

# DON GREENWAY WORKSHOP REPORT

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## INTRODUCTION

On September 18, 2007, an invited workshop was held to focus on determining the future identity and roles of the Don Greenway. The concept of the Greenway dates back to early proposals to renaturalize the lower Don River. The purpose of the workshop was to ensure that the idea of the Don Greenway would be furthered and reinforced as overall waterfront revitalization progresses. Fifty-three people attended the workshop, which was held at The Historic Distillery District, Archeo Restaurant, Building #45, 55 Mill Street, Toronto. A participants' list is attached as Appendix 1.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

1. Develop consensus on the functions and uses of the Don Greenway.
2. Identify opportunities to resolve any remaining issues.
3. Provide input regarding the functions and uses of the Don Greenway to the:
  - EA team for the Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection Project,
  - MVVA team for the Lower Don Lands Framework Plan,
  - Future planning for lands between the Ship Channel and Unwin Avenue, and
  - Lake Ontario Park Plan.

The workbook provided to participants is attached as Appendix 2. It includes:

- Agenda
- Objectives
- Ground Rules
- History of the Greenway Idea
- Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection Project/EA
- Lower Don Lands Framework Plan
- Discussion Questions



## AGENDA – SEPTEMBER 18, 2007

4:00 pm	<b>Welcome and agenda overview</b>	Suzanne Barrett, Facilitator
4:05 pm	<b>Opening remarks</b>	John Campell, Waterfront Toronto Councillor Paula Fletcher
4:15 pm	<b>Importance of the Don Greenway</b>	David Crombie, Canadian Urban Institute
4:25 pm	<b>History of the Don Greenway idea</b>	John Wilson, Chair, Task Force to Bring Back the Don
4:40 pm	<b>Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection EA</b>	Paul Murray, Gartner Lee Steve Willis, MMM Group
4:55 pm	<b>Questions of clarification</b>	
5:00 pm	<b>Initial concepts for the Lower Don Lands framework plan</b>	Michael Van Valkenburgh, MVVA Associates, with Steve Apfelbaum, Applied Ecological Services, Inc
5:30 pm	<b>Questions of clarification</b>	
5:40 pm	<b>Supper break</b>	
6:00 pm	<b>Round table discussions</b>	All
7:00 pm	<b>Plenary reports</b>	Table facilitators
7.40 pm	<b>Summary</b>	Suzanne Barrett
7:55 pm	<b>Concluding remarks and next steps</b>	Christopher Glaisek, Waterfront Toronto
8:00 pm	<b>Adjourn</b>	

## PRESENTATIONS

**John Campbell** welcomed participants on behalf of Waterfront Toronto. He outlined the context for the workshop in relation to a number of current waterfront planning initiatives and environmental assessments. He emphasized Waterfront Toronto's commitment to green infrastructure, and said that he was looking forward to participants' advice about the functions and uses of the Don Greenway.

**Councillor Paula Fletcher** noted the City's expectations for the Don Greenway, as described in the City's Secondary Plan for the Central Waterfront. She reminded participants that the scope of the Greenway extends from the tip of the Leslie Spit, through Lake Ontario Park and across the Port Lands to connect with the Don River Valley. Councillor Fletcher expressed her interest in defining a greenway that would truly bring nature into the developing Port Lands. She stressed the importance of making sure that the results of this workshop don't sit on a shelf, but are acted upon.

**David Crombie** talked about early discussions of concepts to re-naturalize the Don River and its mouth in *Regeneration*, the Final Report of the Royal Commission into the Future of Toronto's Waterfront, 2002. He noted that greenways are now an important part of waterfront revitalization efforts all over the world, citing some local examples including Hamilton and Oshawa. Mr Crombie noted three key values of greenways. First, they represent a transformative experience that connects ecology, economy and community. Second, they help to build good cities. And third, they can provide forms, functions and uses for everyone, in ways that may change for each successive generation.

**John Wilson** outlined the history of the Don Greenway idea (see Appendix 3), starting with a report to Council called *Bringing Back the Don* in 1991.

**Paul Murray** described the environmental assessment for the Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection (see Appendix 4).

**Michael Van Valkenburgh** and **Steve Apfelbaum** presented their initial concepts for the Lower Don Lands (see Appendix 5).

## QUESTIONS

Q: Dalton Shipway asked if the next stage is to assemble lands for the greenway south of the ship channel?

