



# QUEENSVILLE FOREST PROPERTY

## WHAT YOU SAID REPORT 2022

**FORESTRY**  
1-877-464-9675  
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**York Region**

# INTRODUCTION

In 2021, The Regional Municipality of York secured the Queensville Property in the Town of East Gwillimbury at 20753 McCowan Road and 4762 Queensville Sideroad. This property will become the newest York Regional Forest tract.

A property management plan is being developed to identify how to protect and restore the property's natural features and habitats while respecting the vision and goals outlined in York Region's It's in our Nature Management Plan for the York Regional Forest 2019 – 2038.

York Region consulted with various stakeholders on the proposed Queensville Property Management Plan including forest visitors, residents of the Town of East Gwillimbury, other York Region residents, and several partners including cities and towns in York Region, conservation authorities and the York Regional Forest Advisory Team. The Indigenous communities of Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation were also invited to participate in the consultation process.

This report summarizes engagement results with residents specifically, including input received through the online information session and online interactive map and includes how feedback received is being considered by York Region staff.

# ABOUT THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

York Region's public consultation focused on the plan's most important features for residents and forest visitors including:

- Restoration plans and timelines
- Trail design and location
- Parking lot location and design

Information about maintaining proposed cultural heritage elements of the property was also considered.

To share information, answer questions and gather feedback about the new tract, York Region organized the following public engagement activities:

- A virtual workshop with the York Regional Forest Advisory Team held on August 23, 2022; the Advisory Team includes representatives from Durham Mountain Biking Association (Biking), Georgina Sportsman Alliance, Huronia Loggers Association, Local naturalist clubs, Local rate payer associations, Oak Ridges Trail Association (Hiking), Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Ontario Trail Riders Association (Horseback riding), Public Education (Nature's Classroom), York Regional Forest Nordic Ski and Snowshoe Club and York Regional Police
- An online information session held on September 13, 2022; thirty-three people participated in this hour-long session; the panel included an external facilitator and two York Region staff from Forestry Services who presented the proposed Queensville Property Management Plan and answered questions from participant



