

# on the WATERFRONT

DAY THREE

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

## An eco-haven to be guarded



A bridge carries municipal services across the Grand River from an area near Brant Park (at left) to the city's northwest industrial area.

MICHAEL-ALLAN MARION  
Expositor Staff

Brantford's northwest is such a haven of rare ecological wonders that the city must take great pains to guard and nurture them, like a mother bear would her cubs.

That is the exhortation of the Waterfront Master Plan, which places the northwest at the centre of its focus on protecting and enhancing a corridor of natural assets along the Grand River.

The area around the western stretch of Hardy Road, between the Northwest Business Park and the Grand, also is shaping up to be the biggest battleground over the principles of the master plan.

Environmental and waterfront advocates who have been guardians of the area for years are locked in battle with a group of developers who propose to construct subdivisions of mixed housing in a way that they contend would not adversely affect the sensitive ecology.

They point out that much of the area has been zoned for low-

density residential, single-family homes for years.

The differences between the two camps were stark at every turn in public consultation summits, presentations to the Waterfront Task Force political overseeing group, and council.

The final master plan comes down on the side of the environmentalists.

"The northwest sector contains some of the most unique and sensitive natural heritage features found within the Grand River watershed and the province of Ontario, some of which are relicts of environmental conditions that existed thousands of years ago during the post-glacial period," the consulting team that authored master plan writes.

The consultants point out that the area exhibits unique and complex physiographic characteristics which still support forms of plant life that exist only there under those unique conditions.

Brad Bricker, an ecologist with Plan B Natural Heritage who helped write that section of the

master plan, told a meeting of the Waterfront Task Force that the area isn't just special in the eyes of local environmentalists - it is of provincial, and possibly even of national, significance.

"When you put it all together - perched fen, Grand River forest, switchgrass prairie, oak woodlands, tufa mounds - this part of Brantford has connected environmentally significant areas," Bricker said.

"This area jumps out." The area is also the site of archaeological digs that document aboriginal settlement patterns dating to 9,000 B.C., and includes the remnants of the Davisville Mission Site of Mohawk and Mississauga settlers in the early 1800s.

For all those reasons, the master plan recommends that the contentious area be taken out of development and the companies be compensated through land swaps or other solutions in a process of negotiations.

It also recommends imposing a 30-metre buffer around every significant feature, and recommends

a map of potential restoration areas between the buffers that would make one ecosystem again.

The developers - Sifton Properties Ltd., Grandview Ravines and Rizzo Group - say they have taken into consideration the sensitive no-go areas in the midst of their projects, and are prepared to add natural buffers too.

But they contend it is still possible to develop sensitively.

The difference between the two camps was no more starkly visible than in an exchange at a meeting of council's community development services committee in June, when the master plan was first endorsed in principle.

"It is our finding that our development can co-exist with the features on our property," Glenn Scheels, an agent for Sifton, insisted of the plan to put mixed housing on the remaining half of the company's 42 hectares not curtailed by environmental considerations.

"We do believe that we can help create a wonderful waterfront."

A short while later in the discus-



Coun. Marguerite Cescht-Smith

sion, Kari Gonsen, an agent for Grandview Ravines declared his client's support for the principles of the master plan, while insisting that a compromise can be found that would still allow development while protecting the environment.

Donna Hinde, of The Planning Partnership that led the consulting team, became impatient at their comments.

She said all the buffers would

make for fractured development that would be impractical to undertake without causing some harm to what should be regarded as one ecosystem.

"I can barely believe we are still having this conversation in 2010," she said, shaking her head.

"It reminds me of when I first started in the mid '70s, when we had to talk about whether it would be the environment or development."

She compared their thinking to someone going to Quebec City, standing on the Plains of Abraham historic site, and trying to imagine spots in what is a preserved battlefield where houses could still be built.

Many city councillors and staff still hope they can reach a settlement with the developers that will protect the northwest's ecology.

Coun. Marguerite Cescht-Smith, who chairs the Waterfront Task Force, says it will mean the developers would have to be willing to consider land swaps or other options that would have them with-



### 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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12.5' x 21.5'	\$7,999	21' RD	\$3,299	15' X 24'	\$10,499
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15' X 30'	\$10,699				\$8,699

