

JANUARY 2021 NEWSLETTER

Our work of several decades to protect natural heritage lands, to promote stewardship, to enhance public access and to develop trail connections has been fully validated in recent months. Hundreds of visitors flock daily to use publicly accessible trails in the area as the pandemic restrictions continue; for many it is their first visit.

Last Fall saw a flurry of changes in Provincial land planning policy and legislation. Land use policy has always been a highly political arena but the recent changes have been especially polarizing. Rousing campaigns have been launched by some of our community partners as the Provincial government has made revisions to the Planning Act and the Provincial Policy Statement. Recent amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act have diminished this vital institution's role and authority in the land planning process. There has been a large increase in the use of Ministerial Zoning Orders, a mechanism which can be used by the Minister to override the planning process, to remove barriers to land development projects or stop actions related to land development.

All these changes have the potential to bring both harm (loss of habitat and valuable land for food production, inappropriate siting of development) and good (more certainty and efficiencies in the land planning process for some). The rapid pace and sheer number of recent changes mean we citizens must do our part in becoming better informed, pay attention to what is happening in our communities and offer our comments when they are sought.

The pandemic has made civic participation much easier. We can readily sit in on council meetings without leaving home. Most are broadcast publicly and can be found with a quick online search. For example, just before Christmas, on very short notice it was possible to tune in to the delegations, reports and deliberations about a contentious MZO request which was under consideration by King Township. During the summer GDA was a delegate in Durham Region Council's deliberations about the Veraine proposal; we sat in the comfort of our homes while being heard by Council.

We can also keep connected and informed in new and convenient ways. We were able to hold our later-than-usual Annual General Meeting partly in-person in an open-air barn, and partly via Zoom. We wanted to bring to your attention to a couple of meetings in the coming month:

1: Carruthers Creek Watershed Plan: Among the concerns about the Veraine proposal was its impact on Carruthers Creek. Regional Council of Durham decided to resume the public engagement period on the draft Carruthers Creek Watershed Plan (CCWP), which was paused in April 2020 due to the Covid-19 situation. Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Region of Durham will be hosting two virtual open houses on the contents of the draft CCWP:

- Monday, February 1 from 7 pm to 8 pm
- Thursday, February 4 from 7 pm to 8 pm

To register for either virtual open house, click here: [GoToWebinar link](#).

2: David Crombie, Former Chair of the Greenbelt Council is a guest speaker in a webinar on Tuesday January 12 at 7pm. Entitled “Protecting Ontario’s Environmental Future”, the conversation will also feature speakers from Canadian Environmental Law Association, Ontario Nature and Environmental Defense. The event is free; click here: [Register today](#) to tune in to this live discussion.

We continue to work on projects which will bring more opportunities for public access to nature, and for more trail connections to communities. We hope to have news in the next few months about one such project. There are many steps and partners with this quiet background work – it takes time and dogged determination and we never truly know when or if it will come to fruition but we keep trying....

Volunteers completed the installation of 13 beautiful benches throughout TRCA lands. Lumber milled and donated by GDA member Ian Gillespie was then cut, assembled and installed under the guidance of GDA board member Rob Ferguson. Take a walk on the Brock, Walker, Glen Major, North Walker Woods, Secord and Goodwood tracts and have a seat and enjoy the views!

After a productive spring, summer and fall working on several large projects, our trail volunteers have continued to head out to remove fallen trees in these winter months. In the spring, work will begin once again on various maintenance projects as Covid restrictions permit. If you would like to participate in some of these trail projects, get in touch by emailing info@greendurham.ca. You don’t need to commit to regular attendance, you can choose projects and timing that interest you. Most of our projects take place on weekdays because the trails are not as busy with visitors. We have liability insurance to cover our volunteers.

GDA was awarded a grant of \$5,000 from TransCanada Trail to assist with maintenance costs. Thank you TCT! Research indicates that trail maintenance is an important factor in encouraging people to get outside and enjoy nearby nature. Well-maintained trail entrances, parking lots and trails make people feel safe and comfortable being out in the wild. And we know that people who get outside regularly can stay healthy and feel calmer at this very stressful time. Nature is a great antidote to stress.

If you visit the trails, check out GDA’s poetry loop. Park at the Allbright Road entrance to the Walker Woods, at 2986 Concession 6, Uxbridge (just south of Reg. Rd. 21). The 8 km loop begins at the kiosk, with stanzas posted throughout Walker Woods.

Several years ago GDA commissioned Chrismar Mapping Services to create trail maps of the trails south of Uxbridge. Uxbridge Township contributed funds to the project and partnered with GDA. The maps are sold at Blue Heron Books, Boyds Cycle, and now online at www.chrismar.com. With each sale, some of the profit goes to the vendor, some to Chrismar, and some to GDA. With the pandemic, Chrismar tells us that sales are up significantly – by at least 30%. The two conservation authorities which manage the lands featured on the maps tell us that visits to these properties are up at least 200%!

And just because, take a look at these beautiful maps on the Greenbelt Foundation website, their Near Urban Nature Project: https://www.greenbelt.ca/near_urban_nature_project_maps