

Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan

Date: March 15, 2024

To: Planning and Housing Committee

From: Interim Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning

Wards: Ward 2 - Etobicoke Centre and Ward 3 - Etobicoke-Lakeshore

SUMMARY

The Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan is a non-statutory planning document that helps to guide land use decisions and acts as a resource to inform initiatives related to natural heritage restoration and flood remediation. The Plan was developed by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) in collaboration with City Planning and Toronto Water staff, and staff from the Region of Peel, City of Mississauga, City of Brampton, Town of Caledon, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Greater Toronto Airports Authority.

The Plan will be finalized after presentation to the Board of the TRCA later this year. This staff report indicates the City of Toronto's commitment to continuing to collaborate with the TRCA and regional partners to undertake its implementation.

The Plan and its management actions align with many existing City of Toronto policies and ongoing programs and strategies. The Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan, and watershed planning more broadly, is a requirement of Provincial policy. The Plan has and will continue to inform land use and infrastructure planning decisions, municipal programs and help identify opportunities to protect, enhance and restore the health of the watershed, including important natural features and areas. Ongoing collaboration and support by TRCA, the municipalities in the watershed, partners and watershed stakeholders/residents will be key to the successful implementation of the Plan and to achieving the vision for the watershed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Interim Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, recommends that:

1. City Council endorse the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan, in Attachment 1 to this report, and direct the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to advise the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Board of Directors of the City's ongoing commitment to implementation.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

City Planning confirms that there are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations included within this report in the current budget year or future budget years.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This report presents the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan, which will be implemented at the municipal level throughout the watershed area. This regional watershed-scale plan provides guidance to municipalities to protect, enhance and restore the health of the watershed and build resiliency to land use and climate change impacts. A healthy Etobicoke Creek watershed will help ensure safe and sustainable waterways, ecosystems and human communities.

CLIMATE IMPACT STATEMENT

One of the core goals of the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan is to improve climate resiliency. Through the development of the Plan modeling was conducted to better understand the impacts of future weather models to the ecosystem health of the watershed. The Plan's implementation will better integrate climate adaptation planning with land use decisions and natural area restoration programs.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on June 15, 2022, City Council adopted Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 583, including Official Plan updates related to the environment and climate change (Item PH34.1). This included the addition of policies and non-policy language advancing the importance of watershed planning, mapping of the Water Resources System, and refining mapping to the Natural Heritage System. The OPA is before the Minister and Municipal Affairs and Housing and is awaiting approval before coming into force.
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.PH34.1>

At its meeting on July 14, 2021, City Council adopted the Toronto Green Standard, Version 4 (Item PH25.17). This includes updated performance measures that, amongst others, require new development to prepare Stewardship Plans where development is within or adjacent to the Natural Heritage System.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.PH25.17>

At its meeting on January 29, 2020, City Council adopted the Ravine Strategy Implementation (Item EX12.1). This included key next steps to implement the Ravine

Strategy over the next ten years.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EX12.1>

At its meeting on October 2, 2019, City Council adopted the Toronto Biodiversity Strategy (Item IE7.8). The actions in this strategy helped align with those in the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.IE7.8>

COMMENTS

This report provides an overview of the [Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan](#) (the Plan), recommends City Council's endorsement of the Plan, and that the Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) be advised of the City's ongoing commitment to its implementation. The Plan is a valuable resource used to inform land use planning decisions and initiatives related to natural heritage restoration and flood remediation. The Plan is designed to be implemented by municipalities and helps achieve requirements of provincial legislation, including the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan) and Greenbelt Plan. The TRCA will be finalizing and releasing the Plan following approval by their Board of Directors. The Plan is targeted to be considered by the TRCA Board in September 2024, following endorsement by the partners identified below.

Development of the Plan was led by the TRCA, in collaboration with the City of Toronto, Region of Peel, City of Mississauga, City of Brampton, Town of Caledon, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Greater Toronto Airports Authority. Staff from City Planning and Toronto Water sit on the Steering Committee and provided input and direction through the development of the Plan.

