

TMP Recommendations for the Warden Woods Concept Site

Background: *Protecting Warden Woods*

The TMP has been seeking increased ecological protection of and regeneration for Warden Woods and its surrounding community since plans for the proposed re-development of industrial-commercial lands along Warden Avenue were being discussed around 2003-2004.

In 2005, we both launched a volunteer-led Warden Woods Ecosystem Inventory and presented a preliminary set of recommendations to the October 6 meeting of the Planning and Transportation Committee of the City of Toronto. The Committee approved a motion that the City undertake a professional ecological inventory, to augment the volunteer initiative of the TMP, and begin developing a long-term plan to protect Warden Woods.

Following the meeting of October, 2005, staff in Parks Forestry and Recreation engaged a consultant, James Kamstra, who produced a report titled *Ecological Baseline Study of Warden Woods Park, Toronto*. **One of the recommendations of the Kamstra report was that local outreach and education could be enhanced through the creation of a citizen group that could be called the “Friends of Warden Woods”.**

The TMP published its report, *Protecting Warden Woods*, in March 2008. One of its recommendations consisted of a set of draft objectives for the Friends of Warden Woods.

A significantly detailed response to *Protecting Warden Woods* provided by the City indicated that many of our recommendations were already in place, would be pursued, or would not be considered. In particular, the response noted that:

- the recommended designation of the Woods as an ESA was being considered as part of proposed 2011 amendments to the Official Plan;
- the development of the requested management plan for the Park might be more extensive and expensive than was reasonable, but could be addressed under less onerous auspices; and,
- While the Friends of Warden Woods might be an excellent concept, it was beyond the City’s means until a new community centre had been built and staffed.

We think this last comment has been superseded by other City initiatives, including those cited in items c and d overleaf, such that this should no longer be an obstacle.

Reach by Reach: The TMP’s Regeneration Plan & Reach-based Regeneration Concept Sites

Following the publication of *Protecting Warden Woods* and the receipt of the City’s response, the TMP began to develop both the Friends of Warden Woods and our own regeneration plan for Taylor Massey Creek, called *Reach by Reach*.

This 49-page document, published in November 2008, was submitted to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the City of Toronto with respect to the development of the TRCA’s Don River Watershed Plan and is believed to be Ontario’s first citizen-led watershed regeneration plan.

Reach by Reach provides:

- a compilation of current conditions in Taylor Massey Creek;
- descriptions of the strengths and challenges in each reach in the Creek; and,
- the articulation of reach-by-reach regeneration objectives, including detailed suggestions focused on:
 - Water and Wetlands;
 - Terrestrial Natural Heritage; and,
 - Trails, Signage, and Community Engagement.

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Reach by Reach also prioritized the reaches requiring regeneration, with a cost estimate of \$4,275,000 to be spent over 5 years to regenerate the top 5 priorities. Of these, Warden Woods was our fifth priority. The TMP will continue to pursue responses from the City of Toronto and the TRCA on actions to address the other 4 priorities. Our vision for the regeneration of Warden Woods as contained in *Reach by Reach*, revised due to the City's comments on *Protecting Warden Woods*, is enclosed as Appendix A.

TRCA Actions: Board Motion of July 2008 and Page 6-18 of the Don River Watershed Plan

Prior to the release of *Reach by Reach*, the TMP made a presentation to the Board of the TRCA, on July 25 2008, that detailed our request for plans that would regenerate the Don on a reach-by-reach basis. The TRCA approved a motion that that the Authority seek "reach-by-reach funding from senior levels of government to support watershed plan implementation."

While no action on this motion has yet been taken, the draft of the new Don River Watershed Plan dated February 23, 2009, includes on page 6-18 a statement that the Authority "Support implementation of reach regeneration by the Taylor Massey Project."

At this time, we offer the following principles as a template for reach-based regeneration:

- Concept sites should consist of full reaches (Reach-based Regeneration Concept Sites);
- Reach-based Regeneration Concept Sites should be selected on a strategic basis that:
 - Prioritizes actions on the most degraded reaches of each sub-watershed; and,
 - Comprises a long-term plan to remediate all of the degraded reaches of the Don;
- Reach-based Regeneration Concept Sites should embrace and extend the definition of concept sites as described in *Forty Steps to a New Don* i.e. - they should improve water quality, water quantity, and terrestrial habit and engage the local community, generating excitement and enthusiasm for additional strategies, approaches, and techniques that can be applied to protect our environment; and,
- Reach-based Regeneration Concept Site planning should include the community, transparency and accountability for financial impacts, and practical and measureable targets to be used in subsequent reports or assessments.