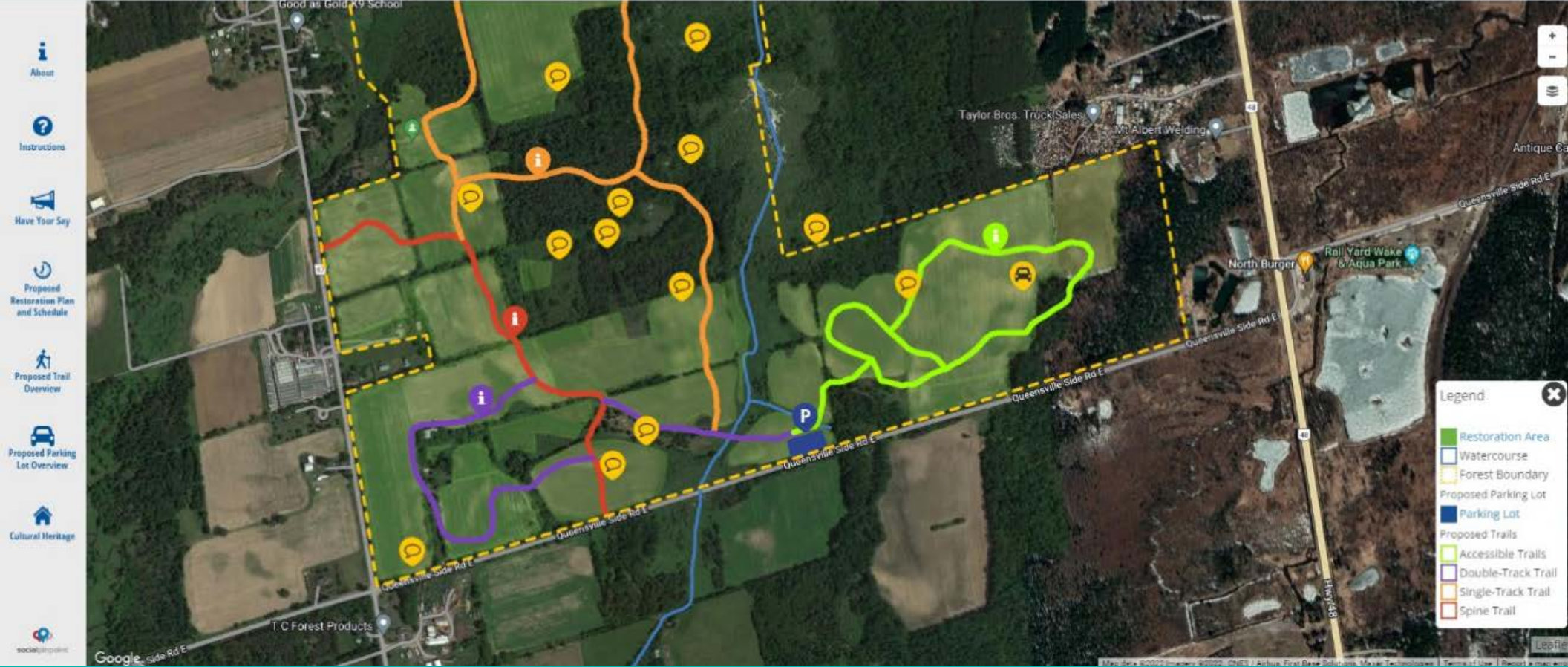


Figure 1: Screenshot of Interactive Map

- An online engagement tool available from September 13 to October 4, 2022. This tool included an interactive map of the property showing proposed trails, restoration areas and a parking lot with additional information and pictures pinned to different parts of the map. The tool allowed the public to leave comments, express general approval or constructive feedback on proposed plans, respond to comments from other residents, and ask questions. Participants were also able to 'like' or 'dislike' comments from other respondents. In addition, this online tool enabled staff to provide background on the plan and answer questions from the public directly
    - An email address and phone number were given to members of the public who could not or preferred not to use the online map to provide feedback
    - The online interactive map received 780 visits with 22 unique stakeholders providing input; feedback from social media posts and email echoed many of the comments left on the interactive map
- A [recording of the presentation](#), [presentation slides](#) and an [archived copy of the online interactive map](#) are available at [york.ca/queensvilleforest](http://york.ca/queensvilleforest)

# PUBLIC EVENT NOTIFICATIONS

## Public engagement activities were promoted through:

- A public notice delivered by Canada Post to residents within a five-kilometre radius of the property
- Print and digital advertisements in community newspapers
- Social media posts on Facebook and Twitter
- Direct emails to all stakeholders, partners and participants on the project mailing list
- Notifications via the Greening [e-Newsletter](#), [#yrmatters](#) and internal York Region staff e-Newsletter
- Signs at seven nearby York Regional Forest tracts: Bendor and Graves, Brown Hill, Davis Drive, Eldred King, Hollidge, North and Zephyr

