

THE TAYLOR MASSEY PROJECT

Celebrating and Protecting Taylor Massey Creek

Comments on the Don River Watershed Plan

Submitted to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority,
the Don Watershed Regeneration Council, and the City of Toronto



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References

The draft of the Don River Watershed Plan is available at www.trca.on.ca
Reach by Reach is available at www.theTMP.org

Approved by the Board and submitted on May 13, 2008

Preface

This report provides a series of comments about the current draft of the Don River Watershed Plan (the new Plan).

Before providing our comments, we wish to acknowledge and extend our deepest appreciation to Janet Ivey, Watershed Planning Coordinator, for her role in the preparation of the \$1,000,000 Plan.

Ms Ivey's ability to coordinate the work on the ten technical reports behind the new Plan and to integrate that to the lofty ambitions of the current draft, as well as her meeting with the TMP to discuss initial thoughts that were distilled into the first draft of *Reach by Reach*¹, our regeneration plan for Taylor Massey Creek, exemplify the best of public service.

Deficiencies in the new Plan noted in this report for the most part represent strategic choices beyond the scope of Ms Ivey's influence and which we consider to be the responsibility of senior management at the TRCA.

Strategic Overview

The current draft of the new Plan notes that it “builds on hard-won gains” and “marks the next stage in the revitalization of the Don.”

In reality, 55 years of poor permitting by the TRCA, directed by municipal appointees, have left the City of Toronto with not one but two \$1 Billion tax-payer bailouts for watershed management - \$1 Billion for the Wet Weather Flow Master Plan and \$1 Billion for the basement flooding program – while the prescription for revitalization will remain unsigned until the Implementation Guide is complete, addresses which agency will do and pay for what regeneration efforts, and is offered for further stakeholder consultation.

While the Plan is based on ten technical reports with significant merit and has commendable goals, it misses the mark on four important perspectives:

1. No Review of *Forty Steps*: Ostensibly an update of *Forty Steps to a New Don*, the 1994 watershed plan for the Don, the new Plan has been created without a promised review of *Forty Steps*.

The lack of such a review is a significant oversight, as it would have provided a way to measure past success, particularly vis-à-vis TRCA/ municipal cooperation, progress on sub-watershed goals, and with respect to the completion and efficacy of 1994's proposed concept sites. To paraphrase an old adage, those who do not study the past may repeat similar mistakes.

With respect to Taylor Massey Creek, *Forty Steps* indicated that the Creek was the source of 80% of the pollutants to the Don “under some flow conditions” and that a sub-watershed study of Taylor Massey Creek was a priority in order to identify future regeneration opportunities. No update on the 80% figure has been provided in the new Plan, and no sub-watershed study of Taylor Massey Creek has been under-taken since 1994, in spite of repeated requests from the TMP over the last four years.

¹ The final version of *Reach by Reach* will be posted to the TMP's website by May 29.

2. The Absence of a Sub-watershed Management Framework: Both *Forty Steps* and the new Plan present sub-watershed regeneration plans. However, the TRCA does not perform sub-watershed monitoring nor reporting.

In conjunction with our requests for a sub-watershed study of Taylor Massey Creek as described above, the TMP has also been suggesting for about four years that current condition reports and report cards for the watershed as a whole provide no insight into the quality of water and the state of ravines near people's neighbourhoods, cannot contribute to discussions weighing actions needed in competing locations, and do not monitor the cumulative impact of local regeneration efforts.

In short, citing sub-watershed regeneration plans every fourteen years is something of a moot exercise unless the TRCA shifts to sub-watershed management framework, with monitoring and reporting on the attainment of science-based targets. We re-iterate the need expressed in *Reach by Reach* for the TRCA to shift to sub-watershed management;

3. Community and Agency Stewardship: The new Plan's statements, in several instances, about increased public outreach, education, and marketing are commendable but are hindered by a top-down attitude. This is clearly expressed on page 1-5: that the plan "provides direction to local non-governmental organizations and private landowners with regard to regeneration priorities, best management practices and opportunities for environmental stewardship." Not only is this patronizing, it implies a level of inter-agency cooperation for these efforts that does not exist.

In contrast to a top-down approach on stewardship, agencies should cooperate on issues such as property standards and encroachment; snow dumps and old landfills; publicly-accessible surface water quality reporting, including the annual spills report promised for 2007, and; increased municipal funding for valley plantings, trails, signage, and benches.

