



# Town of Huntsville Staff Report

**Meeting Date:** January 28, 2026

**To:** General Committee

**Report Number:** OPS-2026-3

**Confidential:** No

**Author(s):** Tina Scott-Burns, Manager of Parks & Cemeteries

**Subject:** Brunel Lift Locks Capital Repairs

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## Report Highlights

This report seeks approval to commence planning and budgeting for capital repairs and component replacements of the Brunel Lift Locks beginning in 2026.

## Recommendation

**WHEREAS:** Ellis Engineering Inc. performed a comprehensive inspection of the Brunel Lift Locks in 2025 and presented the findings to General Committee on September 24, 2025;

**AND WHEREAS:** The results of the inspection included recommended repair and replacement work, including timelines and preliminary costs;

**NOW THEREFORE, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:** Phase 1 of the Brunel Lift Locks repair and replacement project, as noted in report OPS-2026-3, be approved at a cost of up to \$100,000 in 2026 to be funded through the Parks Capital Reserve;

**AND FURTHER THAT:** Phase 2 of the Brunel Lift Locks repair and replacement project, as noted in report OPS-2026-3, be included in the draft 2027 Mayor's Budget for consideration.

## Background

The site of the locks located off Brunel Road is a part of Huntsville's heritage. This site was not only the lift locks for early boat traffic before highways were constructed, but it was also the site of a major lumber mill which took advantage of the fast-moving waterpower for the mill's operation.

Over the years, this site has been subject to major renovations and reconstruction including the removal of buildings. The change has brought the area to what is now a tourist attraction to view the boats travelling the Muskoka River, as well as a place to picnic in the park and fish below the MNR water-controlled dam.

The last major renovation was in the late 90's when the existing wooden lift lock system was completely replaced with a concrete structure which is in operation today.

In 2015, the Municipal Heritage Committee Citizen Advisory Council supported, via recommendation MHC13-15, that the retaining walls be replaced with modern sustainable molecular material which would not negatively affect the heritage value of the operational Locks.

In 2017, General Committee approved surface patching to the worst areas of the retaining walls at the Locks. A full replacement of the retaining walls was not undertaken due to the fact that, at that time, discussions with the MNRF identified that within a 2-3 year period there was the potential to jointly address the provincially-owned lands and the Locks repairs. Unfortunately, this partnership opportunity has not materialized.

In 2019, rebuilding of the Brunel Locks was included in the draft 2020 capital budget however, due to budgetary constraints, the project was deferred in 2021, via resolution OPS57-19. Since that time, the replacement project has been deferred for a number of years, and staff have been working to repair the existing locks to keep them operational. This was done in an effort to reduce pressures on the budget and timing constraints.

In 2024, staff were directed to hire an engineer to perform a structural inspection and assessment of the Locks and provide a 10-year restoration plan for the related assets. The results of this assessment were presented to General Committee in September 2025 by Ellis Engineering Inc.

## **Discussion**

The comprehensive inspection of the Brunel Lift Locks was completed to assess the current condition of both underwater and above-water components, including the north and south approach walls and the operators' building.

The primary objectives of this assessment were:

- Conduct a visual inspection of the structure and associated components
- Document condition states and identify any performance deficiencies
- Recommend maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation needs as part of a 10-Year Capital Plan

The inspection results and detailed findings were presented to [General Committee in September 2025](#). The recommendations provided will guide future planning and budgeting to ensure the long-term safety and functionality of the Brunel Lift Locks.

There are many recommended capital repairs and component replacements required as a result of the structural assessment. Taking both timing and budgetary constraints into consideration, staff are recommending a phased approach to tackle the project, as follows:

### **Phase 1: 2026**

- Replace Cover Plate Bolts at Access Shafts
- Replace Anchor Bolts at Valve Brackets
- Replace Timber Lock Gate Seals
- Drill Holes in Vertical Steel Posts
- Reconstruct Interlocking Brick Walkways

This work is comprised of smaller repair/replacement items that could be completed without having to close the Locks in 2026. An engineer would be engaged to perform the design work and provide contract administration and engineering services throughout the project.

Total estimated repair/replacement costs, including contingency (20%) and engineering, design and administration services (15%) = \$100,000.