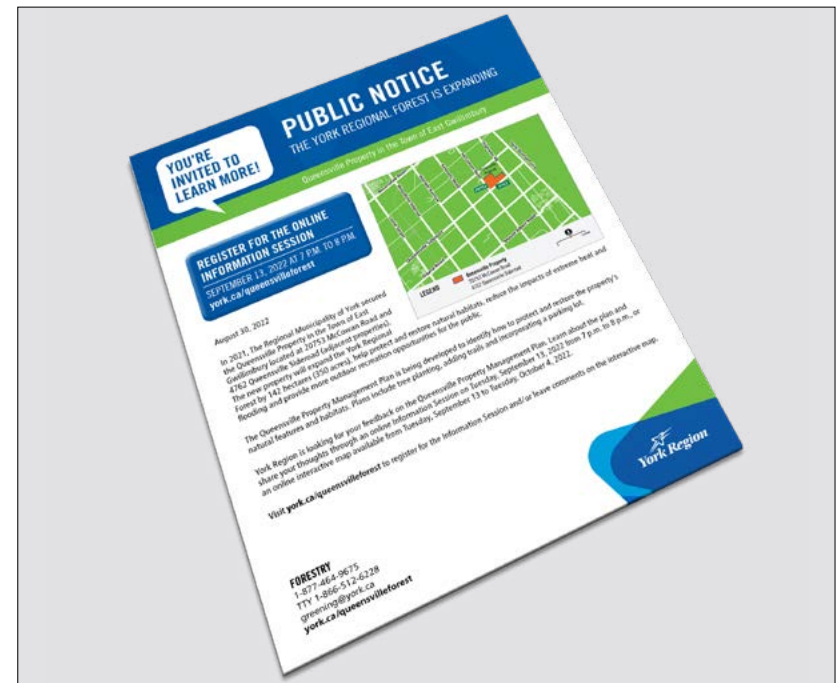
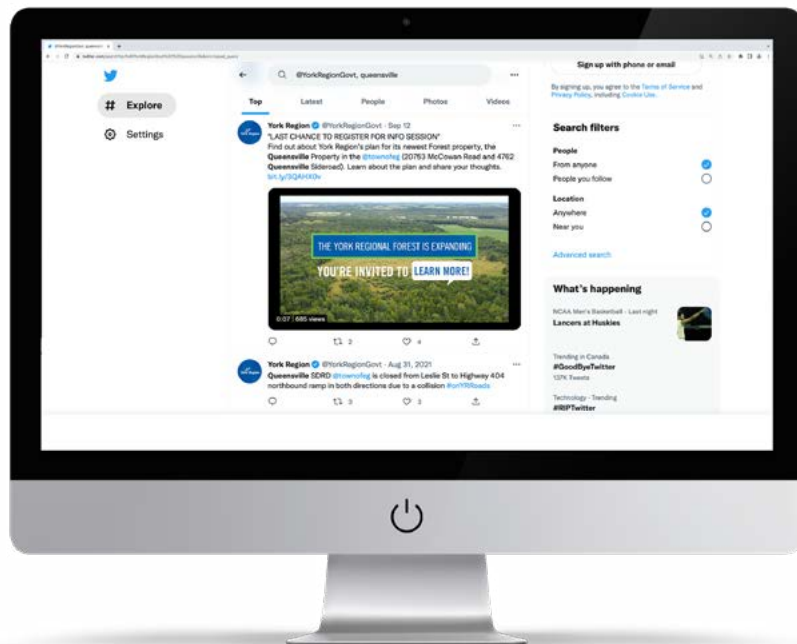


Figure 2: Examples of Digital ad, Notice and Social Media post



# RESULTS

Overall, feedback received on the proposed Queensville Property Management Plan for the new Forest tract was very positive and most welcomed another opportunity to enjoy nature in York Region. Some comments have been edited for clarity.

**Examples of what you said include:**

"I completely support this project!! Do whatever it takes to restore the natural environment and habitat." (+11 likes)

"Sounds like a good plan to me." (+4 likes)

"I am very happy about this project and live close to it..."

"I fully support the addition of another forest to add to the existing York Region Forests! Looking forward to its opening in 2024!"

"Look well thought out, nicely done."  
"I absolutely love this...."

**The top three sentiments from participants reflect general support for:**

- The purchase of the land and intent to create a new Forest tract on the property
- The restoration objectives (tree-planting) and incorporation of diverse habitats including grassland communities
- The number and design of the proposed trails and parking lot

The following section summarizes comments received during the online information session and online interactive map and provides examples of what you said by topic. If a participant 'liked' or 'disliked' a comment, the number of likes and dislikes was included next to that comment for additional context. It also outlines how feedback received is being considered by York Region.

## Restoration plans

*York Region will restore the property's natural features and habitats by planting 145,000 trees over 70 hectares (173 acres). Restoration will occur over five years and, over time, newly-planted trees and shrubs will mature and become mixed-wood forests. The Region will work with contractors and engage the public in the planting process.*

Participants were supportive of the restoration plan. Many also expressed interest in seeing more meadowland and grassland incorporated on the property.

### Examples of what you said include:

"I suggest community tree planting for several weekends. There are lots of people who like to get their hands dirty." (+1 like)

"This property, especially the areas that are currently agricultural lands might provide an opportunity to create some much-needed diverse meadows of substantial sizes." (+4 likes)

"I would have liked to see the planting schedule cover the creek / wet area planted sooner. I'd like to see a proper species list of the plantings also by area and percentage...."

"What species of trees are being planted — mainly softwoods or hardwoods? I was disappointed this was not presented [at the Info Session]."

"I would love seeing more natural grassland restoration projects like at the Bendor and Graves Tract. Like forests, grassland and grassland plants and animals are losing their habitat as well. This new property could be an excellent opportunity to implement another grassland project!" (+6 likes)

## How this feedback is being considered:

There are several factors to consider when determining tree species including short- and long-term objectives of the property/forest, soil type, drainage and species competition as wildlife may feed on young trees or other plants may consume their water, sunlight, and nutrients.

