. The pace of growth in Southern Ontario is tremendous. It is important, therefore, to stake out those enduring features that will add to the enjoyment of urban life for later generations. Creation of the Urban

Eco Park and establishing a clear future for the lands between Cootes Paradise and the Escarpment are decisions commensurate with the significance of the creation of the Niagara Escarpment Commission or Rouge Park.

While a good portion of the lands are in public hands, there is risk that those held privately may be the site of inappropriate urban development. The Pleasant View lands, (roughly bounded by Valley Road, Patterson Road, Highway 6 and the CNR line--refer to Map 3 on page 6), are almost entirely surrounded by public natural areas and remain largely in a natural state. The majority of these areas are now afforded certain protection through the Niagara Escarpment and/or Greenbelt Plans of the Ontario Government and the broader area has the potential to become a larger Eco Park, which would complement the emerging eco-tourism industry in the Hamilton area. Past Ontario Municipal Board battles have been fought and won over the private holdings; however, the low-density residential permission applicable to the Pleasant View lands that have heretofore effectively prevented development because of market realities, is not as strong as actual legislated protection prohibiting urban development. A plan properly identifying essential natural features and connections and defining appropriate development areas is badly needed.





Map 2: The Eco Park Gateway - a local opportunity including 201 King Street East, surrounding uses and features



# The Urban Eco Park Gateway

Lands at the eastern end of the community of Dundas offer the perfect anchor and Gateway to the Eco Park. The Gateway is generally defined by York Road on the north, Spencer Creek on the south, Olympic Arena and Hydro One facility on the east and East Street N. and Martino Memorial Park to the west. This area is characterized by prominent access routes (Cootes Drive and York Road) and almost entirely natural open spaces and areas of environmental importance. Furthermore, the lands are almost entirely in public ownership. Although conceived as part of the larger Eco Park, the Gateway itself constitutes a unique opportunity to create an interconnected, productive landscape specific to its natural and cultural heritage at the heart of Dundas.

Most of the Gateway lands were at one time owned by the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth. All parcels have remained in public hands, except the property at 201 King Street E. (to be discussed later in this document) and one to the far west currently occupied by Attridge Transportation, as shown on Map 3 overleaf. The Gateway lands have Open Space, Natural Open Space and Utility designations in the Town of Dundas Official Plan, reflecting their legacy as public lands. The current uses in the Gateway are described below and are identified on the Map 2 at left.

