

## **The Case for Saving Natural Areas The Benefits for the Community, the City and Developers**

**Introduction:** While the proposed Kanata North development is the case study, the rationale provided below can be applied to all new development. *Everything is connected to everything else!* Water, including brooks, creeks, streams, rivers and riparian areas, wetlands and storm water, wood lots, forests, valley lands, hedgerows as habitat and linkages, biodiversity protection including road ecology considerations should be looked at as a whole.

There has been a tendency to consider these elements in isolation with too convenient a focus just on endangered species, allowing a narrow concern rather than coming to terms with nature's interdependencies and accepting we have to change the circumstances that have put these species at risk in the first place.

In taking a more holistic approach, we can save more natural areas by showing there can be value and benefit for everyone in this approach.

### **Benefits:**

**Natural Park:** Leaving the trees in situ will save money otherwise required for landscaping and maintaining a traditional grassed park/playground.

Natural areas can attract volunteers who are more likely to take on 'ownership' in maintaining trails, doing interpretive work and serving as ambassadors for these features, i.e. Friends of Petrie Island.

Trees naturally clean the air, reduce erosion and greatly assist in stormwater retention

**Healthy Communities:** There are a growing number of studies that identify benefits for people of all ages from a connection to nature. Adults significantly benefit physically and emotionally by access to greenspace and the opportunity to observe wildlife.

The Beaver Pond in Kanata serves as such an oasis. It attracts a wide array of people in that community, pushing strollers, bird watching or just going for a leisurely walk. All communities would benefit greatly from such an area – particularly ones where there are existing natural features such as those in the proposed Kanata North development.

**Children's Well-Being:** For children, greater activity addresses the serious concern about childhood obesity. Health officials and educators have also identified the problems associated with "*nature deficit disorder*" among children. Exploring nature provides a critical opportunity for children to develop a sense of adventure, confidence, creativity and independence. This is something that is not only needed for an individual's development but for a productive and healthy society.

**School Resource:** The forest would serve as an educational resource that will be invaluable for nature study by students in the several schools that will locate nearby. The Macoun Marsh in Ottawa's east end has become internationally-recognized through the efforts of science teachers at the St. Laurent Academy and Jean Vanier Catholic School. Said teacher, Michael Leveille "*young people should know that the environmental condition of our planet is not hopeless – we can identify and record (document) one little habitat at a time*".

**Wildlife:** Provision for wildlife by protecting natural habitat and linkages. Not only does this preserve biodiversity but it will, undoubtedly, reduce wildlife conflict with new homeowners. There is a growing change in attitude about wildlife in the city, and residents no longer accept the notion that animals such as deer, beaver and coyotes should be killed or trapped if they return or remain in their original homeland after it has been developed. Providing habitat and linkages is the first step in reducing conflict along with education that teaches homeowners how they can enjoy and easily live in harmony with wildlife.

**Stormwater Planning:** This should utilize the new thinking regarding green infrastructure and stormwater wetlands. This is being implemented in new developments in North America, and locally in Kemptville. There are many potential advantages of this kind of ecological engineering done in cooperation with nature. These include better performance of the SWM system at less cost for maintenance and replacement, as well as providing recreation opportunities, fish and wildlife habitat, a more attractive landscape and, of course, a vast improvement in water quality. With respect to the Kanata North development, we believe if such a system were implemented, the community would accept the notion of locating a stormwater wetland outside the southeast urban expansion boundary, towards March Valley Road, on lands that have already been cleared.

**Shirley's Brook:** The flow and quality of water in Shirley's Brook serves as important fish habitat that needs to be protected. The proposed riparian buffer for this area should be at least 50 meters wide, and not the recommended 15 meters. This would allow for some recreational use (e.g. a pathway), and would provide a natural corridor for the movement of plants and animals.

**Hedgerows:** Maintaining hedgerows would meet the request from existing homeowners for privacy buffers while creating more distinct neighbourhoods. It would also preserve effective eco-corridors across the width of the development linking aquatic features with the forest that, in turn, would allow for the critical natural linkage between Shirley's Bay NCC Greenbelt and the South March Highlands to the west.

**Marketing Opportunities:** There is a growing need for more passive recreation. Developers are having to take into consideration a better balance between the needs of young families and an aging demographic. Thus far, within the City of Ottawa, resources have been almost exclusively directed to constructed parks, playgrounds and sports fields in new communities. Pairing parks with schools might be one way to save more natural areas within proposed developments and correct the current imbalance.

There is a sizable senior population in the Kanata area and in West Carleton, with many of these seniors wishing to remain in the community when it is time to downsize. Seniors are more likely to be willing to pay more for smaller homes that have access to nature trails nearby. The success of the eQ condos on Terry Fox at Richardson Side Road demonstrates this.

The advantages for developers also include the opportunity to build a unique community that stands out from the other subdivisions across Ottawa. The branding possibilities are numerous, and these would provide economic value for developers.

For example, a recent ad for a development in Kanata West: "*Arcadia brings nature home for those who thrive on the joy of being outdoors. Landscaped trails weave through the community's ponds and parkland, and along the picturesque Carp River corridor.*" Similarly, Regional's eQuinelle development and LA Group's Kemptville Meadows project in Kemptville are good examples of environmentally-sensitive growth plans, whereby smaller, affordable homes are advertised to feature trails and access to 11 acres of land that will remain in its natural state.

**Current Status of Protecting Natural Areas in Proposed Kanata North Development:** The recently-introduced Provincial Policy Statement 2014 requires that municipalities now conform to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Reference Manual, rather than using their own criteria, to define “*significant woodland*”.

The concern is that the interpretation of whether these lands qualify is being left to the developers. We have encouraged the City to develop its own interpretation or, at least, to do the field work, to ground truth existing conditions. For example, the developer’s environmental consultant produced a report last fall that neglected to show the variety of wildlife using Woodlot S20 as significant winter habitat (no winter tracking was done) or the important linkage it supplied to other natural areas, key criteria in determining whether it receives protection under PPS 2014.

The report also indicated that there were no significant trees in Woodlot S20. Yet, photographs taken by residents, shows just the opposite.

**Summary:** The City needs to play a more proactive role and provide leadership in saving these natural areas. At the end of the day, it will be in the best long-term interests of the community, the city and developers.

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