

Canadian Brownfields Case Study

The Meadoway



Source: Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, 2019

Figure 1: conceptual rendering of the Meadoway, from *The Meadoway Visualization Toolkit*.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Meadoway is an east-west accessible, multi-use trail that connects downtown to Rouge National Urban Park, Toronto. Unique from classic brownfield remediation, the Meadoway does not involve cleaning up of contaminants below-ground. Rather, the project transforms 16 kilometres of underutilized monoculture into one of the largest urban greenspaces in Canada (Fig 1). The question that sparked the Meadoway was “Why not rethink the under-utilized space beneath a hydro corridor and repurpose the turf grass into a thriving meadow?”¹. Besides providing much needed greenspace for leisure and urban agriculture, the Meadoway extends Toronto’s active transportation network through restoration of the existing trail network and meadows. The Meadoway won the 2020 Reach Out Brownie Award for its extensive communications, marketing and public engagement processes.

QUICK FACTS

Location

Scarborough, Toronto, Ontario

Project type

Meadow Restoration

Site size

16 Kilometres

Land uses

Hydro Corridor, Open Space, Recreation

Keywords/special features

Multi-Use Trail, Hydro Corridor, Urban Agriculture, Public Park

Website

<https://themeadoway.ca>

Project address

Scarborough, Toronto

Author

Jane Law [in](#)

Editors

Christopher De Sousa, Mabel Mai

Case studies were prepared as a course assignment by students enrolled in PL8312/PLE845: Brownfields & Sustainable Development, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Ryerson University (Winter 2021). Information for the case studies was obtained from online sources, available reports, and, in some cases, site visits and direct communication with stakeholders.

If you are aware of any errors or updates to the case studies, please contact chris.desousa@ryerson.ca

The opinions expressed in this case study are those of the authors only and do not represent the opinions and views of either Ryerson University, the School of Urban and Regional Planning, or the Canadian Brownfields Network.

Site Characteristics

The project is 235.6 ha in size and contains 93.4 ha of natural habitat (i.e., forest, meadow, wetland, and dynamic communities) and 74 different vegetation communities². The majority of The Meadoway lies in the Highland Creek watershed (about 136 ha), while the western 70 ha is in the Don watershed³. A small segment of the eastern end of The Meadoway is in the Rouge watershed⁴. All the watersheds are in Scarborough, Toronto.

Site Background

Prior to colonial times, the Meadoway was a forest⁵. In the 1950s, the surrounding agricultural lands began to urbanize, and Ontario Hydro began to designate sections of land across the province as hydro corridors bringing electricity from major hydro-electric generating stations along the Ottawa River⁶. As a result, a series of large hydro towers were constructed in The Meadoway in order to provide energy to a rapidly growing population⁷.

Cleanup

As one of the largest linear habitat restoration projects in Ontario, The Meadowway serves as a model for how to successfully revitalize hydro corridors across the Greater Toronto Area and abroad⁸. Cleanup of The Meadowway followed the Class EA Schedule C Process, the most rigorous of planning processes that exist for a hydro corridor⁹. The environmental assessment consisted of 5 phases:

Phase 1: Identify Key Problems

User Safety: lack of fully connected multi-use trail network across the LSA forced trail users to detour off-corridor into busy streets; unmanaged/unauthorized use of informal trails and access points throughout the trail, posing safety risks to users and raises concern to land and utility owners¹⁰.

Continuity and Connectivity: no connection between the existing trail and the City's major multi-use trail network. Contributing to the lack of connectivity is the limited number of safe access points to cross the river valley systems spanning the trail¹¹.

Accessibility: lack of mid-trail access points (e.g., parking lots or other entrance features) limited the accessibility of the trail. Further, portions of the trail showed need of resurfacing,

repair, and realignment¹².

Access and Enjoyment: of healthy, ecologically diverse greenspace that contributes to the City's climate resiliency¹³.

Phase 2: Develop Alternative Solutions

User Safety: the trail will minimize the interaction between trail users and road vehicles by limiting off-corridor detours and connections as much as possible¹⁴.