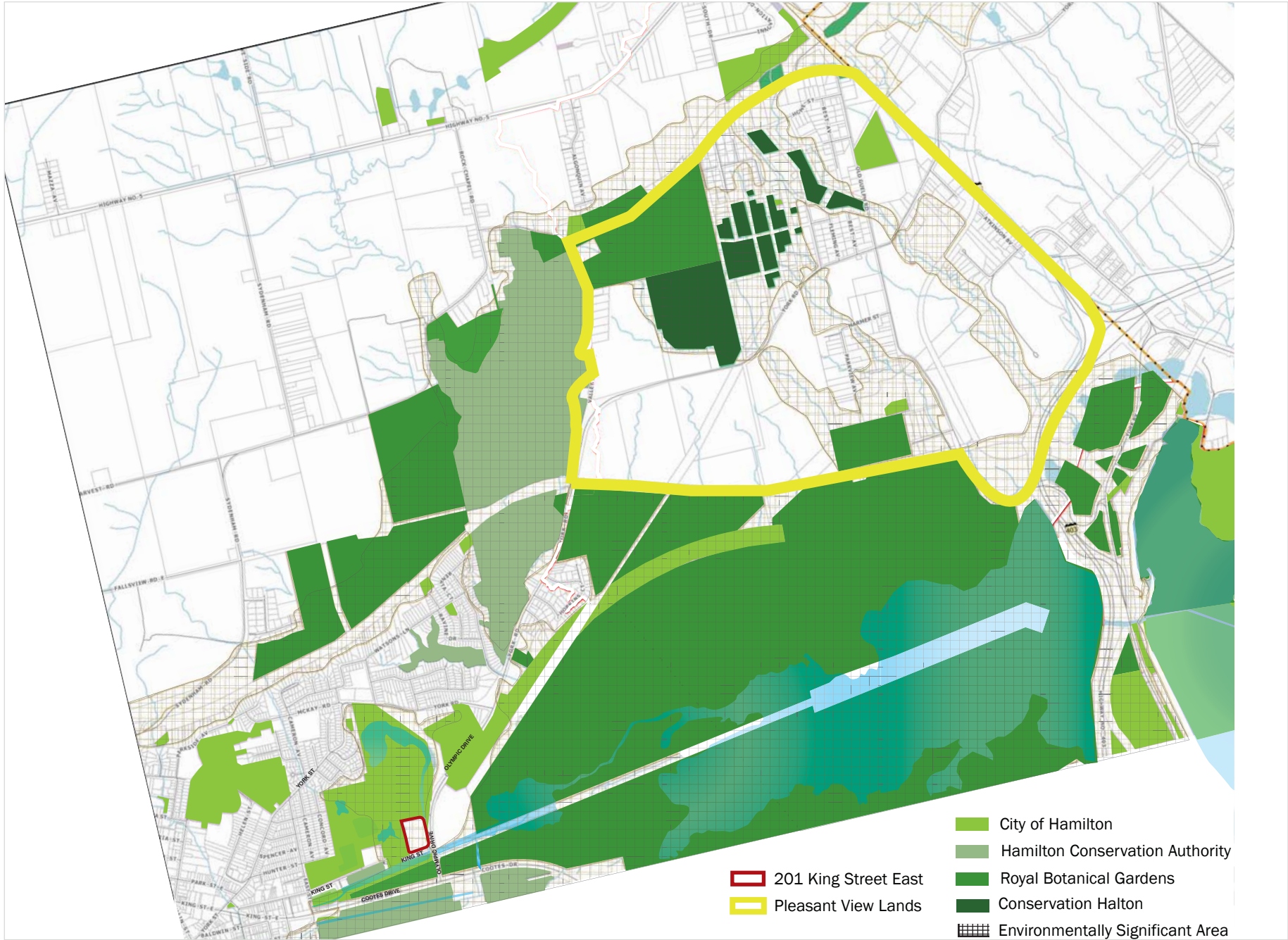
**Volunteer Marsh:** a pocket wetland that has been encroached upon by fill associated with the excavation of the adjacent combined sewer overflow tank and raising the grade level of 201 King Street E. to meet flood plain guidelines for development. The marsh has the potential to be remediated.

**Martino Memorial Park:** a sports park, home of Dundas Little League Baseball, Volunteer Field (baseball), 2 softball fields, park shelters, shrub beds, and a natural area.

**Dundas Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Facility:** a below ground tank and associated small pump house.

**201 King Street E.:** currently vacant and the subject of a development application requiring amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law. Regrading and filling of the site has already been undertaken as a result of previous development applications and the creation of the adjacent CSO tank. Turtle nesting has been observed on the site in the past.

**Veldhuis Greenhouse lands:** once North America's largest producer of cacti, this site was recently acquired by the Hamilton Conservation Authority, with significant funding support from the City of Hamilton. This major public investment was made with the intention to turn the site into a



Map 3: Publicly owned open space and Environmentally Significant Areas



renaturalized conservation area on the Desjardins Canal incorporating the existing geese feeding area along King Street East.

**Delsey Wetlands:** engineered wetlands designed to address flooding of Delsey Creek are now becoming a cherished part of the landscape in this area of Dundas and are home to many varieties of birds.

**Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP):** the plant discharges treated water into the canal but due to the sensitive nature of Cootes Paradise, the Dundas WWTP includes a tertiary level of treatment further reducing



Lake Jojo

suspended solids and nutrients.

**Lake Jojo:** an little-known recreation space surrounded by trails and occasionally used by skaters in the winter. It is a natural area adjacent to the more formal recreation spaces of Martino Park.

**Community Recycling Centre:** the former waste transfer station has been redeveloped to become a Community Recycling Centre to help Hamilton achieve its waste diversion efforts.



