

THE BAXTER



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RESIDENTS AND DECISION MAKERS LIVING AND WORKING IN THE AREA, CARING FOR A CLEAN AND HEALTHY WATERSHED

To make this vision a reality.... It will ONLY succeed if the entire community of Cavan Monaghan and people outside the community pitch in! So...as a first step...please pass along this newsletter to friends and family urging them to visit www.baxtercreekwatershed.org, subscribe and join as members using the free membership form. All ages from children to seniors are welcome because today's actions will result in a long-term legacy that will benefit everyone.



An aerial view of the Baxter Creek Valley. Photo courtesy of Kirk Hinsley.

NEWSLETTER OF THE BAXTER CREEK WATERSHED ALLIANCE

Welcome! Thank you for visiting the Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance website at www.baxtercreekwatershed.org and for subscribing to learn more and be connected to this exciting new community initiative.

This inaugural newsletter provides a bit of history and background of the organization, the people involved, and the goals we are setting out to accomplish. Future newsletters will contain all kinds of information and ways everyone can help with our goals to protect the natural heritage of “*this green and pleasant land*” as it was so described by early settlers to this area as well as living up to the Cavan Monaghan municipal slogan to “Have It All. Right Here”.

So inquiring minds have asked how did the Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance come to be – what is it – and who is behind BCWA?

In December of 2018, [the Province announced](#) 243 Ontario government-owned lands deemed as ‘surplus’ were to be sold off [including the 42 hectare \(105 acre\) land](#) that once housed the Millbrook Correctional Centre (known locally as the ‘jail lands’. Some interested locals wondered if there was a way to secure the property as a key environmental, cultural and social benefit for the local community and beyond.

Word of mouth spread, and after meeting with members of Kawartha Land Trust (KLT), a Peterborough-based non profit dedicated to “*protecting the land you love*” with over 4500 acres currently under KLT’s protection, became an interested partner in the potential acquisition of the former Millbrook jail lands.

As discussions continued the core group realized that the conservation, protection and enhancement of the entire watershed is of paramount importance – especially in light of current and anticipated development pressures. We will comment more on what a watershed is and why its protection is so important in an upcoming newsletter.

Thus the seeds for the **Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance (BCWA)** were planted and the organization was formed during 2021. It is a federally and provincially registered non government, non profit organization incorporated to provide a community platform to preserve and protect the health of the watershed and to create a dynamic environmental legacy for the local community and beyond.

The **Old Millbrook Jail Lands Association (OMJLA)** was then created as a secondary non-profit organization under the umbrella and direction of BWCA. As a stand-alone legal entity, OMJLA is dedicated to the acquisition of the 42 hectare (105 acre) property locally known as the ‘Millbrook Jail Lands’ in possible partnership or collaboration with government and other agencies such as

Kawartha Land Trust. The goal is to conserve, restore and enhance this natural area within the intensifying urban fabric of Millbrook and surrounding area with an ecological-based land use plan for the long-term benefit and enjoyment of the community – for this land to be kept in the public trust as an open green space – perhaps Millbrook’s own ‘High Park’ perhaps? More on this ambitious community plan can be found below.

As an incorporated non profit three interim **Directors** of the Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance as well as the Old Millbrook Jail Lands Association have volunteered to lead the group: Ron Awde, Chris Grayson and George Raab.

Supporting active current members of the **Steering Committee** include: Graham Whitelaw, David Webster, Craig Onafrychuk, Mark Davidson, Paul Downs, Jane Zednik and special assistance in land securement from John Kintare, Executive Director of the Kawartha Land Trust.

The BCWA website was launched in December 2021 and is still in its initial stages with more information being continually added including more biographical information on the current steering committee.

Calling all volunteers! How you can help...

If you have an interest in a particular area from clerical work, fund-raising, financial management, ecological restoration, environmental monitoring, conservation, landscape stewardship for example - and can volunteer your services – please let us know through the website or by email to: baxtercreekwatershed@gmail.com A BIG THANK YOU to those who have already volunteered their skills and support. If you have questions please send an email to BCWA. All emails will be answered.

If you can find a way to help provide financial support this start-up to help defer expenses now being borne out of the pockets of committee members; that will be more than appreciated. Plans are underway to register BCWA as a charity so that we can accept charitable donations and issue tax receipts in the near future. When charitable status is set-up, a notification will be sent out.

AND... If you have photos, stories and/or information on the diverse natural heritage found in this area (example below) that can be shared in a future newsletter and/or posted on the website – please do submit images and your stories!!! You can send information via email to baxtercreekwatershed@gmail.com or by uploading from the form on the website.

In the meantime, if you want to see detailed natural heritage mapping of your residence or neighbourhood, click on the link and check out the interactive mapping resource on the website:

[Resources | Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance](#)

Additional downloadable maps are being prepared and will be uploaded to the website Resources section in the coming weeks.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead

THE MILLBROOK JAIL LANDS

The maximum-security Millbrook correctional centre – locally known as The Millbrook Jail opened in 1957 and has sat empty since closing in 2002. For several reasons, the government of Ontario and Infrastructure Ontario (IO) a Crown agency of the Province of



August drive through a local area of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Photo courtesy of Harry Stooshinoff.

