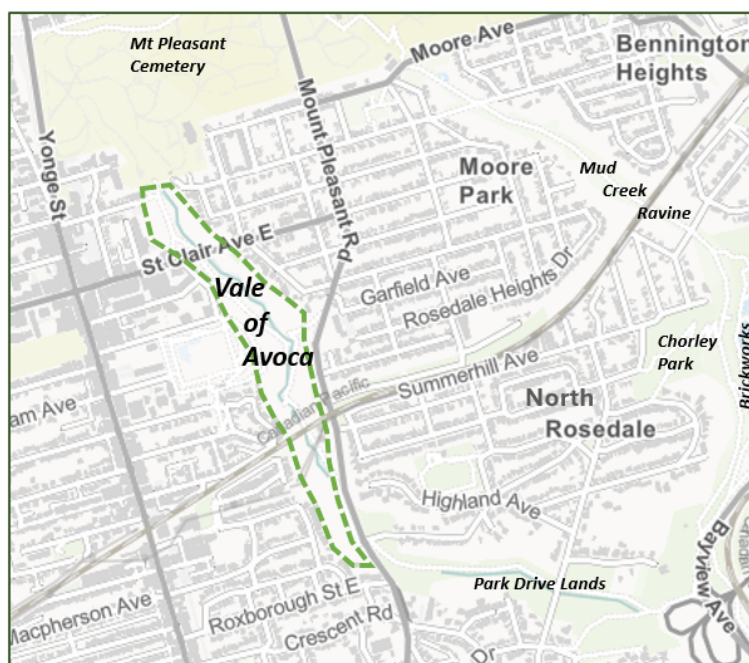


Spare a Thought for the Vale of Avoca

By Tom Connell, NRRA Parks & Ravines Committee

It's widely recognized the Toronto's ravine system is one of our city's great blessings. So, it is particularly regrettable that a spectacular ravine in our area – the Vale of Avoca – shows the effects of years of cumulative neglect.

The Vale of Avoca is a section of ravine running south from Mt Pleasant Cemetery (just east of Yonge Street), down to where Roxborough Drive meets Mount Pleasant Road. The area stretches for almost 1.5km and covers over 15 hectares (well over 30 acres). Yellow Creek flows through the Vale of Avoca on its way to meeting the Don River via a channel under the Bayview Ave cloverleaf. (See map.)



Base map source: <https://map.toronto.ca/torontomaps/>

The interconnected problems in the ravine are obvious to anyone walking there. There is extensive erosion affecting the banks of Yellow Creek and the ravine slopes; this undermines habitats and infrastructure in the ravine and degrades its capacity to deal with storm-water run-off. Pathways, stairs, and wayfinding in the ravine are in very bad shape, greatly impeding pedestrian access and recreational use; for example, the access stairway and path closest to the Yonge/St Clair intersection is “closed for maintenance”, but with no signs of actual maintenance being undertaken.

Additionally, there is a proliferation of invasive species in the ravine, including Norway Maples, Japanese Knotweed, and Common Buckthorn leading to an important impact on biodiversity. The City has designated the Vale of Avoca as an *Environmentally Significant Area* or ESA. According to the City, ESAs “are particularly sensitive and require additional protection to maintain their unique environmental qualities.”

Unfortunately, this designation has not meant that a coordinated and urgent plan has been developed to deter the relentless march of invasives, nor has it served to halt the area's ongoing degradation. So, yes, significant, but, no, no plan.

There has been a long wait for concerted efforts to remediate conditions in the Vale of Avoca. However, responsibility for different elements of the Vale is held by various city departments, including Toronto Water Services, Toronto & Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), and Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PFR). The lack of a master plan for this ravine has hampered a coordinated and timely response to its continuing deterioration.

While Toronto Water recently conducted a geomorphic survey and public consultation on priorities for the restoration of sections of Yellow Creek where City storm sewer and water main infrastructure are threatened and identified required works, none of it will be conducted within the next 5 years, and some of it well beyond that. Happily, though, the TRCA is planning slope stabilisation work below Summerhill Gardens and Heath Crescent, with the first being planned for this year and the latter for 2025, having moved up from 2031 and now including the Heath St E staircase. Vivid thanks to Councillor Saxe for her intervention on that piece of infrastructure. Additionally, City departments, elected officials (Councillors Saxe and Matlow), and neighbourhood groups are currently exploring the potential to expedite needed remediation of this ravine, to leverage invested resources while mitigating unnecessary disruption that could arise from inefficiently sequenced capital projects.

The importance of our ravine systems is well understood. These green spaces safeguard biodiversity, mitigate the impact of extreme weather (flooding and heat), and provide opportunities for recreation that are essential to both physical and mental health. The expected addition of tens of thousands of new residents to the midtown area adds urgency to the need for improved access to our neighbouring green spaces. Improvements to the Vale of Avoca would represent a major upgrade to trail system connectivity, providing improved links to the Beltline Trail, to the Brickworks and Don Valley, and to the Yonge Street corridor.

The **Midtown Ravines Group** is a community organization, involving several residents' associations, that is promoting the development of a vision and master plan for the Vale of Avoca, and of coordinated near-term actions by the city and other stakeholders to realize the potential of this treasured ravine. The NRRA is pleased to be an active participant and supporter of the Midtown Ravines Group and will update residents of North Rosedale on future developments concerning these efforts.