

RUNNYMEDE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED AND THE 'ENVIRONMENT-FIRST APPROACH' TO PLANNING

Runnymede Development Corporation Limited owns 95 hectares (234 acres) of land bordering Lake Ontario in Ajax. In the summer of 1990, it proposed a residential subdivision for the site, comprising approximately 600 single-family dwellings, 130 townhouses, 1,300 condominiums, and other uses including a hotel, marina, office and retail space, and recreational areas.

At that time, however, the developers were not fully aware of the impact the project would have on the environment, particularly on the existing ecosystems of the Carruther's Creek Marsh and the Ajax Warbler Swamps, both of which lie within the boundaries of the property. These natural areas, designated as regionally and provincially significant, would have been damaged and a planned 250-berth marina would have been especially harmful to the marsh.

After discussions with government agencies and local interest groups, Runnymede voluntarily withdrew its proposal and re-evaluated the project; it decided to implement a new strategy, stressing an "environment-first approach" and developing a new and innovative plan for the property.

This process began with an assessment of the property's physical and biological features. Based on that information, a document outlining the environmental guidelines for planning was prepared; it established the net acreage that can be developed by preserving the Ajax Warbler Swamps and creating two buffer zones around the marsh. The 60- to 90-metre (197- to 295-foot) wide buffer will preserve existing grassland areas that are important for nesting migratory birds, and establish an outer reforestation zone that will restrict pedestrian access and shelter the marsh from adjacent development lands.

The results of the study were reviewed with local authorities, agencies, and interest groups before the company began work on an Environmental Management Plan (EMP). The purpose of the EMP is to find ways to mitigate potential harm to the marsh and woodlot as a result of developing the future residential community.

Concurrent with preparing the EMP, Runnymede is developing subdivision concepts. At this writing, it is refining a final concept that will include a variety of low-, medium-, and high-density residential units with a small neighbourhood commercial facility. A 122-metre (400-foot) wide park is proposed along the shoreline to include pedestrian links to the west and, ultimately, to the east.

Runnymede's "environment-first approach" embraces the principles for a healthy waterfront as outlined in *Watershed*, which will be reflected in the proposed community in a number of ways: maintaining the wetlands and constructing stormwater ponds to filter water from urban run-off will assure that it is clean and green. Bikeways and pathways connecting to the marsh, and a lake driveway permitting transit, will enable the area to be more accessible, useable, and open. To the north, a proposed wildlife corridor would link habitats of the Ajax Warbler Swamps to another complex to the east.

The project will also be diverse and affordable, accommodating a range of activities and housing types. Finally, by maintaining and enhancing existing natural features, Runnymede will create an attractive community that offers a high quality of life for future residents.

Carruther's Creek Marsh



east and west in an attempt to keep pace with the exploding residential and commercial development. And while they did this, the waterfront — about 20 miles of shoreline — was chopped up and jurisdiction was split among several bodies. . . .

It resulted in piecemeal development. Toronto City Council became aware of the problem and recognized the hodge-podge of development on its doorstep. . . . It directed its Planning Board to prepare a report.