**Phase 2: 2027**

- Clean and Coat Structural Steel
- Replace Northwest Timber Retaining Wall
- Replace Southwest Timber Retaining Wall
- Replace Southeast Timber Retaining Wall
- Visual Inspection - above-water portions
- Comprehensive Inspection of Structure

This work is comprised of larger repair/replacement items that would require closing the Locks for the 2027 season. An engineer would be engaged to perform the design work and provide contract administration and engineering services throughout the project.

Total estimated repair/replacement costs, including contingency (20%) and engineering, design and administration services (15%) = \$2,100,000.

**2025 Locks Operations:**

As part of the recommended Phase 2 noted above, the intention would be to close the Brunel Lift Locks for the 2027 season. In 2025, a summary of the operations has been provided below which notes the total # of boats to go through in a season, broken down by month.

Month	# of Boats
May	0
June	50
July	154
August	244
September	20
October	13
TOTAL	481

Much of the Phase 2 works require a de-watering of the Locks along with extensive permit requirements (since it is in-water work). The environmental impact of the works will affect the permitting and any requirements around permits. If the project was completed over time (ex: over 2 or 3 years), the project would not only be more costly but would also have greater negative impact to the surrounding environment (ex: fish species). By closing the Locks for one season, this would eliminate the need to de-water in the near future.

**Funding:**

The Brunel Lift Locks are currently included in the Town's Asset Management Plan, with annual contributions to the Parks Reserve serving as savings toward their eventual replacement. However, the 2025 Asset Management Plan outlines a parks asset inventory with estimated replacement costs of approximately \$28.6 million, yet only allocated \$100,000 for the locks. The updated replacement estimate of \$2,100,000 was not considered at the time, as it had not been received from the consultant.

Additionally, current annual contribution levels and reserves are insufficient to fully fund the replacement of all park assets. Presently, the Town contributes \$663,683 each year (with a planned annual increase of 10%), while the annual replacement cost identified in the 2025 Asset Management Plan totals \$1.35 million. This results in an annual funding shortfall for parks assets of \$691,296. Staff have initiated efforts to identify grant opportunities that may help offset project expenses.

Should the Parks capital reserve be used to fund this project, projections indicate that the reserve will be in deficit by approximately \$2 million by the end of 2027, based on the four-year capital forecast approved by Council. This proactive strategy aims to alleviate the financial strain on the municipality and support the timely delivery of key infrastructure improvements.

## Options

1. Approve Phases 1 & 2 of the Brunel Lift Locks project, as noted in Report OPS-2026-3 to be funded through the Parks Capital Reserve (**recommended**)
2. Approve Phase 1 of the Brunel Lift Locks project and split Phase 2 over a period of 2 years to ensure that the Locks remain open during boating season (not recommended)
3. Do not approve the Brunel Lift Locks project (not recommended)

## Capital

The Brunel Lift Locks, and all of its components, are already included in the Town's Asset Management Plan. The Phase 1 project costs however have not been included in the 2026 Mayor's Budget so approval of the project is necessary to move the project forward in 2026, otherwise the project would come forward through the 2027 budget process.

In 2026, the Phase 1 project costs are estimated to be approximately \$100,000 as noted above which is recommended to be funded through the Parks Capital Reserve. The intention is that any grant funding received for this project would help to offset the amount that would need to be funded through the Reserve. In discussions with potential funders, it is anticipated that the project costs could be eligible for up to 50% funding, however, approvals have not yet been secured. Council approval of a project is necessary in order to secure such funding approvals.

The Phase 2 project costs are estimated to be approximately \$2.1M as noted above. These costs, and associated funding, are expected to be included in the draft 2027 Mayor's Budget.

## Council Strategic Direction

- Balanced Growth-1.3: Develop an implementation plan and financial strategy to advance the Waterfront Development Strategy.
- Protected Natural Environment-1.1: Continue to apply best practices in maintaining our natural heritage features.
- Stable, Trusted & Engaged Community Partner-2.1: Create, implement, and invest in the Town's Asset Management Plan, including long-term financing strategies.
- Stable, Trusted & Engaged Community Partner-2.2: Continue to seek alternative funding sources from other levels of government, including grants, sponsorships, and partnerships.

## Consultations

Brandon Hall, Operations Manager  
Reva Frame, Director of Corporate and Community Strategy  
Ellis Engineering Inc.  
NOHFC Representatives

**Respectfully Submitted:** Tina Scott-Burns, Manager of Parks & Cemeteries

**Manager Approval (if required):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Director Approval:** Randy Bissonette, Director of Operations

**CAO Approval:** Denise Corry, Chief Administrative Officer