

Bring Back the Don

SEASONAL UPDATE

Spring 2010

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On your marks... Grow: A new source for Toronto

Greg Fenton, Task Force Member

In 1793 John Graves Simcoe chose Toronto as the site for the capital of Upper Canada because of the value of the natural harbour. The Don River emptied into a marsh at the eastern edge of the harbour; it was an essential rest-stop for birds on their North-South migratory highway.

As Toronto industrialized, the marsh became polluted and was viewed as a health risk. By 1912 the solution was to fill in the marsh and the port lands were formed. The Don was made to end unceremoniously at the Keating channel in an unnatural 90-degree right-hand turn.

In the last 50 years the port lands have declined to the point of now being largely vacant, post-industrial lands at the centre of Canada's largest city. In the late 1980's concerned citizens started to put together a vision of an alternative that today stands poised

to revitalize the eastern end of the city's waterfront.

A new vision for the mouth

This summer, the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and Waterfront Toronto intend to submit to the Provincial and Federal governments, the Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection Environmental Assessment (EA) which proposes a new mouth for the Don. The plan covers 125 hectares from the West Don Lands at King Street East and River Street south to the Ship Channel, and from the East Bayfront (Parliament Street slip) to the Don Roadway.

Central to the plan is a naturalized mouth for the Don with 12 hectares of aquatic habitat; 13 hectares of wetlands and levees; and 21 hectares of upland forest, parks and open space. This is balanced



The plan today for a newly re-naturalized Don River mouth.

with new neighbourhoods of 12,500 homes, schools, recreational and cultural centres, commercial and retail space.

The plan serves two purposes: reducing the risk of river flooding, and creating a new green heart for the City of Toronto that presents an opportunity to lead the world in environmentally friendly urban regeneration.

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At Issue

John Wilson, Task Force Chair

Our Task Force has fought to minimize the negative impacts of dumping snow in the Don Valley. Several years ago the Works Department agreed to our request to make the Pottery Road Snow Dump the dump of last resort, while staff explored other measures for winter snow removal. Since then, the Pottery Road dump has not been needed. Last year, the General Manager of Transportation Services, having worked hard to find suitable alternatives, “delisted” the Pottery Road dump, and it became a potential restoration site.

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don has renamed the site “Cottonwood Flats”, and with help from Urban Forestry staff we have developed a preliminary design for renaturalization. The plan involves landscape restoration, aquatic habitat improvement in an old mill race, and a sustainable trail system. Cottonwood Flats now sits like an empty “donut hole” in the middle of high-quality natural surroundings, including Crothers’ Woods, Sun Valley “Trees Across Toronto” site and Beechwood wetland. As the flats return to nature they will become the centre of Toronto’s largest habitat patch in the Don.

Thanks to Task Force member Councillor John Parker and former member Jane Pitfield for their leadership on this issue.



Ontario’s Greenbelt was created in 2005 to protect Southern Ontario’s farmland and natural areas from urban sprawl. Rules for its expansion were announced in 2008. At that time our Task Force asked the minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing



to allow the inclusion of river valleys like the Don to sustain vital habitat linkages between the Greenbelt and the Great Lakes.

That worked out well! On February 26, 2010 Mayor David Miller, Minister Jim Bradley and Councillor Paula Fletcher announced the Greenbelt will be expanded to include the Don and Humber valleys, permanently protecting their natural heritage. City staff are now working to draft the formal request that the city must present to the province. Thanks to Toronto Environmental Alliance and congratulations to Task Force member Councillor Fletcher for her leadership.



Last November Toronto was awarded the 2015 Pan Am Games and the West Don Lands was announced as the location of the Athletes’ Village. This will jump-start the positive redevelopment of the West Don Lands, an integral part of restoring the mouth of our urban watershed. The Athletes’ Village is intended to conform to the Precinct Plan developed by Waterfront Toronto and approved by City Council. It is critical that the village be built for the long-term, and that it meets the high sustainability standards that the Precinct Plan sets out.

