

We save land.



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## **Town Centre Park Master Plan Proposed Woodland Restoration**

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023, staff from The Conservation Foundation met with Woodridge Park District staff to learn of the upcoming, planned woodland restoration work associated with Phase Two of the Town Centre Master Plan. Park District staff provided a tour of the woodland areas, along with a tree survey and the concept plans.

The majority of the woodland areas were dominated by invasive, non-native trees and shrubs. Common Buckthorn, *Rhamnus cathartica* and 'Bush' Honeysuckle species, *Lonicera spp.* were most prominent. The larger trees present were also primarily non-native. There was little evidence of a healthy, diverse plant and habitat community present.

Buckthorn and honeysuckle are extremely aggressive and outcompete native species, including the herbaceous plants growing beneath them. This unbalanced system does not support healthy and diverse wildlife habitat. In addition, the dense stands impede vision and create an uninviting environment for park patrons.

We agree with the planned work to remove the invasive understory brush, along with hazardous and non-native tree species. Ideally, work would combine both tasks in unison and the entire woodland area within Phase Two is completed as one effort. If non-native species remain in adjacent sections, they likely will continue to drop seeds and spread into the areas recently cleared, diminishing the effort to improve the habitat system. We encourage the Park District to keep several dead or declining native trees to serve as wildlife habitat, as long as they pose no hazardous risk to park visitors. These trees will eventually decompose to add much needed nutrients to the soil.

After the non-native shrubs and trees are removed, the Park District's intent is to seed the areas with native vegetation, and plant a variety of native trees and shrubs to improve the habitat. We support and applaud these efforts.

While the initial non-native tree and shrub removal may result in a very dramatic visual change, the plan to reintroduce native plants and trees will support a more diverse, dynamic, healthy and balanced natural area. The wildlife that use these areas now will have the adjacent Hathorne Hill Woods to serve as habitat while the restoration work takes place. As the woodlands recover and native plants grow and dominate, more and diverse wildlife will benefit from the improvements than if these areas were to remain in present condition. Opening these areas will also improve aesthetics of the park and create a safer, more inviting environment.

Before the project commences, we encourage the Park District to continue open communications with the Woodridge community and adjacent neighbors through letters, social media, meetings and site signage.

Brook McDonald, President/C.E.O.  
The Conservation Foundation