

Speak up on the future of Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area: LSRCA



By Brock Weir

Would you like to see more programs and facilities at Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area? Would you like things to stay as they are? Whichever side of the fence you're on, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Area is looking for your input on the future of the popular greenspace.

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Area (LSRCA) is in the midst of a public consultation that will help inform the new five-year management strategy for the conservation area, which currently boasts three kilometres of hiking trails, 11 soccer pitches, two picnic pavilions, and a number of historic buildings.

A public open house will be held Sunday, March 26, from 1.30 ? 3.30 p.m. at Windfall Ecology Centre, which is situated on the Industrial Parkway South side of Sheppard's Bush.

Since 2009, the LSRCA has been working on key projects within Sheppard's Bush to facilitate programming, including turning the old evaporator hut, a key component of the former maple syrup festival, into a multipurpose space for their Conservation Kids summer nature camp.

?Now, we're in 2017 and we're going back out to the public, stakeholders, and partners like the Town of Aurora, the Oak Ridges Trail Association, the Aurora Lions Club and the Aurora Youth Soccer Club, all those people who have a vested interest in the property,? says Brian Kemp, General Manager of Conservation Lands for the LSRCA. ?[We want to know from stakeholders and the public] how we're doing. What are some of the challenges? What don't you want us to touch? We're having some general dialogue on really focusing on how we manage that property from a management zone perspective.

?There are certain parts of the property we will leave will forever leave alone because of their natural heritage value. That would be the upper hardwood forests, where the old maple syrup demonstration used to be. That is a very mature, fantastic example of a mature hardwood forest in the middle of Aurora. We're not going to go in there and clear cut an area to build new buildings, for instance. We're going to upgrade trails and, in some cases, we'll probably close a few trails that have very minimal use and perhaps are somewhat redundant meaning, if you look to your left 25 feet there is another trail there.?

A particular focus, he says, is making sure Sheppard's Bush is maintained in perpetuity for the public while making sure they have the recreational opportunities in place that the residents want, all the while ensuring sensitive natural heritage features are protected. One feature they are considering through the new management plan is upgrading on-site washrooms. Sheppard's Bush is currently served by what Mr. Kemp describes as a ?vault privy? ? essentially an outhouse ? that is typically only in commission for specific events.

?If we want to expand usage on the property, if we want to encourage more families to get out there using the pavilion, perhaps it is time to upgrade the washroom facilities so that the people have an updated facility where it is open all year long, perhaps with running water.

?We hear from the public that it is a fantastic place and just leave it the way it is. We know we can walk there safely and the trails are in good condition. For other users, they are looking for a little bit more around structured programming. These are all things that will come together in the consultation process and then we will start to work through how we deliver this and what we are doing as an organization to position ourselves to be able to deliver these new programs. The more feedback, the richer the management plan is at the end of the day.?

If you aren't able to make it out to this month's open house, you can submit your feedback online at www.lsrca.on.ca through March 31 for a chance to win a \$100 gift certificate to Running Room. To RSVP for the March 26 event, call 905-895-1281 x126 or email L.grzywniak@lsrca.on.ca.