Progress on Warden Woods since the release of *Reach by Reach*

- a. The TMP has obtained expressions of support from both **LEAF** and **RiverSides** for participation in the Friends of Warden Woods in order to provide outreach to all properties around Warden Woods Park on the programs they deliver, focused on the planting of native species on private property, the identification and care of trees, lot naturalization, stormwater management, downspout disconnection, and other water pollution prevention practices;
- b. The TMP has obtained an expression of support from **Lost Rivers** to develop and provide information and local natural heritage walks that can help increase community awareness of the sub-watershed and the Friends of Warden Woods;
- c. **The City has established a Warden Wood Stewardship Team** to begin the process of identifying and responding to problems in Warden Woods Park;
- d. The TMP has received strong expressions of interest from **Live Green Toronto** to deliver program elements under its mandate on a sub-watershed basis in Taylor Massey Creek and which would begin around Warden Woods; and,
- e. **The Clairlea Regent Heights Neighbourhood Association has expressed strong support to expand the footprint and the extent of the ecological endeavours to be delivered in the Warden Woods Concept Site and to take a leadership role, with the TMP, in creating the Friends of Warden Woods.**

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Recommendations to Move Forward

1. That the TRCA expand the footprint and the extent of the ecological endeavours to be delivered in the Warden Woods Concept Site to the full Warden Reach as a pilot project to begin implementation of both the July 25, 2008 motion of the TRCA and the statement on page 6 – 18 of the current draft of the Don River Watershed Plan; and,
2. That the City of Toronto move expeditiously to create the Friends of Warden Woods to engage the community and lead the development and implementation of the Warden Woods Regeneration Concept Site Plan.

To guide recommendation 2, the TMP offers the following as draft terms of reference for the Friends of Warden Woods:

- That the mandate of the Friends of Warden Woods (FWW) be to develop and guide the implementation of a regeneration plan for the whole reach encompassed by Warden Woods and its surrounding lands;
- That FWW be established by the City of Toronto, have charitable status, have a citizen-led board, have one member of City staff to serve as a liaison to all City departments, and be supported for its meetings in a manner consistent with similar committees, such as the Task Force to Bring Back the Don;
- That FWW seek the designation of Warden Woods as an ESA and the development and implementation of a long-range management plan for Taylor Massey Creek, the Park, and surrounding lands. This plan should include local elements of Wet Weather Flow and similar water quantity and quality programs, the stabilization of eroding banks, the identification and restoration of lost tributaries where possible, wetland protection and enhancement in the park, the removal of the BMX area, the reduction of non-native invasive species and their replacement with native plants, the re-placement of the trail and bridge in the Park, the installation of directional and interpretive signage, the support of the local stewardship team for Warden Woods Park, and the public engagement aspects described below; and,
- That FWW and the City pursue public involvement in the community around the Park with respect to:
 - Organizing walks, clean-ups, invasive species removals, and plantings;
 - Outreach to local property owners regarding sound lot management practices with respect to:
 - Encroachment (the private use of public lands);
 - Erosion caused by rear-yard, downspout, and pool drainage, as well as yard Waste thrown onto valley slopes, and;
 - Outdoor waste storage, particularly by the multi-unit buildings along the eastern edge of the park; and,
 - Championing other local environmental initiatives, such as energy conservation and increased plantings of native trees and shrubs on private property.

Jointly submitted by:

The Taylor Massey Project

LEAF

RiverSides

Lost Rivers, and

The Clairlea Regent Heights Neighbourhood Association.

**The Taylor Massey Project ♦ www.theTMP.org ♦ Eco@theTMP.org
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Appendix A Excerpt from *Reach by Reach*, the TMP's Sub-watershed Regeneration Plan

A4 – Warden Woods

Background: Warden Woods is one of the ecological jewels of Taylor Massey Creek, consisting for the most part of a well-treed flood-plain and steep valley slopes that shelter the creek as it flows from St Clair and Warden south to Pharmacy Avenue.

Following a presentation by the TMP on the need to safeguard the woods, the City commissioned an excellent report on the park called *Environmental Baseline Study of Warden Woods Park, Toronto, 2007*, referred to as the Kamstra Study.

A review of the Kamstra Study and our own field assessment resulted in a TMP report called *Protecting Warden Woods*, which suggested a number of regeneration priorities, management protocols, and community stewardship actions for the Park. *Protecting Warden Woods* is available under Publications on our website.

Most of the recommendations in *Protecting Warden Woods* have been addressed in extensive comments by staff in Parks, Forestry, and Recreation, to whom we are extremely grateful.