The TMP believes that improved agency actions for their own stewardship responsibilities would engender increased public trust and enhanced community stewardship; and,

4. Taking Responsibility for the Don: The new Plan straddles an un-comfortable fence.

On one hand, as mentioned previously, 55 years of poor TRCA/ municipal permitting practices have left the City of Toronto with two \$1 Billion tax-payer bailouts for watershed management. On the other hand, over and over again, most of the regeneration plans in the new Plan identify municipal programs, such as wet weather flow, to remediate watershed problems, yet somehow without mentioning increased coordination on matters such as property standards, encroachment, snow dumps, old landfills, water quality monitoring, etc.

Given the close relationship of the TRCA and its municipal and other government partners, the TMP supports the calls at the public meetings of June 2008 and April 2009 for a clear articulation of which agency is responsible for what proposed regeneration action, who will pay for specific actions, and how public consultation will be sought for regeneration plans not yet developed or prioritized.

These aspects of the new Plan, including how to address increased outreach and stewardship, should be detailed in the Implementation Guide, without which the new Plan is not complete, and without which the new Plan cannot be adequately discussed by the TRCA's municipal partners and, more importantly, their citizens and rate-payers.

Comments on the Taylor Massey Creek Sub-watershed Regeneration Plan

A comprehensive sub-watershed study / current conditions report would probably have included information that the TMP considers important to crafting a set of regeneration priorities for Taylor Massey Creek, but which are not in the new Plan.

For example, Taylor Massey Creek may be the most polluted watercourse in Canada; has excessive amounts of stream in hardened channel, underground, or girdled by gabion baskets; and has the potential to have a continuous trail for almost its full length.

As a result of these concerns, the TMP's vision for the Creek, expressed in *Reach by Reach*, includes:

- That the City of Toronto's Wet Weather Flow Master Plan be delivered in a watershed management framework that will include targets with measurable outcomes, restores the creek to natural conditions, and engages the community;
- That the Creek meet the provincial water quality objectives for e-coli 90% of the time by 2015;
- That the City transition the Storm Outfall Monitoring program into a comprehensive surface water quality monitoring program, with spills and aquatic test results from all levels of government posted to the internet for public access;
- That the planting of the Warden Hydro Corridor be pursued to add 1% to the area of the sub-watershed in natural cover;
- That the whole of the sub-watershed be connected by the Taylor Massey Trail, including separate pedestrian and cycling trails in the Warden Hydro Corridor; and,
- That the sub-watershed be regenerated on a reach-by-reach basis, potentially adopting the TMP's first five priorities at an estimated five-year cost of \$4,275,000.00.

In contrast to this approach, the new Plan offers an impressive buffet (on page 6-18) but which, without the Implementation Guide, provides no indication of which agency might commit to which item, when, what the cost might be, or who will pay for it.

Moreover, in the absence of the Implementation Guide, buttressed by an apparent lack of action on the motion of the Authority from 2008 that directed staff to seek funding for reach-by-reach regeneration, some clarification about the identification of "priority sites" may be in order.

The absence of an ecological and financial basis for the pre-selection of these priority sites over others, prior to the development of the Implementation Guide, reminds the TMP of a recent municipal decision to build a wetland in the Goulding Estates in 2008. Given a set of potential projects and a sense of their costs and benefits, informed discussion might have suggested a better use for the \$300,000.00 spent on the pond - but no such public consultation took place.

For the Taylor Massey Creek Sub-watershed Regeneration Plan, we note that there are no Priority 1 nor Priority 2 sites on Figure 34. In addition, Gerrard Prairie, which is the last of the 31 natural heritage site listed in Figure 26, has been listed as a Priority 4 site in Figure 34 – while other, more-pressing needs have not been ranked.

With no review of *Forty Steps*, no sub-watershed management framework, no concerted effort on municipal stewardship on property standards, encroachment, snow dumps, landfills, and water quality monitoring, no Implementation Guide, and a \$2 Billion legacy of poor planning, the TMP cannot endorse this Plan.

We also note that both the Goulding Wetland and many of the suggested “priorities” in Figure 34 are in the ward of a City of Toronto councillor who previously chaired the Wet Weather Flow Implementation Advisory Committee. This raises the possibility that decisions are being made on the prioritization of regeneration activities – without a fully developed in the Implementation Guide - for reasons other than ecological and cost/benefit considerations.