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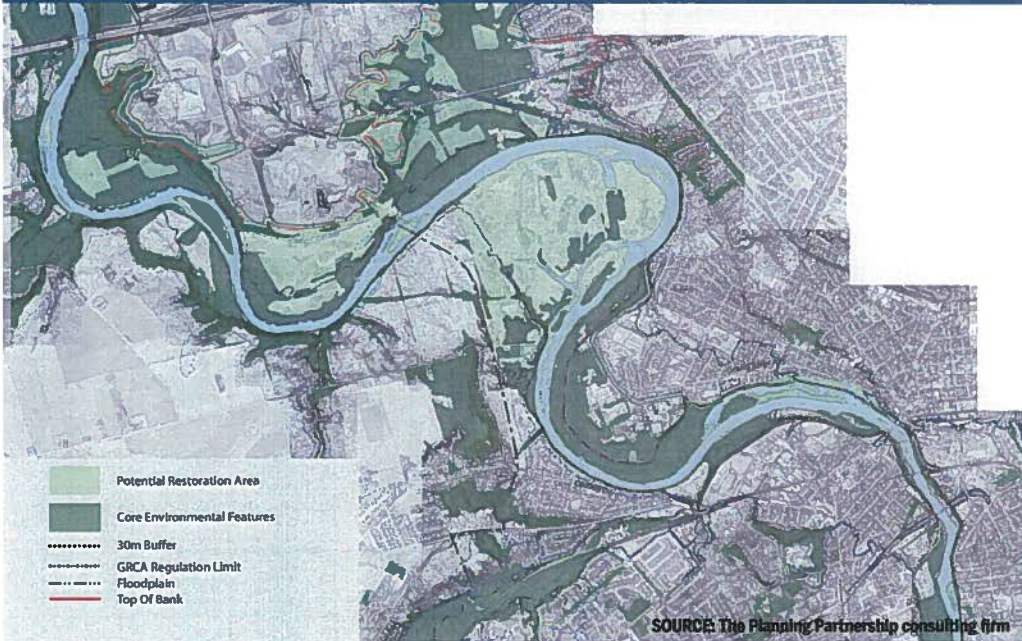
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PER MONTH

Natural Heritage Framework



SOURCE: The Planning Partnership consulting firm



**Donna Hinde**  
Tae McIntOSH for The Expositor  
draw from the contentious area and build on other lands. She believes that research, environmental science and public per-

ceptions have reached the point of no return. "We really need to ensure that we keep that area intact," said Ceschi-Smith. "The findings of the experts who worked on the master plan are very clear about that." In any case, a settlement is likely to take some time, given that a battle is about to take place at the Ontario Municipal Board. Sifton suddenly launched an OMB appeal against the city in March, while the master plan was going through its process of public consultation sessions and workshops. Grandview Ravines has joined Sifton in the appeal. Sifton's legal agent, Barry Card, said in a brief that the city had failed to deal with its applications for an official plan amendment and

a rezoning for its proposed mixed housing development within the 120-day period stipulated in the Planning Act. "It has been nearly two years since the application was filed," Card said at the time. "It didn't seem like anything was happening so an appeal had to be made." The city counters that with the Sifton file it is dealing with the third different company and third proposed development for the same location over the past decade. Planning officials said at the time they wanted to make sure the applications had all the necessary reports and information from provincial, municipal and other agencies which were examining the latest plans, because the area has several ecological, heritage and aboriginal archaeological features

that were being considered in the writing of the master plan. The city has retained Hinde, of The Planning Partnership, and Bricker, of Plan B, to represent the city's position at a hearing, in consideration of their work on the master plan. The OMB has scheduled a pre-hearing conference for Sept. 29, where the two sides can take a first look at the issues. One of the objectives of a pre-hearing conference is to explore the possibility of a settlement of issues through a mediator. It is unknown yet how much the OMB action might delay the implementation of the master plan's provisions for the northwest. [mamartom@theexpositor.com](mailto:mamartom@theexpositor.com)

The northwest sector contains several natural features along the course of the Grand River that according to the Waterfront Master Plan require protection by keeping out development. The master plan contends they "combine to represent the largest, most intact and biological diverse natural area that remains in the city of Brantford."

HERE ARE THE MAIN ONES:

- The Grand River Forest Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) encompasses the slopes, terraces and floodplain. It provides habitat for several Carolinian tree species, such as hackberry, sycamore, sassafras, hickories and oaks. The ESA also is home to two perched fens (special wetland formations left from the last ice age), which provide habitat for relict species (those that once were plentiful along Great Lakes shorelines but are now uncommon). The forested slopes provide winter roosting habitat for such species of concern as the bald eagle, and support the great blue heron rookery and a deer wintering area.
- The Davisville Swamp Provincially Significant Wetland (PSW) is identified in the master plan as one of the largest remaining wetlands in the city and a key environmental feature in the northwest. It provides habitat for species at risk.
- The Tufa Mounds Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) was designated by the province in 2008. The spot south of Hardy Road contains relict tufa mounds formed by the precipitation of calcium carbonate from cold groundwater springs.
- The province granted the area an ANSI designation because it is the largest tufa deposit in such quantities ever reported in Ontario and offers educational, interpretive and scientific opportunities. The Davisville Mission Site was discovered partly because the native settlers used the tufa rocks as the foundations of their buildings. Archaeologists discovered their "footprints" during their investigations in the area.
- The Brant Park Conservation Area supports floodplain wetlands and such rare plant communities as savannah and prairie grass that provide habitat for several rare species.
- The provincially significant wetlands and environmentally sensitive areas are supported by a unique groundwater system with three aquifers, periodic waterspouts, and streams that appear temporarily, run for awhile, then disappear.

