

EX12.1- Ravine Strategy Implementation-Executive Committee consideration on Jan 23, 2020_Lenka Holubec

23 January, 2020

via email: exc@toronto.ca

Re: **EX12.1- Ravine Strategy Implementation Executive Committee consideration on Jan 23, 2020**

Dear Mayor Tory and members of Executive Committee,

I appreciate having this opportunity to raise my comments.

Today, Jan 23rd 2020, Executive Committee's consideration on Ravine Strategy Implementation is important and timely.

It would be no overstatement to say that how Toronto will face major challenge of mitigating climate change intertwined with fast evolving biodiversity loss, while at the same time coping with pressures of rapid growth, may very well determine a measure of this city's success and sustainability for a long run.

In early October last year, the City Council adopted Declaring Climate Emergency, Biodiversity Strategy and more recently another needed efforts - Parkland Strategy.

Pace and audacity of implementation of these combined major initiatives and how the City manages growth near Toronto's Environmentally Significant Areas and ravines will be critical for whether we succeed in keeping nature in our city now and for the long term.

Therefore:

- **I am urging Executive Committee to uphold Toronto Ravine Strategy Principle 1: Protect and make it a strong pillar for all other components, since there is no ravine, wildlife, ecological integrity, ecosystem services or opportunity to connect people in the city with nature, unless this nature remains unimpaired.**
- **I am requesting implementing of existing provincial and municipal policies guiding the city building decisions in respect to natural heritage and adopting of this legal frame into Ravine Strategy Implementation as much as into other initiatives - Biodiversity Strategy and Parkland Strategy.**

"Protecting Toronto's natural environment and urban forest should not be compromised by growth, insensitivity to the needs of the environment, or neglect." The City Official Plan, 3.4 THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Ravine Implementation Strategy Report is a multilayer plan consisting of many types of ideas.

When reading Report's **1. Background: The Ravine System**, I was struck by description - *"Ravines are **also** important natural refuges in the city, and contain most of Toronto's Environmentally Significant Areas"* appearing towards the end of this segment chronology. Perhaps we still need some time to figure out priorities.

"Ravines provide an exciting opportunity to connect people in the city with nature. Approximately 30 percent of Toronto's population lives within 500m of ravines, and some areas in close proximity to ravines will see considerable population growth in the coming years, such as Don Mills and Eglinton, the Lower Don, and more. Ravines play a vital role in connecting people with nature and provide essential access to urban greenspace and opportunities for passive and active recreation which contributes to the physical and mental health and well-being of residents. They offer unique tourism destinations, attracting visitors from across the region and

elsewhere. A 2017 study found that Toronto's ravines provide over \$800 million in services every year from nature-based recreation, avoided health care costs due to inactivity, and reduced rates of depression (see Attachment B).

Ravines are **also** important natural refuges in the city, and contain most of Toronto's Environmentally Significant Areas, forests, wetlands, floodplains, and many varieties of plants and animals, including significant species. They support biodiversity and provide essential habitat for wildlife, including globally important flyways for migrating birds. When people are engaged in Toronto's ravines, they can be inspired to take responsibility for the natural environment and become involved in affecting positive change."

- Report also mentions **2. Ravine System Challenges**

"Some of the new development and intensification will occur near the ravine system, and many people will rely on the ravine system for access to greenspace, outdoor recreation and active transportation routes, including ravine trails. **Responding to these trends, ravines must be able to attract and engage increasingly urban and diverse populations.**

Without investment and protection that increased activity also has the potential to harm natural areas and damage ravine ecosystems. Ravines are subject to increasing pressures from recreational use, encroachments from adjacent private property, and illegal activities such as dumping of waste and off-leash dog activity. In many areas, we are loving our ravines to death."

One of the really important roles for the City to play is to ensure that we have clarity as to where growth will go, as well as where growth won't go.

We cannot blame people for loving nature-parks to death if poor planning decisions are made and no mitigation at all available, while thousands more users are virtually thrown into natural heritage nearby. If trails become never ending procession of people and pets, there is not too much in terms of wildlife able to stick around. Apparently High Park could be well on this way, despite of all its still remaining richness and long term restorative efforts.

Recent UN Biodiversity Report defines as driver #1 of biodiversity loss land use change followed by overexploitation, climate change, pollution and invasive species.

Planning decisions where to grow and where to protect are the back bone of the long term city vision of keeping remaining core natural heritage ecological health and sustainability.

Ravines contain most of Toronto natural heritage and protecting and enhancing of this nature refuge ecological health is essential for fighting off biodiversity loss and this way providing connection to nature for communities.

This precious connection grows from awareness and respect not necessarily off more active use.

Protected areas are vital for conserving biodiversity and many studies have shown that they do contribute to the persistence of biodiversity - we just need to remember that protection requires more than just a designation - it requires management of public use and good planning decisions.

