

Yonge-Eglinton growth policies under review

TAKING STOCK

By Edward LaRusic

Since 2002, the Yonge-Eglinton area has attracted 75 development proposals -- almost one-third of them for buildings higher than 25 storeys -- adding more than 12,000 residential units to the midtown community.

That pace of development has generated some push-back from the local councillor and area residents who complain that needed infrastructure has not kept up with growth.

The complaints, voiced at a city-led consultation meeting earlier this week, come as the city embarks on an update of the Yonge-Eglinton secondary plan, with an eye to setting new policies to guide future growth in the area. In a companion exercise, the city is completing a review of parks, open space and streetscapes in the Yonge-Eglinton area.

Reflecting on the Yonge-Eglinton Secondary Plan approved by the Ontario Municipal Board in 2006, Ward 22 St. Paul's councillor **Josh Matlow** told *NRU*: "I don't think the [current secondary plan has been good for the community." He added that the policies within the plan have failed to give adequate tools to city staff to ensure new development meets the needs of local residents.

"The bottom line is that there [have] been a lot of mistakes made in the past at Yonge and Eglinton. CONTINUED PAGE 5 ▶

New protections urged for Toronto's natural environment

RESPECT FOR RAVINES

By Leah Wong

Toronto's ravines, one of the city's most valuable natural resources, are expected to become even more ecologically significant in the face of population growth and climate change.

Given that reality, the Ontario government is seeking public input on how to protect the province's natural areas, such as Toronto's ravines, and mitigate the damaging effects of changing weather patterns. As part of its coordinated review of the Growth Plan and the *Greenbelt Act* the government is hosting a town hall meeting at the Toronto Reference Library on Monday. For the review, residents are being asked to consider the inclusion of urban areas, such as Toronto's ravines, in future expansion of the provincial Greenbelt.

"The ravines are the heart and lungs of Toronto," **Greenbelt Foundation** program director **Shelley Petrie** told attendees at the 2015 Urban Watershed Forum held at Evergreen Brickworks March 20. She said the city's numerous ravines serve as a natural system that promotes a healthy urban environment.

In the review of Toronto's Official Plan, city staff has been asked to evaluate the role Toronto's river valley connections in mitigating the impact of climate change CONTINUED PAGE 7 ▶

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RESPECT FOR RAVINES

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that could leave the city more vulnerable than in the past to frequent and extreme storms.

“The system is a foundation for flood management and what keeps us safe in the city,” **Toronto and Region Conservation Authority** planning, greenspace and communications senior director **Carolyn Woodland** told forum attendees. “That can’t be taken for granted, particularly with where we’re going with growth. We will need to be considering how we make that system more resilient.”

Ownership of the ravines, a key component of the city’s natural heritage system, is largely in public hands. The city and the TRCA own about 60 per cent of the ravines with the remainder in private hands.

Currently there is a need to stabilize conditions in the ravines.

“The ravines are injured, they are disturbed and they are damaged,” said Toronto ravine and natural feature protection unit supervisor **Norman DeFraeye**. “I think it is our duty and our obligation in looking to the future to stop the damage and start letting it repair as much as it can.”

In recent years, DeFraeye noted, between 5 and 10 per cent of the city’s tree canopy has been damaged by the Emerald Ash Borer and the loss of trees from debilitating ice storms. He said there is a need to plant more trees to improve the canopy.

However, he remains optimistic that the condition of the ravines can be stabilized in the next 10 years, with interventions, but he cautioned that natural restoration will not be sufficient.

“As Toronto intensifies and its population grows, we risk losing what we value in the ravines,” **Waterfront Toronto** board chair **Mark Wilson** told forum attendees, who urged that preservation of the natural ecological systems be a top priority.

With Toronto’s population expected to hit 3.64 million by 2041, the ravines will likely play an important role as a source of outdoor recreation space for residents.

At present, there are a number of challenges for residents who want to explore the ravines, with limited wayfinding facilities. As well, for some, the ravines carry the negative perception of being a haven for the city’s transient population.

DTAH partner **Megan Torza**, curator of the RavinePortal exhibition at DTAH last fall, said there is scope to improve signage and wayfinding in the ravines. For the exhibition, which looked at the past, present and future role of the ravines



Don Valley Brickworks Park

SOURCE: LEAH WONG

in the lives of Torontonians, she worked with students from Thorncliffe Park to discuss how the city’s diverse communities interact with the ravines. Toronto’s newcomers, for example, may view the ravines in different ways than long-time residents.

In the effort to preserve the ravines while encouraging increased usage by residents, DeFraeye said there is a need to educate people on respectful use of the natural environment. Even with low usage, he cites evidence of abuse, such as dogs roaming off-lease or people biking off-trail.

“In providing a really wonderful interconnected system, we want people to be proud of the fact that they are the user of the system,” he said, urging residents to respect the ravines as essential to the future environmental health of Toronto.

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