Delsey Engineered Wetlands

**Centennial Park & Butterfly Garden:** at the head of the canal on the former turning basin. The park is underused but the butterfly garden against the canal, a naturalized area featuring indigenous plantings, is a place for quiet contemplation, which also provides an ecological support function for the Gateway area.

**Hydro One Dundas Field Business Centre:** at the terminus of King Street East, this property fronts the Desjardins Canal and trails have been

formed along the south edge leading to West Pond and the North Shore Trail network. The edge of this property is a nesting area for three species of turtle.

**West Pond:** open water at the eastern end of the Desjardins Canal leading to Cootes Paradise. The North and South Shore Trails surround the perimeter of West Pond.

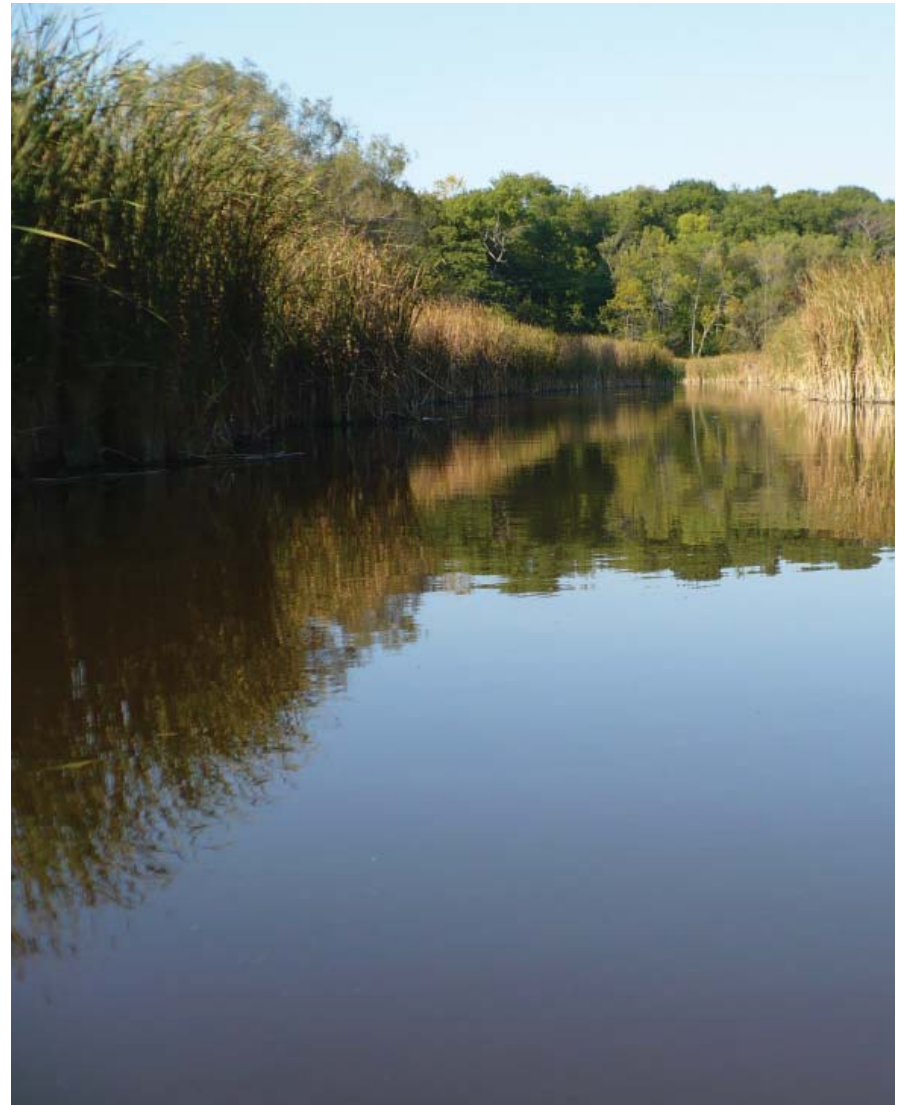


Desjardins Canal looking west toward Dundas



**Olympic Sports Park:** home to several soccer fields and an arena. There is also a softball field, benches, trees and parking areas. Behind the arena are the **Dundas Community Gardens**, which are also a known turtle nesting area.

