

**ACRE's recommendations and proposed changes to  
Chelsea's Municipal Master Plan  
February 27, 2021**

In both the municipal survey results and ACRE's survey of residents, the number one priority for Chelsea residents, in the context of the Master Plan review, is the protection and conservation of the natural environment. This message from Chelsea residents to the municipal council is clear, supported by evidence, and cannot be ignored if public consultation as part of the Master plan review is to be considered legitimate. Fortunately, there are a number of ways in which the Master Plan can be revised to reflect the values and aspirations of Chelsea residents. ACRE has participated in each phase of the Master Plan review and also met with municipal staff to discuss proposed changes to the Master Plan and to suggest ways in which to integrate nature conservation into the plan's land use zoning. Specifically, ACRE proposes the following changes to the Zoning Plan: 1) Add a "Nature Conservation" land use zone, 2) Add an "Ecological Corridor" land use zone, and 3) change lands currently zoned RUR-C (Rural-in-consolidation) should be Zoned RUR (Rural). In addition to the proposed zoning changes, ACRE asks for the development of bylaws to meet the following two goals: 1) conserving 30% of the land area in Chelsea by 2030 as intact natural ecosystems; and 2) being a carbon neutral community by the year 2035.

Zoning Changes:

**1) Nature Conservation land use zone**

Currently ACRE, a non-profit organization that also acts as a conservation Land Trust, owns and manages five properties in Chelsea (Figure 1). These properties are in the process of being registered as Privately Protected Areas under Quebec's law (Natural Heritage Conservation Act, C-61.01). A nature conservation land use zone in the municipal Master Plan would more accurately reflect the land use and protection status of these properties. A conservation land use zone could also be applied to other protected areas within Chelsea where nature conservation is the primary purpose, e.g., the two servitudes in Quartier Meredith that are owned by Chelsea.

Proposed functions for a conservation land use category include:  
- extensive recreational only

**2) Ecological corridor land use zone**

Gatineau Park is a highly valued part of Chelsea and support for Gatineau Park is extremely strong among Chelsea residents. The park has identified and mapped the boundaries of ecological corridors that are critical to the long-term ecological integrity of Gatineau Park. Parts of three of these ecological corridors are within Chelsea municipality, while a fourth one, the

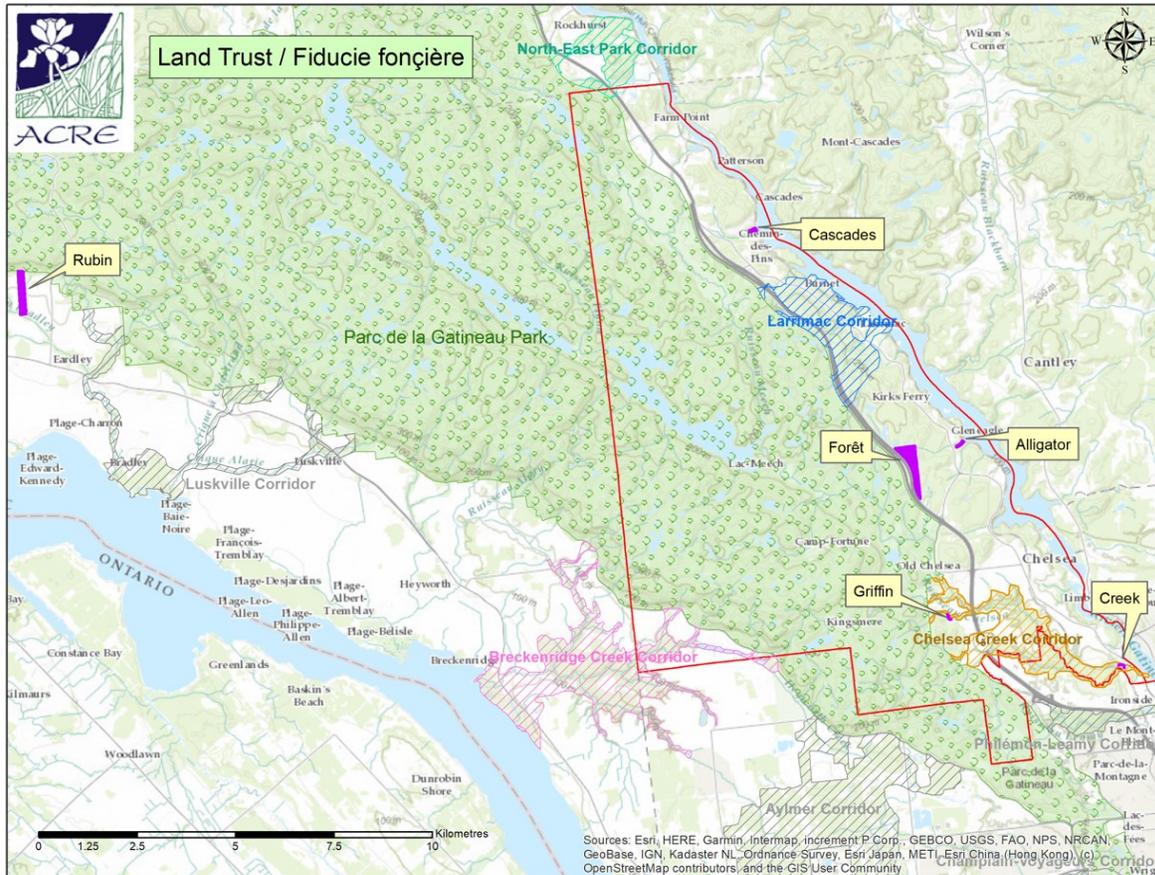
Larrimac corridor, lies fully within Chelsea's boundaries. An 'Ecological Corridor' land use zone could include land use functions and bylaws that ensure any future development must prioritize functional ecological connectivity. As stated in Chelsea's Strategic Vision 2040 report "The Master plan and municipal bylaw review also provides the opportunity to create an ecological corridors development program that could be integrated into the municipality's other planning documents and, in so doing, restore the balance that should exist between municipal development and environmental protection and conservation". Furthermore, one of the proposed actions listed in the Sustainable Development Action Plan is to "ensure connectedness and conservation of ecological corridors".

