

DRAFT new Snowmobile By-law.

Deadline for comments:

noon, Monday, 28th of November, 2011



November, 2011

Are you happy with the draft of the new Snowmobile By-law?

The complete new by-law is on-line at www.city.whitehorse.yk.ca. Please offer your comments directly to the By-law people at the City of Whitehorse, e-mail Roxanne.McCutcheon@whitehorse.ca or phone: 668-8317. You can also speak to one of your board members of the Hillcrest Community Association.

In the past years, there's been growing controversy over increasing off-road vehicle use in the city — the City's *2007 Trail Plan* emphasized the need to address conflict around motorized vehicles; the City's *2010 Official Community Plan (OCP)* warned about this problem; last year's Yukon Government's Off-road Vehicle Task Force heard about the conflict; and the City's Snowmobile Task Force were given the same message.

2007 Trail Plan: ... in higher-use areas, in cases where motorized use in particular has increased or changed, or in areas of the City where resident and user demographics may have changed, conflicts between user groups have arisen.

The old bylaw was written in 1974 when there were about 11,000 people in Whitehorse. With today's 26,000, the population has more than doubled. Hillcrest has seen a significant part of this growth in the above-the-airport area.

What's in the new by-law? By 2013, drivers will be required to pass a safety course and carry a Safe Snowmobiler Card as proof. Snowmobiles will have a city-wide greenspace speed limit of 50 km/hr, (30 km/hr when passing people). On roads, the old speed limit of 25 km/hr has been raised to 30 km/hr and not between 10 pm and 7 am. Except for driving on roads, there are no restrictions to times they may be driven. In environmentally sensitive areas, snowmobiles must only be driven on a motorized trail. There are no special rules about driving snowmobiles inside neighbourhoods, or in other areas of our greenspaces.

At any hour of the day or night, snowmobiles can drive inside residential greenspaces, such as the parts of Hillcrest currently being opened up by firesmaring, those new open areas in back of people's homes, or in the inner greenbelt area around our new rink. Is this what people want?

The speed limit for cars downtown is 50 km/hr and 30 km/hr in school zones (and coming up Hillcrest Drive); having snowmobiles travel on small and windy trails in greenspaces at these speeds is unsafe.

Motorized Trails

In 2007, the city had 150 km of motorized trails. Now, the city is reporting that there are 400 km of motorized trails. The accompanying maps, based on the map in the new by-law, only show 150 km of motorized trails.

The concept of citizen participation called for in the City's *Whitehorse Strategic Sustainability Plan* says "To engage all citizens in community planning."

We need to know where these new motorized trails are. How the new by-law will affect Hillcrest is not known. Currently, there are no motorized trails in Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake Park. We wouldn't suddenly want an official motorized trail right through our tobban hill for instance.

OCP 18.5.2: The Trail Plan recommends the creation of a map of "out and away" trails for motorized recreation vehicle usage. This map shall be designed to strongly discourage the use of all terrain vehicles on non-motorized trails and in environmentally sensitive areas.... Work on this project shall be done in conjunction with groups such as the Klondike Snowmobile Association, Motor Vehicles Branch, and others.

Why is the Klondike Snowmobile Club considered stewards of motorized trails when the new by-law doesn't require them to use motorized trails except in environmentally sensitive areas.

During the OCP process, Hillcrest lobbied that these important trail decisions should be done openly with groups of neighbourhoods. These motorized "out and away" trails affect many parts of the city at a time.

A solution to the problem: the OCP's Urban Containment Boundary

The OCP gave a way to address reducing conflict among user groups when it created the Urban Containment Boundary (UCB), a concept of focussing sustainable growth in the inner part of the city, saying in part:

The current UCB contains approximately 13% of the land area of the City of Whitehorse. UCBs are used by cities as a key tool in encouraging sustainable development. UCBs encourage growth that...

- allows for better support for alternative transportation modes such as transit, walking and cycling

In other words, the city will become denser in this area. By using the Urban Containment Boundary, the by-law can follow the direction of the OCP which says...