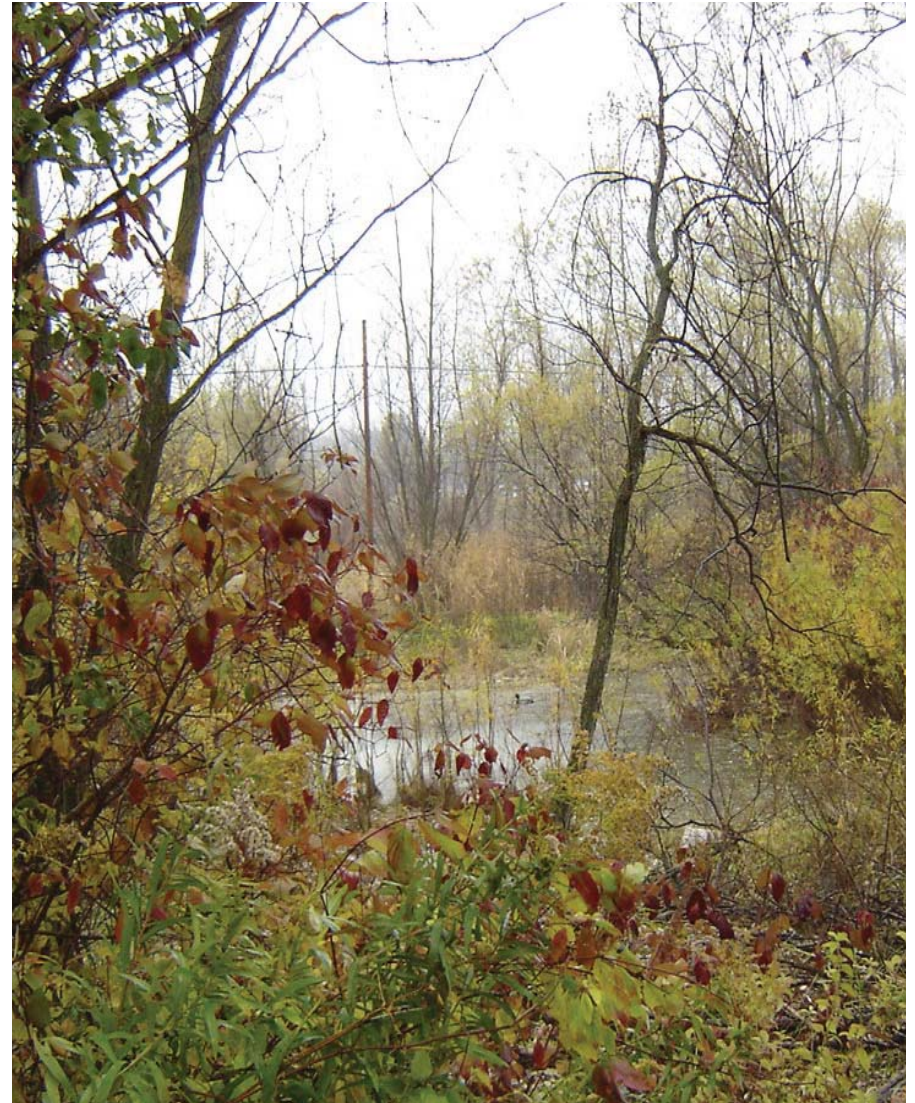
**Desjardins Canal:** the Desjardins Canal was completed in 1837. The purpose of the canal was to bring lake-going vessels from Burlington Bay (now Hamilton Harbour) through Coote's Paradise to a warehouse area along Spencer Creek. As a result, for a twenty-year period, Dundas was the head of Great Lakes shipping. This helped Dundas advance rapidly as a community, leading to its achieving incorporation as a town in 1847. After the completion of the Great Western Railway in 1855, the need for a navigation canal diminished rapidly and Dundas was soon eclipsed by Hamilton as the main urban centre in the region. The Desjardins Canal Company went into bankruptcy in 1876 and the canal ownership was transferred by the Crown to the Town of Dundas. Shipping on the Canal finally ceased in 1895 when full rail service came to town. Although the canal's turning basin was filled in to create Dundas Centennial Park to celebrate Canada's centennial in 1967, this picturesque water channel remains as a visible reminder of Dundas' early prominence.