Registered Professional Foresters will create a planting plan for each area and select species based on the site conditions. Portions of the property are quite wet, and others dry so there will be a diversity of species to suit the growing conditions.

The Region will plant native trees and shrubs on this property over six years to increase woodland cover in York Region. It will be a mix of conifer (softwood such as white pine, and eastern white cedar) and deciduous (hardwood such as hackberry and white birch) trees, with the majority being conifers.

Grasslands are an important and valuable ecosystem that support local diversity. While one of the main objectives for the property is to increase woodland cover in York Region, there are several areas that may be more suited to grasslands. Where site conditions suggest grassland would be more appropriate, the Region will work to restore this type of habitat.

The Region will also look for opportunities to include grassland species in seed mixes applied to areas where trees and shrubs are planted. It will take many years for trees to grow big enough to shade the ground in these areas. While these areas transition to mature woodlands, grassland species can help to reduce competition with weeds and provide habitat to support pollinators, birds and other wildlife that benefit from these ecosystems.

## Trail design and location

*Five trail loops will be built on the property so visitors can explore a range of natural features like forests, wetlands, streams, fields and restoration areas. These will range from fully-accessible trails to single footpaths, for a total trail length of 6,700 metres.*

We heard general support for the proposed trail design and locations. All participants were supportive of the trails, with some providing suggestions regarding signage and safe access to the trailheads.

### Examples of what you said include:

"I [am] glad that there will be more of this kind of trail."

"You need to add better signage in this and all York Regional Forests. Have numbered signposts throughout the Forest with a map of the entire trail system on each post indicating location, direction etc. Refer to Durham Forest signage, Walker Woods for example."

"Access points could cause much traffic. [I'm] concerned with [the] intersection of Queensville and McCowan as well as Queensville and 48 Hwy which also should have a proper light standard like the intersection at McCowan."

## How this feedback is being considered:

Trails will be designed and built to support a variety of user groups with various needs and skill levels. The safety of visitors is a priority and will inform proposed access points (i.e. locations with clear sightlines).

Easy trail access will be considered for visitors travelling by vehicle, bike, on foot or by horse. Visitors on horseback will be able to enter the property from several locations. While parking will be restricted to one location off of Queensville Sideroad, additional access points (non-vehicle access only) will be available off of Queensville Sideroad, (closer to the intersection at McCowan Road), and off of McCowan Road.

The existing access point to the old homestead off of McCowan Road will be closed because it is difficult to see oncoming traffic and exit from safely.

The spine trail access point, which will provide non-vehicle access for visitors to the property and support staff and maintenance vehicle access, will be located off of McCowan Road and Queensville Sideroad where clear sightlines exist.

To help visitors find their way around the York Regional Forest, the Region is developing a Wayfinding Signage Strategy Plan. Recommendations from this plan will be applied to all Forest tracts including the Queensville property.

## Parking lot design and location

*Vehicle access to the property will be provided through a gravel parking lot off of Queensville Sideroad. The parking lot will be large enough to hold approximately 50 passenger vehicles and several large vehicles (such as horse trailers). Three accessible parking spaces will be included and constructed to Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards. There will be two entrances to the parking lot from Queensville Sideroad. Visitors will be able to access trails from the parking lot, which will include a display case and signs.*

Most participants were supportive of the proposed parking lot design and tract access and suggested some additional access points.

### Examples of what you said include:

"Excellent proposed parking space which will accommodate the growing community. I love the double entrance - one at each end."

"Would like to see a smaller parking lot added, perhaps where the spine trail meets Queensville Sideroad, to enable users needing accessible access to reach more of the accessible trails in a shorter distance." (+4 likes)

"I would like a pedestrian/horse entrance close to the intersection of McCowan/Queensville to minimize time spend walking/riding on the road."

## How this feedback is being considered:

The parking lot will provide safe access for all visitors to the property, be as close as possible to the accessible trails and be in a central location to provide quick access for visitors to reach other trails as well.