Proposed functions for a conservation land use category include:

- Residential (with lower overall density and appropriate clustering to retain functional ecological connectivity)
- Villégiature communautaire
- Business and services (with low density and locations to retain functional ecological connectivity)
- Extensive Recreational
- Intensive Recreational (with types and locations to retain functional ecological connectivity)

### **3) Change all land zoned RUR-C to RUR**

Within the rural areas of Chelsea all currently undeveloped and privately-owned lands have been zoned Rural in Consolidation (RUR-C). It is our understanding that the land use type RUR-C was requested by the municipality, which contradicts a key orientation of the MRC Master Plan to minimize and limit development in rural areas and instead focus development in areas that fall within the urban perimeters. In the draft Master Plan the RUR-C land use is for "rural areas in which local developers will be able to pursue ongoing developments and initiate new low-density housing projects". The lands being zoned RUR-C are primarily rural forests bordering low-density neighborhoods that are used primarily for low impact recreation by local residents, i.e., the local forest trails. ACRE's recommendation is to keep these lands zoned as Rural (RUR), which limits development to lots that are already adjacent to existing roads and does not allow the creation of new roads.



**Figure 1.** Map of land trust properties owned by ACRE and Gatineau Park ecological corridors in Chelsea.

**ACRE’s guiding priorities for the Chelsea Master Plan review**

**1. Nature Conservation - protecting 30%**

- Chelsea needs a nature conservation plan, that includes a bylaw to protect 30% of its territory (excluding Gatineau Park) focused on key biodiversity areas, ecological connectivity and ecosystems services (especially water recharge). The 30 % value is based on Canada’s national position and an emerging international consensus under the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- ACRE has done a biodiversity analysis and will map those areas in conjunction with the municipality. Such areas should be considered for Nature Conservation (Green) zoning and the land owners provided with options to get a fair market return on the value of their property (done through community purchase, Ecological Gifts, etc.). ACRE is willing to work with the Municipality and the community to ensure these lands are conserved.
- The citizens of Chelsea are overwhelmingly concerned with improving nature conservation. The evidence is in the community surveys done by ACRE and the Municipality. Nature conservation is the community’s number one priority. It is recognized that we are in the midst of a global

biodiversity crisis and solutions must be found in each municipality as well in other levels of governance.

## **2. Protect ecological corridors of Gatineau Park that are in Chelsea**

- Chelsea should lead on providing protection for the identified ecological corridors that radiate outward from the park. The corridors should be zoned “Ecological corridor” to minimize development. This should be part of a nature conservation bylaw.
- The Municipality of Chelsea should show explicit support for the conservation goals of Gatineau Park and encourage other municipalities in the MRC to do the same. The value of Gatineau Park is well recognized in the citizen's survey.

## **3. A Carbon Neutral Community by 2035**

- Chelsea needs a plan with conditions and bylaws to achieve carbon neutrality by 2035. The plan should include: a) a transparent carbon budget tracking system; b) a requirement that all council decisions be transparently done through a filter of achieving carbon neutrality; c) coupling of Chelsea nature conservation objectives to the municipal carbon budget; d) a progressive tax on residences and businesses burning fossil fuels; e) a requirement that any new developments include the highest standards of construction and transportation planning to achieve carbon neutrality; f) a full transportation strategy aimed at carbon neutrality.
- The World Economic Forum lists climate change as the most significant problem facing humanity. It is an existential threat. Chelsea is a rich and educated community. We need to become carbon neutral far faster than the 2050 date required by the Intergovernmental Panel in Climate Change for the entire planet. This is a moral obligation.

## **4. Smart Development in the right places**

- In the municipal citizens consultation, the recent rapid pace of development was listed as a major concern for citizens. The MRC schema requires two village cores and then areas outside the village cores. For the Chelsea village core, the boundaries contain significant ecological areas, notably intact forest, which should not be turned into high density housing. The existing Chelsea village core boundary needs to be reviewed as it is far bigger than the boundary recommended by the citizens visioning exercise for the Centre Village.
- Outside the village cores, development should be limited and there must be clarity on the densities prescribed in the Golder report. ACRE may support density changes if there is certainty for long-term protection of lands as result. This needs clarity in a bylaw.
- The Larrimac development uses 1-acre lots instead of 2-acre lots, on the basis that the remaining acres would be preserved as a natural ecosystem. Regrettably this is not the case as the residual area is zoned recreo-touristique.