

Item for the Information of the Regional Watershed Alliance

TO: Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance
Wednesday, September 20, 2023 Meeting

FROM: Anil Wijesooriya, Director, Restoration and Infrastructure

RE: **THE MEADOWAY: PHASE 2 FUNDING UPDATE**

KEY ISSUE

Update on the status of The Meadoway project and funding secured from the Weston Family Foundation to advance Phase 2.

RECOMMENDATION:

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the update on the status of The Meadoway project and Phase 2 funding, be received for information.

BACKGROUND

The Meadoway is an innovative city naturalization and community driven initiative linking 16 km of the Gatineau Hydro Corridor between the East Don River in downtown Toronto to Rouge National Urban Park. The Meadoway has been undergoing a significant transformation from a barren hydro corridor to become a vibrant expanse of urban greenspace and meadow habitat which will connect four ravines, 15 parks, and 34 neighbourhoods over its 200 hectares, housing more than 1,000 diverse species of flora and fauna. In addition to the revitalization of the corridor, the project seeks to build meaningful community engagement and educational opportunities around natural and cultural heritage that will facilitate an increased sense of community pride and ownership of this important regional connection.

At Authority Meeting #7/18, held on September 28, 2018, an update on The Meadoway and recommendation to advance implementation of key priorities was approved per Resolution #A143/18, in part, as follows:

WHEREAS The W. Garfield Weston Foundation has made a \$10 million of the \$25 million pledge available immediately to TRCA to implement Phase 1 of the project; ...

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT with appropriate Board Authority approvals including purchasing approvals, authorized TRCA and LCF officials be directed to take all necessary actions regarding retaining consulting services, the hiring of contract staff including project managers, and the signing and execution of any service agreements within the limit of the confirmed approved funding agreement for Phase 1; ...

THAT updates be brought back to the Authority on an annual basis as implementation of the project proceeds.

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From 2018 – 2022 TRCA worked closely with the City of Toronto and other key stakeholders to advance Phase 1 of the project. Discussions with the City beginning in 2017 helped to prompt an initial \$6.3 million City of Toronto investment and the initial \$10 million dollar Weston Foundation grant for the project in 2018. An additional \$1.348 million was granted by the Weston Family Foundation during this timeframe bringing their total contribution to \$11.348 million. From 2022 onwards, TRCA was also successful in securing an additional \$2.744 million, mostly from federal grant programs, to leverage the Weston Family Foundation grant. In total, \$14.092 million was raised in addition to the initial City investment to support advancing Phase 1 priorities. Work focused on planning and design of the multi-use trail with continued advancement of meadow habitat across the corridor. Throughout this period of time, education, outreach, and communications were integrated into all aspects of project delivery.

For active transportation, key activities completed as part of Phase 1 of The Meadoway included the completion of the multiple award-winning Visualization Toolkit and the planning, design, and approval of the conceptual trail alignment via a Municipal Class Environmental Assessment, Schedule C process. This included a comprehensive stakeholder and consultation program. Detailed design packages were prepared for priority areas of trail implementation and construction of the connection at Highland Creek was initiated and will be complete by fall 2023. The work at the intersection of Highland Creek and The Meadoway creates linkages to the Pan Am Path, Morningside Legacy Project (a partnership with the Williams Treaty First Nations) and to the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail via the Highland Creek valley. The Meadoway and all these networks are vital components of the TRCA's Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region.

Key restoration activities completed in Phase 1 included establishing 80 ha of native meadow which has increased pollinator and wildlife habitat, plant species biodiversity and thus improved climate resilience. 68 ha of adaptive management was undertaken in previously established areas of the corridor which included invasive species management, garbage collection, infill seeding and monitoring. In addition to this work 34 ha of buffer mowing around newly established native meadows, 30 ha of maintenance mowing has occurred, and 9.5 ha of native shrubs were planted in partnership with the City of Toronto.

Through advancing this initiative TRCA has emerged as experts in the field of meadow restoration. To share the knowledge gained from working on The Meadoway “A Blueprint for Naturalizing Infrastructure Corridors” was published at the end of 2022 as a ‘how to guide’ for right of way restoration based on the lessons learned. The guide is available in small quantities as a hard copy publication but also available online at www.themeadoway.ca

Given restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, The Meadoway Schools Program pivoted in Phase 1 to provide a curriculum linked to e-learning resources for teachers to engage their students through virtual field trips to The Meadoway and online platforms

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like Google Classroom. Key activities completed included hosting virtual webinars, producing pre-recorded videos, and leading Facebook Live sessions. In 2021 and 2022, a variety of education and community learning activities were coordinated and delivered, including community workshops, school tours and clean-ups, as well as a customized environmental program for Special Education for a high school near The Meadoway. In addition, University of Toronto students undertook science monitoring programs focused on The Meadoway which furthered the shared understanding of the ecological and hydrological benefits of meadow and utility corridor restoration work.

