

Bolton Camp project engages youth

By Mark Pavilons

Engaging youth and reconstituting an old favourite, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) is hoping to transform the former Bolton Camp into a regional jewel.

And that means closer ties with nearby King Township.

Darryl Gray, director of education, training and outreach for TRCA, explained the new Bolton Camp Project to King councillors recently.

The 90-year-old facility has gone through many uses in its history and Gray said they're embarking on a new vision to create, explore and share this community facility.

They're repurposing the site and engaging local youth to take ownership of the new direction. They've asked young people to develop concepts, programs and even take part in renovations on the site.

Over the past two summers, students have been putting a bit of spit and polish on the facility, helping to refurbish the buildings. TRCA hopes to transform the park into a regional outdoor recreation and community learning centre. Architects will be working with the youth to redesign the buildings. By encouraging their participation, it connects youth with community leaders

Gray said the 250-acre site is a unique space that can be enjoyed by all. He sees it becoming a regional destination and he hopes to engage York Region and King Township youth and staff.

He said he's been amazed at the ideas and caliber of work put in by the high school students. He would like to draw community leaders from Nobleton and Schomberg as well.

He wants to start conversations with King and look at trail connections with Cedar Glen and perhaps Cold Creek.

Gray admitted there's a long way to go in this \$25-million, 10-year project.

Once used as an overnight camp for youth, the idea is to cater the space to provide programming for participants of all ages - adventure, sports and fitness activities, community art and culture programs, outdoor education and training, leadership development and social entrepreneurship opportunities.

According to TRCA, "Our vision for this new facility is that of a place where people come together to learn, live, play and share in experiences. Think of a community centre turned inside out."

"While respecting the historic features of the property, the new Bolton Camp may have sports fields, a gymnasium, pool, green fitness equipment, yoga classes, running clinics, an outdoor community kitchen, smoothie or coffee bar, tree-top tours/canopy tours, ropes courses, community theatre and art spaces, retail or market space and outdoor classrooms/collaboration spaces."

The camp on the site was established in 1922 as a facility for mothers with small children from low-income families to get away for a time. It closed in 1999 after 77 years. The property was acquired a little more than three years ago by TRCA, with the support of Peel Region and the City of Toronto.

TRCA noted that for the New Bolton Camp to be successful, programming should be responsive to the needs of all members of our community. This will take a different approach. With this in mind, they intend to open Bolton Camp up to a range of potential partners and contributors, including social enterprises, youth entrepreneurs and others, to take a shared stake in the success of this community venture and asset.