Continuity and Connectivity: the trail will provide a complete east-to-west multi-use trail connection between downtown Toronto and Rouge National Urban Park, while linking numerous local and regional trail systems and communities along the way¹⁵. Further, the trail will increase connections for multi-modal transportation options, such as the Eglinton Crosstown LRT and the Scarborough Subway Extension¹⁶.

Accessibility: the trail will provide for enhanced opportunities for the public to access, enjoy, and learn about the natural environment and facilitate opportunities for improving community connection to the local environment, such as through the creation of dedicated garden and urban agricultural plots¹⁷.

Access and Enjoyment: the trail will have a fully accessible active transportation network and

naturalized greenspace for a variety of trail users to enjoy, including the elderly and those with mobility issues¹⁸.

Phase 3: Develop Alternative for Implementation

The focus of the Class EA was on developing alternative trail alignments for incomplete sections of the hydro corridor (figure 2). Three alternative trail alignments were considered, as seen in Figure 3: (1) where the trail remains within the hydro corridor as much as feasibly possible; (2) where the trail navigates the existing street network, and (3), where the trail is placed both in the hydro corridor and existing streets¹⁹. Criteria were developed to consider the benefits and the environmental, socio-economic and cultural impacts of each alternative²⁰. This was done for sections 3, 5 and 6 of the trail.

Phase 4: Develop Project Rationale, Planning, Design, and Consultation Process

The Meadowway Class EA ESR was prepared to include the project activities, correspondence, consultation, planning, and decision-making processes up to and including Phase 4 of the MCEA process²¹. Members of the public, Indigenous communities, stakeholders, and government agencies were provided an opportunity to review, examine and provide

Figure 2: Example of Phase 3 - Developing Alternative Solutions

THE MEADOWWAY - SECTION 3 - PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE ALIGNMENTS