The Phase 1 communication strategy for The Meadoway focused on digital engagement with a greater focus on digital tools and regular content to stay connected to audiences via three active social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). This included several Facebook Live E-Learning videos, ongoing website updates (public access map, updated menu buttons, website translation options, trail, and restoration updates, etc.) and newsletters. Trail branding through the Scarborough Centre Butterfly (Thomson Memorial Park) area was also undertaken and The Meadoway continued to participate in and be recognized as a member of the High Line Network.

RATIONALE

In May 2023 the Weston Family Foundation committed another grant of \$6.332 million over 2023- 2025 to support the second phase of The Meadoway. With this grant the Weston Family Foundation has now committed \$17.68 million to TRCA of their earlier \$25 million pledge to The Meadoway.

The following is a high-level overview of key deliverables within the funding agreement for Phase 2.

Project Management and Operations

A core team of project and contract management staff will be funded to provide overarching direction and delivery of The Meadoway, with a focus on liaising with key stakeholders to maximize partnership opportunities.

Key activities include, but are not limited to:

- Continue to coordinate and liaise with key project stakeholders, consultants, and City of Toronto departments in support of delivering a multi-faceted project;
- Manage the preparation and execution of all required permits, approvals, and licenses for activity and construction within the hydro corridor as activities evolve and are rolled out;
- Manage contracts and oversee onsite construction works to ensure the multi-use trail continues to advance not only efficiently but also with great care to mitigate impacts;
- Seek additional leverage funds to continue to advance trail construction through grants, potential corporate sponsorships of certain project elements, and other funding models;
- Collaborate with stakeholders in the development of other Meadoway projects, such as trail improvements with Parks Canada at Rouge National Urban Park

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and the planning and design of The Meadowway Entry Park with the Garden Club of Toronto and work underway by Durham Region to advance The Meadowway eastward in Pickering and Ajax;

- Field general inquiries from and engage with members of the public, local non-governmental organizations, and politicians on project progress;
- Work with school boards and academic institutions to promote greater use of The Meadowway as an outdoor classroom and support research opportunities;
- Facilitate knowledge transfer on meadow restoration and trail construction within corridors via presentations to municipalities, conservation authorities, universities, and other groups at the local, national, and international level; and
- Lead the preparation and finalization of a MOU between TRCA and the City of Toronto that details roles and responsibilities within the corridor as it pertains to long-term maintenance and management.

Active Transportation Infrastructure

Implementation of two priority trail gaps will be advanced with funding support from the Federal Natural Infrastructure Fund, through the City of Toronto (see financial details). The first connection will be made from Arsandco Park east to Marcos Boulevard. The second connection is from Military Trail to Morningside Avenue. TRCA is also working with Parks Canada to implement upgrades to The Meadowway trail and associated amenities at the connection to Rouge National Urban Park.

Meadow Restoration

Phase 2 will focus on completing the remaining meadow restoration in 2023 and then move to adaptive management and monitoring as the focus in 2024 and 2025. Meadow restoration staff will provide overall management of this component of work including site supervision and crew leads/field staff to complete the delivery of meadow restoration, adaptive management, and monitoring.

2023 Key Deliverables:

- 21 ha site prep and meadow restoration
 - Site prep (mow, till, cover crop repeats 4-6 times)
 - Site grubbing and removing invasive species and garbage
 - 9 ha of buffer mowing repeated 4-6 times
 - 21 ha native meadow seeding
- 80 ha of adaptive management
 - Invasive species management
 - Maintenance mows
 - Garbage collection
- 9 ha of native shrub planting nodes to be managed
 - Includes invasive species management within the shrub nodes
 - Infill plantings
- Monitoring
 - Bird monitoring: 15 transects
 - Butterfly monitoring: 25 transects
 - Flora monitoring: 30 plots

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- 30 ha maintenance mowing
- 34 ha of buffer mowing
- Research: climate change, biodiversity, etc.

2024-2025 Key Deliverables: Meadow restoration will be completed in all sections of The Meadoway (101 ha), and adaptive management and monitoring will continue to fully establish the newly planted meadows.

