

THE TAYLOR MASSEY PROJECT

Celebrating and Protecting Taylor Massey Creek

June 16, 2008

Adele Freeman, Sonya Meek, Phil Goodwin, and Nicole Swerhun
Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
PDF via email

RE: **Don River Watershed Plan Public Meeting**

Attached please find our responses to the questions in the Participant Workbook from the public meeting held June 9, with some over-arching comments and recommendations included under question 4.

1. *Review the Vision and Guiding Principles from Forty Steps to a New Don. Do they still reflect your perspectives and priorities for the Don? Could they be improved? If so, how?*
 - No. They are too ambiguous, repetitive, and lack clearly articulated, practical, and measureable goals;
 - They lack any sense of the importance of the sub-watersheds and the need for sub-watershed regeneration plans to ensure the overall health of the Don. The TMP is particularly concerned that the sub-watershed plan for Taylor Massey Creek, which was a major deliverable in *Forty Steps* has still not been prepared;
 - When did this become the Don Plan Update? This was supposed to be a new vision, for which the TRCA hired a respected environmental organization 18 months ago, and for which neither the promised public meetings nor the report materialized. This text is 14 years old, contributes nothing new, and does not include new problems such as climate change. If you were not going to unveil something new and uplifting, why didn't you just put this on the website and ask for comments; and,
 - There is no indication of how any of the goals in the Plan will be accomplished. While some aspects of the health of the Don have improved, others have deteriorated. The Don Watershed Regeneration Council, as an advisory, multi-stakeholder organization, must consider making recommendations for how agencies will do things differently in the future, as these are the agencies that have got us, for better and for worse, where we are.

2. *Question on issues, priorities, and objectives from Forty Steps*

2.1 Caring for Water

The TMP believes we need four key improvements not addressed in this section, as follows:

- Better inter-jurisdictional cooperation with improved regulatory protection – eg: specific actions for water quality below the Provincial Water Quality Objectives; federal/provincial moratoriums against the introduction of non-native fish species; etc;
- Massive public and corporate education on water conservation and pollution prevention;
- Enhanced water quality monitoring with publicly availability of data, including on spills; and,
- Enhanced enforcement on all aspects of water, including water quality, downspout disconnect, spills, and encroachment on both watercourses and lots abutting ravines.

2.2 Caring for Nature

This section is full of truisms that need to be replaced with specific targets. Stating that we need to “improve water quality” and “regenerate the health of natural areas” are obvious watershed goals with which we cannot disagree, but they need to be complemented with specific actions both for the watershed and more particularly for each sub-watershed. See our comments under question 4.

2.3 Caring for Community

As we read this section, the repetitive, touchy-feely use of the word “caring” jumped out at us. We suggest that each of the three sections should find a suitable alternative for the word. More specific comments include:

- This section reads like a public service announcement. We don’t think the role of the TRCA should be to convince people to take a walk or become involved in the Don’s cultural heritage. Rather than “caring for community”, we think the TRCA needs to Engage the Community, instilling a sense of the public’s right to clean water and its right to access to water and greenspace; and,
- Under this section, the Don Council should be seeking earlier and more transparent posting of TRCA business, from board and watershed meeting agendas, minutes, and financial reports to water quality, spills, and enforcement actions. We are confident that access to meaningful information, especially on pollution, will result in an engaged community.

2.4 Management/Implementation

- The wording is fuzzy and should be complemented with actionable directives aimed at agencies; and
- A wish-list for the Don cannot be delivered without balancing Don watershed objectives with other TRCA objectives. For example, while the TMP cannot comment on relative appropriateness of the TRCA's desire to seek \$100 million for green building development at Kortright, we wonder how the TRCA will balance priorities between this project and the need to raise funds to test the potentially-leaking landfills along Taylor Massey Creek and rehabilitate them as may be required.

In particular, we note the failure of the \$35 million Living City fundraising campaign to translate RAP goals into achievements, and can only wonder how raising and spending \$100 million might focus TRCA priorities on be funneled toward other emerging priorities rather than being allocated toward primary TRCA mandates such as water quality.

