

The Niagara Parks Commission

Minutes of the public meeting of The Niagara Parks Commission held on Thursday, April 10, 2025 at the School of Horticulture, 2565 Niagara Parkway, Niagara Falls, Ontario, L2E 6T2.

Attendance

Members: Chair Bob Gale
Vice Chair Graham Coveney
Commissioner April Cotton
Commissioner Natasha DiCienzo
Commissioner Jim Diodati
Commissioner Dan La Caprara
Commissioner Wayne Redekop
Commissioner Ted Salci
Commissioner Erwin Wiens

Regrets: Commissioner Spencer DeWolfe
Commissioner Tom Insinna

Staff: David Adames, Chief Executive Officer/Secretary to the Commission
Marcelo Gruosso, Chief Operating Officer
Paul Forcier, Police Chief
Steve Barnhart, Senior Landscape Architect
Chris Giles, Director, Communications and Marketing
Laura Pingue, Director of Finance/Controller
Janice Spino, Chief Human Resources Officer
Katy Wassenaar, Manager, Public Affairs
Darla Jones, Executive Assistant to the Chair and CEO/Recording Secretary

1. Call to Order

Chair Gale called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Approval of Agenda

The following motion was moved by Commissioner Salci and seconded by Commissioner Wiens:

That the agenda be approved.

Carried.

4. Land Acknowledgement

Chair Gale provided the following land acknowledgement:

The Niagara Parks Commission wishes to acknowledge and honour the lands along the Niagara River corridor as the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples. In both spirit and partnership, we recognize and thank the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation of the Anishinaabek, the Neutral Nation, and all who provided stewardship of these lands over millennia. Recognition of the contributions of Indigenous peoples is consistent with our commitment to making the promise of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities. We are grateful for the opportunity to live, work, and play here and thank all those who have served and continue to serve as caretakers of this special place.

5. Chair's Opening Remarks

Chair Gale requested that the recording secretary read aloud the names of Commissioners in attendance.

The Chair welcomed those in attendance and provided the following remarks:

"Good morning, everyone, and welcome to our April Public Commission Meeting. This week we are celebrating National Tourism Week in Canada, a fantastic time to reflect on the investments we have made as an organization to grow tourism in Niagara and this province. We are in an exciting time as staff prepare to open our seasonal attractions like the Whirlpool Aero Car and White Water Walk next weekend, the beginning of golf season on April 18 and in May the opening of our heritage sites, including the Laura Secord Homestead and McFarland House. While the Victoria Day long weekend is often considered the official kick-off to tourism season in Niagara, we will transition to our spring/summer pass products next week, which kicks off our season here at Niagara Parks. Reflecting on the past few weeks since our last meeting, I attended the Town of Fort Erie's municipal council meeting on March 31 and the City of Niagara Falls' municipal council meeting on April 7, alongside our CEO, David Adames, to provide an update to council members. As you know, Niagara Parks is a provincial agency with stewardship responsibilities for the 56km Niagara River corridor that intersects directly with three lower tier municipalities: the Town of Fort Erie, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and the City of Niagara Falls, as well as the upper tier municipality, the Region of Niagara. During the presentation to Fort Erie Town Council, we discussed past capital investments, including the replacement of the Black Creek Bridge, work along the breakwall and substantial repaving. In 2025: capital projects in the south will include paving sections of the Parkway and service roads, continuing breakwall repairs and upgrades at the Niagara Parks marina. We were pleased to confirm to Fort Erie council that the marina will be in operation for the 2026 boating season, which has also been

communicated to slipholders. Earlier this week, we presented to Niagara Falls City Council, including an overview of capital work planned for the central area of Niagara Parks. Highlights include repaving the Niagara Parkway from Clifton Hill to Fraser Hill (work to begin later this month), the Kingsbridge Loop and public realm planning and infrastructure upgrades within Queen Victoria Park. We will present updates to the Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Regional Council over the next two months. On April 1st, we welcomed Minister of Tourism, Culture, and Gaming, the Honourable Stan Cho, and Niagara West MPP Sam Oosterhoff, Associate Minister of Energy and Intensive Industries, for a tour of the Niagara Parks Power Station and the new exhibit: "Tesla: A Spark of Genius." Minister Cho also toured the Flying Theatre construction area at Table Rock Centre with project manager Ron Carpenter. We look forward to hosting the Minister for the ribbon-cutting and grand opening of our newest attraction later this summer. I am grateful to continue working with Minister Cho over the next three years as the Province has confirmed my reappointment as Chair and new three-year term that will begin as of tomorrow, April 11. On Wednesday, April 2, I had the opportunity to attend the annual Niagara Parks volunteer appreciation dinner at Table Rock Centre. It was a pleasure to speak to the group and meet some of our dedicated volunteers who collectively contributed over 2,000 hours of volunteer time last year. Speaking of dedication to this organization, I also want to thank and recognize Commissioner Natasha DiCienzo whose term comes to an end on May 1st. Natasha has been an active member of our Board, serving two terms since her appointment in May of 2019. In addition to serving as Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee, she has also attended and represented the Board at numerous events during her time as a Commissioner. Thank you, Natasha, for your hard work and dedication to our Board. We wish you all the best. We'll now continue with the rest of our public meeting."

Chair Gale invited Natasha DiCienzo to the front of the room to present her with a framed picture of Niagara Falls on behalf of the Commission. Natasha provided remarks and thanked the Commission and staff.

6. Approval of Draft Minutes

The following motion was moved by Commissioner La Caprara and seconded by Vice Chair Coveney:

That The Niagara Parks Commission:

1. Approve the minutes dated March 13, 2025 (COMM-2025-05).

Carried.

7. Presentations

Niagara Parks Foundation Year-End Review

Niagara Parks Foundation Chair, Debbie Whitehouse, provided an update presentation including priority projects of the Foundation and 2023-2024 highlights.

The Commission received the presentation for information.

Business Highlights

Niagara Parks CEO, David Adames, provided a presentation respecting Business Highlights.

The Commission received the presentation for information.

Chair Gale suggested that the board meets with Niagara Parks' large tour operators if timing permits.

Other

Chair Gale invited Tim Parker, Niagara Adventure Excursions Inc., to speak. Tim thanked staff for their cooperation and assistance with the opening of a new Starbucks location at Grandview Plaza, scheduled for May 13, 2025.

