

APPENDIX 2

**A REVIEW BY CITIZENS CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE
OF THE ETOBICOKE WATERFRONT**

**OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT
OF THE PROPOSED SKATEBOARD FACILITY
IN COLONEL SAMUEL SMITH PARK**

**which was commissioned by the City of Toronto
from Marshall, Macklin, Monaghan
and is dated March 2006**

An objective of the Natural Environment Assessment that was commissioned by the City was “to identify natural heritage features and potential impacts to specific features and functions of the natural environment at Col. Samuel Smith Park.” Notably absent from the assessment are several unique natural features of the park.

For example the old creek bed surrounded by evergreens and known as the swale or bowl in the north-east corner of the Lakeshore Grounds is well known to Toronto birders as a prime spot for birdwatching. One ornithologist reported this spring seeing a rare worm eating warbler there. This area is not referred to in the report which focuses primarily on the project site and not on the Lakeshore Grounds as a whole.

Nor was any attention given to the role that Samuel Smith plays in the migratory patterns of many bird species. The report says that few species would use the skateboard site during migration. It then quotes a local birder as having identified 160 different bird species in the park, 121 of which were migratory birds. The authors fail to grasp the fact that the skateboard/skating track site is not an isolated island—it is part of the Lakeshore Grounds.

As a member of the Toronto Ornithological Club told the TRCA Board last January:

“Col Samuel Smith Park and the adjoining Lakeshore Grounds, with their attractive wetland, rippling creek, old trees, and native plantings, form part of a natural migration corridor which funnels spring birds northward after their long crossing of Lake Ontario, through the city, and towards Humberwood Park (in northern Etobicoke), one of the three parks where bird habitat is being improved under the Bird Flyways scheme. One of the most experienced and knowledgeable naturalist members of the Toronto Ornithological Club, Glenn Coady, has strong views about the importance of waterfront parks:

“Waterfront parks with ample food resources, cover from predators and minimized human disturbance, are absolutely critical to:

1) spring migrants exhausted by monumentally long distances already covered in migration, including a just-completed Great Lake crossing, especially in disorienting weather like storms or fog overnight;

and

2) fall migrants requiring safe places to feed/store migratory fat reserves and safely stage prior to an arduous lake crossing that is merely a minor prelude to an often trans-continental/trans-oceanic/trans-hemispheric migration that forms a devastatingly challenging prerequisite to their safe return the following year. We can do precious little locally to maximize birds' chances of surviving their first winter on their winter quarters, but we CAN do much locally to ensure that their fall migration is undertaken with the least stress possible to see them off with the best fighting chance to survive their first winter (the most critical to overcome in reaching adulthood) and return to us the following year.

Safe waterfront migration fallout sites are crucial to recharging birds' energy stores to make the next inland hop to sites like Humberwood Park—these networks of prime waterfront fallout sites serve to quickly channel birds using our rivers/ravines to even better/safer locations a short flight inland.

The combination of both lakefront and inland sites is instrumental and necessary to minimize the stress of migration and to ensure birds arrive in prime condition to initiate breeding quickly on spring arrival, and arrive at winter quarters after fall migration in a condition that will maximize their chance of subsequent winter survival.”

Citizens Concerned about the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront (CCFEW) disagrees with the Natural Environment Assessment that migratory birds would not be affected by the presence of a skateboard and skating facility.

It has been suggested that the park could potentially be considered Significant Wildlife Habitat (more specifically a landbird migratory stopover area) as per the 2005 Provincial Policy Statement of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Several rare migrant species and species of concern: Cerulean Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and Worm-eating Warbler have been found in the park within the last year. In winter, a Short-eared Owl, another species of special concern, has been a regular visitor in the open areas of Lakeshore Grounds immediately adjacent to the proposed site. The site meets all of the criteria for landbird migratory stopover areas including species diversity, size of the site, habitat diversity, location on the waterfront and historical use of the site. No assessment of the provincial policy statement was carried out as part of the Natural Assessment report.

Col. Samuel Smith Park is also a resting spot for monarch butterflies before and after their flight across Lake Ontario. The meadow where it is planned to build the skateboard facility is an ideal location for the butterflies because of the protective trees in the creek bed to the east. Among the wildflowers planted in the park by the TRCA over the years is swamp milkweed which monarchs feed upon. A butterfly garden was planted last year adjacent to the Assembly Hall in the Lakeshore Grounds. Butterflies are not mentioned in the Natural Environment Assessment.