Fully implementing of existing protection policies when making city building decisions near natural heritage system and integrating of this legal frame into Ravine Strategy Implementation and other initiatives - Parkland Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy - is not an option but necessity if we are serious about protecting of remaining Toronto's nature ecological health and mitigating major challenges of our time – climate change and biodiversity loss.

The City has officially fully adopted PPS 2014 changes into OP amendment No. 262 to the Official Plan of the City of Toronto with respect to the Environmental Policies and Designation of Environmentally Significant Areas, CITY OF TORONTO BY-LAW No. 1158-2015, adopted by the City Council unanimously in 2015 and approved by Province in May 2016.

- Fast forward towards **Next Steps:**

"Initiate Ecosystem Services Working Group in early 2020, to bring together experts from the City of Toronto, TRCA, academia and other levels of government. This group will develop **a made-in Toronto approach to ecological integrity (EI)** and a monitoring framework that will recognize the complex and dynamic nature of urban ecosystems (report back to I&E Q4 2020)."

This builds on the **City of Toronto Natural Heritage Study-Final Report - A project in Partnership between City of Toronto and TRCA, December 2001** when “**A “made in Toronto” approach** was adopted, through which a natural heritage system was defined by combining terrestrial, aquatic, geophysical and hydrological data layers using geographical information(GIS) software.

That was time period when an acute awareness of having to protect remaining valuable natural areas in Toronto was prominent which resulted in formulating of objectives towards protection, mapping and designation of natural heritage in the Province and municipally between 2009-2012 and laying down of the grounds for Environmentally Significant Areas as we know it today.

We’ve come a full circle.

I am urging the Executive Committee not to let “*the urgent get in the way of the important*” in respect to Ravine Strategy Implementation.

Sincerely,

Lenka Holubec

Background:

Biodiversity Conservation

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION-A Call for Action for Canadian Decision-Makers

"There is no recovery from extinction, it is forever and unlike climate change whose impacts will be felt by many of the world's population in the future, biodiversity loss is here now in the present, there is no future discounting."

The three critical drivers augmenting biodiversity loss are our disconnected relationship to the land, over consumption and habitat loss.

One of the major barriers is the will to act—at all scales from our individual homes and gardens, to our workplaces and schools, to every level of governments. Unfortunately, we have a political system where “**the urgent always gets in the way of the important**”.

<https://www.changingtheconversation.ca/biodiversity-action-agenda>

OPA 262 CITY OF TORONTO BY-LAW No. 1158-2015

To adopt Amendment No. 262 to the Official Plan of the City of Toronto with respect to the Environmental Policies and Designation of Environmentally Significant Areas.

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/bills/2015/bill1173.pdf>

d) Chapter 4: Land Use Designations

Land use designations are a key implementation tool for protecting the City's natural environment by directing growth away from the City's protected natural areas most of which are contained within lands designated as Parks and Open Space Areas. In addition to providing protection, the Parks and Open Space Areas policies allow for limited development which is compatible, minimizes adverse impacts on natural features and meets the Development Criteria in Parks and Open Space Areas. Policies are amended enhance protection for natural heritage features.

Section 3.4 Natural Environment, non-policy text, Page 3-24 third paragraph is amended by:

"Human settlement has dramatically changed the landscape of Toronto. **Our remaining natural heritage features and functions require special attention.** They are an evolving mosaic of natural habitats that supports the variety of nature in the City and provide important ecosystem functions. The City's significant natural heritage features and functions are shown as the natural heritage

system on Map 9. **The natural heritage system is important to the City, both within and beyond our boundaries and needs to be protected for the long term. It is made up of areas where protecting, restoring and enhancing the natural features and functions should have high priority in our city-building decisions.** We must be careful to assess the impacts of new development in areas near the natural heritage system. The size of this adjacent impact zone will vary across the City, depending on the local characteristics of the natural heritage system and adjacent areas. The natural heritage system shown on Map 9 is an evolving natural system that may grow beyond these boundaries. There are other areas with natural heritage value that are not shown on the map. As well, there may be other such areas in the future that will have to be identified and protected."

"Since early 90th, there was a growing awareness in the City of Toronto of having to protect remaining valuable natural areas. Too often in the past, we have considered green space as an afterthought, what was left over after development took its course"

<http://trca.on.ca/trca-user-uploads/MetropolitanWaterfrontPlan.pdf>

Metropolitan Waterfront Plan, Metropolitan Planning Department, Feb 1994

An ecosystem approach recognizes the dynamic and complex interactions of natural and human communities and processes.

The Plan is intended to ensure that there is a balance of uses along the waterfront, that sensitive environmental and heritage areas are protected, that green space and access to it are expanded, and that sites of importance to the region's economic vitality are maintained and improved.

