

on the WATERFRONT

DAY ONE

ON THE WATERFRONT PART ONE OF A SIX PART SERIES | BY MICHAEL-ALLAN MARION
Photography by BRIAN THOMPSON Brantford Expositor/QMI Agency except where indicated

Twenty-years, 43 recommendations, \$8-million, one waterfront master plan - PRICELESS

MICHAEL-ALLAN MARION
Expositor Staff

Imagine you are taking an all-day sojourn on the waterfront 20 years from now, on a trail along the Grand River through Brantford.

You see old sights with history that you and most residents knew little or nothing about for decades but now are beckoning you to visit, and others that were only recently created.

You start in the northwest, passing by a business park with commercial and light industrial

ment between 200 B.C. and A.D. 900, and the Davisville mission site in the early 1800s.

You may know about it, but there is no indication of once-controversial plans by developers for housing subdivisions around Hardy Road, which did not materialize.

The trail takes you around a bend in the Grand, southward past Scarfe Gardens, Glenhyrst Gardens, the end of Dufferin Avenue and Parkside Drive into Holmedale. You can stop in at each place with ease.

Then you come to the edge of the old, but revitalized neighbour-

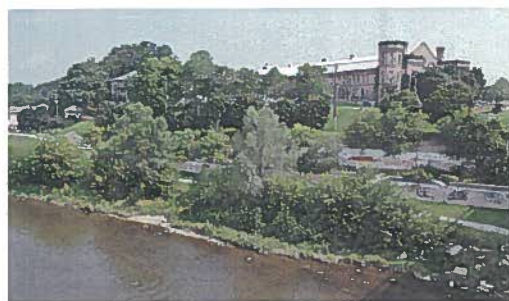


A view of the Grand River, with Brant Park to the left, and a portion of Brantford Golf and Country Club at lower right.

buildings sitting in harmony with nature's elements. Then you continue walking through an area of natural habitat between Hardy Road and the Grand.

You stop from time to time to behold interpretive signage explaining rare and ecologically sensitive features, and trail markers featuring results from archaeological excavations of aboriginal sites going back 11,000 years.

You see references to the Double Lake and Snow Hill digs, which yielded artifacts from the Late Paleoindian period around 8,000 B.C., the Middle Woodland settle-



A view of the Grand River and the Brantford Armouries.



A view of the Grand River looking southeast from the city's Northwest industrial area.



Brantford city councillor Marguerite Ceschi-Smith chaired the Waterfront Task Force which oversaw the writing of the Waterfront Master Plan.

empty space have been replaced by brimming commercial and residential development with green areas that you can easily get to from the main trail.

The trail works its way along the western edge of Eagle Place to the southeast, with a sensitively developed neighbourhood in the Birkett Lane, Erie Avenue and Baldwin Drive area that was for years a patch of farmland.

Further to the south, you come to an area beyond the dyke butressed by well-stocked and managed natural vegetation that was once scrappy land.

What you have enjoyed in your imaginative sojourn on the waterfront are the main elements of the city's Waterfront Master Plan.

City council recently approved it in principle after a year of research and four public consultation and workshop sessions attended by more than 100 residents and stakeholder groups at each meeting.

It contains 43 recommendations, which if implemented over 20 years could cost \$8 million to \$10 million.

To make sure it gets going, council has earmarked a reserve capital account of \$1.75 million, to be funded by casino revenue allocations at the rate of \$350,000 per year for five years, to pay for land acquisitions and remediation.

The new council is supposed to

begin implementing the recommendations when it takes office after the Oct. 25 municipal election. The master plan is expected to be a major topic of discussion on the campaign trail.

"This master plan is a bold vision," said Coun. Marguerite Ceschi-Smith, who chairs the Waterfront Task Force, a political group overseeing first the writing of the document and now the implementation process.

"Our city had its beginnings on the waterfront and the river was the source of its transportation for food, water and industry," she said.

"For decades, the city turned its back on the river as it developed on a different course. But lately residents are learning to appreciate the river again and embrace it and its green corridor as a precious treasure," Ceschi-Smith continued.

"This master plan contains so much that people can see in our waterfront for ourselves and for nature, and it has a plan that offers a sustainable course for the future."

