

## **Darts Hill Watercourses and Wetlands Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q. What is a wetland**

- Wetlands are areas of land that are inundated within 30 cm of the surface of the ground with water during any part of the year and support important ecological functions for communities, fish, and wildlife. Some wetlands are considered 'permanent' due to year-round saturation, while some will dry out and only seasonally flood. Types of wetlands vary across regions of the province. Common wetland types include bogs, fens, marshes and swamps.

### **Q. Are there different types of wetlands?**

- Yes, there are many different types of wetlands, all of which perform different ecological services to human communities as well as wildlife populations. Broadly, the measure of a healthy wetland is based on the capacity to perform a range of functions in the environment. Wetland functions are the natural processes that occur in wetlands and may involve sediment trapping, water storage and quality, and maintenance of biotic diversity. Derived from these functions are ecological values such as providing clean drinking water, reducing risk and severity of flooding, and sustaining high levels of biodiversity. Wetlands can also be important island stop-overs for wildlife searching for water, cover and food.

### **Q. Who Regulates Wetlands?**

- While a range of federal and provincial legislation applies to activities on or near wetlands, the Provincial Water Sustainability Act (WSA) is the primary legislation that manages BC water resources and protects all natural sources of water, including seepage from slopes and the ground. No works or changes to or near a wetland can occur without expressed consent from the Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development (MFLNRORD).

### **Q. What happens if a wetland is identified on my property?**

- You cannot undertake development before you retain a Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP) to complete a detailed site-analysis on your property to confirm the presence or absence of mapped and unmapped wetlands. In this instance, a QEP would be a Professional Agrologist or Registered Professional Biologist who has demonstrated education and field experience identifying and delineating wetlands in the field in the Lower Mainland. The Lower Mainland presents challenges to some wetland specialists who may only be familiar with non-disturbed wetland communities. It is the responsibility of a property owner to conduct due diligence prior to development and to take reasonable precautions to ensure compliance with applicable legislation.

### **Q. What's the difference between identified 'wetlands' and 'potential wetlands'?**

- Mapping and identification of wetlands was based on cursory level assessments of three key variables: hydrology, soils, and vegetation. All 3 parameters were required to be met to be

assessed as a wetland. Potential wetlands are areas that had only exhibited varying levels of hydrology (ponding/saturation) and/or marginal vegetation but had questionable levels of soil indicators. As much of the Lower Mainland has been disturbed by human activity over time, vegetation communities have been severely modified and therefore may not present as strongly as soils and hydrology. It is important to note that the delineations are approximate and to be considered preliminary. Final determination with respect to the legal status of wetlands and whether provincial regulation applies requires future site-specific analysis and detailed mapping by a Qualified Environmental Professional.

**Q. Is the City going to initiate additional environmental studies to verify the presence and non-presence of wetlands?**

- The current Stage 2 land use concept reflects the latest environmental study which was conducted in Spring 2020. The study builds on prior environmental assessments and its intent is to be used as a screening tool for future development applications. Wetlands and watercourses identified in the report represent a moment in time. While no additional studies will be initiated by the City, future development applicants are expected to consult with a Qualified Environmental Professional to conduct comprehensive site-specific assessments to inform Provincial and City riparian setbacks or regulatory approval requirements.

**Q. Have all wetlands and potential wetlands in Darts Hill been identified?**

- No, only preliminary wetland mapping has been conducted and represent a high-level assessment of the plan area, based on best available information, to guide general land use planning. Further detailed site assessments and evaluation may identify or confirm presence and classification of additional wetlands or watercourses and or absence of wetlands and watercourses.

**Q. Can I appeal a wetland designation on my property?**

- Proposed changes to or near wetlands require an application and expressed consent from the Provincial Government through the Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development (MFLNRORD) through a WSA Approval. It is important to note that prior to approaching MFLNRORD for changes to a wetland, the City's Planning & Development department should be approached to help discuss the feasibility of the plan and how best to approach the WSA Approval application. The City and the Province will each consider and assess the individual merits of each application based on the type of wetland, its features and functions, and overall ecological value. Development applicant proponents must retain an appropriately Qualified Environmental Professional to assist them from the onset.

**Q. How will the identified wetlands impact the Stage 2 land use plan process?**

- The Darts Hill timeline is on pace to be brought forward as outlined in Corporate Report R021 for Council consideration in Spring 2021. The City will review and refine the plan and inform the community and Citizen Advisory Committee members throughout the Stage 2 planning process while detailed servicing and transportation related studies are conducted.

**Q. What is a Watercourse**

- Watercourses are bodies of water that are connected by surface flow and can be categorized into either constructed ditches or streams.

**Q. How are Watercourses Classified?**

- Watercourses are divided into 4 categories and are colour coded similar to a traffic signal in RED, YELLOW and GREEN to indicate if there is fish habitat present so that any maintenance work that may need to occur in the stream can happen at the right time of the year to prevent impacts. It is important to note that 'fish habitat' includes connectivity to any downstream known fish presence. A ditch or natural stream does not need to have fish present in order to be protected. The City of Surrey follows the definitions of 'fish habitat' laid out in the Federal Fisheries Act and will defer to guidance from Fisheries and Oceans Canada whenever changes in or about a stream are proposed.

**Q. How are Watercourse Setbacks Determined?**

- The Provincial Riparian Area Protection Regulation (RAPR) outlines minimum setbacks (no build zones) called Streamside Protection and Enhancement Areas (SPEA) for land development around watercourses. The RAPR requires local governments to protect SPEAs through regulatory tools such as zoning bylaws and development permit areas. The City of Surrey's Sensitive Ecosystem Development Permit Area (SEDPA) is triggered when development occurs within 50 metres of watercourse. Consequently, development will need to comply with Part 7a of the Zoning Bylaw (the Streamside Protection Bylaw). The City of Surrey's municipal setbacks to streams exceeds the RAPR SPEA in most cases due to an interest in reducing liability to landowners and the public.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact John Nguyen at [john.nguyen@surrey.ca](mailto:john.nguyen@surrey.ca)