No part of the Pan Am facility is on lands designated for renaturalization at the Don mouth. Without positive developments like these, our urban watershed will remain broken. Congratulations to Task Force member Councillor Pam McConnell for her leadership on the West Don Lands plans.

Pottery Road Reconstruction

By John Routh, Task Force Vice-Chair

Pottery Road is not very long but it provides a useful connection between downtown and East York. Before the Bayview Avenue extension was built in the 1950s, it ran from Hillside Drive all the way down and back up again connecting to the south end of Leaside. Now it just ends at Bayview Avenue at the bottom of the Don Valley. As a connecting road, it is heavily used. Unfortunately it is in a state of poor repair and is badly in need of upgrades.

The city’s Transportation Services Division is planning to do some major work this summer. Starting in June and lasting for at least six months the road will be completely resurfaced and landscaped. This will mean that the road will be closed to through traffic for the length of the project. Access to Todmorden Mills and Fantasy Farms will be maintained by dividing the work into two phases. The first phase will be from Broadview Avenue to the bottom of the hill. The



PHOTO TAKEN BY JOHN ROUTH

second phase will be on the bottom half from Bayview Avenue to the Don Valley Expressway overpass.

When finished, the road will have improved pedestrian access as well as a smooth ride for motorists. In the meantime users of the road will have to find alternate routes such as Bloor Street East or Gerrard Street East to make their way across the Don River.

New Trail in the East Don

By Albert Fong, Task Force Volunteer

The East Don River south of Lawrence Avenue East features a number of parks that are only loosely connected. This spring a new trail will open that will link two of these parks. A newly constructed bridge near the Wynford Heights trail provides a long awaited connection between Milne Hollow Park at Lawrence Avenue East and a park that is accessed from Wynford Heights Crescent. Even though it is close by the Don Valley Parkway, this section of the East Don River has retained a degree of tranquility which is a wonderful surprise.



PHOTO TAKEN BY ALBERT FONG

New bridge on East Don River, just north of CN bridge.

JOIN US!!

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don

is looking for volunteers for three working teams: Policy and Planning; Communications, Outreach and Marketing; and Habitat Restoration.

Policy and Planning: this team considers important planning initiatives and promotes policy revisions that involve the Don Watershed. Current issues include: development of a Don Valley multi-use trail; amendments to the City of Toronto

Official Plan; Don Mouth Naturalization and Flood Protection Project; Don and Waterfront trunk sewers.

Communication, Outreach & Marketing:

this team works to raise awareness of issues, and to build links among the various groups active throughout the Don Watershed. If you have media/public relations experience and would like to help manage projects/events, this team is for you.

Habitat Restoration: this team helps to protect existing valuable habitat, restore

degraded areas and create new natural areas. Current activities include: plans for habitat restoration and wetland creation; invasive species problems and control methods; stormwater ponds and parking lot designs.

Come and share your ideas! Call 416-392-0401 or send an email to bringbackthedon@gmail.com for information about dates and locations of team meetings.

City of Toronto Don Community Events

Events happen rain or shine, and usually last a couple of hours. Please come prepared for outdoor work (sturdy footwear, sunscreen, etc.).

Saturday, April 24, 10 a.m. – noon Trees Across Toronto!

Join us for this signature event to learn how to plant a tree and help us grow our urban forest. Four locations across the City:

- Broadacres Park
- Earl Bales Park
- McCowan District Park
- Milliken Park

Visit www.toronto.ca/tapp for maps and more details.

Saturday, May 1, 10 a.m. – noon East Don Restoration Event

Join us to continue enhancing the new wetland, south of Cummer Avenue.