A: Christopher Glasiek replied that Waterfront Toronto will work with TEDCO to assemble these lands.

Q: John Wilson asked how the MVVA design addresses flood protection on the north side of the ship channel?

- A: Ken Greenberg replied that the team includes considerable expertise to address flood protection in an integrated way. He noted David Crombie's reference to taking the notion of the greenway and building it into green neighbourhoods. They are not just looking at storm water conveyance but at small pedestrian streets and neighbourhoods on the ship channel. Along the edge there will be very public spaces, just as there are in West 8's design for the Central Waterfront. As part of flood conveyance there will be continuity of hydrology in a very compelling and seamless system. The focus is on the Don River and the way it comes to Lake Ontario and the harbour.
- Q: Bill Snodgrass asked about the historic trace of the Don River geography.
- A: Steve Apfelbaum replied that we're not yet trying to design the greenway, but as we consider appropriate uses and functions we can also think about connectivity. We haven't defined the width yet, but we know that resident and breeding birds need 500 metres or wider. For migration, we don't need such width over a long distance. Migratory birds need to see east-west oriented greenspace along the shoreline. Then they can take advantage of smaller pieces of green to move from north to south in fall and south to north in spring. At night, they look for areas without lights and during the day they need to see green features. So our concept is to provide more orientation for spring and fall migratory birds.
- Q: Councillor Fletcher inquired whether sports fields would disrupt migration of Monarch Butterflies?
- A: Gord MacPherson replied that experience shows that sports fields are not an issue for butterflies on the waterfront, citing the example of East Point in Scarborough, where butterflies make considerable use of the habitat areas surrounding the sports fields.
- Michael Van Valkenburgh added that the team's decisions about landscape configuration will include elements to attract and improve habitat for butterflies and birds.
- Steve Apfelbaum noted that he could show us many parks in Chicago that have important staging areas for monarch butterflies.
- Q: Councillor Fletcher asked for some commentary on the wilderness opportunities in the Port Lands and Lake Ontario Park, noting that she hasn't heard that theme, but the community has said it's very important.
- A: Ken Greenberg replied that the wilderness idea was an inspiration to the organic design proposed by the team. Like the ravines, which provide a natural edge and counterpart to our entire city. The presence of nature is an extremely large element, and is strongly articulated with people like Steve Apfelbaum on the team.

## ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

There were seven round tables, each with 5-8 participants. They were facilitated by Nicole Swerhun, Anneliese Grieve, Tanya Bevington, Elaine Baxter-Trahair, Michael Van Valkenburgh, Ken Greenberg and Gwen McIntosh. Participants were asked to address the following questions:

1. What functions should the Greenway perform, in addition to flood conveyance?
2. How important are these functions?
3. Based on these functions and priorities, what kind of place should the Greenway be? What it should look like/feel like?
4. What other advice do you have regarding the Greenway?
5. Do you know of good examples of greenways in other places? If so, where?

Table reports and comment sheets filled in by individual participants are included in Appendices 6 and 7 respectively.

## PLENARY REPORTS

### Questions 1 and 2: What functions should the Greenway perform, in addition to flood conveyance? How important are these functions?

#### Uses by Wildlife

Participants agreed that the Don Greenway is fundamentally all about nature. It should serve as a safe and supportive corridor and habitat for various species (small mammals, insects, birds, fish, turtles, snakes and frogs) including rare ones.

Specific requirements include:

- allow for safe passage of migratory species (bird flight, stepping stone for terrestrial wildlife),
- provide habitats for resident and breeding wildlife,
- ensure that wildlife are the prime focus,
- maximize diversity,
- provide connected tree canopy cover,
- strike a suitable balance between aquatic and terrestrial habitats to sustain wildlife, and
- ensure that the green spaces are part of a web and not an isolated entity.

#### Uses by People

Participants agreed that the Greenway should be a place to observe, experience and explore nature - a "wild in the city" respite. Some emphasized that access to natural

areas is important to reduce vandalism and encourage environmental stewardship. However, human use should be a secondary focus to wildlife and nature.

Many participants thought that the Greenway should be for the local community, with connections to the residential areas. It could also be a regional facility for passive recreation. Manicured space should be avoided or kept to a minimum. Services and amenities should be close by but not in the Greenway itself.

Some people advocated that trails should be generally on the periphery of the Greenway, leaving the middle wild. It was also suggested that pedestrian trails should be incorporated through a variety of wildlife habitats to increase opportunities for people to interact with nature.