8. Other Business

There were no items of other business.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Thursday May 8, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. at the School of Horticulture, 2565 Niagara Parkway, Niagara Falls, Ontario, L2E 6T2.

10. Closed Session

The following motion was moved by Commissioner Salci and seconded by Commissioner La Caprara:

That The Niagara Parks Commission move into Closed Session.

Carried.

The Commission moved into the Closed Session at 9:41 a.m. with the following persons in attendance:

Members: Chair Bob Gale
 Vice Chair Graham Coveney
 Commissioner April Cotton



Commissioner Natasha DiCienzo
Commissioner Jim Diodati
Commissioner Dan La Caprara
Commissioner Wayne Redekop
Commissioner Ted Salci
Commissioner Erwin Wiens

Staff: David Adames, Chief Executive Officer/Secretary to the Commission
Marcelo Gruosso, Chief Operating Officer
Paul Forcier, Police Chief
Steve Barnhart, Senior Landscape Architect
Chris Giles, Director, Communications and Marketing
Laura Pingue, Director of Finance/Controller
Janice Spino, Chief Human Resources Officer
Katy Wassenaar, Manager, Public Affairs
Darla Jones, Executive Assistant to the Chair and CEO/Recording Secretary

Bob Gale
Chair

David Adames
Chief Executive Officer/
Secretary to the Commission

Darla Jones
Executive Assistant to the Chair and
CEO/Recording Secretary

April 10, 2025



Report to The Niagara Parks Commission

RE: Summary of Recommendations from the Golf Committee

The following are recommendations of the Golf Committee at its meeting held on April 30, 2025. Any variances to staff report recommendations will be noted in **red** below.

Special Olympics Ontario – 2025 Niagara Golf Program (Report 2025-42)

1. Waive fees for up to 28 Special Olympics athletes to practice and play at Legends on the Niagara's Chippawa golf course and practice facility once per week for 10 to 12 weeks from June to August 2025; and,
2. Waive fees for the Team Canada Special Olympics advanced athletes to play on the Championship courses at Legends on the Niagara three to five times during the 2025 golf season.

Golf Department Updates (Memo 2025-24)

1. Receive Memo 2025-24 respecting Golf Department Updates for information.

Stanley Thompson Society (Memo 2025-25)

1. Receive Memo 2025-25 respecting Stanley Thompson Society for information.

Prepared by: _____

Name: Darla Jones

Title: Executive Assistant to the Chair
and Chief Executive Officer

Submitted and

Authorized by: _____

Name: David Adames

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Date: April 30, 2025

Report to the Golf Committee

RE: Special Olympics Ontario – 2025 Niagara Golf Program

Recommendation(s)

That the Golf Committee recommends that The Niagara Parks Commission:

1. Waive fees for up to 28 Special Olympics athletes to practice and play at Legends on the Niagara's Chippawa golf course and practice facility once per week for 10 to 12 weeks from June to August 2025; and,
2. Waive fees for the Team Canada Special Olympics advanced athletes to play on the Championship courses at Legends on the Niagara three to five times during the 2025 golf season.

Overview

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Board to waive fees at Legends on the Niagara for up to 28 Special Olympics athletes to practice once per week from June to August 2025 on the Chippawa course and for Team Canada's Special Olympics advanced athletes to play three to five times during the 2025 golf season on the Championship courses.

Golf was officially endorsed as the Special Olympics Ontario's (SOO) 18th sport in 2010. SOO now has 521 golf athletes in 42 programs province wide. Golf made its debut at the Provincial Games in 2013 at the York Region Summer Games. There are 11 Team Ontario golf athletes, including two from the Niagara area.

Multiple communities across the province support the SOO golf program to further develop athletes and introduce others to the game. Funding is available for those that qualify at the provincial and national level; however, there is no funding for local development. Public and private golf courses, including the cities of Brampton, London, Windsor, and Club Link courses, support the SOO golf program by allowing complimentary access to the golf courses.

The Niagara North Committee (NNC) is a volunteer organization operating under the SOO umbrella that offers instructional and recreational golf for persons with intellectual disabilities. The athletes represent all skill levels, from beginner to advanced players that are able to play 18-holes independently. The program is delivered entirely by volunteers who offer one hour of instruction and skill development followed by two hours of supervised play on the course. Insurance coverage is in place for the program through SOO.



2024 was the 10th anniversary of The Special Olympics program at Legends. The program continues to achieve growth, progressive skill development and success for the athletes.

Some highlights during the past 2 seasons include:

- Nine of the athletes played in the Qualifiers in Milton and Brantford and 3 qualified to play in the Summer Provincial Games in Brantford in July 2025.
- In addition to the Provincial Qualifiers in Milton and Brantford, events were held and our Chippers were represented this year in Port Colborne (Niagara Regional Invitational), Weston ON (Provincial All Abilities Championship) Wichita Kansas (USGA Adaptive Open), Brighton ON (Canadian All Abilities Championship), Doylestown PA (GAP) and for the first time in Europe at St Omer, France (EDGA ParaGolf).
- One of the athletes was featured in a Special Olympics International / Coca-Cola / BBC sponsored mini- documentary promoting Equity and Inclusion in Sport. Numerous scenes were filmed at the Legends in August of 2024. The film was released in November 2024 and can be viewed here. <https://www.bbc.com/storyworks/specials/game-on/>.

Both golfers and volunteers feel privileged to be part of the programs. The NNC, volunteers and participants greatly appreciate Niagara Parks' generous support and are requesting the same arrangement for 2025.

Niagara Parks Golf staff will also participate and provide further support to this initiative through the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) by providing instruction to further develop the program and skills of the athletes.

Implications

Financial

It is anticipated that the impact on revenues will be minimal. Golf staff will schedule the program to minimize interference with public play. The program is flexible and can be rescheduled if needed should other paying groups require this time period (e.g. for a tournament).

Consultation

Pending approval, Golf staff will consult with the Corporate Services department to finalize the program.

Alternatives for Consideration

The Committee could direct staff to propose a reduced rate as an option to the participating athletes. This alternative is not recommended as it does not demonstrate the same level of support provided by the Board in the past.

