

on the WATERFRONT

DAY FOUR

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

Rediscovering Holmedale's charm

MICHAEL-ALLAN MARION
Expositor Staff

Holmedale neighbourhood needs to pull out and wear more often a sparkling strand in the jewelry box that it has ignored for far too long.

It's the Grand River running right by, and the bountiful natural setting along its banks, say the authors of the Waterfront Master Plan.

That stretch of the Grand contains the old industrial and residential Holmedale neighbourhood that was once oriented toward the river but whose focus pulled away over the years as the factories closed.

It also includes the intake canal to the Holmedale water treatment plant; Waterworks Park, one of the city's few wilderness areas.

Further to the south is a stretch of mostly vacant lands along the river that once had factories that went out of operation and deteriorated into brownfield sites. Many now are undergoing residential redevelopment.

They include the Solaray land that has been transformed into the Jamieson Court subdivision, the former Penman site where a condominium complex has been approved, and former railway lands where builder Mayberry Homes is constructing a row of homes near the dyke.



A view from Lorne Bridge of the paved trail atop the dyke, and the CNR tracks in Holmedale.



The Ardeny Corporation has its head office located in a former factory on Grand River Avenue in Brantford.



A parcel of vacant land on Grand River Avenue in Brantford was once the site of a huge Penman's factory.

The whole neighbourhood is linked by Grand River Avenue.

The master plan carries several recommendations to buttress natural spaces with a continuous linear greenway along the Grand. It would be done by seeding prairie meadowlands along the dyke and planting more trees, while provid-

ing more access points to the river and making development projects more sympathetic to that greener canvass.

The master plan also carries recommendations designed to guide better development practices.

"The objective is to get development to front on the river in a

way that is for the benefit of all," said Donna Hinde of The Planning Partnership, which led a consulting team that wrote the master plan.

"That way, the river becomes an amenity to all the neighbourhood, not just the lucky few who happen to be able to look at it from a backyard that others don't have."



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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Multani Homes built a small group of new homes in the Holmedale area, calling it Jamieson Court.



Mary Ellen Kaye



The head office for Williams occupies part of a former factory on Grand River Avenue.

The Waterfront Master Plan carries a vision for development of neighbourhoods, and redevelopment of old ones. Here are the main elements that apply to Holmedale:

- Create well-marked waterfront gateways to the Grand. They are meant to make up for the reality that the river itself is often not immediately visible, even though it is close at hand. In Holmedale, access points with good signage would be installed at strategic spots off Grand River Avenue.
- Improve the look of perimeters of development sites at the edge of public waterfront land. The master plan says locations along the Grand, including in Holmedale, are marred by backlotting, unsightly exposed backyards and the rears of buildings that pose privacy problems for residents. It recommends getting owners to remove or improve unsightly private fencing with new rules that limit height and favour natural landscaping, such as hedges to replace or conceal existing fences; and introducing facade improvement programs.
- The city would adopt design guidelines and give developers manuals that include best practices to better demonstrate intentions and expectations.
- The city would acquire lands, through purchase or exchange, in areas deemed inappropriate for development.
- Remove invasive plants from Waterworks Park.
- Enhance the dyke by establishing a meadow and prairie community.
- Pursue the building of an off-leash dog park in the open fields of Waterworks Park. Cost: \$50,000 for study.
- Install a sign for Waterworks Park at the entrance off Grand River Avenue. Cost: \$10,000.
- Prepare interpretation plans for archaeological sites in Holmedale. Cost: part of a \$50,000 estimate for interpretation plans for archeological sites across the city.
- Complete a feasibility study to designate the Holmedale area as a cultural heritage landscape under the Ontario Heritage Act. Cost: \$25,000.

Hinde noted the old grid pattern had streets running perpendicular to the river, which gave people easy access to it. They merely had to walk a block or two down a street to get there.

"We need to return to that thinking as the neighbourhood redevelops."

In fact, political and social conflict over development in the Holmedale stretch of the Grand were major factors in a grassroots push for a waterfront master plan.

Residents started raising complaints in 2007 over the Penman redevelopment with two six-storey condominium buildings; and further along the Grand, a line of houses being built in stages by Mayberry that back onto the river.

The residents wanted the area to

maintain a green veneer, to have continued access to the riverfront, and the city to acquire some lands for parks and other facilities.

The developers said they were merely following established rules in the city's official plan and provincial policies meant to promote residential infill and housing intensification in the old parts of cities.

The residents formed the grassroots group Keep Our Public, went door to door gathering signatures on a petition calling for a waterfront master plan, and pressed their case in delegations at public hearings and council meetings.

When council approved those developments, some members of the group launched appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board.

They also participated during

the past year in public sessions in the writing of the master plan to try to instil it with their interests, and curtail development.

"We had a lot of dialogue over the question of development," recalled Mary Ellen Kaye, who leads Keep Our River Public.

"We didn't want very much built and we wanted the area to have more connecting green space with access to the trail on the dyke and to the river. And we wanted shaded green space with trees."

But since those development projects were already in the works and people are coming back to the river, she said, those guiding the process thought it best to avoid quarrels over already approved developments.

The more prudent course, they

recommended, would be to get ahead of the trend with provisions designed to make improvements in spots where the city has authority, and write better planning guidelines for development on private property along the river.

"All the recommended measures are a compromise we can live with, if they're implemented," said Kaye.

She said she likes recommendations for 30-metre riparian buffers with natural species, a coordinated strategy for a series of waterfront gateways including in the Holmedale neighbourhood, an off-leash dog park in Waterworks Park, and tree plantings on municipal property.

"They would make our community a better place."

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Mary Ellen Kaye, Keep Our River Public



A view of the Grand River from the Lorne Bridge in Brantford.

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