Donna Hinde, who heads The Planning Partnership, the lead member of a team of consultants who wrote the plan, said many successful communities have been built on waterfronts and their continued success has been due in part to their ability to keep their bond with the water.

"Montreal has an amazing waterfront and has invested heavily in it," she said in an interview.

"Quebec City has done phenomenal work, and so have Halifax and Charlottetown. A waterfront becomes a fantastic resource and amenity for residents and visitors, and it truly becomes a generator of economic development."

Because Brantford spent time building away from the river, it needs to create more access points to the water, she told council in a presentation.

"We need to tell the story of Brantford's history and natural features on the trails. The river should be a stronger identifying element in the city's image."

"And the city's economic development strategy should include the business opportunities related to the river such as the outfitter, cultural attractions and a destination for cycling and hiking."

Mary Ellen Kaye, who runs the grassroots group Keep Our River Public, said the waterfront master plan is a far more reaching document than she imagined when she first started advocating for it nearly three years ago.

At the time, she was leading grassroots community opposition to some unpopular developments along Grand River Avenue, and realized that real change would



ON THE WATERFRONT

Brantford is undertaking a massive reconsideration of its waterfront, a stretch of more than 25 kilometres of the Grand River and with more than 70 kilometres of trails from where it enters the city in the northwest to where it leaves in the Oxbow.

The city recently approved the Waterfront Master Plan after a year of study, numerous public consultation meetings, workshop sessions with stakeholders and experts, and hours of debate at meetings of council.

Ready for implementation in the next term of council, the master plan holds a multitude of ideas that would greatly transform key areas of the city along the waterfront.

Over the past year, Expositor reporter Michael-Allan Marion attended most of the sessions, conducted many separate interviews, and did his own research on important issues in the writing of the master plan.

On The Waterfront, a six-day series, is the result of his coverage.

SATURDAY – 20 Years, 43 Recommendations, \$8 million, One Waterfront Master Plan: Priceless

MONDAY – Tracing the Legacy of the Grand River Settlements

TUESDAY – The Northwest: An Eco-Haven to be Guarded

WEDNESDAY – Rediscovering Holmedale's Charm

THURSDAY – Going Lower Downtown

FRIDAY – Eagle Place: A New Southern Gateway



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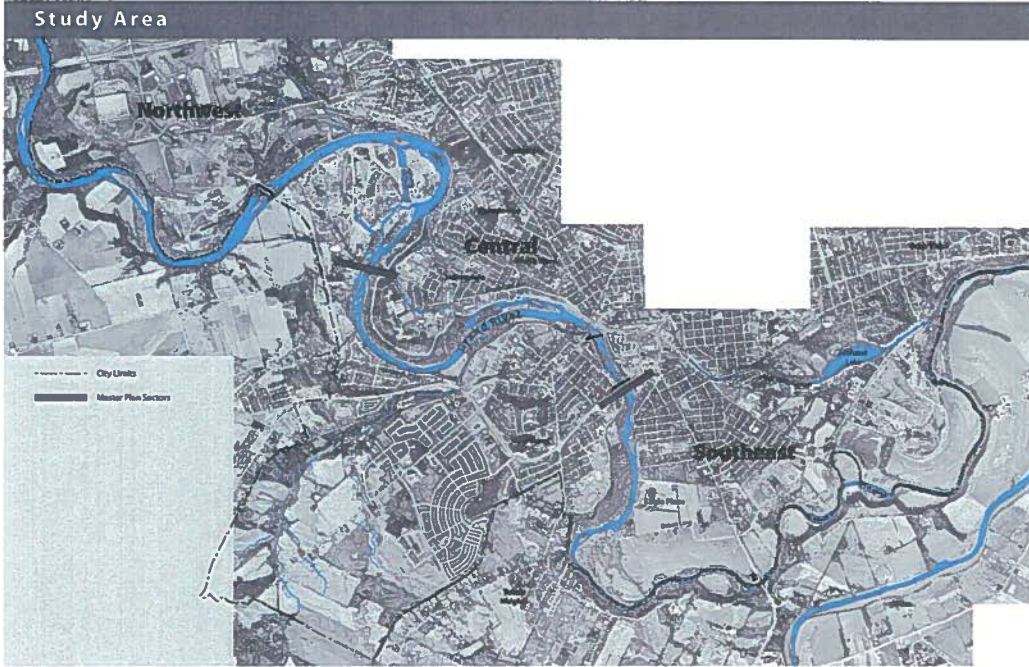
MONTH

FROM PER MONTH

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FROM PER MONTH

\$59



only come if the public got a chance to express its desires for the waterfront.