- 101 ha of adaptive management
 - Invasive species management
 - Maintenance mows
 - Garbage collection
 - Infill plantings
- 13 ha of native shrub planting nodes to be managed
 - Includes invasive species management within the shrub nodes
- 43 ha of buffer mowing
- Monitoring
 - Bird monitoring: 15 transects
 - Butterfly monitoring: 25 transects
 - Flora monitoring: 30 plots
- Meadow restoration research working closely with local universities and colleges, including but not limited to the following:
 - Meadow restoration techniques
 - Different maintenance mow techniques trialing equipment for efficiency and overall meadow species diversity benefit
 - Climate change
 - Diverse species mix trials
 - Invasive species management trials throughout meadow section
 - Thermal imagery on benefits of native meadow vs mown grass
 - Soil organic matter and plant biomass
 - Meadow resiliency to climate change
 - Biodiversity
 - Native seed germination trials for species diversity
 - Wildlife, pollinator research of species within The Meadoway
 - Species Gantt charts showing pollinator interactions to host species
 - Hydrology and benefit for flood mitigation through native meadows
 - Key performance indicators
 - Creating qualitative and quantitative measurable matrix

Education

The Meadoway's education program is an important component of the project's long-term vision. The program helps to animate The Meadoway story and brings to life the project's slogan "Community Powered Green Spaces". By fostering meaningful connections between local students and The Meadoway, a powerful sense of place is cultivated among future generations of residents while important relationships are nurtured that promote the desire to care for and enhance the greenspace. Phase 2 will integrate a comprehensive education and outreach strategy. This will build upon the

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education and outreach activities delivered during Phase 1 of the project from 2019 to 2020.

The objective of the education program is to animate the unique story of The Meadoway through curriculum-linked school programs. Students and teachers are engaged through meaningful programs that focus on a variety of topics related to the project including habitat restoration, urban biodiversity, ecological stewardship, and climate action.

Key activities from 2023 to 2025 will involve engaging students and teachers along The Meadoway corridor in curriculum-linked programs. This will help to foster important, long-term relationships with The Meadoway. Activities will include, but are not limited to:

- 1000 students and teachers engaged through 40 classes annually;
- Classes will have the opportunity to grow native plants from seed and transplant some into The Meadoway;
- The science of The Meadoway will be communicated in a fun, age-appropriate manner with a focus on “hands getting dirty” as important relationships with local sites are fostered; and
- Engage upwards of 100 new Canadians through English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and students from Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) centres.

Outreach

The outreach program focuses on public learning opportunities and events targeting a wide variety of community members along and adjacent to The Meadoway corridor. Through the outreach program, the science of The Meadoway is communicated in a fun, audience-appropriate manner with a focus on fostering personal relationships to The Meadoway and building community capacity and stewardship. Outreach campaigns raising awareness of the project and its benefits will also target opportunities for corporate sponsorships and fundraising.

Key activities include, but are not limited to:

- Host community events in collaboration with local residents and partner organizations:
 - 4 community events hosted annually
 - Events will focus on a variety of topics related to the project, including habitat restoration, urban biodiversity, ecological stewardship, and climate action
 - Activities will include nature hikes, citizen science programs, and public stewardship events throughout the year
 - Engaging workshops, tours, and public talks about The Meadoway will be available to a wide range of audiences and community groups as requested
- In collaboration with stakeholders, develop and coordinate a volunteer initiative with representation among local residents across the 16 km Meadoway corridor:
 - Comprehensive volunteer initiative developed and coordinated annually
 - Volunteer initiative to provide community members with an opportunity to

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become more involved with The Meadoway project and help shape longer-term community stewardship opportunities in collaboration with stakeholders

Wayfinding and Signage

Signage is a powerful education and outreach tool. To address The Meadoway's future plans for wayfinding and interpretive signage, the project team, in consultation with the City of Toronto, gathered necessary wayfinding design specifications, and in 2020 undertook a desktop analysis to identify potential sign locations. A ground-truthing exercise was conducted in 2021 in all seven sections of The Meadoway to determine the best location for signage based on anticipated user-need. Since then, the project team has worked closely with the City of Toronto and their consultants to further identify and confirm the placement of signage in already established areas. With funding support of the City of Toronto, design and implementation of a wayfinding signage pilot is anticipated to begin in 2023 and be completed by 2024. In 2025 TRCA will work closely with the City of Toronto to advance wayfinding in additional areas of the corridor and continue to prioritize the roll out of signage as new trail sections are completed.

Wayfinding information will focus on situating individuals to where they are geographically in The Meadoway and the connections to other trail networks and points of interest. Interpretive signage will highlight the ecological importance of meadow habitat and educate users on the various stages of naturalization. Opportunities to highlight species of interest and other natural features will be considered as content is developed.

Newsletters and Online Content

The Meadoway will continue to reach out to subscribers through a quarterly newsletter which features timely information on progress of work, seasonal points of interest and ecological principles. The website will be updated as needed and new features explored regularly to ensure information is fresh, accessible, and captivating to viewing audiences. Social media posts will be regular (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) with a minimum of two posts per months. Content will focus on ecological benefits of the corridor and trail construction updates. Newsworthy items will always be featured in a timely manner in addition to the two posts per month.