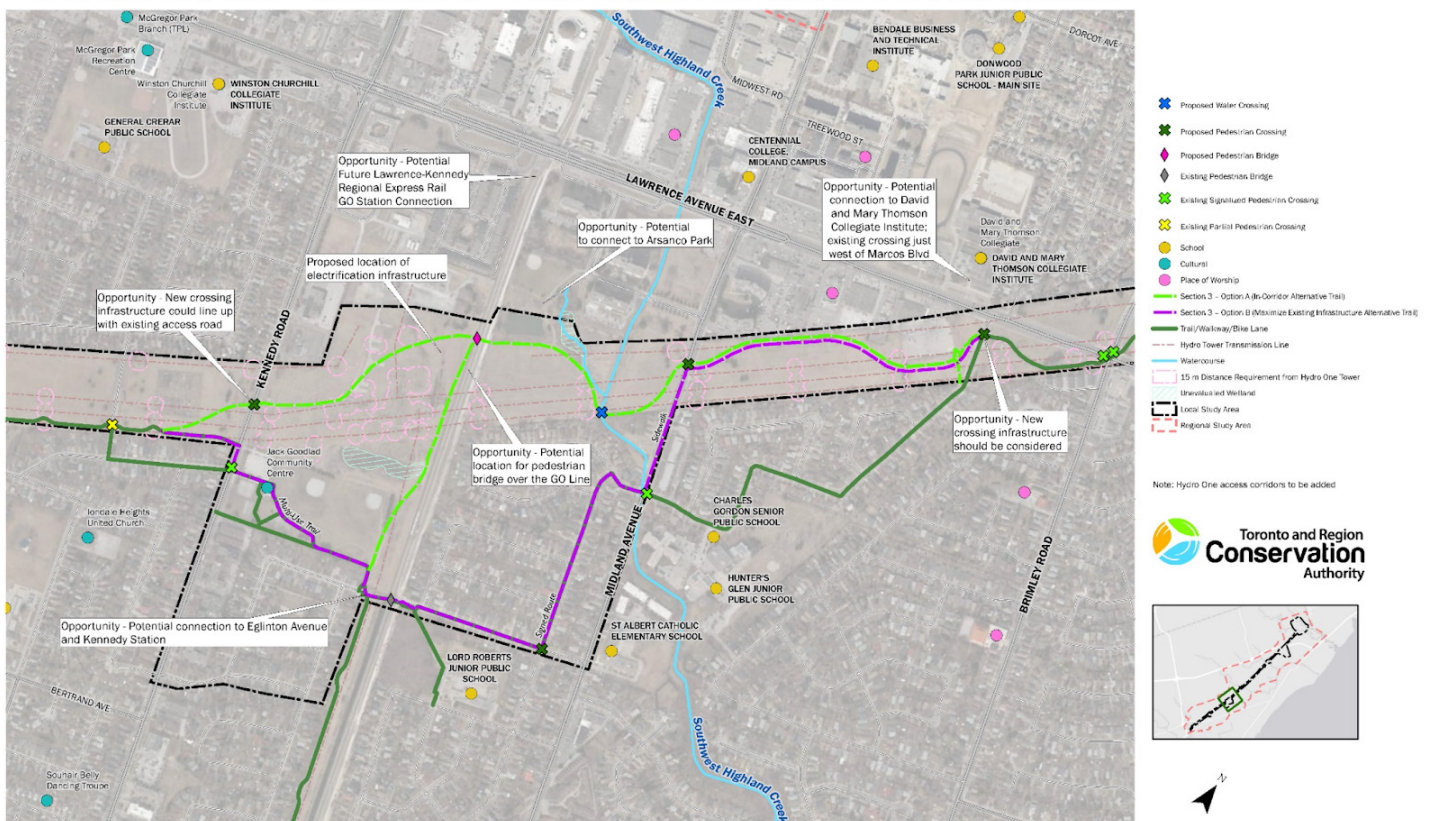




Figure 3: Community Engagement Process

feedback on the project's findings at each phase of the process²².

Phase 5: Develop and Prepare Drawings and Additional Documents

Phase 5 was contracted out and completed by architects and engineers²³.

Planning and Redevelopment

The Meadowway underwent extensive planning and community engagement, as required by the Provincial Secondary Land Use Program (which permits for secondary uses on hydro corridors with a priority for projects that are for the common good)²⁴.

The Meadowway also supports the Official Plan by:

- Building a more liveable urban region by reducing auto dependency, improving air quality, and protecting and promoting access to greenspace and natural heritage²⁵;
- Integrating land use and transportation by encouraging active transportation and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions²⁶;
- Supporting the social and economic development of mixed-use communities in Centres by connecting Centres to the surrounding City fabric and transportation system with trails, parks, and bikeways²⁷;
- Enhancing neighbourhoods and greenspaces by developing existing parks and recreation facilities²⁸;
- Building Toronto's green space system by

improving public access and enjoyment of lands under public ownership²⁹; and,

- Encouraging a progressive agenda of active transportation by providing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure with corresponding policies and programs that create an urban environment which encourages people of all abilities and ages to use active transportation³⁰.

The Meadowway also contributes to: Toronto Bike Plan, City of Toronto Walking Strategy, Cycling Network 10-Year Plan, TransformTO Climate Action Strategy, Healthy Toronto by Design - Public Health Division, Ravine Strategy - Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and the Growth Plan for the GGH (2017)³¹.

Community Involvement

The Meadowway used a variety of community engagement strategies (figure 3), including: Community Liaison Committee: stakeholder representatives, community groups, and residents who reviewed and provided feedback throughout the planning process, assisting in building consensus on The Meadowway's guiding principles³².

Indigenous Communities: Prior to the delivery of any notifications, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks was approached for advice and information on the Indigenous communities that should be

contacted during the Indigenous Engagement process³³.

Technical Advisory Committee: composed of key stakeholders formed for The Meadowway Class EA, and provided critical feedback on concepts, constraints, design solutions, and other project material³⁴.

Key Stakeholders: including Crosslinx Transit Solutions, City of Toronto, Metrolinx, TTC, UTSC, HONI and Parks Canada³⁵.

Local Politicians: all affected Councillors, MPs, and MPPs were issued key project notices and invitations to all public engagement events, and opportunities for in-person project updates were provided³⁶.

Review Agencies: including the Department of Fisheries and Ocean and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry³⁷.

The Public: three Public Information Centres were hosted to showcase work in progress and gather public feedback using tools such as a 24-foot map, Virtual Reality panoramas, and a flipbook. Engagement took place in community centres, schools, and the outdoors³⁸.