Rationale for Recommendation

This continues to be a unique opportunity to assist with the development of a special group of individuals utilizing existing Niagara Parks facilities and resources to develop players and grow the game. Staff would also like to take an active role in developing and promoting the program. Staff believe that this program supports Niagara Parks' goal to advance the game of golf.

Relevance to Strategic Plan

This initiative aligns with Niagara Parks' 10-Year Strategic Plan. Supporting programs of this caliber clearly demonstrates Niagara Parks' efforts to connect with the local community, create awareness and "grow the game" across the country.

Other Pertinent Reports

[Report 2019-18](#) – Special Olympics Ontario – 2019 Niagara Golf Program (The Niagara Parks Commission, May 9, 2019)

[Report 2018-72](#) – Special Olympics Ontario – 2018 Niagara Golf Program (Finance and Audit Committee, April 11, 2018)

[Report](#) – Special Olympics Ontario – Niagara Golf Program (Finance & Audit Committee, April 19, 2017)



[Report](#) – Special Olympics Ontario – Niagara Golf Program (Finance & Audit Committee, February 17, 2016)

Prepared by: _____

Name: Curtis Labelle

Title: Director, Golf Operations

Submitted by: _____

Name: David Adames

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Authorized by: _____

Name: David Adames

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Date: April 30, 2025

Appendices

None.

Memorandum

Date: April 30, 2025
To: Golf Committee
From: Curtis Labelle
Subject: Golf Department Updates

Information Items

1. Golf Course Opening Schedule
 - On Friday April 18 Whirlpool, Ussher's Creek, Chippawa and the practice facility will open, weather permitting.
 - The Golf Academy & TaylorMade Performance Center is open by appointment.
 - Battlefield will be open for public play Friday May 16.
2. 2025 Golf Business Outlook
 - The National Golf Course Owners Association (NCGOA) released their spring pulse report that highlights continued momentum in golf. Sources include, Canadian golf course operators, economic forecasts from the Bank of Canada, and industry insights. Revenue growth is expected, with operators forecasting a 5.4% increase in gross revenues. This suggests a shift toward more tempered expectations following two years of exceeding projections.
 - The All-Access online reservation portal opened on March 19. Over 30,000 rounds were booked after the first day.
 - As of April 15, Whirlpool - Ussher's Creek and Battlefield have over 70,000 total rounds reserved for the 2025 golf season. (represents approximately 57% of rounds played in 2024).
3. Battlefield Cart Path Update
 - a. The Asphalt portion of the project commenced on April 16, the process will take 2- 3 weeks to complete based on weather.
 - b. Rankin was able to secure sod from a supplier about a month earlier than anticipated and will commence around the same time as the asphalt.

- c. Originally sod work was going to take place while open for public play but now the majority if not all will be completed prior to opening.

4. Whirlpool Cart Path Update

- a. The 18th hole renovations at Whirlpool came under budget and the surplus was used to restore some cart path sections.
- b. The cart path on 18 from the green to appropriately 175 yards out was excavated and restored with a new asphalt.
- c. The wash pad and cart path from behind 9 green towards the 10th tee was restored with new asphalt.
- d. Some of the worst cart path sections on the golf course were addressed with cold patch. Although not a permanent fix this will be a major improvement for guests.

5. Legends / Whirlpool Pub Promotions

- A major marketing initiative will be launched at both Legends and Whirlpool to stimulate increased business in the pubs. Commencing Victoria Day weekend until Thanksgiving dine in guests can submit a ballot to be eligible for the season ending grand prize draw(s). A 50 round All Access package valued at \$3500.00 will be drawn and the winner(s) announced. Guests can enter a ballot each time they dine to improve their chances, this will be promoted in the cart plates and supported with other marketing campaigns.
- Dine & Play will be offered exclusively at Whirlpool Sunday – Thursday. Dinner followed by 9 holes of golf with cart from 5-6 pm commencing Victoria weekend – Labour Day at a special price.
- 9 & Dine will be offered on Chippawa at Legends in a similar manner details and pricing are being finalized.

Prepared by: _____

Name: Curtis Labelle

Title: Director, Golf Operations

Submitted by: _____

Name: Curtis Labelle

Title: Director, Golf Operations

Authorized by: _____

Name: David Adames

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Date: April 30, 2025

Memorandum

Date: April 30, 2025
To: Golf Committee
From: Curtis Labelle
Subject Stanley Thompson Society

Background

- Golf Course architect Stanley Thompson (1893-1953) was a genius who left his mark on the Canadian landscape from coast to coast and further afield in the Caribbean, USA and Central America. His 'larger than life' persona resulted in an exceptional contribution to the golf world that has passed the test of time. His legacy includes more than his golf courses: he mentored and trained many prominent golf architects.
- He founded the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) with the likes of Donald Ross and Robert Trent Jones Sr. A posthumous crowning achievement was the 2005 designation of Stanley Thompson as a Person of National Significance by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. In 1980, Stanley Thompson was inducted into the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame and, in 2015, he was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame.
- To honor his work and achievements The Stanley Thompson Society was founded in 1998. Through education, advocacy, research and experiences, the Society is dedicated to the celebration and preservation of the legacy of Canada's iconic golf course architect, Stanley Thompson.
- To fulfill this mandate the Society is operated by a board of directors, and supported through the membership dues of Friends, Clubs and Corporate members, as well as fundraising programs and the sale of products.
- Whirlpool Golf Course was designed by Stanley Thompson, opening in 1951 and was his last major design in his lifetime. The Niagara Parks Commission supports the Stanley Thompson Society through annual membership dues and participates in hosting small events from time to time at Whirlpool.
- The Stanley Thompson Society hosts events each year at courses across Canada as part of the Stanley Thompson Series. The event starts with a guest speaker during lunch to discuss the host clubs design and other fun / interesting facts. A casual round of golf is followed with tee times, there is no formal reception afterwards.
- Whirlpool will be hosting the Stanley Thompson Society this June 5th with tee off times starting from 1:00 – 2:00 pm. Lunch is included in the entry fee with a small gift distributed to the guests. This would be an excellent opportunity to have some representation from Golf Committee members to participate in the event.



