

CURRENT CONDITION AND FUTURE STATUS OF THE 30M SHORELINE “BUFFER” IN GREYSTONE VILLAGE

A report by Sustainable Living Ottawa East, October 2021

Brief Background and Context

Prior to its landscaping by Regional, this stretch of shoreline had been mostly untended. While SLOE and individual residents did considerable planting and caretaking work on other stretches of the OOE shoreline, this privately-owned stretch was off bounds. Construction landfill dumped along the shoreline over 50 years ago raised it from flatland to a steep and jumbled embankment. In recent decades it had simply been grass mowed to the edge of that embankment, at which point wherever there was soil and toe-hold, it became revegetated with mostly Manitoba maple (MM).

SLOE and the OOECA as a whole advocated for a naturalized, bio-diverse and accessible shoreline. Regional responded positively and constructively to community input. To a large extent, the resulting landscape is very successful. However, Regional stated that it would undertake the landscaping work but not for the ongoing maintenance. The community’s position and advocacy that the City should assume ownership and responsibility has not been accepted. So the future is in limbo; and the situation is already resulting in some degradation in the landscaping investments that have been made.

In this context, SLOE organized a community walk on September 16, 2021, in the company of a local landscape architect and Regional rep Evan Garfinkel, to assess conditions and do some initial thinking about the future of this valuable community and ecological resource. Twelve community residents, including two who live at Greystone, participated. Some high-level comments follow, and after that some specific findings tied to the numbered map on the next page. A final section includes some requests to Regional, along with some initial thoughts about future management.

General Observations and Comments

Conditions differ markedly between the southern half of this shoreline, beginning at the ascent from Brantwood Park, and the northern stretch beginning at around the point where the land dips down towards the storm sewer outfall (Lookout – North on the map). It seems fair to say that more attention and investment was paid to landscaping the southern section. But it is also more mature and stable because the landscaping began when public access to the shoreline path was still restricted. Regional’s landscape architect is producing some plans to rehabilitate the landscaping that had been done in the northern half, and these will be discussed with the community prior to implementation. Implementation should include means to protect the new plantings so that they are not adversely affected by wandering pedestrians and cyclists.

Both sections are currently dominated by meadowland planted with native grasses, flowers and shrubs. But in many places aggressive and unappealing weed species are increasingly dominant, e.g., ragweed, burdock, sow thistle and reed canary grass (an invasive). Especially on the west (MUP) side of the foot-path, trees have been interplanted with the meadow species; and/or “volunteer” species, especially

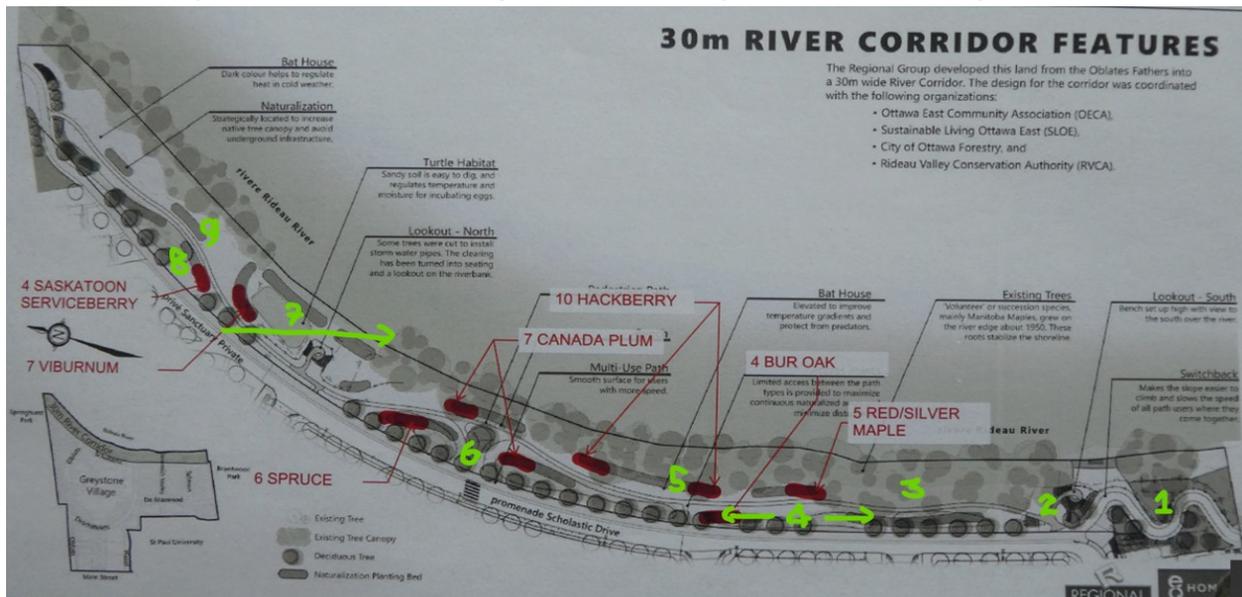
MMs but also cottonwood, are present. The trees will eventually form a canopy that will favour shade-tolerant understory over the current meadowland species.