Cootes Paradise

**Cootes Drive:** one of the main entrance-ways to Dundas from west Hamilton, running along the south side of the Canal. It is lined on both sides with natural areas and trails reinforcing the welcoming image of Dundas as a community nestled within a natural setting.

**Spencer Creek and Trails:** running along the south side of the Canal, Spencer Creek is the largest creek flowing into Cootes Paradise and the Hamilton Harbour. The creek contains both warm and cold water fish species, such as chub, bass, pike, trout and salmon. The creek banks and associated pathways provide a nesting place for turtles and a home for a variety of other wildlife. The banks of the creek are popular hiking routes. Rotary Club-sponsored Spencer Creek Trail coincides with a portion of the longer Yellow Diamond Trail along the railbed of the former Dundas-Hamilton commuter rail line.



Volunteer Marsh



# Structuring Elements of the Urban Eco Park Gateway

All of the elements described above could be linked to create an Urban Eco Park featuring natural areas and wetlands, passive and active recreation areas, and community sustainability and education facilities, as shown on Map 4, overleaf.

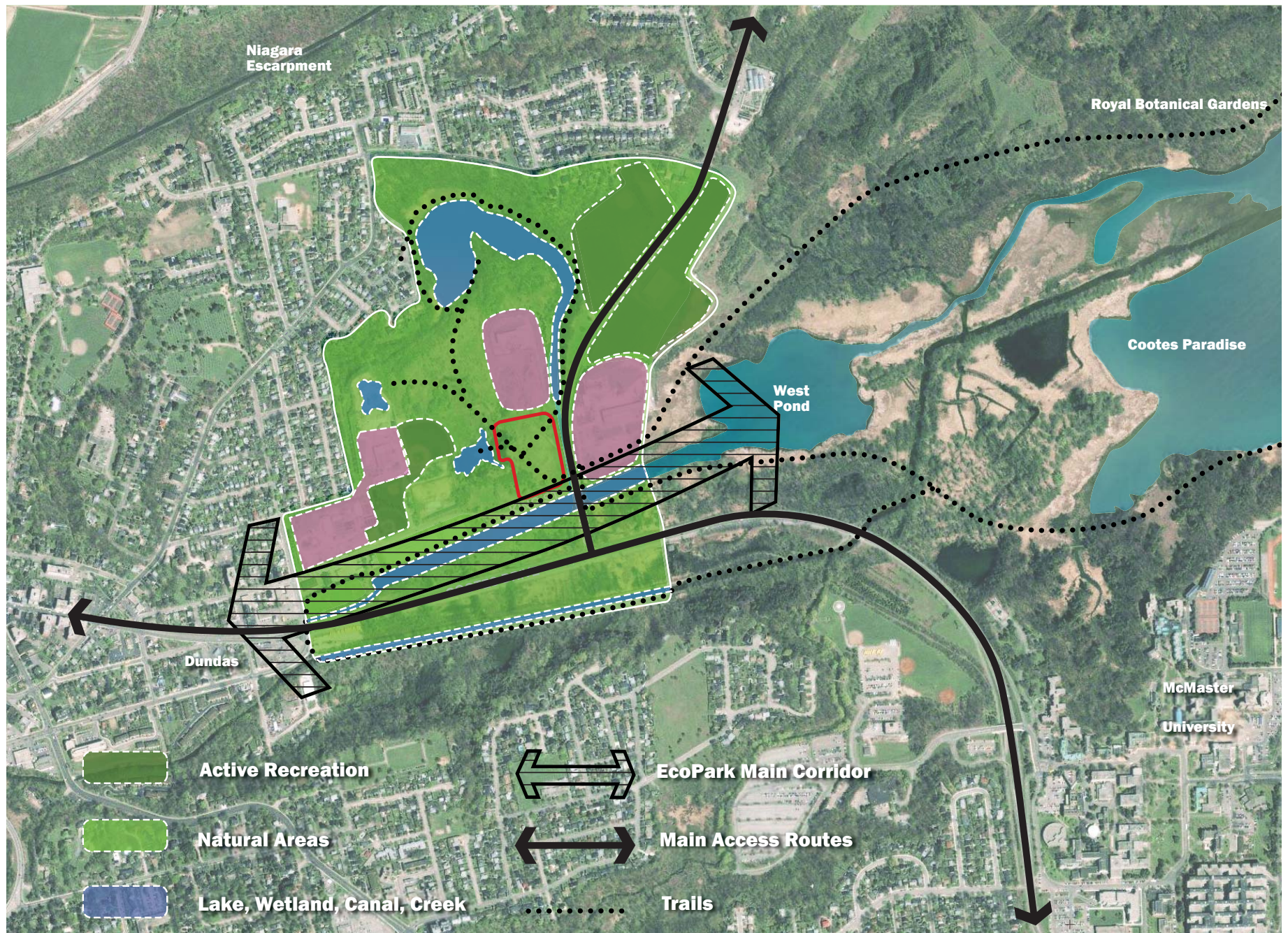
The existing utility facilities – the CSO tank house, WWTP building and Hydro One Business Centre – are compatible with this vision. The CSO tank house is small and its visual impact on the Eco Park could be minimized with appropriate landscaping. The WWTP could be incorporated