"When they first asked me at city hall what kind of process I had in mind, I said 'cast as wide a net as you can because there are people all over the city who have so many ideas that I could never think of on my own,'" Kaye recalled.

What's important, she added, is that there was a full public process with a lot of meetings and workshops.

"I was impressed with the work done by the consultants that we hired and all the people who came out," she said.

"I saw all kinds of interesting ideas that people wrote on sheets of paper that were attached to the wall. Later I saw so many of them

in the master plan. This is just the beginning."

The Waterfront Master Plan turns on a central vision that Brantford is an important community in the Grand River Valley "that has a great diversity of natural features and is enriched with an extraordinary historic legacy, evident of the aboriginal and European culture that have settled in this land for over 11,000 years."

The plan's intent is to reinforce that dual legacy and build on its successes, including the establishment of neighbourhoods along the Grand, 70 kilometres of trails and hundreds of acres of public space.

It seeks to do that by:

- Protecting and enhancing natural features and the city's cultural heritage, interpreted so that all can



Mary Ellen Kaye leads the grassroots group Keep Our River Public, which early on pressed for a waterfront masterplan.

understand and appreciate its history;

- Identifying and enhancing access to the area's network of trails;

- Offering access points to the water, along with a variety of educational, recreational and leisurely activities that celebrate the Grand and draw residents and visitors alike;

- Ensuring that appropriate development on adjacent lands is rooted in best practices and contributes to the waterfront and the city's image.

- Inspiring residents to embrace the vision and become stewards of the environment.

In succeeding days, On The Waterfront will look at how those principles and recommendations were applied to particular areas of Brantford along the Grand.

See the issues, the potential, the recommendations and cost in protecting and enhancing such areas as the city's aboriginal and non-aboriginal cultural heritage along the river, the environmentally sensitive Northwest, Holmedale and North Ward, the "Lower Downtown" and Eagle Place in the south-east.

mamarion@theexpositor.com

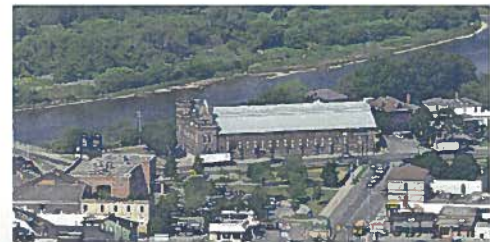
Donna Hinde stands on the trail bridge otopert of the Grand River with Colborne Street buildings in the background on Friday morning.

Photo by TAE MCINTOSH for the Expositor.