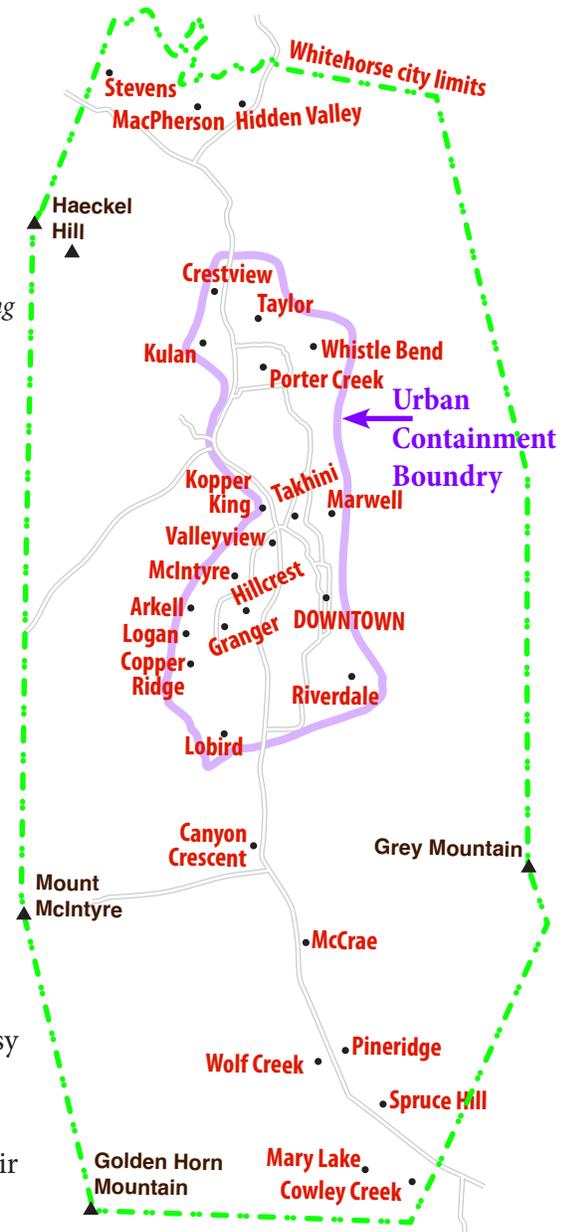
The City Parks & Recreation Master Plan and Trail Plan recommend the idea of "out and away" trails. These trails would be designated for motorized use, allowing those residents routes to get away from the local green space and into the larger hinterland, where they will not be a nuisance to non-motorized users.

Inside the UCB, the by-law should set speed limits of 30 km/hr on trails, slowing to 10 km/hr passing people. The by-law should also restrict snowmobiles to only using motorized trails within greenspaces inside the UCB. These regulations would encourage drivers to get out of this increasingly denser population area of the city and go to the hinterland, the more uninhabited areas of the city outside the UCB.

Since the by-law has chosen to allow drivers to access trails from their home (except for those living downtown), each neighbourhood needs an out and away trail to connect with the greater motorized trail network. In the long run, trailheads for accessing trails may be a better idea.

Some people like having a packed trail close to the neighbourhood for easy walking. Having this is something each neighbourhood should discuss as part of the process.

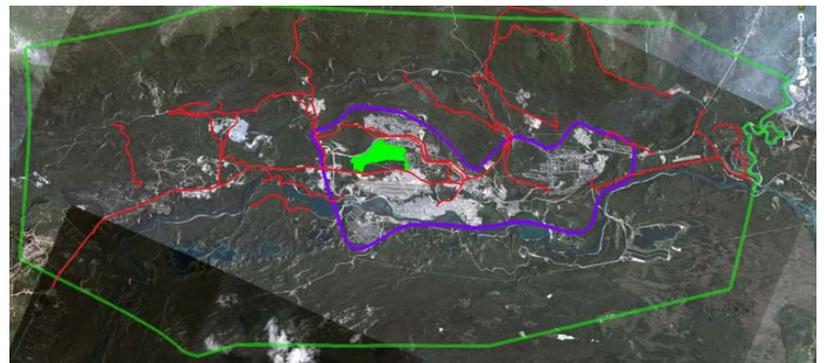
It seems obvious that having neighbourhoods involved in designating their motorized trails is critical to a harmonious project.