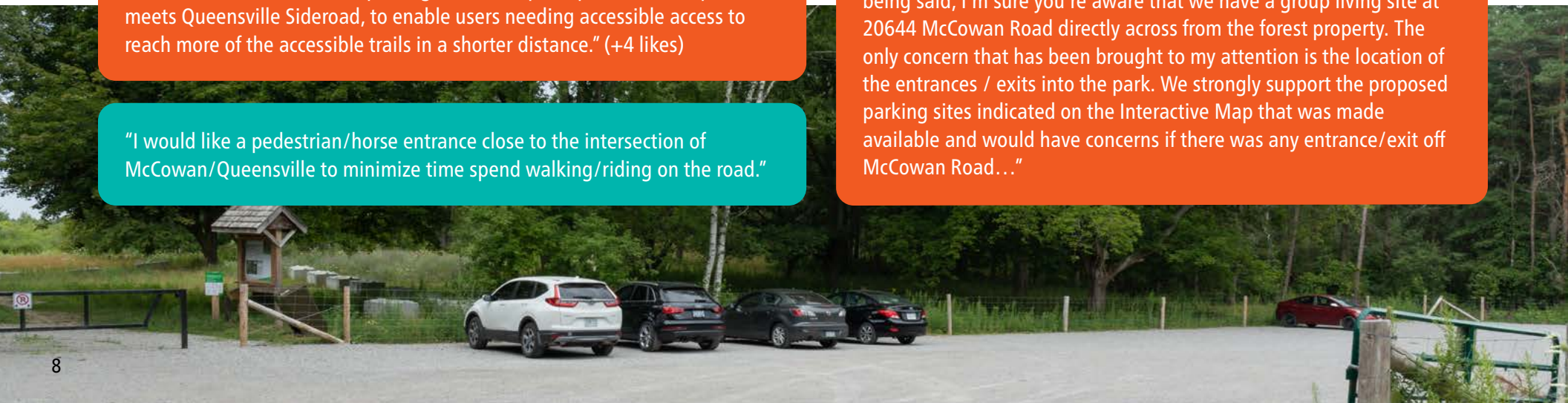
A double entrance will make it convenient for visitors with larger vehicles and trailers to pull through and to manage the property when equipment needs to be brought onsite.

### Additional comments and questions:

The information session and online interactive map also enabled participants to share any additional suggestions or comments. Key themes and samples of these comments are summarized on the following pages.

"...Concern with speed of traffic and people pulling out of parking lot."

"[Our organization] is very supportive of this new development. That being said, I'm sure you're aware that we have a group living site at 20644 McCowan Road directly across from the forest property. The only concern that has been brought to my attention is the location of the entrances / exits into the park. We strongly support the proposed parking sites indicated on the Interactive Map that was made available and would have concerns if there was any entrance/exit off McCowan Road..."





# Dog Walking

Examples of what you said include:

"Consider adding this to the list of forests that allow off leash dogs." (+2 likes and 7 dislikes)

"I am NOT in agreement with an off-leash area in the Queensville Forest Tract for several reasons. #1 - Bendor and Graves is down the road and is a huge area with a fenced in and open area for dogs to run. #2: some of us like areas without loose dogs. #3: all other forest areas are dogs on a leash. Keep this one the same."

"I like the idea of including an off-leash dog area in the Queensville Forest Tract. It is a creative and innovative idea and has worked well at Bendor and Graves. Since the off-leash area would be a designated area of the forest tract, walkers who are uncomfortable with dogs off leash would have other walking options within the tract of land. This seems to be a reasonable compromise and balances the interests of everyone who would like to enjoy the Queensville forest tract." (+4 dislike)

"...I also hope that for the sake of the wildlife dogs will be kept on leash (or perhaps there could be a designated or fenced off-leash area)."

## How this feedback is being considered:

Effective May 1, 2022, dogs must [remain on-leash at all times](#) in all York Regional Forest tracts, except in designated areas (currently, Davis Drive Tract and Bendor and Graves Tract). This decision followed an extensive research and public consultation period to explore options for how to accommodate dog walking in the Forest. Currently the Queensville Property is planned to be an on-leash tract.

The Region will continue to monitor and evaluate the presence of dogs in the Forest and may make adjustments to the updated rule as well as to our education and enforcement protocols as the need arises. Should use levels warrant designating an additional tract, staff will select one based on anticipated level of use, parking availability, location and ecological impact.



## Washrooms and amenities

Examples of what you said include:

"For the larger hiking trails, I can typically walk for over an hour and have needed to use a washroom during this timeframe. It would be appreciated if you could consider putting in composting facilities for future use at this new site as well as the other larger ones.