Prepared by: _____

Name: Curtis Labelle

Title: Director, Golf Operations

Submitted by: _____

Name: Curtis Labelle

Title: Director, Golf Operations

Authorized by: _____

Name: David Adames

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Date: April 30, 2025

Report to The Niagara Parks Commission

RE: Summary of Recommendations from the Property and Infrastructure Committee

The following are recommendations of the Property and Infrastructure Committee at its meeting held on May 1, 2024. Any variances to staff report recommendations will be noted in **red** below.

Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project and Interpretive Plan Update (Report 2025-43)

1. Receive Report 2025-43 respecting the Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project and Interpretive Plan for information.

Soka Gakkai International of Canada Update (Report 2025-46)

1. Receive Report 2025-46 – Soka Gakkai International of Canada Update.
2. Receive and approve the updated design for the SGI peace garden proposal.
3. Delegate authority to the Chair and Chief Executive Officer to complete a formal agreement with Soka Gakkai International of Canada, to Niagara Parks' satisfaction.

Capital Projects Update Presentation

1. Receive for information update on 2024-25 capital projects.
2. Approve completion of the projects contained in the fiscal 2024-25 capital budget.
3. Approve the allocation of an additional \$505K to CP1265-Fort Erie Breakwall from the 2025-26 unallocated capital account, bringing the project total to \$2.3M.



Prepared by: _____

Name: Darla Jones

Title: Executive Assistant to the Chair
and Chief Executive Officer

Submitted and

Authorized by: _____

Name: David Adames

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Date: May 1, 2025

Report to the Property and Infrastructure Committee

RE: Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project and Interpretive Plan Update

Recommendation(s)

That the Property and Infrastructure Committee recommends that The Niagara Parks Commission:

1. Receive Report 2025-43 respecting the Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project and Interpretive Plan for information.

Overview

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project and the development of the Gonder's Flats Interpretive Plan.

At its November 12, 2021, meeting, the Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) approved the following recommendation:

Authorize the Vice Chair and Chief Executive Officer to execute the necessary agreements and associated documentation to enable The Niagara Parks Commission to receive funding through the Ontario Community Environment Fund and from Ducks Unlimited Canada to implement the Gonder's Flats Restoration Project.

Since that time, the majority of the construction has been completed in collaboration with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) and additional funding partners. As the site is now available for public access, there is a need to develop an interpretive plan to leverage the educational potential of the site as well as guide sustainable use of the property by visitors to protect this critical wetland habitat.

Project Update

The Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project represents one of the largest wetland projects ever undertaken in Niagara, with significant investment from Niagara Parks and its partners (Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Ducks Unlimited, Land Care Niagara, Niagara Community Foundation, and the Ontario Land Trust Alliance). This project is the culmination of over 10 years of ongoing environmental restoration work at Gonder's Flats, starting with the removal of a degraded asphalt road and parking lot that was eroding in the Niagara River. The arrival of the invasive

Emerald Ash Borer further degraded the property by decimating the forest canopy, resulting in unsafe conditions for visitors and poor habitat quality for wildlife. NPC has also had to manage invasive plant species from over-taking populations of Swamp Rose Mallow, a species at risk plant, that currently inhabits the site.

As an extension of NPC's coastal wetland project, the vision of returning Gonder's Flats into a functional wetland habitat was finally realized in 2023. In addition to the excavation of the pond, berms, lookouts and an accessible walking trail, the entire property was replanted with native grasses, wildflowers, trees and shrubs by staff, volunteers and Brock University students. Through these efforts, wildlife diversity (amphibians, reptiles, fish, birds and plants) has established quicker than anticipated, representing a fully functional wetland habitat.

While the primary focus of the project was to create wetland habitat for wildlife, the site has enormous potential for research and to provide passive recreational and educational opportunities on a variety of topics to visitors to Niagara Parks. In collaboration with Brock University, Gonder's Flats is already being utilized to study the impacts that restored wetlands have on water and soil quality as well as determining how they compare to naturally created wetlands. Students from Niagara College's Ecosystem Restoration Program are also utilizing the site to learn plant identification, which in turn, provides an inventory of existing plants to NPC. In addition, citizen scientists are engaged to assist in ongoing inventorying of flora and fauna throughout the site.

The site has already gained popularity with local residents and birding clubs who utilize the site for tours and bird counts including a large tour as part of the Migratory Bird Day on May 11th, 2024. The project has been highlighted in numerous tours, presentations and articles by Niagara Parks staff including a keynote presentation and tour as part of the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects conference recently held in Niagara Falls. Staff continue to receive inquiries regarding the project and its next steps.

New Niagara River Access

Based on public and partner input, improved access to the Niagara River was identified as one of the primary considerations for future development at Gonder's Flats. With inspiration from the viewing nodes installed at Darlington Provincial Park, a similar design was developed for installation at two locations along Gonder's Flats. Installed in December 2024, these viewing nodes now provide a fully accessible opportunity to view the Niagara River, while being resilient enough to overcome flooding, wave action and ice flows. In addition, these nodes will aid in the creation of nearshore habitat by slowing down the water and allowing sedimentation and vegetation to establish. Where

used elsewhere, these nodes often become popular locations for wildlife viewing and fishing, all of which can be leveraged to develop future programming.



Gonder's Flats Interpretive Plan

Now that the majority of the construction has been completed, an Interpretive Plan is required to showcase ecological restoration and provide opportunities for individuals to connect with nature and wetlands through educational programs, research and low impact recreation within a universally accessible and sustainable environment.

Interpretation is the process of bringing a site to life. Interpretation provides visitors with a sense of first-hand involvement and intellectual, emotional, or spiritual connection. Interpretation is not simply education. Gonder's Flats currently has numerous points of interest and potential topics to interpret. At the same time, to effectively protect this resource, the interpretive plan can aid Niagara Parks in ensuring the site is being used sustainably and responsibly by visitors.

The Gonder's Flats Interpretive Plan has the following five primary goals including:

- 1) Evoke a sense of understanding and stewardship in visitors to Gonder's Flats
- 2) Interpretation and natural immersion are accessible to all at Gonder's Flats
- 3) Trail wayfinding and infrastructure supports proper trail and nature area etiquette.
- 4) Leverage, support and promote wetland research and wetland benefits.
- 5) Support park-wide Placed Based Learning Initiatives and Revenue Generating Opportunities

To achieve these goals, there are a number of opportunities that can be explored and utilized.