Ontario which oversees this property chose to demolish the buildings and by 2015, the demolition was complete. Since the jail lands were abandoned, despite it being private property, the site has become a popular destination for all manner of recreational users – some actually believe the land is already publically owned parkland.

BUT it is not.... with the help of the community, keeping this property as a public open recreational green space could become a reality.

BCWA presented as a delegation before Cavan Monaghan Council on December 20, 2021. You can review the PowerPoint presentation online at this link:

[Protecting the Millbrook Jail Lands \(escribemeetings.com\)](https://www.escribemeetings.com)

You can also view the recording of the BCWA delegation and the reactions of Council in the Livestream coverage starting at the 2:15 mark of the video online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaPNd8yf-Z0>

On January 5th, 2022, a Zoom meeting was arranged between members of BCWA and Kawartha Land Trust with the Honorable David Piccini, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. BCWA and KLT presented their current [vision document](#) for the former Millbrook Jail Lands. The Minister requested a summary of the vision to be provided and that a subsequent meeting be prepared. The summary that has been forwarded to the Minister is below.

THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF THIS IMPORTANT CAMPAIGN AND THE VISION BCWA HAS FOR THE FORMER MILLBROOK JAIL LANDS

The Township of Cavan Monaghan in Peterborough County is a growing rural community with a blend of agricultural lands and settled areas across a connected natural heritage system. Since the Millbrook Jail closed and was demolished, the local community in the Village of Millbrook has demonstrated a strong interest in preserving the 42 hectare (105 acre) property located within the settlement area for public use.

Early in 2021, a local group of residents with common interest in watershed conservation founded the Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance, a non-government community-based organization. The Alliance, in collaboration with the Kawartha Land Trust, shared an interest in protecting the former Jail lands and so founded The Old Millbrook Jail Lands Association, a stand-alone association of the Alliance, to establish ownership of the lands while keeping them as a public urban open space stewarded under guidance by the Alliance with a Conservation Agreement held in perpetuity by the Trust. It is the vision of the Alliance to see the significant natural ecological features of the Jail Lands conserved for future generations. The mental health and physical wellness benefits of publicly accessible urban open spaces has become increasingly important in recent times with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns the public has endured.

The former Millbrook Jail property, located within the planning boundary of the Oak Ridges Moraine, is a singularly beautiful property with a diverse landscape of hills and dales, containing significant mature woodlands, pine plantations, springs, seeps, recharge areas, valley lands, cold headwater streams, open grasslands and meadows. It provides panorama views across the Baxter Creek watershed, the Village of Millbrook and over the neighboring diverse Oak Ridges Moraine landscape.

As the area of Millbrook experiences the implementation of a long-term growth strategy there is a demonstrated lack of publicly accessible open green space within settlement areas that is in proximity to residential and built up areas. Ensuring there is adequate open green space to provide for ecosystem services, natural heritage offsetting, and critical environmental values in supporting the physical and mental well-being of the community is paramount. The forested area of the property is recognized as a 'Significant Woodland' in the Cavan Monaghan Official Plan. The open grasslands are important for providing grassland bird breeding habitat – several that are species at risk – and is also the primary headwaters of a coldwater trout stream which is a tributary of Baxter Creek.

In line with Ontario's Provincial Policy Statement protecting the Jail property will:

- Demonstrate a commitment to building a strong healthy community in the Township (Section 1).
- Demonstrate a healthy, liveable and safe communities (Section 1.1 Managing and Directing Land Use to Achieve Efficient and Resilient Development and Land Use Patterns):
 - Improving accessibility to open green spaces for persons with disabilities and older persons by addressing land use barriers which restrict full participation in society;
 - Ensuring open green spaces will be available to meet current and projected needs;
 - Promoting land use patterns that conserve biodiversity; and
 - Preparing for the local impacts of a changing climate by preserving open green space, headwater recharge and discharge areas.
- Provide a publicly accessible natural setting for a wide variety of outdoor recreation, parklands public space, open green space, while expanding trails and linkages (Section 1.5 Public Spaces, Recreation, Parks, Trails and Open Space).
- Showcase wise use and management of resources, natural heritage, and water (Section 2):
 - Ensure a large open green space is protected for the long-term environmental health and social well-being of local people while providing green space to conserve biodiversity, protect natural heritage, stream headwaters, for environmental and social benefits



An aerial view of the southeast corner of the Old Millbrook Jail Lands. Photo courtesy of Kirk Hinsley.

Preserving and enhancing this property and its ecosystem services, in a natural state, will add protection to the Millbrook Well Head Protection Area which covers 74% of the property.

The property also has potential for passive use that would have economic value to the community. The Cavan Monaghan Corporate Strategic Plan 2012-2014 suggests that the property has redevelopment potential. The Alliance's vision includes the potential for publicly beneficial low-impact institutional or educational redevelopment consistent with zoning of the property in the Official Plan.

The opportunity to protect such a significant publicly owned property located on the immediate boundary of a rapidly urbanizing community, as natural urban open green space, recreational conservation reserve for future generations to enjoy, will come along only once. Once it is gone, it is gone forever.



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