Also, I find there is not a lot, but still enough trash on the trails that could be solved with more waste receptacles in the parking area. People are very addicted to their coffees and seem to need to walk while having one and then just toss their waste wherever they are. I do as much cleanup as I can but there aren't many receptacles at all the locations."

"...NO washrooms as it encourages a place to "hang out". Install outhouses for convenience"

"Not sure if it is worthwhile or not but maybe consider a few small shelters (just a wooden roof with a chair or wood bench) within the trails, in case of being caught in inclement weather."

### How this feedback is being considered:

Currently there are no washroom facilities at any York Regional Forest tracts; however, the Region will consider the feasibility of adding restroom facilities in the future to the tracts where warranted and appropriate. Public feedback as part of this process and other consultation related to understanding the York Regional Forest visitor experiences highlighted the need for this type of facility.

## Hunting

Examples of what you said include:

"Would love to see more York Regional Forest properties that allow hunting, like the Simcoe County Forests do. This would be a great opportunity for local hunters!" (8 dislikes)

### How this feedback is being considered:

The Region currently allows hunting in the Pefferlaw, Cronsberry and Metro Road Tracts of the York Regional Forest, subject to the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act* and the Town of Georgina Discharge of Firearms By-law. At present, hunting will not be permitted on the Queensville Property.



## Naming of the property

Examples of what you said include:

"Naming of this property. You / we acknowledge the Indigenous history verbally and in papers that very few see. Why not consult the First Nation bands you reference for a truly Indigenous name for this tract..."

"I would not like to see it called Queensville Forest as it is not even close to Queensville. It would be misleading. Perhaps it could be called Mount Albert Forest, Holt Forest or East Gwillimbury Forest. I would also not like it named with a family name. Although it would be nice to have some of the trails named after the families who owned and lived on the farms..."

### How this feedback is being considered:

The Region is considering different names for the property, and the official name will be confirmed before opening the property to the public in late 2024. The name "Queensville Property" is a placeholder due to the location (Queensville Sideroad and McCowan Road). In the past Forest tracts have been named based on local landmarks, location, land donors, history of the property or local area.

## Invasive species

Examples of what you said include:

"Have you assessed the invasive plants on the property and do you have a plan to steward the property to remove them?"

### How this feedback is being considered:

Invasive species on the property have been inventoried and the Region is currently implementing management strategies to control non-native invasive species such as dog-strangling vine, European buckthorn and garlic mustard.

#### The Region will also:

- Follow a risk-based approach to invasive species management including assessing the location, surrounding features and restoration plans
- Create an Invasive Species Action Plan for the York Regional Forest which will help guide our management and prioritization of invasive species
- Work with our neighbours on invasive plant encroachment issues if they arise



