

A Vision for Conserving the Former Millbrook Jail Lands



*Version: 5.3
November, 2021*

Introduction

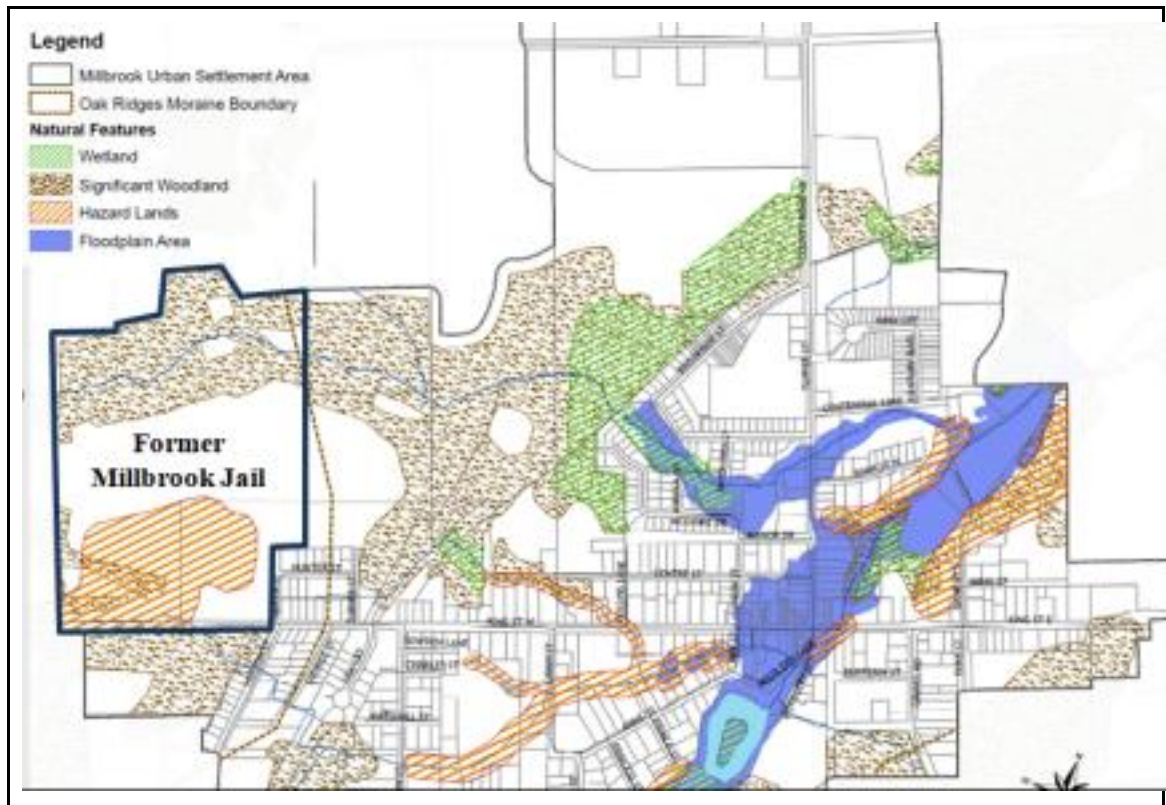
It is understood that the land that once accommodated the Millbrook Jail is to be offered for sale through Infrastructure Ontario to the local and First Nation communities and non-profit organizations if no other government ministry or agency expresses need or interest in retaining the property for other public use. Since the jail closed and was demolished, there has been strong interest in the community to ensure that this property is reserved for public use and that the significant natural ecological features are conserved for future generations. An approach was made by the leaders of an initiative to save this property, to partner with the Kawartha Land Trust, an established non-profit organization that now protects more than 20 properties in perpetuity across the Kawarthas and Peterborough County area.

As an initial step to preparing for the property being offered, a core group of community members and volunteers from the Trust have prepared a vision statement that provides some background about the property and outlines the potential recreational uses and conservation goals for the property.

This document is intended to serve as an initial guideline in communicating with other stakeholders and possible partners in order to invite input and discussion and to develop broader support for the project.

Rationale

The property that once accommodated the Millbrook Jail, 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 a panorama of beautiful views across the Baxter Creek watershed, the Village of Millbrook and over the neighboring diverse Oak Ridges Moraine landscape.



The increasing density of housing and industry in rural communities like Millbrook, as a result of urban sprawl, poses a direct threat to the long-term viability and quality of natural resource areas that are vital to our well-being and existence. Millbrook lacks accessible natural and publicly owned conservation reserves in proximity to residential and built up areas. With the ongoing large-scale residential build-out and even more developments expected in the future; ensuring there is adequate green space to provide for a sustainable environmental future, natural heritage offsetting, and to play a critical role in supporting the physical and mental well-being of the community is paramount. This unique biodiverse land is wholly located within the designated Oak Ridges Moraine planning boundary with areas of Oak Ridges Moraine Natural Linkage, Countryside, and Settlement Areas. The forested area of the property is recognized as a ‘Significant Woodland’ area in the Cavan Monaghan Official Plan, as well as area providing open grasslands 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.