Design

The design of key lookout points, entranceways, and intersections of The Meadowway are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Western Gateway: features Jonesville Allotment Gardens and garden planting to signal an entranceway and create a transition between the Don River and The Meadowway. Also acts as the primary connector to the Eglinton Crosstown³⁹.

Givendale Gardens: features enhanced accessibility to Givendale Allotment Gardens and the surrounding neighbourhoods and community buildings, with a focus on safe crossings⁴⁰.

Highland Creek: a bridge with lookout spots, educational signage, spur trails, and connections to the Pan Am Path (figure 4)⁴¹.

Eastern Entrance: garden plantings that signal an entranceway and buffer views to Hwy 401⁴².

Morningside Meadows: stretches of meadows around a paved multi-use trail⁴³.

Highland Creek Crossing: educational wayfinding, accessible seating, and cycling amenities to support different users of the trail⁴⁴.

Ellesmere Ravine Crossing: a bridge within the tree canopy of the ravine with a scenic lookout, accessible seating, and signage⁴⁵.

Design of other intersections and crossings were also considered.

Trail Intersections: includes both nodes and connections between existing and new trails, with



Figure 4: Rendering of Highland Crossing, a future bridge envisioned in The Meadowway

some intersections featuring seating⁴⁶.

Typical Road Crossing: includes marked crossings and paving, cycling signals, and accessible seating and signage⁴⁷.

Additional Design Considerations include:

Child's Eye View: meadow habitats designed as an exploratory experience that is both age and height-inclusive (figure 5)⁴⁸.

Urban Agriculture: provides increased opportunities to grow food and encourages stewardship over the land (figure 6)⁴⁹.

Wetlands: restored wetlands that provide community education opportunities (figure 7)⁵⁰.

Financing

The Weston Family Foundation has pledged up to \$25 million in support, with an initial commitment of \$10 million announced at the launch event on April 11, 2018⁵¹. The City of Toronto has to date committed \$6.3 million for a total Phase 1 budget of \$16.3 million⁵². Additional funds are being sought to complete Phase 2 between 2021 and 2024⁵³.

The project will cost an estimated \$38 million, which includes completion of the 16 km of multi-use trail, installation of wayfinding and signage, building bridges over Highland Creek and

Ellesmere Ravine, planting and maintaining 115 hectares of meadow habitat, and running annual community engagement and education programs.

Observations & Key Lessons Learned

From a hydro corridor revitalization perspective, a key lesson learned was the need to take into consideration what the community was asking for in a realistic manner⁵⁴. Rather than over-promising an element that was not feasible within the space, it was better to explain why some things could or could not be done. For example, some community members had requested that a large water park be placed within the space⁵⁵. However, from a safety standpoint, a waterpark within a hydro corridor is definitely not feasible⁵⁶. Being prepared to direct individuals to other potential solutions, such as moving a requested waterpark to a nearby greenspace, was one way to address situations where public wants or needs could not be addressed⁵⁷. Approaching the public consultation sessions with a clear, transparent message of what is possible within the space was a key lesson learned⁵⁸. Of importance is highlighting the potential of the project, while also explaining the limitations of the space at the beginning of the consultation period⁵⁹. This helps to avoid setting unrealistic expectations of what is feasible with the project scope and timeline⁶⁰.



Figure 5: Example of Meadows envisioned for The Meadowway

A final key success of The Meadowway was the community-oriented education component that created a sense of community ownership over the space⁶¹. Since 2019, TRCA educators worked in partnership with elementary schools near The Meadowway, visiting classes to teach students about biology and restoration, grow plants from seed, and plant the plants in the hydro corridor in the springtime⁶². Educating youth with the goal of developing their sense of ownership over the space was key to building a strong community connection to the space⁶³.

Going forward, community involvement will continue to be a key part of The Meadowway. What is envisioned, if funding and resources allow, is the creation of a "friends of" group⁶⁴. While the TRCA will continue on with trail maintenance, once the project has taken hold, the TRCA aims to take a step back and transfer key long-term responsibilities of programming and activating the space to local community groups⁶⁵. Through the "friends of" model, community members would come together to act as the voice for Meadowway in the long term⁶⁶.



Figure 6: Example of Urban Agriculture envisioned for The Meadowway



Figure 7: Rendering of Wetlands, a future bridge envisioned in The Meadowway

Endnotes

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