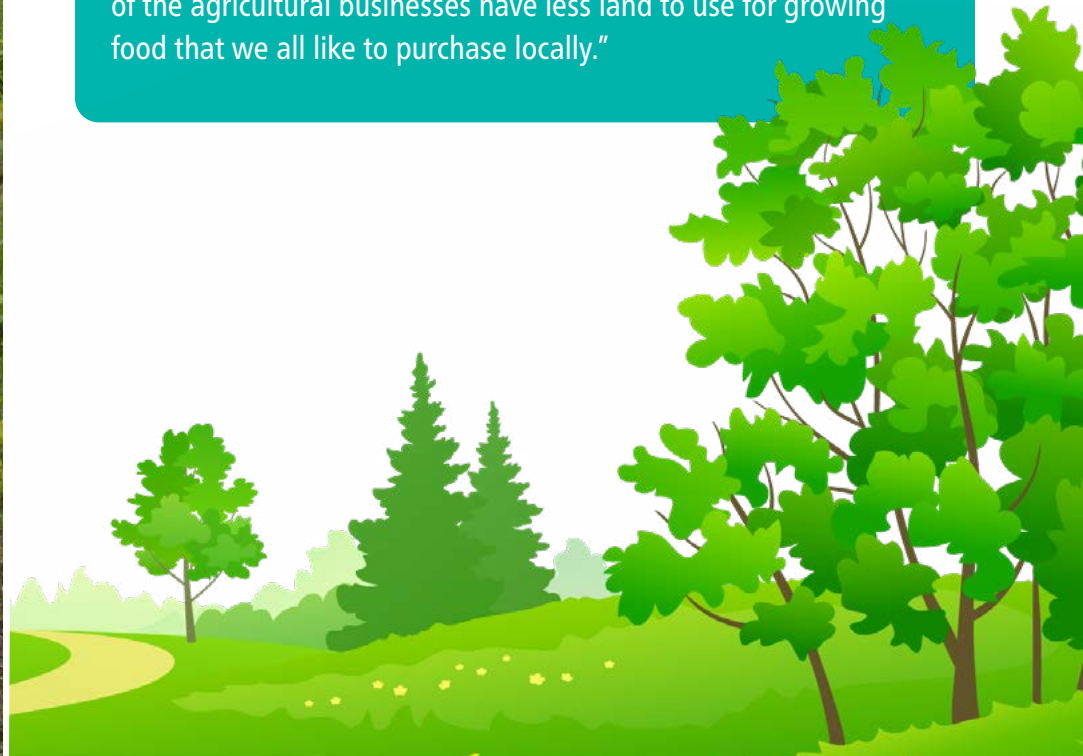


## Agricultural land

Examples of what you said include:

"The current agricultural lands have fed generations of families in the community and we feel that, at minimum, some of these agricultural lands should remain since these have formed a significant part of the cultural heritage of this area and to ensure ongoing food supply for future generations. The Region could use this as an opportunity to not just educate people about forests but also educate people about agriculture."

"I am an avid user of the walking trails in the area so I support the creation of public spaces, however it concerns me that quite a lot of the agricultural businesses have less land to use for growing food that we all like to purchase locally."





## How this feedback is being considered:

Through our Vision 2051, [Regional Official Plan](#), [Climate Change Action Plan](#), [Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy](#) and [Greening Strategy](#), the need to accommodate growth, support a productive agriculture and agri-foods sector, protect and enhance the natural environment, and combat impacts of climate change as important priorities is recognized. We understand that, at times, we need to balance our various priorities to best serve our communities.

The Region is taking steps to combat impacts of climate change on residents and businesses through our progressive policies and actions. One such action is our Natural Infrastructure Project through the [Federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund](#) (DMAF). DMAF provides funding support to build new infrastructure that mitigates and adapts to climate change. The Region's DMAF Natural Infrastructure project aims to mitigate impacts of extreme heat and flooding through planting 200,000 trees on public lands in urban areas and acquiring 100 hectares of land to plant 200,000 trees in rural areas. Lands acquired through DMAF will be operated as public natural space as part of the York Regional Forest.

The property at 20753 McCowan Road and 4762 Queensville Sideroad was acquired through our DMAF Natural Infrastructure Project and supports our project objectives. The Region purchased these lands to restore natural heritage features through tree planting, providing public access to natural space for passive recreation, and managing existing natural heritage features to ensure their health and function.

We will continue to engage with the community regarding designing and planting of this property including extending the time over which planting will occur, and phasing tree planting to ensure the land remains workable for the tenant farmer. We will work with the community on the placement and design of any infrastructure (trails, parking, fencing) to minimize potential impacts. Through the [Greening Strategy](#) and other Regional initiatives, we will continue to seek opportunities to collaborate with the agricultural community to protect and enhance the natural environment, and maintain a productive agriculture and agri-food sector.





## General comments

Examples of what you said include:

"Is there going to be a fence around the new tract to keep trespassers off the properties to the east?"

(+ 1 like)

"Brown Hill Tract on Ravenshoe has some of the BEST mountain biking in the region for all levels of experience as well as some excellent shared use trails. Would love to see a more extensive single track network for another great MTB location in the region."

### How this feedback is being considered:

The Region will be installing fencing where feasible along the property boundaries. Due to trail alignment limitations and the conditions being relatively wet, this site would not be a good candidate for mountain biking trails.







## NEXT STEPS

Thank you for taking the time to give us your feedback!

Feedback collected from the public and from the York Regional Forest Advisory Team will inform the Queensville Property Management Plan. The Region intends to finalize the Management Plan in early 2023.

The Region will continue working on the property over the coming years to plant additional trees, construct the parking lot and trail system and add signage, benches and waste receptacles. It is anticipated construction of the parking lot and some initial trails will begin in late 2023 or early 2024. Once in place, the Region will be able to welcome the public to explore and enjoy this new property.

Stay tuned for updates on this property through our various media channels, including the [Greening e-Newsletter](#). If you are not yet registered for the Greening e-Newsletter, [please sign up](#).





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