The event will include tree and shrub planting as well as general restoration and maintenance of the parkland. Enter the East Don Trail at Cummer Avenue, and look for signs to the site. Partner: East Don Parkland Partners

Sunday, May 2, 10 a.m. – noon 2nd Annual Pedal the Don bike hike

Join Bring Back the Don for a free bike hike parallel to TRCA's popular "Paddle the Don". Ride the 17 km. DonValleytrails from Lawrence and Yonge (southeast side in the park next to the library) to the Mouth of the Don at Lake Shore Blvd. Register at www.pedalthedon.ca (<http://www.pedalthedon.ca/>).

Saturday, May 15, 10 a.m. – noon Windfields Park Community Planting

Join us as we help to naturalize the banks of the Don River with native trees and shrubs. Follow the signs from the park entrance beside the Banbury

Community Centre or take the Wilket Creek Trail south from York Mills Rd., just west of Bayview Ave. Partner: Friends of the Don East.

Other Events in the Don

Many other groups host community activities in and around the Don Watershed:

Friends of the Don East

Please visit www.fode.ca or call 416-657-2800 for a listing of FODE events.

Lost Rivers Walks

Please visit www.lostrivers.ca

Taylor Massey Project

For event schedule, check www.thetmp.org

Evergreen Brick Works

For a list of Evergreen events at 550 Bayview Avenue, visit www.evergreen.ca

On your marks... Grow: A new source for Toronto

Continued from cover page

Support from the grassroots

The environmental assessment has been a four year long process. It was often very technical addressing complex issues of hydrology, ecology and urban design. The completion of the EA will be the culmination of a long planning process whose roots can be traced back to a public meeting at the Ontario Science Centre in 1989. It channeled the passions of community activists, inspired the broader community to become actively engaged in finding and implementing solutions, and sparked the birth of the Task Force to Bring Back the Don.

From this initial groundswell of engagement, the Task Force proposed a vision of returning wetlands to the mouth of the Don in 1991 as part of the seminal "Bringing Back the Don". By 2001, the idea of transforming part of the Port Lands into a naturalized

river mouth had become enshrined in the City of Toronto's Central Waterfront Secondary Plan and shortly thereafter the EA was initiated by the TRCA on behalf of Waterfront Toronto.

Twenty years of citizen support have got the dream of a new naturalized mouth of the Don to the starting line, but the onward investment is significant and **this project now needs all our support to get underway**. It's important to recognize the investment's broad and diverse return: a restored and re-naturalized centrepiece for Toronto's harbour, flood protection for hundreds of existing homes and businesses, new communities in former industrial lands, and an opportunity to showcase climate positive development in Canada's largest city. Can we grow a newly restored source for Toronto's future?



Imagine yourself at the re-naturalized mouth of the Don.

Find out more about the plans for the Lower Don Lands and Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection EA at <http://www.trca.on.ca/protect/environmental-assessment-projects/don-mouth-naturalization-and-port-lands-flood-protection-project/> or at www.waterfronttoronto.ca under Projects – Lower Don Lands. Write to your councillor, MPP and MP to let them know that you support a naturalized Don Mouth, flood protection and regeneration in the Lower Don Lands. And look for ways to learn more and get involved – imagine yourself at the re-naturalized mouth of the Don.

THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS!

The Task Force would like to thank the City of Toronto and the many individuals, corporations, community organizations, and school groups that continue to support our projects so that together we can "bring back the Don".

DOING RESEARCH ON THE DON?

Check out the information on our website, www.toronto.ca/don. The Toronto Public Library has a collection of related materials at its Urban Affairs Branch in Metro Hall, 55 John Street (John at King). Call 416-397-7241 for more information.

BRING BACK THE DON

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don is a 23-member citizens' group sponsored by the City of Toronto that works to "bring back" a clean, green and accessible Don River watershed.

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don
Metro Hall
23rd Floor
55 John Street
Toronto ON M5V 3C6

For information about events or activities, please call 416-392-0401.

Bring Back the Don events are also posted on the City of Toronto's web site: www.toronto.ca/don



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