*Area of disagreement:* Participants recognized that there can be tension between nature and human activities. For example, most table groups discussed the role of active recreation and sports fields in the Greenway. Many participants were adamant that they should not be included. Others felt that it was important not to exclude one use for another. It was suggested that if any sports fields are included, criteria should be developed, such as: provide for local (not regional) use, locate on the periphery of the Greenway, use real (not artificial) turf and prohibit lighting.

Other suggestions for human uses of the Greenway included:

- human uses should be related to the Greenway's wildlife habitat values (being in a natural setting, watching wildlife, etc),
- focus on passive uses and walking trails,
- separate bikes from pedestrians and put bike trails on the edges,
- make it a place to take kids,
- provide a series of habitats and places with different experiences,
- allow for organic and passive formation of functional trails,
- create destination nodes for people (benches, viewpoints and such spaces), but not formal picnic areas,
- include educational opportunities,
- provide shade,
- do not provide large swimming facilities,
- encourage fishing,
- maximize public safety (eg limited or no access after dark),
- encourage year-round uses, and
- ensure ways to accommodate large numbers of people without disturbing wildlife or ecological functions.

### Environmental Functions

Participants emphasized the importance of connecting the Don River and the Lake, both for the river and the people. The design of the Greenway must be resilient to change and sustainable. It should function as a storm water retention and control feature and act as a floodway. The Greenway should be a place for plant communities and nature in general to thrive.

One group suggested that the design process could use a formula that focuses on the qualities and functions of the natural places. If you start with the integrity of each natural place you can design it so that people fit in.

It was suggested that there should be a marshy area towards the centre to reflect a ravine-style landscape and overall function, with human activity situated mainly at the edges to avoid damage to the ecosystems.

Other recommendations for environmental functions included:

- adjacent development to be completely sustainable, including an off-grid, renewable energy system for neighbourhoods to mitigate climate change,
- manage stormwater on site,
- Greenway to be a natural setting with minimal or no maintenance or energy use,
- strict environmental guidelines protected by legislature,
- wildest places in the middle with a gradation to more accessible places at the edges,
- ensure a dark place with minimal/no light pollution to provide a suitable habitat for insects, contributing to the food chain,
- limit dust and noise,
- create large masses of functional habitats,
- provide appropriate buffers between people and wildlife,
- keep out cats and dogs,
- minimize Canada geese by avoiding open expanses of mown grass,
- continue uses that are available in the Don River Valley,
- find ways to incorporate stormwater from sports facilities into the natural environment (eg bio-filtering wetland), and
- consider vertical landscape elements to serve as a buffer between human users and wildlife inhabitants.

### **Question 3: Based on these functions and priorities, what kind of place should the Greenway be? What should it look like/feel like?**

There was general agreement that the Greenway should be a place of serenity and beauty. It should be a great piece of protected wilderness in the city where you can experience contact with water, skyline views and elements of surprise. It should enable people to close their eyes and imagine native people here before Europeans arrived. A place that is quiet, peaceful, spiritual and magical. An un-winding place.

### **Question 4: What other advice do you have regarding the Greenway?**

Participants suggested that the Greenway should be a historical tribute that respects the origins of the Don River Mouth and Ashbridge's Bay Marsh. It should be a vast expansive delta (but how much should remain in the flood plain)?

The Greenway should be *in* the city, not *of* the city.

Consider stewardship opportunities for Portlands businesses.

Finally, the Greenway and the adjacent developments should be a reflection of the new reality of how we must live sustainably in our world and in the natural landscape.

**Question 5: Do you know of good examples of greenways in other places? If so, where?**

Some participants suggested examples of parks and greenways:

- Highland Creek Valley
- Music Garden, Toronto Harbourfront
- Research Triangle Park, North Carolina
- 7<sup>th</sup> hole of Don Valley Golf Course
- Below Science Centre
- Ravine at Bayview south of York Mills
- Todmorden Mills
- Boston Common
- Central Park, New York
- Stanley Park, Vancouver
- Kortright Centre Marshland
- Spadina Quay Wetland

**NEXT STEPS**

Chris Glasiak concluded the workshop by thanking everyone for participating and said that it had been an impressive and valuable discussion. Waterfront Toronto will circulate a draft workshop report to participants for comments and then post a final report on the website. The workshop results will be incorporated into the work being undertaken by the MVVA Team for the Lower Don Lands and by Field Operation for Lake Ontario Park.