

## Shoreline projects on hold as Ottawa drags its feet

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Along the north shore of Lake Ontario, citizens are fighting to save shoreline from over-development, fund-raising to secure old-growth forest and banding together to manage wetlands or build trails.

Municipal politicians and civil servants are falling in with the idea of nature as a partner. Unmown wilderness, not pesticide-drenched parkland, is a source of civic pride.

Even major corporations are onside. Ontario Power Generation, General Motors, Co-Steel Lasco and Dupont have dedicated land, money and staff positions to the stewardship of the land around their plants and office buildings.

But one group is woefully out of step. It consists of those entrusted with the management of the lake's commercial harbours, and their federal masters.

"Some of the biggest eyesores are the federal lands and they're the most contaminated," says Vicki Barron, executive director of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, one of my cycling companions on a summer-long trip along the waterfront trail.

"It's a crime. The federal government has a responsibility in this. They've been part of the problem, they created the issues and now they're trying to walk away from it."

The discussion of federal irresponsibility was sparked by an innocent question as our party of 15 stopped in Oshawa's Lakeview Park for a picnic lunch.

Three of us- Vicki, myself and Marlaine Koehler of the trust- are making the 650-kilometre trip in monthly increments. We started in Niagara-on-the-Lake in May and plan to make Gananoque in October.

Others have joined us, and on each outing, we get progress reports on the trail and its attractions from citizens, municipal staff and politicians. This weekend, we're accompanied by two mayors who are seasoned cyclists- Ajax's Steve Parish on the Saturday, and Cobourg's Peter Delanty on the Sunday

"So what's the major challenge Oshawa faces in making the waterfront accessible?" I ask, making conversation over sandwiches in the garden of the 1835 Henry House.

Regional Councillor Warren Young doesn't need prompting:

The harbour commission. The federal government.

"We've had a real problem negotiating with them," Young says. The city wants the federal government to do an environmental assessment of the lands so clean-up costs can be apportioned and development proposals entertained so the city's waterfront plan can be implemented, expanding residential, commercial and recreational uses down to the waterfront.

But the plan has gathered dust for almost a decade as Ottawa drags its feet. The story, depressingly similar to Toronto's harbour history, has a different twist in Pickering, where we start the morning, guided by acting mayor Mark Holland.

Here, the Pickering Harbour Company holds sway over Frenchman's Bay, at the heart of the city.

A bitter 20-year legal battle between the city and the company ended in a 1996 out-of-court settlement, but there's no shared vision, as can be inferred from an unsightly pile of concrete rubble on the east spit, a fence erected by the harbour company to prevent the city from using part of a new parking lot, and derelict barges left to rust in the water.

"They're monuments to the bay's neglect," Holland comments.

In the continuing tussle for control, the company scored a significant triumph earlier this month, gaining Ontario Municipal Board approval for a development project that the city opposed as too dense and not in synch with its plan for a "nautical village" with an old-fashioned streetscape (retail at ground level and residential above) along Liverpool St.

The decision overturns years of planning, Holland says. "I think we're all just a little stunned."

Fast-forward to Port Hope, the third in this trilogy of developmental delay. The problem there is low-level nuclear wastes, from uranium processing carried out by the now-defunct Eldorado Nuclear company, that have been buried all over the landscape and stalled development of about a third of the shoreline.

After two decades of negotiations, three local municipalities and Ottawa signed a \$300 million agreement in 2000 for the cleanup, which will probably take another 15 years, what with environmental assessments, construction of storage and moving of contaminated materials.

"We're not going to wait," Todd says, outlining a multitude of waterfront enhancements, including a bridge that will take the trail across the Ganaraska River.

In stark contrast to foot-draggers of whatever political persuasion are the Friends of Thicksen's Woods, who in 1982 purchased a 6.5-hectare old-growth forest for \$150,000 to stop it from being developed.

Now the Whitby group has done it again, anteing up a \$100,000 down-payment this year for a 3.4-hectare meadow to the north of their nature reserve that was zoned for industrial development. A nature festival on Sept. 21 offers a chance to learn about the new buffer zone and help pay the mortgage.

One major downer: the forced 3-kilometre detour along frighteningly busy Highway 2 in Clarington because the gated community of Wilmot Creek will not permit the trail to pass through.

As we stopped at Bennett Rd. to double-check the map, two successive motorists stopped, anxious to ensure our group knew we had to turn north.

The exclusive "adult" development is known locally as Wrinkle City or Viagra on the Lake. Who's to say whether those are appropriate monikers? Not us. We didn't go there.

Of interest along the way:

James Rowe House, saved from demolition and moved to a waterfront location by energetic Whitby citizens who are turning it into a vibrant community centre. The elegant 1857 home is

marooned in a sea of sunbaked mud as they await SuperBuild funding for \$100,000 of \$494,000 worth of landscaping and access for the disabled.

The Corbett Creek bridge, a monument to the ingenuity of Whitby planning director Bob Short. It's a retrofit of a sanitary sewer viaduct and cost \$45,000, compared to the usual million-dollar bridge expense.

Second Marsh, the largest coastal wetland in the GTA, saved from development by Jim Richards, a young General Motors worker who took on the Oshawa Harbour Commission when it wanted to drain the marsh 40 years ago. Richards still works for GM, as manager of the nearby McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve, site of a proposed Great Lakes wetland interpretive centre.

The Darlington Trail, past the nuclear plant that takes on a warm-and-fuzzy aura in the midst of 335 hectares of wildlife habitat.

Cobourg beach, one of the most beautiful stretches of sand on the lake.

The Newautin Nature Sanctuary, built by developer Bob Marshall, who died tragically in a boating accident last month, just two weeks after his wife Margaret. The couple created a nature reserve in the middle of a subdivision and were passionate about getting it to work as a functioning wetland.