into the park as an eco-education resource with the recycling facility, creating a living showcase for environmental responsibility and ecological recreation. The south edge of the Hydro One property could similarly be landscaped to enhance the existing trails on the bank of the Canal. Should Hydro One ever render surplus the building at 40 Olympic Drive, the existing building could be re-imagined as more publicly-accessible community space as with the Don Valley Brickworks or Wychwood Barns projects in Toronto, both of which involve restoring similar types of buildings for community, cultural, and café/entertainment uses.



Desjardins Canal looking east from Olympic Drive





Map 4: The Urban Eco Park Gateway



The Gateway could be organized into a number of activity areas:

### **Corridor**

The most used area would be the land and water features extending directly from Dundas along King Street E. to West Pond. The Butterfly Gardens and Centennial Park constitute a destination and point of connection to the urban area. It is from here that land and water trails originate running both north and south of the Canal, and a point east of Olympic Drive could be used as a launch for kayakers and canoeists. As noted earlier, the Hydro buildings have distinct re-use possibility for community and cultural activities at the end of this corridor. We propose that King Street E. be transformed into a park road to support this character. Any Dundas-bound auto traffic can continue southbound on Olympic Drive and use Cootes Drive.

### **Active Recreation**

The active recreational facilities at Martino Memorial Park and Olympic Sports Park provide an important resource and activity for the Gateway. Ideally, 201 King Street E. should be restored as a wetland with forest and meadow buffer areas, however, as it has already been re-graded and levelled it could have complementary use for other recreation should expansion of facilities be required.



Spencer Creek

The current permissions for the site at 201 King Street E. allow for a restaurant. The ecological theme of the area could extend to a park restaurant, café or seasonal tea house exhibiting excellence in design and sustainability that serves locally sourced foods, much of which could come from its own organic kitchen garden.

### **Trails**

Many trails already connect to or pass nearby the proposed Gateway, and certainly the Canal is a major access point to the waters of Cootes Paradise. Additional trail connections could be made across the 201 King Street E. site through to the restored Volunteer Marsh, the formal play areas of Martino Park, or the natural areas of Lake Jojo, as well as to the Canal, restored Veldhuis site and Butterfly Garden.

### **Natural Areas**

In recognition of the sensitive nature of the Volunteer Marsh wetlands and turtle nesting areas on the banks of the Canal and potential areas at 201 King Street E., portions of the Gateway could be renaturalized with limited public access. Other areas, however, provide opportunity for more passive recreation in a variety of landscapes. The Gateway could feature a native species garden as an extension of the Butterfly Garden. The recently graded site at 201 King Street E. could be renaturalized as a meadow or woodland.