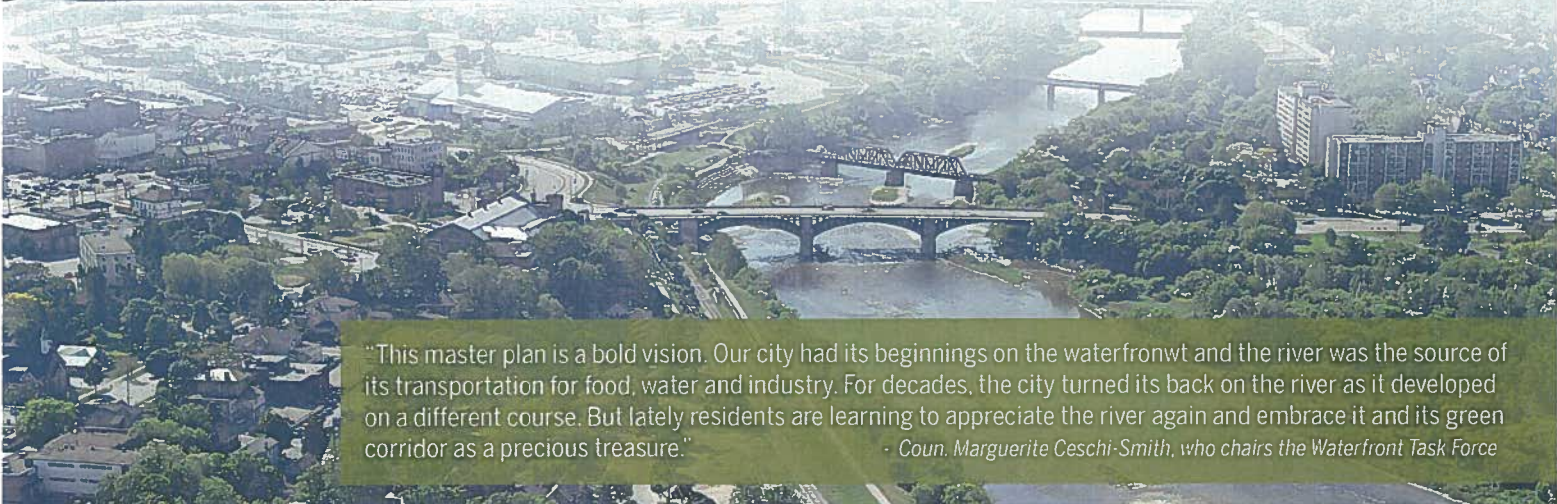
The Waterfront Master Plan is built on 10 "pillars" or imperatives that form the foundation for key directions and strategies for the environment, parks, access, heritage and culture, destinations and neighbourhoods and districts.

The pillars are:

- **Link and enhance natural features systems.**
The plan sees the natural landscape as one complex, interrelated collection of woodlands, wetlands, fens, cultural meadows and prairie landscapes. Some have Provincially Significant Wetland designations, and one spot in the northwest has been declared an Area of Natural and Scientific Investigation.
- **Protect water quality.**
The Grand River is the city's only source of drinking water, which makes measures to protect and enhance water quality necessary features of the master plan.
- **Protect the integrity of the dyke.**
Vehicular access should be restricted and vegetation limited to closely trimmed grass. The trail system should be maintained.
- **Value heritage resources.**
An archaeological consultant with the team says Brantford's rich cultural heritage has rich Aboriginal settlement patterns going back 11,000 years in this area of the Grand, according to the results of excavations of settlements along the river.
These resources present an opportunity to tell a more complete story of settlement in the area.
- **Manage naturalized riverside parks and plan for recreation that depends on a waterside location.**
The consultants say the city could enhance and better use its extensive parkland along the river, including Waterworks Park, D'Aubigny Creek Park, Lorne Park, Fordview Park, the Brantford and District Civic Centre and Gilkison Flats.
Access points for canoes, kayaks and other non-motorized boats should be made available.
- **Celebrate and leverage the trails.**
There is an opportunity to leverage, through better signage rest areas and other amenities, the investment of 70 kilometres of trails built over the years, either independently or in partnerships with Brant Waterways Foundation, Grand Valley Trails Association, and the TransCanada Trail System.
- **Create and promote the Waterfront Cultural Corridor.**
The master plan says Brantford's waterfront presents an "unparalleled opportunity" to attract residents and visitors to the water, which can be accomplished by building on the area's ecological, cultural and archaeological features, through celebration, entertainment, commemorative sites, education centres and unique recreation opportunities.
- **Plan for a sensitive urban interface.**
The interface includes a buffer, setbacks to built features and appropriate uses that front, face and feature the natural heritage system.
- **Be a model for environmental stewardship.**
The city, other government agencies, interest groups and the 95,000 residents of Brantford all have a role to play in protecting natural habitat, water quality and ground water sources, and promoting more public awareness.
- **Plan based on the watershed.**
Planning and development must recognize that the Brantford area is just a linked component of the 300-kilometre long Grand River watershed, an ecosystem measuring 6,800 square kilometres that is 20% larger than Prince Edward Island.



The Grand River runs past the Brantford Armouries and the downtown area.



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- Coun. Marguerite Ceschi-Smith, who chairs the Waterfront Task Force

An aerial view of the Holmedale area of Brantford (lower left) and the Grand River running past the core area.

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