Outreach Campaigns

On an annual basis TRCA will implement one unique outreach campaign that will aim to continue to raise awareness of the project. A secondary goal of any campaigns launched will be to provide opportunities for private donations.

Fundraising

Fundraising efforts will continue to focus on securing intergovernmental support for the implementation of the multi-use trail for Phase 3 priorities. It is expected that through TRCA and Toronto and Region Conservation Foundation that there will continue to be opportunities to access infrastructure related funding through the provincial and federal governments. TRCA will continue to work closely with the City of Toronto to seek

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opportunities to collaboratively access City funds where a match for intergovernmental funds is required. Continued efforts to allocate future projects works and operating funds for Meadowway management and steward in the City's long-term budget planning will be made. TRCA is also working closely with City Council, staff and development proponents to identify and realize opportunities to leverage redevelopment proposals near The Meadowway to complement or fund projects behind standard parkland dedication requirements. Work to leverage existing strong relationships with school boards and institutions such as the University of Toronto and Centennial College located on or near The Meadowway for out of classroom learning and programs will also continue.

TRCA, through its fundraising team, will continue to apply for grants for restoration and education when they align with The Meadowway objectives to offset, leverage or enhance funding from the Weston Family Foundation.

In 2023, in collaboration with key stakeholders and with the support of an external consultant, TRCA will develop a fundraising strategy and campaign. The fundraising strategy and campaign will emphasize generating revenue to leverage Phase 3 investments and long-term support for initiatives like adaptive management of meadows and education and outreach programmes, which will continue in the corridor in perpetuity. Securing capital funds for key projects needed to achieve greater connectivity for the corridor will also remain a priority.

Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillars and Outcomes set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

Pillar 1 Environmental Protection and Hazard Management:

1.2 Leadership in greenspace conservation

Pillar 2 Knowledge Economy:

2.1 Research and development that drives innovation and climate-based solutions

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.1 Connect communities to nature and greenspace

FINANCIAL DETAILS

In addition to the recent \$6.332M grant from the Weston Family Foundation for Phase 2, \$6.881 million has been secured by TRCA in coordination with the City of Toronto from the following federal government sources:

- \$5.6 million Natural Infrastructure Fund, through the City of Toronto: for advancement of two priority trail segments (2023/2024);
- \$1.05 million through Parks Canada: for enhancements to the connection and amenities near Rouge National Urban Park (2023/2024); and
- \$0.231 million from Nature Based Climate Solutions grant to support meadow restoration (2023).

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This brings the current total value of Phase 2 deliverables to \$13.213 million from all sources. Several potential contributions from the City of Toronto are also being discussed and or finalized to support wayfinding, signalized road crossings and other public realm enhancements. TRCA will continue to seek support from all levels of government, the private sector, and philanthropic organizations to leverage the Weston Family Foundation donation to advance The Meadoway.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

At a high level, the following will be key next steps for Phase 2 of The Meadoway:

- Meadow restoration and education and outreach activities to proceed as outlined in the funding agreement with the Weston Family Foundation;
- Funding agreement to be completed with the City of Toronto to allow for the transfer of Natural Infrastructure Funds to support implementation of two priority trail connections. Tenders for this work will be released as soon as possible, following agreement finalization;
- Develop and release RFP for consulting services to support an enhanced corporate and private donation campaign;
- MOU to be completed with the City of Toronto to define long-term maintenance and management responsibilities in the corridor; and
- TRCA to continue to explore ways to leverage the Weston Family Foundation funds for Phase 2 work and future planned undertakings in Phase 3.

The overall implementation of The Meadoway has been phased to allow for the best possible coordination with stakeholders and adjacent infrastructure updates. Phase 3 of The Meadoway (2026+) is currently unfunded. Key deliverables will include:

- Detailed design and implementation of the rail crossing east of Kennedy Road in cooperation with Metrolinx;
- Detailed design and implementation of the technically challenging crossing at Ellesmere Ravine in close coordination with Hydro One and Infrastructure Ontario;
- Completion of the trail connection from Morningside Avenue to Conlins Road in conjunction with the implementation of the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus' Landscape and Public Realm Master Plan; and
- On-going adaptive management and maintenance for 101 hectares of meadow habitat.

Phase 3 capital costs for trail construction are currently estimated at \$6.25 million, based on conceptual design in the Environmental Assessment (2019). TRCA will need to secure on-going annual funding of approximately \$0.5 million beyond 2025 to support adaptive management of meadow habitat. The City of Toronto has committed, in principle, to support all other maintenance and management responsibilities in the corridor.

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