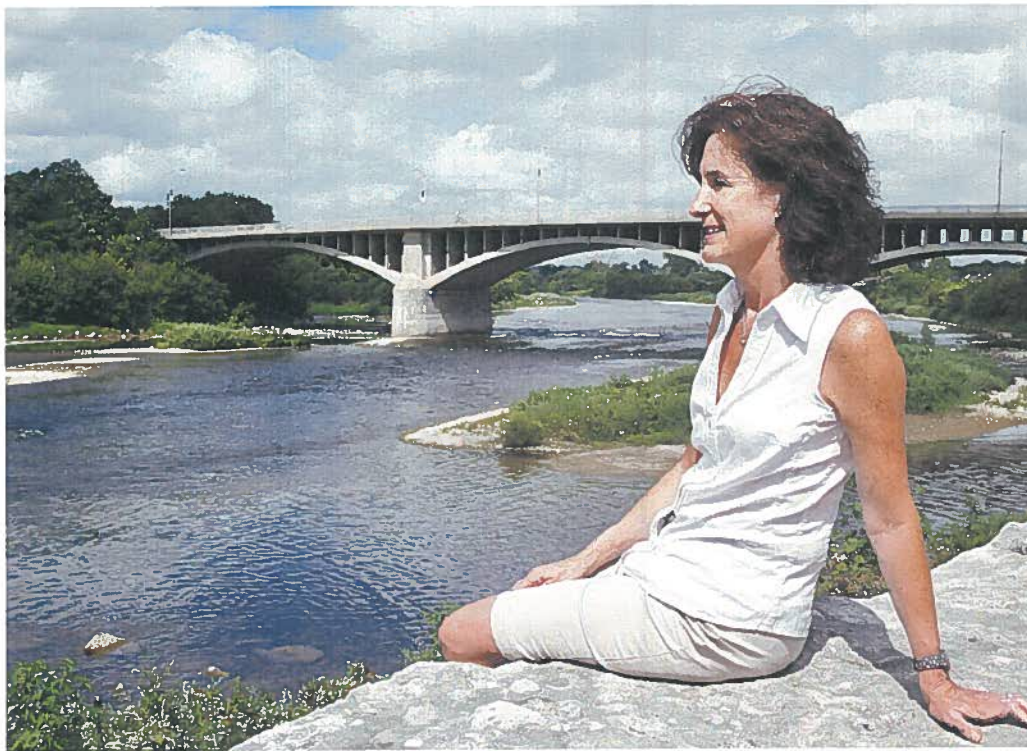
IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS AND COSTS:

The Waterfront Master Plan calls for the implementation of several projects along the waterfront, in association with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Grand River Conservation Authority, over a period of 20 years. Here are the main ones to preserve and enhance natural heritage, including estimated costs:

- Establish 30-metre buffers around the environmentally sensitive areas, provincially sensitive wetlands and area of natural and scientific interest. Cost \$30,000 per year.
- Prepare management plans for prairie, savannah and oak woodland habitats. Cost: \$100,000.
- Prepare a program for rare species recovery. Cost: \$50,000.
- Create first flush floodplain wetlands in the southeast. Cost: \$500,000.
- Implement wildlife crossing aids for D'Aubigny Creek, Birkett Lane, Mohawk Canal and the northwest. Cost: \$300,000.
- Develop a reforestation program for urban neighbourhoods. Cost: \$100,000.
- Prepare a forest management plan for the city. Cost \$100,000.
- Prepare forest management plans for D'Aubigny Creek, Fordview, Gilkison Flats, Rivergreen and Mohawk parks. Cost: \$40,000 each.
- Prepare tree planting guidelines and landscape requirements for new developments. Cost: \$50,000.

"When you put it all together – perched fen, Grand River forest, switchgrass prairie, oak woodlands, tufa mounds – this part of Brantford has connected environmentally significant areas."

Brad Bricker, an ecologist with Plan B Natural Heritage



Donna Hinde overlooks the downtown Brantford waterfront while working on the Waterfront Master Plan.

Tae McIntOSH for The Expositor

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