Preserving this 42 hectare (105 acre) property and its ecosystem services, in a natural state, will help to protect the Millbrook Well Head Protection Area (WHPA) which covers 74% of these lands. Lack of management of the vacated Millbrook Jail lands has already resulted in significant, but still reversible damage to watercourses and land features in the wooded northerly area and grasslands of the property. Continued lack of protection and management will result in greater disturbance and fragmentation of these natural areas without any regard for habitat, botanical or wildlife species which depend on the natural linkage areas of the property as corridors across the watershed.



Many residents of Millbrook believe that with the closure of the prison and the loss of economic benefits it once provided to the community, this land should be preserved to serve the residents of Millbrook, the Township of Cavan Monaghan and the surrounding area as one of the few easily accessible natural areas for the community. The property also has potential for passive, low-impact economic and ecosystem service values to the community. The Cavan Monaghan Corporate Strategic Plan 2012-2014 suggests that the property has redevelopment potential, however, in light of constraints across the property as well as existing and historic environmental considerations, further evidence is required to assess the community responses solicited for that report.

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

Vision Highlights

The property will be conserved for the purpose of providing:

- Wildlife and botanical habitat in designated areas
- Areas for walking trails and pedestrian access to natural areas
- Areas for public low impact recreational use
- A zone for possible future educational or institutional centres or similar use not to exceed 1.2 hectare (3.+/- acres), (or other suggested area) including parking, in the

upper flat 'brownfield' area of the property

- Connectivity of woodland area to natural core and linkage areas to the south, west and east
- A setting for teaching and ecological research at all educational levels
- Connectivity to the core ecological areas to the east, south and west
- Preservation of the open greenspace of the wellhead protection area
- To potentially partner with other organizations or the Municipality to consider other complementary uses for benefit to the local community consistent with the goals of conservation and protection of the significant natural areas and water features.



Ecological Objectives

Key ecological goals for the property will include:

- Conservation and restoration of the watercourse channel, springs and seepage areas damaged by vehicle traffic
- Conservation of mature growth trees
- Restoration of animal and bird habitat (emphasis on species at risk)
- Stabilization of open slopes to prevent further erosion
- Targeted expansion of woodlands where buildings have been removed and on other open areas of the property as a potential offsetting mechanism for development in other areas of the watershed
- Establishment of a 30 metre +/- woodland corridor on the west boundary of the property to 'connect' the woodlands at the north of the property with the woodlands to the south of King Street, to provide protection and cover for animals moving from one area to another (i.e., mitigating forest fragmentation)
- Possible partnerships with local First Nations communities to create another savannah and prairie habitat on a portion of the property – a natural feature that is scarce.

Public Use

As well as preserving and protecting natural habitat, it is recognized that there is the community desire to accommodate public access and recreational activities, such as cross country skiing, snowshoeing and tobogganing in the winter months and running, dog walking, birdwatching, throughout the year.

The stewardship plan for the property will balance activities in order to meet the ecological objectives while ensuring that people are able to be in the natural environment. Education of the public to reinforce the need to protect the ecology will be an important role for the stewards to fill with assistance from people with expertise and experience in conservation on publicly accessed natural reserves. Trent University, Fleming College, Habitat for Humanity, Camp Kawartha, and the local school board and other organizations can be involved as possible partners for a more active management, economic development and educational approaches.



Restrictions & Covenants

Considerable impact has been made to the natural areas of the property through use of vehicles over the last ten years and mountain bike trails since early 2020. Currently the following restrictions are being considered for the property:

- The restricted access zones will be mapped and identified in conservation agreements and by signage on the property
- Motorized recreational vehicle traffic on the site will not be permitted except in designated areas for barrier free accessibility and parking or for the purposes of maintenance.
- Cooking or campfires are not intended to be permitted
- Camping will not be permitted without prior approval and permits

Approach to Ownership & Stewardship

The property will be owned by a federally incorporated non-profit community-based group, The Old Millbrook Jail Lands Association, with stewardship guidance from the Kawartha Land Trust and the Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance. Kawartha Land Trust will continue to monitor those lands as identified under a Conservation Agreement in perpetuity. In the event that the community organization ceases to function, ownership of the property would revert to the Land Trust or other designated public or non-profit body or institution.

Funding the Project

The community organization recognizes that to bring this timely vision for the Millbrook Jail Lands to fruition, communication and discussion with the public and other stakeholders prior to Infrastructure Ontario releasing the land for sale to community government and non-profit groups is essential, and have developed a preliminary plan for the period prior to the sale.

- 1.** The Old Millbrook Jail Lands Association has been formally incorporated as a non-profit corporation and initiative of the incorporated Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance which is a local non profit environmental community organization.
- 2.** There will be a limited funding drive to raise start-up funds in addition to resources that may be provided by the Kawartha Land Trust to initiate the process to prepare for purchasing the property and developing the major fundraising campaign, a need for a group of people who are able to support the start-up costs if it appears that the project may be possible.
- 3.** The community group, the Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance, is working with the Kawartha Land Trust to develop corporate and government support, as well as partnerships with other organizations, through sharing this Vision document and making presentations to municipal government, provincial and federal representatives, as well as the First Nations communities, business owners, service organizations and various foundations.
- 4.** It is anticipated that major gifts and foundation grants will make up at least 50% of the total, with hopefully 25% funding from government sources to match 25% community giving.
- 5.** The Fundraising strategy will also include establishing funds for ongoing stewardship costs and reserves as well as initial capital costs.

Appendix 1: Official Plan Designations