For example, the transportation corridors are crucial for mobility and enterprise within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), which includes Metropolitan Toronto and the four regional municipalities of Durham, Halton, Peel, and York, encompassing an area of over 7,060 square kilometres. The Plan directs that the demands of both local and regional access must be accommodated. It should be easier for people travelling by public transit, by bicycle, and on foot to overcome the barriers posed by expressways and railway lines. But there must still be regional vehicular access to and through the waterfront.

Some natural areas need to be protected from human traffic, while other parts of the waterfront are clearly people places that provide for recreational opportunities, cultural events and commercial activity. The Plan aims to protect certain sites, particularly those significant natural resources within a defined Waterfront Environmental Impact Zone (see Chapter 5), and endeavours to reconnect the natural systems along the waterfront.

Competing demands for rare waterfront resources must be managed, and priorities identified. The policies protect and enhance public places for human activities, and encourage public and private development to fit better into the overall character of the waterfront. The result should be a social and built environment that is compatible with the natural one.

An Ecosystem Approach

An ecosystem is a network formed by the interaction of living things, including humans, with one another and with their habitat. The waterfront planning process takes an ecosystem approach that recognizes the dynamic and complex interactions of natural and human communities and processes, on a scale from the microscopic to the global. This approach to planning implies the recognition of natural boundaries, necessitating a greater degree of inter-governmental collaboration. It also requires policies that recognize a broader spectrum of issues and which take into account connections between the various components of the ecosystem.

In the urban context, the planning priority is to ensure that we benefit from the natural system while not unduly impairing natural processes. The state of the ecosystem's health is vitally important to Metropolitan Toronto. Water quality, for example, influences public health and recreational opportunities for residents. Public works facilities play an essential role in safeguarding a high quality of life.

Too often in the past, we have considered green space as an afterthought, what was left over after development took its course. We now realize that if any natural spaces are to remain, we must take a pro-active approach to saving them.

The ecosystem approach requires us to look beyond a particular site to what is happening in the next bay and in the whole watershed, and to have regard for cumulative impacts. A new structure in the lake at one site may destroy the beaches at another. Factors outside the shore area, such as upstream activities, have a major impact on the quality of the shoreline environment. All elements of the community have complex and changing relationships that require coordination and consideration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the year 2000 the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority was commissioned by the City of Toronto to undertake a study of natural heritage features and their status within the newly amalgamated City. The goal was to provide a preliminary framework in support of the natural heritage policies of the new City of Toronto Official Plan. This included:

- Providing an inventory of ecological information;
- Informing the development of natural heritage policies; and
- Providing a tool to identify a natural heritage system within a functional framework that is designed to address biodiversity and ecosystem needs, while recognizing urban context and multiple-use values.

The inventory was developed by a combination of "desktop" exercises such as literature review and aerial photography interpretation and supplemented with field investigation. A "Made in Toronto" approach was adopted, through which a natural heritage system was defined by combining terrestrial, aquatic, geophysical, and hydrological data layers using geographical information systems (GIS) software. A complete list of these data layers is found in Section 4 of the report. It is recognized that the data layers have some limitations, and that there is as yet no system available for an integrated evaluation of all of them. Furthermore, field surveys have not been undertaken at many sites. It should therefore be recognized that lack of data does not imply lack of significance. As a result, the "Made in Toronto" approach proposes that the natural heritage system should be seen as a functional framework that will continue to evolve over time as new information or evaluation systems become available.

Two products have been produced as deliverables. The first is this report, which summarizes the study methodology and results and outlines some key directions for natural heritage protection and restoration. Maps

included in the report are designed to illustrate study results and the types of data collected, but are not of a scale which allows for close examination of details. This ability is provided through the second product, which is a series of GIS data sets and a user access tool delivered in laser disc format (see Figure 1). This allows the user to view and overlay natural heritage and land use data layers in any combination at scales ranging from the entire city to individual sites. The tool also includes a template for transferring on screen data to printed map format.

APPROACH

Using a comprehensive evaluation system already devised, the terrestrial study is the largest component of the inventory. The methodology applied is the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) Terrestrial Natural Heritage Approach which scores and ranks biodiversity at landscape, vegetation community and species levels.

The landscape analysis evaluates habitat patch conditions related to size, shape, and the surrounding landscape matrix, as well as total habitat cover and distribution. The landscape analysis is also applied to one hypothetical modelled scenario (Appendix E) in order to illustrate how the data can be used to evaluate a multitude of possible future scenarios for increasing habitat values.

Detailed information on the individual vegetation community types within habitat patches is provided for approximately 60 percent of the city's known natural areas by a combination of digitized new and older life science study information. Approximately half of this coverage is provided through field inventories conducted in 2000, using the Ecological Land Classification System (ELC). Information utilized from previous studies is translated to ELC categories in order to maintain a consistent data standard. Flora and fauna species of concern are included in the vegetation communities coverage.

The aquatic component of this report used a variety of information sources to describe and