However, the biggest challenge regarding Gonder's Flats is the lack of utilities and amenities which will limit the length of stay and programming opportunities. Therefore the interpretive plan will focus



on shorter term visits and leveraging Gonder's Flats as part of larger park-wide place-based learning initiatives.

Supporting infrastructure

In addition to the viewing nodes, other amenities and interpretive elements will be incorporated into the wetland site. This includes park benches, teaching circles, photo stands and signage such as trailhead signs and interpretive panels. Similar to those used along the Niagara Parks Power Station landscape, a minimum of ten interpretive panels will be developed and installed to Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards. These panels will include static information as well as QR codes to additional content.

To support and encourage citizen science, interpretive panels can provide a QR code linked to iNaturalist, so that visitors can be encouraged to submit their observations of plants and animals. These observations can then be utilized by NPC staff to identify invasive species and/or unique species that may require further management action. Additionally, including a link to surveys can provide critical data on who is using the site, why and possibly answer a number of questions to support various research projects (e.g., Connections to Nature)

Educational Programming

Educational programming will target children/school groups, adults, and families, as well as more specific audiences like new Canadians or professional organizations. Programs could be delivered by staff, volunteers, or strategically aligned naturalist groups. Programs targeted to school groups must be developed, reviewed, and changed to align with keep up with curriculum standards. Recurring general interest programs or school programs like guided hikes can be connected to Group Sales to enhance their offerings.

Gonder's Flats can also be leveraged as part of larger environmental/natural heritage focused tours. Utilizing the model for cultural heritage place-based learning that has been developed by NPC's Heritage and Education departments, there is an opportunity to provide extended tours ranging from 3-6 hours across NPC property. These tours can be tailored to focus on distinct types of habitats, wildlife, ecological restoration techniques, and/or a combination of cultural and natural heritage points of interest. With the completion of the Gonder's Flats Wetland, visitors to Niagara Parks can now experience old growth Carolinian Forest, Black Oak Savannah, prairies and meadows, wetlands, coastal wetlands and aquatic habitats all in a single visit.

Implications

Land Management - Operations

The Gonder's Flat Wetland Restoration project is an example of Niagara Parks' Environmental Stewardship land management approach. Environmental Stewardship is the responsible use, management and protection of the environment in an ethical way that accounts for society's needs both now and in the future. With this concept in mind, the Gonder's Flats wetland was designed to remove the hazards of the dead ash trees and utilize a low maintenance approach. This approach to land management creates greater efficiencies, provides safe and resilient natural spaces for residents and balances land uses such as recreation and tourism with environmental protection. Niagara Parks' operations team will still however need to maintain trail and lookout surfaces to ensure accessibility. In addition, as with most natural areas, invasive species will continue to be monitored and maintained. For example, in 2024, NPC utilized a herd of goats to manage populations of phragmites, a fast and tall growing invasive grass species. This initiative gained over \$1.6 million in earned media, bringing significant local and national attention to NPC's environmental stewardship role.

Financial

The implementation of the Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project did not require any cash resources from NPC. Instead, all funding resources (\$150,000) for construction was secured in partnership through the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, with additional funding support from Ducks Unlimited Canada, Land Care Niagara, Niagara Community Foundation and Ontario Land Trust Alliance.

The implementation of this interpretive plan at Gonder's Flats has an estimated cost of \$140,000 phased in over the next four years. To support the installation of interpretive panels and trailhead signs this summer, \$25,000 within the NPC's 2025/26 Capital Budget has already been approved.

To offset the costs to maintain and enhance Gonder's Flats through educational programming and interpretation, revenue generating opportunities, such as guided tours and hikes, are anticipated to increase over the next four years. Staff will continue to seek out additional funding opportunities to further support the Gonder's Flats restoration and interpretation.

Staffing

Currently, very few staff have the training and knowledge of NPC's restoration projects/sites to provide a public tour as part of an overall environmental placed-based learning program. As Niagara Parks does employ staff at the Niagara Glen Nature Centre with an environmental education background, there is an opportunity to expand their knowledge to other natural areas throughout Niagara Parks. Having a team of environmental interpreters would also support the management of

many other NPC natural areas, such as Dufferin Islands, Queenston Heights, and the Chippawa Battlefield.

Legal and/or Legislative

This initiative does not create any further legal and/or legislative limitations to NPC or adjacent residents. NPC is however bound by the Occupiers Liability Act which ensures that minimum standards to safe trails and properties are met.

Consultation

Staff have engaged in substantial consultation throughout the Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project and the development of the Gonder's Flats Interpretive Plan. The ongoing engagement with adjacent residents has proven to be very effective as NPC has received positive and constructive feedback. This has been further demonstrated by the recommendations provided by adjacent residents to support increased visitation. These same residents have also provided ongoing oversight of the property, informing staff of any unwanted behaviours.

To further support the development of the interpretive plan, staff have also engaged with representatives from a wide range of organizations including the NPCA, Ducks Unlimited, Land Care Niagara, Brock University, Niagara College and nature clubs such as the Niagara Falls Nature Club and Bert Miller Nature Club.

As a primary next step, following the concept "Not about us without us", Indigenous communities will be directly engaged to develop interpretive content and programs as well as to incorporate traditional knowledge into the long-term management of the Gonder's Flats wetland.

This initiative continues to provide NPC with a high-profile opportunity to promote its mandate to protect the natural and cultural heritage along the Niagara River corridor on a local, provincial, and international scale. To showcase this project, NPC and its partners are planning to hold an official grand-opening event in September 2025, to recognize the contributions that NPC and its numerous partners have contributed to the restoration of this significant site.

Alternatives for Consideration

NPC could consider not developing and implementing an interpretive plan, however as the popularity of Gonder's Flats continues to grow, there is a need to proactively educate site visitors about the importance of these sensitive habitats and provide direction on where and how they can interact with the site. Gonder's Flats is already seeing unwanted behaviours such as driving on the walking trails and parking along the shoreline. As is being experienced at Dufferin Islands, there is also a need to

limit human-wildlife interactions, specifically wildlife feeding, within NPC's natural areas. The implementation of an interpretive plan can demonstrate critical messaging through various forms of media and programs without strictly relying on regulatory signage. This plan aims to demonstrate just how important wetlands are to both wildlife and humans, including the mitigation of flooding and improving water quality.