Full discussion of possible regeneration concept sites in the Creek, including those in *Reach by Reach*, should only be pursued after the Implementation Guide has been made available.

Other Issues

Key Statistics: While it may be true that 2% of the sub-watershed has stormwater controls, testing to determine if these recent additions, some using experimental technology, are working should be complete and made public. In the absence of the ability to install additional stormwater ponds, the new Plan should recommend the installation of technologies such as vortex separators at selected locations, as described in *Reach by Reach*.

Local Involvement: The area school, Willowfield Public School, should be credited, as it has done more plantings and clean-ups than any other organization.

Comments on Proposed Concept Sites

The Maple Reserve: This site has been under discussion for many years and will add both ecological value to the Don watershed and passive recreation opportunities for the residents of Vaughan. We are unsure who is paying it.

Industrially-zoned Table Lands: The generic effort to re-engineer industrially-zoned table lands and their road systems is to our interpretation beyond the mandate of the TRCA, although we would be the first to embrace the establishment of an agency to move Ontario to sustainable re-industrialization. Again, with no Implementation Guide, we do not know where these lands might be, who is paying for these actions, nor how the budget for this agenda might impact the availability of other needed regeneration efforts.

Mud Creek: This site is a City of Toronto / Wet Weather Flow responsibility. Debating the wisdom or the benefits of tax-payer funds to be spent at either Mud Creek or in Terraview Willowfield can only be attempted with an Implementation Guide, and probably a Wet Weather Flow implementation plan, for which discussion should take place at the City of Toronto and not through the TRCA.

Warden Woods: The two expansions of the original concept site proposal – the first to embrace additional water quality improvements and the second to expand the site to include the whole of Warden Woods Park – are commendable. Issues still to be addressed include:

- The expansion of the concept site to include the land between the park and Warden Avenue;
- The inclusion of best practices outreach for landowners in that area;
- The development of a regeneration plan for Warden Woods Park, including the heavily-eroded stream banks;
- A clear indication in the Implementation Guide as to which agency will be delivering and funding which element of concept site implementation; and,
- A plan for community engagement.

While we are unaware of what the TRCA thinks about the last two bullets, but the TMP thinks that the Warden Woods Sustainable Neighbourhood concept site should be managed by the City of Toronto and delivered through the establishment of a citizen-led board called the Friends of Warden Woods, with involvement from the TMP and sister organizations that include the Clairlea Regent Heights Neighbourhood Association, LEAF, RiverSides, and Lost Rivers, as well as other community organizations and City initiatives such as Live Green and the park stewardship group.

Summary and Recommendations

The new Plan presents a complex menu of possible options that will not be complete until it is augmented by the availability of the Implementation Guide.

With no review of *Forty Steps*, no sub-watershed management framework, no concerted effort on municipal stewardship on property standards, encroachment, snow dumps, landfills, and water quality monitoring, no Implementation Guide, and a \$2 Billion legacy of poor planning, the TMP cannot endorse this Plan.

With respect to the Implementation Guide, it should:

- Pledge the TRCA and its municipal partners for improved coordination on stewardship activities under their purview;
- Delineate which regeneration initiatives are to be delivered by the TRCA, municipalities, and/or other orders of government;
- Provide cost estimates and possible sources of revenue for regeneration initiatives;
- Indicate how municipalities will consult tax-payers on expenditures for future regeneration initiatives that they will manage; and,
- Propose concrete measures for public education on watershed management and stakeholder engagement in community-based regeneration activities.

In conclusion, the new Plan is a beginning. The next version of the new Plan and its Implementation Guide should be discussed at a final round of public consultations, following which the two documents should be posted together on the Environmental Registry.

Established in 2003, the Taylor Massey Project focuses on:

- Engaging local residents by coordinating local clean-ups, plantings, and educational activities;
- Articulating a watershed management approach to protecting and restoring the Creek; and,
- Connecting the communities of the Creek with new trails, bridges, and street & railway crossings.

Working with more than 20 partner organizations over the last six and a half years, the TMP has staged 72 events involving 4,145 participants who have planted 3,885 trees and shrubs and picked up more than 1,400 bags of litter.

This document constitutes our 22nd submission to local agencies.