3. *What kind of public consultation would you like the TRCA to consider for the fall?*

- Provide a detailed schedule of meetings and deadlines for submissions. Include in the schedule of events all meetings of the Don Council that the public can attend;
- Ensure that all background and meeting documents, with specific hyperlinks in announcements; and,
- Post the draft Plan to the Environmental Registry for a 60-day comment period.

4. *Do you have any other comments or advice for the TRCA regarding the Don Watershed Plan Update?*

4.1 Background Documentation: We urge the TRCA to provide meaningful background documentation to ensure fruitful public participation in the consultation process now and in community engagement later. Such documents could include:

- A backgrounder on the main components of watershed management, along with clear descriptions of key objectives for watershed under the jurisdiction of the TRCA, such as 35% natural cover, 10% of the area in wetlands, and meeting of the Provincial Water Quality Objectives 95% of the time;
- A summary of responsibilities of federal, provincial, municipal, aboriginal, and conservation authorities vis-à-vis local watershed management;
- A summary of progress and/or completion for the goals and targets contained in *Forty Steps to a New Don*. In spite of statements from TRCA staff that this

document was being worked on and several requests from the TMP for a copy of the document, the document was not provided; and,

- A new vision for the Don, not one that is 14 years old and for which no progress report on its relative success has been provided.

4.2 The Current Conditions Report and Developing a Sub-watershed Consciousness

While the announcement of Public Consultation # 1 referred to the public's ability to learn about the current environmental condition of the Don River and a copy of a Current Conditions Report (CCR) was posted to the TRCA website, there was only a summary presentation on the CCR and no discussion of it. We think this is unfortunate.

While we think the document is quite good, the CCR does not provide a synthesis of the conditions in the sub-watersheds, which would provide an appropriate basis for the development of a sub-watershed consciousness, which we believe is integral to the future health of the whole watershed.

There are two ways that this can be remedied:

- We suggest the TRCA adopt an editorial perspective, both within the CCR and the full Plan, that raises the profile of the sub-watersheds and that strongly establishes that the health of the sub-watersheds comprise the health of the Don; and,
- We suggest that many of the criteria describing the health of the sub-watersheds in text within the CCR be assembled in chart form. The chart could have the four sub-watersheds across the top: the West Don, East Don, German Mills Creek, and Taylor Massey Creek. The left-hand side of the chart could consist of 20 to 30 criteria, such as the percentages of natural cover, wetlands, impervious surface, and water quality, as well as data describing the number of combined sewer outfalls, storm-water outfalls, fish barriers, lengths of watercourse in concrete channel, length in gabion baskets, length with riparian buffers 10 metres wide, etc.

4.3 From a Sub-watershed Consciousness to Sub-watershed Goals and Regeneration

Once the TRCA refines the CCR to more fully address sub-watershed conditions and develop a sub-watershed consciousness, the Don Watershed Plan can identify key sub-watershed goals and sub-watershed regeneration plans.

In developing sub-watershed regeneration plans, the TRCA and Don Council should ensure that the Plan contains real, hard targets, as well as recommendations that include both actionable directives to agencies and financial considerations.

4.4 Need for a Detailed and Accurate Consultation Schedule

Over the last two years, the TRCA has been unable to establish, adhere to, and share its schedules for the development of a new Don Watershed Plan.

This has included:

- Not having any public meetings nor a report on a new vision for the Don in spite of having hired a respected environmental organization to so provide;
- Not having met its commitment for public consultation in the winter of 2007; and,
- Not articulating on either its website or at the meeting of June 9 the dates and purposes of Public Consultation Meetings 2 and 3.

In addition, in spite of several requests to the TRCA and the Don Council for a date upon which it would be best to present the Taylor Massey Sub-watershed Regeneration Plan that we have been developing, we have never been provided a date, although we were informed by TRCA staff that the TMP's sub-watershed regeneration plan will be welcome at virtually any time over the next two months.

In the last week, however – *in fact 12 hours after the public meeting of June 9 during which the absence of a sub-watershed perspective was highly noted* - the TRCA announced that:

- The meeting of the Don Council Policy Team that was to be held on June 11 on the topic of Sub-watershed Regeneration Plans, which we were planning to attend, was canceled; and,
- The Don Council meeting of June 26, that was supposed to have been on “Concept Sites” was being shifted to the topic of “Sub-watershed Regeneration Plans”. As the original subject was of a different nature, some of our members made vacation plans and will now be unable to attend this important meeting.,

The TMP is deeply troubled by this change, which we believe represents both a clear inability to plan and prioritize as well as an inability to provide the public with accurate and timely information.