Rationale for Recommendation

NPC's Environmental Stewardship initiatives, such as the Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project have been successful at contributing to NPC's mandate at little to no additional cost and without any long-term legislative restrictions to NPC. The Strategic Plan also includes the direction for environmental management initiatives to address the impacts of invasive species and diversifying NPC's natural areas and habitats while providing superior eco-tourism opportunities. Niagara Parks' natural areas have one of the largest concentrations of rare and endangered species in Ontario. Securement of external funding and partnering with strategically aligned organizations, has allowed NPC to continue to meet these obligations by creating land management strategies and maintenance efficiencies as well as providing safe and functional natural areas which benefits visitors to Niagara Parks, adjacent stakeholders, and the inhabitants within them.

Relevance to Strategic Plan

Directly contributing the goals of Niagara Parks 2018-2028 Strategic Plan, these initiatives assist NPC protect and enhance the natural heritage of the Niagara River corridor. This initiative aligns with the Strategic Plan as follows:

Preserving and showcasing our rich heritage, culture and lifestyle

- NPC's unique natural areas provide eco-tourism and educational value-added opportunities for visitors, showcasing spectacular views memorable adventures.
- The program improves NPC's ability to manage and maintain its natural areas, ensuring they remain safe, resilient and provides essential benefits.

Leveraging and activating our natural wonders and iconic experiences

- Provides an opportunity to promote professional development and build stronger working relationships with strategically aligned agencies.
- This program builds on NPC's image as an international leader in environmental sustainability and education as we utilize best practices.

Supporting a dynamic business environment

- Leverages NPC's existing resources and partnerships to acquire additional funding.
- Contributes to the NPC's activations on the South end of the Niagara Parkway to stimulate visitation and awareness of environmental stewardship.

Taking experiences, services and hospitality to the next level

- A comprehensive program will ensure efficient implementation of projects and reduce maintenance activities, while maximizing staff resources.
- Provides opportunities for the NPC sales department to expand their portfolio of products for clients/ groups such as a Stewardship Tour for corporate clients.

Other Pertinent Reports

[Report 2021-143](#) – Gonder's Flats Restoration Project (Commission Meeting, November 12, 2021)

Prepared by: _____

Name: Corey Burant

Title: Manager, Lands and Stewardship

Submitted by: _____

Name: Marcelo Gruosso

Title: Chief Operating Officer

Authorized by: _____

Name: David Adames

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Date: April 17, 2025

Appendices

Appendix A: Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project Pictures

Appendix A: Gonder's Flats Wetland Restoration Project Pictures



Figure 1: Gonder's Flats Prior to Restoration



Figure 2: Gonder's Flats Coastal Wetland – Installed 2018



Figure 3: Gonder's Flats Wetland Construction



Figure 4: Pond excavation complete



Figure 5 - Gonder's Flats – Fall 2023



Figure 6 – Aerial View of Gonder's Flats – Spring 2024

Report to the Property and Infrastructure Committee

RE: Soka Gakkai International of Canada Update

Recommendation(s)

That the Property and Infrastructure Committee recommends that The Niagara Parks Commission:

1. Receive Report 2025-46 – Soka Gakkai International of Canada Update.
2. Receive and approve the updated design for the SGI peace garden proposal.
3. Delegate authority to the Chair and Chief Executive Officer to complete a formal agreement with Soka Gakkai International of Canada, to Niagara Parks' satisfaction.

Overview

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the design and wording for the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) of Canada peace garden and marker proposed for installation at Locust Grove, and to seek approval for these updated designs in order to move to a formal agreement.

The SGI group is a faith-based non-governmental organization that works to help promote human rights, cultural exchange, access to health care and education, and environmental causes including nuclear disarmament. The group formed in Japan in the 1930s as an off-shoot of Nichiren Buddhism. Since 1983 the group has had consultative status with the UN. The organization works across 192 countries and territories, and has approximately 12 million members.

Niagara Parks was first approached by Soka Gakkai International Canada in March 2021 through the Memorial Tree and Bench program regarding their request to install a modest peace garden at Locust Grove. An initial memo was produced about this request on May 6th, 2021 (Memo 2021-38) which introduced NPC to SGI Canada and their application. That initial request was for the placement of two premium benches, one cherry blossom tree, and “a small memorial monument.” During this early phase there was no location selected for the project, and representatives from SGI noted that they would defer to NPC staff to choose an appropriate site for their request. Since May 2021 this initial request and plan for a peace garden has changed a number of times.

The second report related to the SGI peace garden is Report 2021-107, dated August 12th, 2021. This report pertains to approving Locust Grove as the selected location for the project and contains a significantly updated and expanded landscape plan. Within discussion of Report 2021-107, the Commission requested that NPC staff provide more information on the SGI organization.

The third report, Report 2022-04, dated January 13th, 2022 provided the requested information update regarding the history of the SGI organization and its mandate, and confirmed the location for installation at Locust Grove. This report also provided an archaeological update for the project. SGI paid \$4,477.80 (plus HST) for stage 1 and 2 archaeological assessments of the proposed installation site at Locust Grove, and the site was cleared of archaeological concerns.

Since 2022, correspondence with SGI Canada and proposed plans for a peace garden at Locust Grove have been slowly developing. Due to internal changes at SGI Canada, plans for this project have evolved a number of times. As of February 2025, SGI has met its fundraising targets and plans for the peace garden have gone back to the original proposal from 2021, with a central granite marker and professional landscape surround.

The proposed central granite marker is approximately eleven (11) feet high, composed of an approximately six-and-a-half (6.5) feet high plinth topped by an approximately four-and-a-half (4.5) feet high linear sculpture element fixed on top (image attached as Appendix A). SGI is willing to adjust the proportions of this central marker and an alternate design sketch for the marker has been included in this report with smaller proportions (attached as Appendix B). There will be a quote about peace inscribed on the marker (attached as Appendix C). The quote will appear in four languages, one on each side: English, French, and the two dominant Indigenous languages in Ontario, Anishinaabemowin and Mohawk.