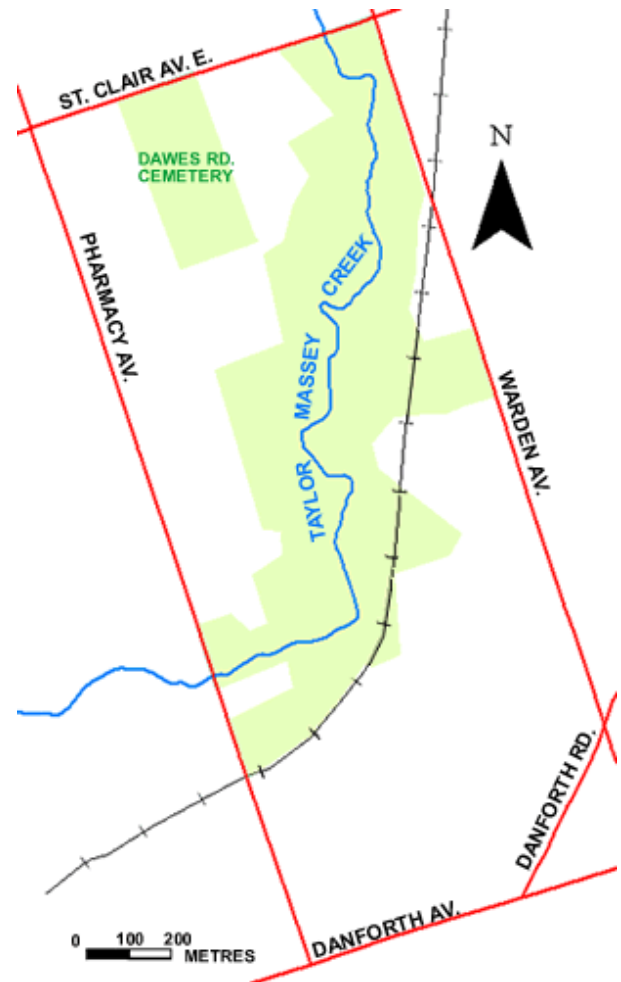
In particular, the City has indicated that Warden Woods is on a list of candidate sites for designation as an Environmentally Significant Area in the next update to the official plan. Discussion will continue on outstanding issues including lights, wetland creation, habitat improvement, signage, creating a local Friends of Warden Woods, and access, trail, and bridge maintenance.

Current Conditions: A short way in from either of its two un-inviting main entrances, and in spite of the occasional rumblings of the subway that passes through a section of the park, Warden Woods somehow becomes quiet, picturesque, and a host to dynamic diversities of both trees and birds.

This diversity is due to several strengths:

- The abundance of water in both the creek and in ground-flow across the slopes of the ravine;
- Good soils that support a relatively large forest with many areas of mature trees, intact under-story growth, and at least seven significant plant species; and,
- A highly-varied population of visiting and nesting birds, due in no small measure to the absence of lights in the park.

Unfortunately, the long-term ecological integrity of Warden Woods is threatened by several modern realities. These include extensive stream-bank erosion, invasive species, poor lot management



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practices, increased regional air pollution, climate change, and local intensification that may result in both an increased demand for access to green-space as well as higher levels of local heat, noise, light, and air pollution.

Recommendations to Reclaim this Reach

- **That Warden Woods be designated a priority regeneration concept site in the new Don Watershed Plan.**

Water and Wetlands

- Agency staff should inventory eroding creek banks and failing gabion baskets and develop a creek stabilization plan. This should include increased riparian plantings for sections where existing stream-side plantings are thin.
- Agency staff should similarly develop a wetland protection and enhancement plan for pocket wetlands in Warden Woods.

Terrestrial Natural Heritage

- Warden Woods should be designated an Environmentally Significant Area and any additional trails or lights prohibited.
- The City of Toronto should develop a Management Plan for the protection and enhancement of the Park, including a long-range planting program, the immediate removal of an informal MBX stunt area, and a plan to manage and eradicate invasive non-native species.
- Warden Woods would benefit from enhanced outreach from the City on lot management practices for abutting property owners, especially concerning encroachment, waste management, and pool draining, through both increased education and increased enforcement. Please see the last bullet below.

Trails, Signage, and Community Engagement

- The TMP supports the City's plans for new signage at the park entrance.
- The TMP suggests the City also develop directional signage, to help people get around the park at night if desired, as well as interpretive signage. For the latter, we suggest a sign denoting the location where the creek originally flowed into Lake Iroquois, the antecedent of Lake Ontario, just upstream of the current parking lot near Pharmacy.
- **While all elements of the recommendations to reclaim this reach should be pursued, the key aspect that makes this reach a priority is that Warden Woods should become a model for enhanced Community Stewardship. The TMP hopes to invite the City, local community organizations, and property owners abutting the Park to create an organization tentatively called the Friends of Warden Woods, to be coordinated by the City but with a citizen-led Board.**