The City of Toronto, along with TRCA, has long supported watershed planning as an approach to best recognize the broader natural systems connections that extend beyond municipal borders. As a downstream municipality, it is vital to acknowledge how the overall ecological health of Toronto is influenced by land use and urbanization patterns upstream. The collaborative implementation of the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan will help to reduce the risks associated with flooding, improve conditions for biodiversity, and increase resiliency to the impacts of climate change across the watershed.

The Plan aligns with the City's Official Plan and is complemented by other policies and programs underway in Toronto, including the Toronto Green Standard, Biodiversity Strategy, Ravine Strategy and the Wet Weather Flow Management Guide.

Watershed Planning

Provincial policy recognizes watershed planning as the most ecologically meaningful scale for integrated and long-term planning. The current policy basis for undertaking watershed planning is outlined in the PPS, Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan. This policy framework requires watershed planning to support a comprehensive, integrated and long-term approach to the protection, enhancement, or restoration of water quality

and quantity within a watershed. It also requires watershed planning to inform: the identification of a water resources and natural heritage systems; growth management decisions; planning for water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure; climate change adaptation planning; and considerations related to cross-jurisdictional impacts. Provincial policies also recognize the importance of protecting, enhancing and restoring the natural heritage system to maintain long-term ecological and hydrologic functions.

The Planning Act requires that municipalities revise their Official Plans to ensure conformity with these provincial plans. Through the Municipal Comprehensive Review, City Council adopted OPA 583, which upon approval by the Minister, would bring the Official Plan into conformity with these provincial policies and enhance many watershed planning principles (outlined below).

Etobicoke Creek Watershed and the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan

The Etobicoke Creek watershed is approximately 22,404 hectares in size. It is the westernmost watershed in TRCA's jurisdiction and represents the south-western border of the City of Toronto. It is bordered by the Credit River watershed to the west and the Mimico Creek and Humber River watersheds to the east. The City of Toronto represents 9.2% of the Etobicoke Creek watershed area, including portions of two wards: Etobicoke-Lakeshore and Etobicoke Centre. The watershed begins in the Greenbelt in the Town of Caledon before flowing south through the City of Brampton and City of Mississauga, and ultimately entering Lake Ontario in the City of Toronto, with the mouth of the Creek located in Marie Curtis Park.

The last watershed plan for Etobicoke Creek was developed in 2002, with technical updates completed in 2010. This version of the updated Plan was developed to reflect the latest data and science, provincial policies, and best management practices. The Plan has a ten-year time horizon and can be refined as needed and includes regular monitoring and evaluation.

The Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan (Attachment 1), outlines the following vision:

"Etobicoke Creek watershed is protected and restored to a cleaner, healthier, and more natural state, to sustain its waterways, ecosystems, and human communities."

Chapter 1 of the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan, Introduction and Background, provides the rationale and policy basis for the Plan, information on local context, and details of engagement. Staff from City Planning and Toronto Water sat on the Steering Committee and were responsible for providing input and guidance throughout the development of the watershed plan on behalf of the City. Extensive engagement took place to increase awareness of watershed planning and to solicit feedback on components of the Plan. Engagement with First Nations and Indigenous communities included: Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (Steering Committee member), Williams Treaties First Nations (including Beausoleil First Nation, Chippewas of Rama First Nation, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation, Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Alderville First Nation), Huron-Wendat Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, and Metis Nation of

Ontario. Engagement Summary reports were prepared throughout the watershed planning process and are publicly available on the project [webpage](#).

Chapter 2, Water Resource and Natural Heritage Systems, describes the key components of each system and provides an overview of how together, these integrated systems provide “essential ecosystems services, such as water storage and filtration, cleaner air, support to biodiversity and habitats, carbon storage, and improving resiliency to climate change”. The Growth Plan, 2020 and Greenbelt Plan, 2017, both include policy requirements to identify, protect, enhance and restore these systems.

Chapter 3 summarizes the existing conditions of the watershed and comparison of trends over the last 20 years. The Plan outlines that, as of 2019, the Etobicoke Creek watershed is: heavily urbanized with approximately 60% of its area in urban use; has very low amounts of natural cover at approximately 12%; and about 28% of the area is within rural land uses. The general trend indicates increasing urbanization and loss of rural and natural cover over the past two decades.