Key questions are where to actively maintain open grassland/meadow versus allowing tree “succession” to proceed. Also where a canopy will form, how much energy should go into controlling invasives in the meantime, and to removing “volunteer” trees. Other opportunities – e.g., boosting edible landscaping – should be considered. But no matter who assumes maintenance responsibility, it makes sense to minimize the financial and labour investments needed for the long-term success of this naturalized landscape. That means understanding and working with “natural” tendencies. Over the last few years a volunteer “invasives brigade” has worked hard to remove invasives along the Greystone and other stretches of the Rideau River Nature Trail but there are limitations to how much can be done by volunteers.

Regarding the footpath itself, the woodchips have largely decomposed or drifted off the path. Annual replacement would be desirable. (Another option is stonedust.) More measures to keep users on the single intended path (e.g., fencing or other barriers, signage about the naturalization process) are also needed to protect the soils and vegetation.

MORE DETAILED NOTES ON THE STATUS OF LANDSCAPING

Recorded on September 16 on a SLOE-organized community walk with a landscape architect



Notes accompanying map numbers – number locations are very approximate!

1. The low-growing plantings on either side of the switchback path are in good shape, though there are some weeds along the edges. The paddle fencing reduces foot traffic and associated disturbance and soil compaction. On the east side no tree species have been planted. The west side has planted trees and “volunteer” MMs. Over time the trees will close in and shade out the existing low plantings on that side. The main question on this side is whether to remove the MMs or allow them to be part of the future canopy. On the east side, if the intention is to retain the meadowland (which would create a nice visual balance), some ongoing weeding, and potentially some cutting back of the MMs along the east edge, will be needed.
2. Just past the seating area, at the beginning of the path, any planting that had been done has been lost because snow dumping off Telmon Ave has caused compaction and probably salinization of the soils so that only ragweed is growing. The snow dumping needs to be stopped, the existing soil dug up and replenished, some grass and flower species replanted, and an ongoing regime established to keep the weed species in check until the planted species are firmly established. This will likely require annual mowing in the spring, and removal of undesired weed species, for a period of about 5 years.¹
3. This is a nice meadowland border between the path and the shoreline. The key problem is weed species that have established especially along the path edge. To maintain the meadowland, the same thing would need to be done as described above, volunteer MMs would need to be removed, and branches of the MMs along the shoreline would need occasional cutting back.
4. The trees planted along this stretch are mostly doing quite well, but it would help their vigour to cut back (scythe?) the grasses, goldenrod etc. that are crowding close to and in some cases overtopping them. Here again, should volunteer tree species be removed? Given the canopy that will eventually form, it's an open question as to how much energy to devote to removing the herbaceous weed species that are crowding in among the intended meadow species. Since the canary grass is an invasive, it would probably be good to at least keep that in check. And it would probably be possible (and attractive) to retain a border of meadowland flowers since the trees are mostly planted closer to the MUP than the footpath.

At the bottom of Deschatelets Ave is another area where snow has been dumped, with the same results as described in point 2 above.