Niagara Parks has been provided with a variety of options for anchoring the central marker based on its final size and weight. SGI has also noted that they would like to purchase two standard Niagara Parks memorial benches for use in the peace garden landscaping. The SGI group is responsible for the full cost of the peace garden proposal, included the central granite marker which is budgeted at \$56,000, along with additional anticipated costs for the two NPC benches and four trees that they have requested surrounding the marker.

The representative from SGI has noted that the purpose of this installation and the quote inscribed on the central marker is to help promote peace in a universal way that will resonate with everyone who visits the site once it is installed at Locust Grove. The SGI group is hoping that construction can be executed during the fall season of 2025. This installation will be pending completion of a formal contract with SGI International of Canada, and all final designs must follow and meet staff direction and approval.

Implications

There are no major costs to NPC to implement this project. SGI has agreed to cover all costs associated with the peace garden proposal including archaeological assessment (which has already been executed), detailed design and engineering, and the full cost of construction/installation. NPC will be responsible for some general landscape restoration including the planting of four native trees.

Consultation

Staff have consulted with senior Niagara Parks staff, Horticulture, and Planning staff and will continue to work with SGI during the installation process. Further, Niagara Parks staff will continue to complete its duty to consult with Partners to ensure the quote is appropriately translated into alternative languages.

Alternatives for Consideration

There are three alternatives for consideration by the Committee. The Committee could recommend to the Board to:

1. not accept this donation; or
2. limit the project to align with the traditional Memorial Tree and Bench Program whereby the proposed quote is solely placed on a tree tag or bench plaque; or
3. propose alternatives to the current iteration of SGI's peace garden which could include:
 - a. reducing the size of the proposed central peace marker (beyond either options shown in Appendix A and Appendix B);
 - b. changing the proposed quote.

The alternatives are not recommended for the following reasons:

SGI has been working with Niagara Parks staff since 2021 in pursuit of this project, and throughout this process they have shown strong commitment and dedication to completing all requested background work at their own expense (including archaeology at the proposed installation site). This has also included a genuine willingness and flexibility to amend designs per staff direction and approval.

Within Report 2021-107, the Commission approved the proposed quote in principle. The report noted that the quote did not meet the typical Niagara Parks threshold for revision by SGI, and therefore staff did not recommend approaching SGI for revisions or alternatives at that time.

Finally, limiting the proposal to the standard Memorial Tree and Bench Program limits the visibility of this quote and its desired intent to promote peace to only those who happen across the individual tree or bench, which was noted in Report 2022-04.

Rationale for Recommendation

The values of SGI to foster world citizenship, to encourage tolerance and respect for human rights, to respect cultural diversity, to promote cultural exchange, and to protect nature and the environment all align with the values of Niagara Parks. Since the spring of 2021, SGI Canada has been working diligently with Niagara Parks staff to fulfill any obligations and requirements asked of them in pursuit of this proposal. Additionally, while the project proposal from SGI does predate the recently approved Niagara Parks Public Art policy (CPM-02-29, approved February 13th, 2025), this project is in alignment with the policy.

Relevance to Strategic Plan

This report's recommendations connect to the following theme within the Strategic Plan:

Preserving and showcasing our rich heritage, culture, and lifestyle:

- Creating a specific peace garden space helps to strengthen the promotion of Niagara Parks by identifying a place of peace, culture, and education for all guests who may visit the Locust Grove location.

Other Pertinent Reports

[Memo 2021-38](#) – Memorial Request – Soka Gakkai International of Canada

[Report 2021-107](#) – Soka Gakkai International of Canada Update

[Report 2022-04](#) – Soka Gakkai International of Canada Update



Prepared by: _____

Name: Rebecca Pascoe

Title: Manager, Cultural Development

Submitted by: _____

Name: Phil Johnson

Title: Director, Cultural Services

Authorized by: _____

Name: David Adames

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Date: May 1, 2025

Appendices

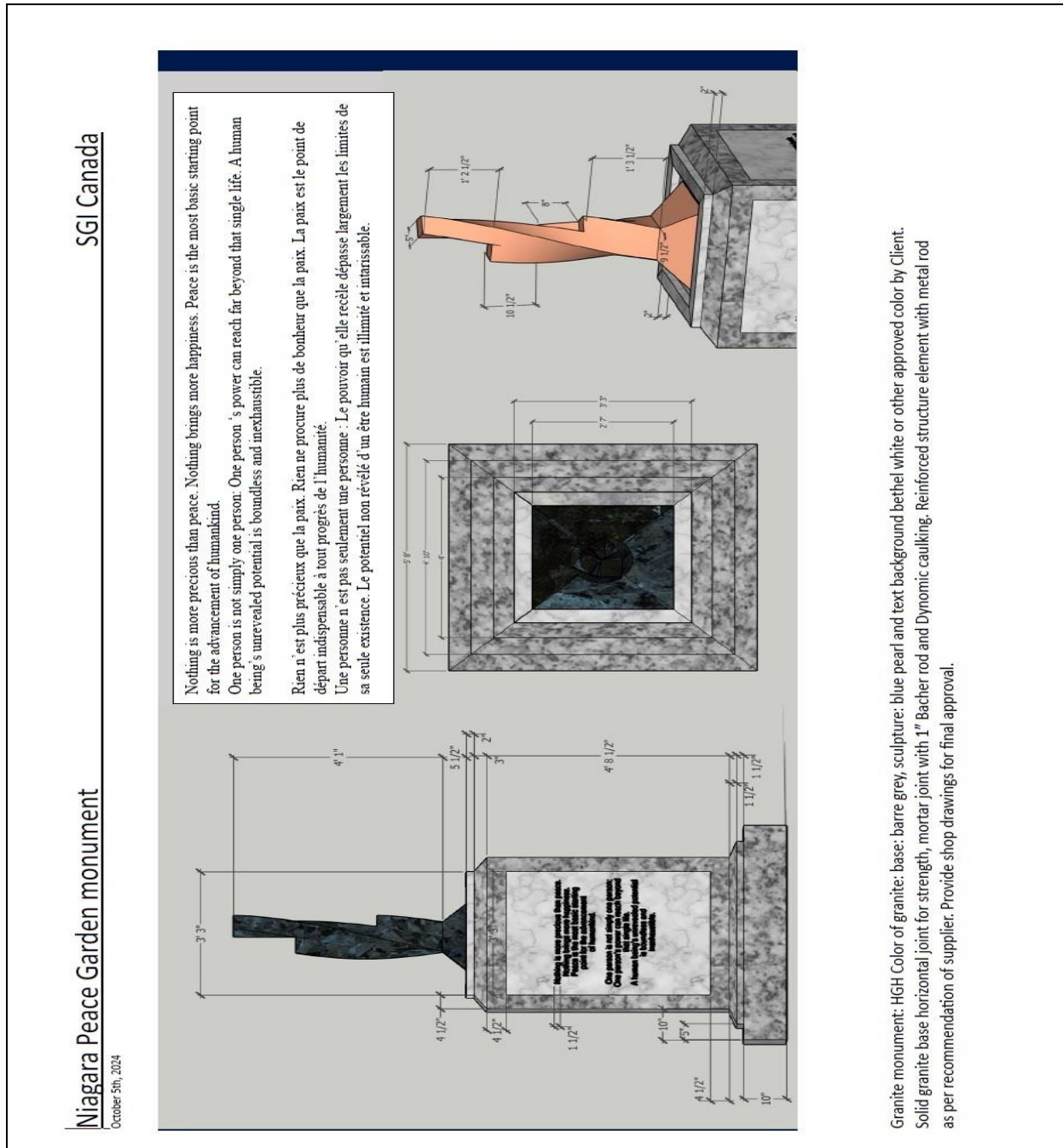
Appendix A: Updated design sketch of proposed SGI Peace Garden central marker