We therefore strongly recommend that the TRCA establish a detailed and accurate schedule for the completion of the Don Watershed Plan, including provisions to post the draft Plan to the Environmental Registry.

4.5 A Word about Sub-watershed Consciousness and Taylor Massey Creek

During the initial presentation June 9 on the watershed, all of the Don's sub-watersheds, including German Mills Creek, were mentioned - except for Taylor Massey Creek. We take no offense at this, but suggest it reflects the lack of TRCA commitment to sub-watershed knowledge and management. We note, for example:

- One of the fundamental deliverables in *Forty Steps to a New Don*, cited in page 151, was the development of a detailed sub-watershed study of Taylor Massey creek. While we would allow that some aspects of the City's Wet Weather Flow Master Plan (WWFMP) address the focus mentioned on page 151, not having a sub-watershed plan for the third-largest tributary to the Don, which is also its highest source of pollutants, remains a fundamental impediment to informed action;
- In the process of developing the new Plan, the TMP has had to remind TRCA staff on at least three occasions, when staff failed to include it in lists of priorities, that the Don Council urged the City to utilize the development of plans for Taylor Massey Creek within the WWFMP as "pilot project to demonstrate the value of an integrated, ecosystem approach to storm-water management and a comprehensive package of improvements on a sub-watershed basis".

We find it truly curious that the Don Council can suggest the City of Toronto pursue a sub-watershed approach to Wet Weather Flow but that we have to continually remind staff and the Council of this fact and to have to lobby for a similar framework within the new Don Watershed Plan; and,

- The third and most recent example of the TMP having to remind staff of the Council's commitment to a sub-watershed approach had to do with the development of the Don River Fisheries Management Plan, which sought to include Taylor Massey Creek within Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ) 5, which includes many other un-connected streams in a series of different sub-watersheds.

Similar to the public meeting on the Don Watershed Plan, the public meeting on the Don Fisheries Plan was provided with no documentation of any kind, let alone the rationale for grouping of Taylor Massey Creek in FMZ 5.

Naturally, the TMP made a submission suggesting that Taylor Massey Creek constitute its own Fishery Management Zone. Later, without have received any formal response to our submission, the TMP learned at a meeting of the Don Council that the TRCA and MNR were considering the "segregation, somewhat" of Taylor Massey Creek, as either FMZ 5a or as FMZ 6.

Obviously, we think that Taylor Massey Creek should be FMZ 6, and have communicated that to the TRCA and MNR.

Nonetheless, the general absence of documents for a public consultation and the manner in which the TRCA communicated the possible "segregation, somewhat" of Taylor Massey Creek from FMZ 5 again speak to an agency positioning itself as not needing to truly implement its own sub-watershed management perspective nor needing to be responsible and accountable to the public.

In conclusion, we think the process is deeply flawed and that the Plan needs significant work. We urge the Don Council and the TRCA to:

- Provide meaningful background documentation to ensure fruitful public participation now and engagement later;
- Ensure that the Plan includes a heavy emphasis on sub-watershed conditions and the development of sub-watershed goals and regeneration plans;
- Ensure that the Plan contains real, hard targets, as well as recommendations that include both actionable directives to agencies and financial considerations; and,
- Establish a detailed and accurate schedule for the development of the Plan, including provision to post the draft Plan to the Environmental Registry;

Sincerely,

Andrew McCammon
Founding Chair

cc Chair and members, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
Don Watershed Regeneration Council
City of Toronto Taylor Massey Councillors Kelly, Thompson, Heaps, and Davis
Other selected GTA Councillors
Task Force to Bring Back the Don
Lake Ontario Waterkeeper
Other partner organizations

Established in 2003, the Taylor Massey Project focuses on:

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

Working with more than 20 partner organizations, including the City of Toronto, the TMP has staged 58 events involving 3,114 participants, planting 2,900 trees and shrubs and picking up approximately 1,310 bags of litter over the last five and a half years. This is our 20th submission to a local agency.