5. The Hackberry trees are not doing well.

¹ Just at the top of the rise to the west (by the first house) are some manholes, which is presumably why this area is not landscaped. There is also a manhole on the river side of the paddle fence. Not sure if that is why this area has been recently cut? Lots of Japanese knotweed by the shoreline here.

6. There's a fair bit of degradation and compaction in this whole area. Foot traffic is not well contained along the intended path. Some fencing or other means of control (e.g., large logs, thorny shrubs) should be considered. Snow dumping off Oblats Ave as had the same impact as described above.
7. There's a beautiful sightline across here to the bend/sweep of the river. Initially the slightly depressed area around the lookout/outfall had been intended for more wet-tolerant species (e.g., meadowsweet, buttonbush), but the soil here now looks very dry and compacted, so another plan for this area may be needed.
8. The planted shrubs in this area are being overgrown by grasses. Some decisions and guidance is needed about what to encourage and how.
9. The landscaping is pretty much degraded along the whole rest of this stretch. Soils throughout look poor and are heavily compacted, invasive species predominate (including large Japanese knotweed patches at the boundary with Springhurst Park, which Regional's contractor has recently tried with limited success to remove) and the planting that has been done is not thriving. Based on current conditions it seems essential that soil amendment and fencing be included in the plan.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Asks of Regional

Regional has done a lot of valuable and impressive landscaping, but the need for more capital investment to complete the plans and to rehabilitate to the point where "someone else" can take over is clear. Since the plans for the north section are under development it makes sense to wait and see what is proposed. But even in the mid-zone between the south and north sections it seems that soil rehabilitation, additional planting, and fencing or some other means to protect the plantings while they are establishing will be key. In the areas affected by snow dumping, some soil rehabilitation and replanting is also needed. Regional also needs to ensure that no further snow dumping occurs on any of the 30-metre river corridor, or for that matter, on any other vegetated portions of the Greystone Village property. A number of residents are of the view that the beauty and success of the naturalization of the river corridor is of direct benefit to Regional and to all of the residents of Greystone and, to that end, believe Regional should have ongoing responsibilities - such as continuing contributions - for maintaining the naturalized corridor.

Role of Residents

Some agreement on overall principles and direction for the landscaping would be valuable – e.g., privilege "natural" processes wherever possible, maintain some meadow, continue to evolve plantings for wildlife and human edibles?? Informal approaches to maintenance – e.g., organized by the Greystone residents association in collaboration with SLOE – may address some very basic ongoing maintenance needs (e.g., clearing herbaceous growth around trees, keeping an eye on snow dumping, maybe removing some invasives); but the job is too big for this to be more than band-aid work. As noted earlier, de-

spite the countless hours of volunteer work to control invasives, there is a real limitation on just how much volunteers can do.

Options?

Given Regional's insistence that it does not have ongoing responsibility, the community needs a clear plan to address the lacuna. One alternative that has been proposed is to mount a campaign to convince the RVCA, NCC and City that an innovative partnership is needed in order that the whole shoreline beginning at Strathcona Park (Sandy Hill) and extending to Linda Thom Park (OOS) is treated as a single park of significant ecological and recreational importance in Ottawa. This is a compelling vision, and if successful would vest ongoing responsibility within permanent and funded entities.

Another options that is worth considering is a community land trust. This would only make sense if an endowment could be established that would generate sufficient annual revenue for ongoing maintenance needs. Further research and study would be needed to determine what an adequate budget would be. But given that Regional is currently paying \$15K/yr in taxes on the shoreline land, an ask for a significant contribution to a community land trust endowment may not be so far-fetched. Other important conditions for moving forward with this option might include (2) an existing charitable land trust willing to serve as the parent organization and (3) a viable way to deal with liability issues.

Ottawa – like many other cities – has a newly established land trust for affordable housing. But increasingly community land trusts are also being used for greenspaces. This would nonetheless be a significant innovation in the Ottawa context. But new models of citizen engagement in the purposing and maintenance of greenspaces are sorely needed.