### **Education**

Interpretive opportunities could be provided to describe the natural and cultural heritage of the area (the Canal and its role in building the Town of Dundas, Cootes Paradise, the history of the Veldhuis site etc.) and the existing natural features could be established. This facility could also tie together the wider sustainability imperative for protecting such natural areas with the need to recycle and appropriately treat any water that is released back into the system, though the education opportunities afforded by the on-site utilities.



## 201 King Street East: An Incompatible Application

A self storage facility consisting of four buildings has been proposed for the property at 201 King Street East, at the heart of the Gateway zone. The property, at the northwest corner of King Street East and Olympic Drive, fronting the Desjardins Canal, is currently vacant but has great potential to be restored as a natural area.

The property is currently designated “Parkland” in the Town of Dundas Official Plan and is zoned “Park and Recreation” in the Town of Dundas Zoning By-law. The site’s current designation as Parkland is logical and appropriate given the abundance of natural areas and recreation uses



The site, with the Niagara Escarpment beyond

surrounding it and its proximity to the larger natural open space system afforded by the Niagara Escarpment and Royal Botanical Gardens. Self-storage uses are not permitted under the current Official Plan and Zoning By-law and amendments to both policy documents would be required. If approved, the requested amendments would see the OP “Parkland” designation changed to “General Commercial” and the “Park and Recreation” zoning changed to “Highway Commercial-Floodplain.”

The site is just outside the Niagara Escarpment Plan area and Greenbelt Plan area but is considered part of the Cootes Paradise Environmentally Significant Area according to the former Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Official Plan (Map 3).

The site is located at the base of the Dundas Valley immediately north of the Desjardins Canal, at the centre of a unique resource of significant natural features, many of considerable environmental importance. The site is readily visible from Cootes Drive, one of the primary entrances to Dundas. Furthermore, its location at the base of the valley means that the site sits in one of the primary view corridors from the Escarpment lands that rise above it: the site commands views north to the Niagara Escarpment, south over the Desjardins Canal, and east to Cootes Paradise.

The proposed storage facility is incompatible with this vision at both the local and wider levels.

The commercial use proposed, a significant departure from the existing parkland designation, has no connection to recreation or natural systems and is therefore inappropriate. From a commercial standpoint the use is disconnected from other similar and complementary uses. It would be better served in an established commercial or industrial area.

Furthermore, the application constitutes a very short term view of the property, which is, as previously noted, designated as parkland. If that designation is amended to one allowing a more intensive land use it will be permanently lost as open space. Once a commercial designation has been applied, self storage will no longer be the highest and best use of that land and in time it will very likely turn over to more intensive and perhaps even less appropriate uses. Many other more suitable sites for a storage use exist in Dundas and the Hamilton region.



Lake Jojo



That the site and the surrounding lands are easily accessible at the heart of the community of Dundas and further surrounded by RBG, Hamilton Conservation Authority and City-owned lands strengthens the argument that the subject site should be preserved for uses appropriate to the natural and recreation uses surrounding it.

The City, Hamilton Conservation Authority, and the RBG have expended great effort and considerable finances to rejuvenate Cootes Paradise. They have recently acquired adjacent property to support those initiatives. Allowing such an isolated commercial designation is a step backwards.

If permitted, the proposed structures would block views from the south to the Escarpment, and would mar views south from the heights of York Road. Storage facilities are inherently unattractive buildings. Landscaping practises and additional traffic may cause the further deterioration of documented turtle nesting areas on the site. The Volunteer Marsh may be further impacted beyond the potential for rehabilitation as a result of further development and construction activity on the site.

The Provincial Policy Statement (2005) contains specific policies that value and warrant the protection of Natural Heritage and Cultural Heritage Landscapes; this application does the opposite.

As such, the proposed application is incompatible with the short and longer term potential of the immediate and larger area.



The Gateway to the Urban Eco Park, with Cootes Paradise beyond



# Summary Recommendations

Because of the site's exceptional potential to become an integral part of the Urban Eco Park within the larger Cootes Paradise-Desjardins Canal-Niagara Escarpment area, we propose the following key recommendations:

- Refusal of the application for 201 King Street E.
- Endorsement of the regional vision of the Urban Eco Park
- Endorsement of the local potential of the Urban Eco Park Gateway
- Development of a plan to design and implement the Urban Eco Park