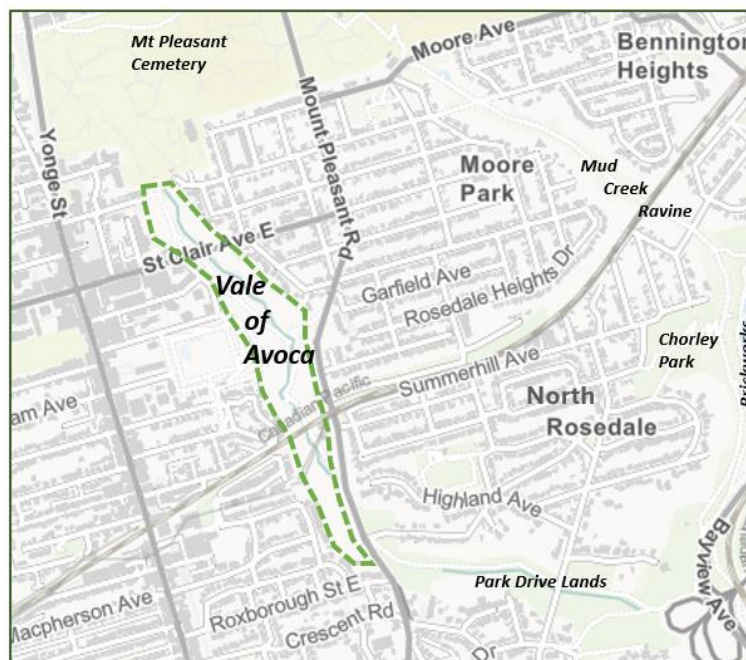


Spare a Thought for the Vale of Avoca

By Tom Connell, NRRRA 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 – continues to suffer from 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 way-finding 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. And there is a proliferation of invasive species in the ravine, including Norway Maples, Japanese Knotweed, and Common Buckthorn. Norway maples, which are readily identified due to their susceptibility to leaf splotches (powdery mildew and tar spots), are aggressively invasive and contribute to local monocultures and erosion as a consequence of reduced surface water absorption. 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 deterred the relentless march of invasives, nor has it prompted a concerted City response to the area’s ongoing degradation.

Efforts to remediate conditions in the Vale of Avoca have been disjointed, or lacking altogether. For example, the stairway access to Heath Crescent was damaged in 2013 and closed due to the need to stabilize the slope. Currently slope stabilization is planned for 2024/25, but the replacement of the stairway is not scheduled until 2030/31 (raising concerns not just in the delay, but in wasteful duplicative construction staging and disruption). Responsibility for different elements are 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 response to its continuing deterioration, leading to effective paralysis.

Furthermore, stabilization investments by ravine-side private property owners are obstructed by lack of visibility about remediation of the underlying problems on the adjacent public lands. A comprehensive plan for the ravine could also include a role for volunteer stewardship groups such as Toronto Nature Stewards.

The importance of our ravine systems are 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 a number of 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.