Appendix B: Alternate design sketch of proposed SGI Peace Garden central marker

Appendix C: Proposed Wording for SGI Peace Garden Central Marker

Appendix D: Views of Location for SGI Peace Garden Installation at Locust Grove

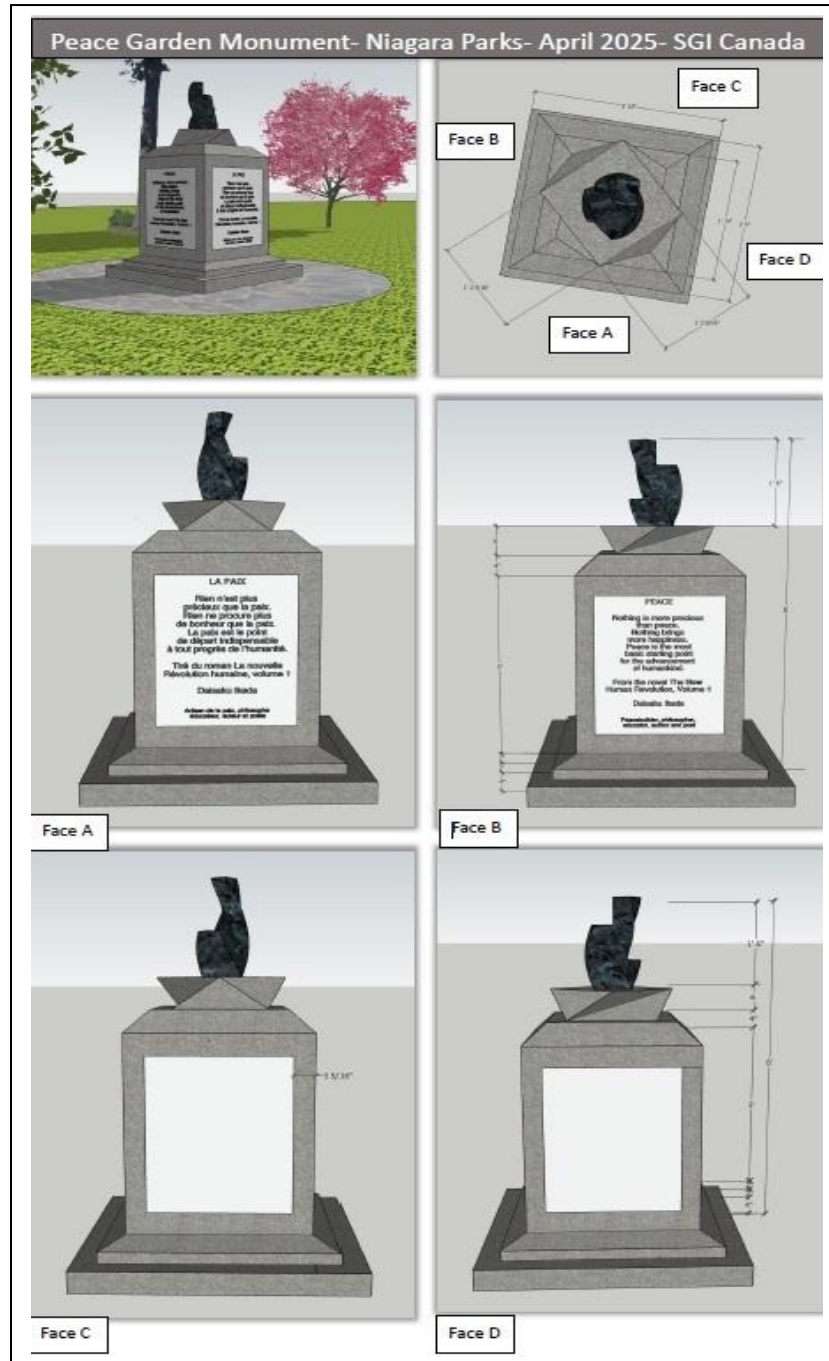
Appendix A: Updated design sketch of proposed SGI Peace Garden central marker



Proposed Peace Garden central marker:

- total height: approx 11' (133.5")
- height of plinth: approx 6.5' (79")
- height of linear sculpture: approx. 4.5' (54.5")

Appendix B: Alternate design sketch of proposed SGI Peace Garden central marker



Proposed Peace Garden central marker:

- total height: 6' (72")
- height of plinth: 4' (48")
- height of linear sculpture: 2' (24")

Appendix C: Proposed Wording for SGI Peace Garden Central Marker

PEACE

Nothing is more precious than peace.

Nothing brings more happiness.

Peace is the most basic starting point
for the advancement of humankind.

—Daisaku Ikeda

Peacebuilder, philosopher,
educator, author and poet

Appendix D: Views of Location for SGI Peace Garden Installation at Locust Grove