Fairness: snowmobile-free area in the City

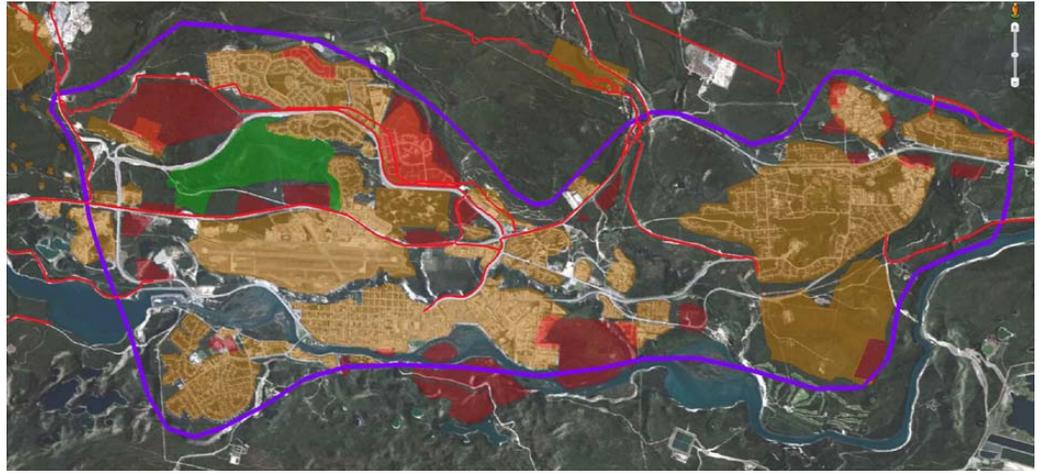
Cities are learning that for a healthy population we need walkable greenspaces and trails, a place to go without the loud whine of snowmobiles and ATVs. The *Trail Plan* says that conflict "Can cause some users to change or end their use." Presently, damage to some of our trails would be considered vandalism if it was downtown. We have a number of wrecked loop trails crossing wetlands and these can't be repaired until vehicles stop driving over them.

Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake Park is surrounded by a growing number of subdivisions. Not only the smallest city park, over half of it is designated environmentally sensitive and it's the only city park completely inside the UCB and with no motorized trails. Since motor vehicles can generally easily travel great distances in little time, and since much of



Green outline is City limits,
purple is Urban Containment Boundary,
red lines are motorized trails
green is our local Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake Park.

Brown areas are industrial and neighbourhoods areas, red areas are some First Nation lands.



Pale green shows environmentally sensitive areas. Note that many neighbourhoods above the airport are surrounded by McIntyre Creek wetlands. This will continue to make Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake Park a destination for their more adventurous trail users.



Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake with the environmentally sensitive layer overlaid.



the city remains open to their use by vehicles, it is only fair that there are some parts of the city where there is no vehicle traffic at all. Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake Park could become the city's first non-motorized Park. The Snowmobile By-law needs a wording to protect such vehicle-free environments over the coming years.

The City's *Whitehorse Strategic Sustainability Plan* calls for a Green Spaces Plan in 2014. And a recent city e-mail said:

Ultimately, discussion of bigger issues in this area would be part of the Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake park planning process... It is expected that overall park planning for Paddy's Pond/Ice Lake could occur in 2013/14.

Show Hillcrest cares. Read the draft by-law and let the By-law department know your thoughts.

Peter Long, Director, Hillcrest Community Association

P.S. Kathryn Secord and I are the Hillcrest representatives on the city's new ATV task force which is rewriting the ATV bylaw. If this notice has provoked any ideas you wish to convey to that process, let either of us know.