Nor was there any acknowledgement of the significant number of trees, shrubs and flowers that have been planted in Col. Samuel Smith Park over the last decade. These were all native species and because the park is in the Carolinian zone many are types of trees specific to that environment. In 1995, when regeneration of the park began, volunteers with the TRCA and the Environmental Youth Corps planted 15,000 wildflowers in the meadow south of the proposed skateboard site. In addition to wildflowers the landscape was altered to provide more diversity of habitat.

The assessment states that there is similar habitat south of the skateboard meadow and therefore loss of the meadow would not affect the birds. The point is not only that habitat will be lost but that it will be replaced with facilities that generate lights and noise.

One of the special features of Col. Samuel Smith Park are the wetlands. They are discussed in the assessment as the receptor of storm water from the project and are described as “created wetlands” as though that diminished their value. In fact they are the termination of North Creek. The major storm water sewer on the property is west of the skateboard facility site and as a recommendation of the 1980 Environmental Assessment it has a container pond and barrier which filters contaminants from storm water.

The wetlands provide good habitat for a variety of fish species. One reason for creating the northern wetland was to provide habitat for warm water fish species. The wetlands also provide nesting sites for swans and other waterfowl. The assessment assumed that North Creek would be used for storm water run off without any effect on vegetation or wildlife habitat. There is no mention of the effect on fish habitat.

Another unique feature of Col. Samuel Smith Park that was not mentioned in the assessment is the presence of a rare form of garter snake. When the park was created special basking and hibernating habitats were created to preserve and enhance the population of this snake which is more commonly found along the north shore of Lake Erie.

The Natural Environment Assessment recommends that the tree and shrub cover east of the site should be retained and that there should be a set back from the drip line of the trees. However it also points out that “the operation and use of a recreation facility adjacent to tree margins may present some risk that limbs from trees at the margin may be damaged by vandalism.” It goes on to say that there should be access routes to the facility from the walking trail to the east. The latter points contradict the finding that retaining the easterly tree cover is important.

The Assessment is also contradictory with respect to the noise and lights expected from the skateboard/skating facility. It says that the skateboard facility will not be illuminated and therefore will not be used after dark. CCFEW thinks that assertion is highly speculative – darkness has not deterred vandals from damaging picnic benches and bird viewing platforms in the park, it will not deter skateboarders. In addition we fear that the lack of visibility from a public street is bound to create security problems which in turn will prompt a demand for more lighting. And the report goes on to say that the skating track would be illuminated. A lit skating track winding around the site will certainly illuminate the skateboard facility sufficiently that it could be used during the period when birds are seeking roosting spots.

With respect to noise the assessment points out that “due to the multi-use nature of the park and the interest in passive uses such as walking and nature viewing, ambient noise is an important consideration.” CCFEW agrees and appreciates the fact that the predominantly passive nature of the park was recognised.

The report then acknowledges that the noise level of the skateboard facility “has the potential to impact wildlife in the adjacent habitat.” It says that the noise would be infrequent because the number of skaters and times of use would vary so that there

would be periods of time when wildlife could use the immediate area without disturbance from noise. The report claims that there would be no skateboard activity at night and that birds would roost uninterrupted. CCFEW disagrees.

What is missing from the report is noteworthy. There is no assessment of the long term effects on birds and wildlife of this “infrequent” noise or of lights. There is no recognition of the role the adjacent treed creek plays as a wildlife corridor.

The report says that there are no significant wildlife corridors in the park. This is patently incorrect – the North Creek serves that function and the school presently under construction will be required to enhance the landscaping along the Kipling Avenue frontage to maintain a link to the orchard area in the north end of the park. In addition the Parks Department have done extensive shrub and tree planting in the easterly area of the park which has improved a corridor from Lake Ontario to the previously mentioned swale or bowl.

The Natural Environment Assessment concludes that there are no significant habitats or species in Col. Samuel Smith Park that would be significantly impacted by the planned facility and that the type of habitat available at the site is abundant and of better quality elsewhere in the park. CCFEW disagrees and believes that a more thorough and informed assessment is required.

The report’s conclusion further says that as new uses and facilities are implemented appropriate mitigation and monitoring measures are recommended, including consultation with the TRCA and stakeholder groups. CCFEW suggests that such consultation should occur before new uses and facilities are considered for Col. Samuel Smith Park rather than after the horse has bolted.