The Plan outlines the current state of four key watershed components:

- Water Resources System: aquatic habitat conditions are poor, and the watershed has a high amount of runoff and in-stream barriers;
- Natural Heritage System and Urban Forest: there is a low amount of natural cover and habitat quality is generally ‘poor’. The remaining natural cover is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change;
- Water Quality: surface water quality is generally poor compared to other TRCA watersheds; and
- Natural Hazards: the watershed can be categorized as medium/high erosion sensitivity and has six Flood Vulnerable Clusters (including two partially located within the City of Toronto: ‘Long branch’ at the mouth of Etobicoke Creek extending to north of Lakeshore Road, and ‘West Mall’ in the vicinity of Dundas Street East surrounding Etobicoke Creek).

Chapter 4 explores four potential future management scenarios to determine how watershed conditions may change. This includes assessing the impacts of different potential future land uses (i.e., levels of urbanization primarily in the headwater areas), varying levels of watershed enhancements (e.g., stormwater management improvements, increased natural and urban forest cover), and, where possible, the implications of climate change. Generally, the future scenario analysis determined that as urbanization increases and the climate changes, there will be negative impacts to all four of the above watershed components. However, by increasing levels of enhancements the overall ecological health and the ability of the natural environment to adapt and respond to climate change increases.

Chapter 5 outlines the Management framework and what needs to be done to protect, enhance and restore the health of the watershed. This includes eight objectives and 36 management actions organized around three key goals: a land use and infrastructure goal; a water resource system goal; and a natural heritage system and urban forest goal:

- Land use/Infrastructure: achieve sustainable land use and infrastructure development patterns to improve watershed conditions and enhance climate resiliency.
- Water resource system: protect, enhance and restore the areas and features that comprise the Water Resource System (including aquatic habitat) for ecosystem resilience and sustainability.
- Natural heritage system and urban forest: protect, enhance and restore the Natural Heritage System and urban forest within the watershed to improve ecosystem resilience and sustainability.

Chapter 6, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation, provides an overview of the process to be used for implementation, tracking and reporting of the Plan (including identifying the resources and funding required for implementation), and provides information on the inventory, monitoring and evaluation that will take place to evaluate watershed health, and the adaptive management plan.

Chapters 7 – 9 include key maps (showing priority areas), a glossary and references. The Plan includes two appendices that provide further details on elements highlighted in the Plan.

Integrating Watershed Planning: Toronto's Land Use Policy and Programs

The land use related management actions in the Plan align closely with City Planning's recent update of the Official Plan's environment and climate change policies. In June 2022, City Council adopted OPA 583 to update the Official Plan's policies to bring the OP into conformity to the Growth Plan and align with recent City Council direction related to addressing the dual crisis of climate change and biodiversity loss. This included mapping a new Water Resources System (Map 9B & 9C) and updates to the Natural Heritage System (Map 9A), which were informed in part by development of the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan. OPA 583 added new policies reflecting the need to protect and enhance these systems, along with new sidebar text on watershed planning, historical watercourses and the water resources system to illustrate their importance.

The Plan also complements the City's [Wet Weather Flow Master Plan](#) (WWFMP), which is Toronto's long-term plan to protect its environment and water quality in Lake Ontario, rivers, streams and other water bodies from stormwater. For example, the Plan envisions a management framework for the watershed characterized by low impact development and green infrastructure, improved stormwater management, and the mitigation of flood and erosion risk, all of which align with the WWFMP.

The management actions related to restoring the Water Resource System, Natural Heritage System and urban forest align with TRCA, Toronto Water and Parks, Forestry and Recreation's ongoing management and restoration efforts. These actions complement Council-adopted strategies and plans including the Biodiversity Strategy, the Ravine Strategy, TransformTO Net Zero Strategy, Toronto's Strategic Forest Management Plan and Toronto Green Standard Version 4.

Next Steps

Following City Council's endorsement of the Plan, City staff will submit a letter to the TRCA Board indicating Council's decision and our ongoing commitment to the Plan's implementation. The Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan has and will continue to inform land use and infrastructure planning decisions and other municipal initiatives, and help identify opportunities to protect, enhance and restore the health of the watershed including important natural features and areas. The City will continue to collaborate with the TRCA and municipal partners on the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan, and will partner on future watershed planning exercises, including the development of the Humber River Watershed Plan, which was initiated in 2023.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan