

Team #3: Golden Prairie Shoreline (GPS)

Process and Design Evolution

The first time gathering together, Team GPS reviewed the results of the Site Survey and then began to compile a list of Guiding Principles. These evolved over the course of two more team meetings and eventually came to be: 1. Conservation & education 2. Utilize the site during all four seasons 3. Embrace sustainable + adaptive design 4. Avoid duplicating existing local programming 4. Passive recreation preferred to active 5. Commitment to accessible and inclusive site design 6. Tell a story that strengthens the journey from Maple Grove to Wanuskewin.

During the earliest discussions, the team was interested in designating this site with a strong Indigenous theme, offering a place to connect to the land with experiential programming (like overnights in teepees) and land-based learning. We discussed whether this was appropriate for Meewasin to undertake and whether it was too similar to offerings at Wanuskewin. Eventually the group decided not to take this direction.

The idea of an Interpretive and Education Centre was introduced early in the discussions and although the name and focus of this building evolved, it was always intended to be a place to gather and learn. This building is referred to as the Riparian Education Centre on the final plan and is intended to be a building that can be rented to non-profit organizations, or corporations for short-term rentals, hopefully allowing the site to become revenue neutral. The building is to include a theatre, classroom space as well as washrooms. Including a green roof in the design was considered a goal compatible with the team's overall vision for the site that demonstrates a commitment to innovative storm water management best practices. The Centre would also serve as a point of entry to the rest of the site and as an amenity to the nearby Maple Grove Trail Terminus, complete with secure bike parking and interpretive panels. Also adjacent, or near the Centre, would be a parking lot (designed with innovative storm-water management practices and plenty of tree cover), a model example of excellent parking lot design, an outdoor classroom (complete with a fire-pit area for winter fires) and native plantings.

A High Ropes Course, complete with Lookout Towers, was considered by the end of the full-day design charrette. The team felt this was a low enough impact development that would provide a novel programming opportunity and revenue potential. This idea was abandoned, by consensus, at the start of the first group online discussion, as it was deemed incompatible with the team's strong conservation goals.

Very early on in the design process the team decided not to locate the Meewasin Trail on the lower level of this site. This was done to separate visitors to this area from the hazards of sharing a path with fast moving cyclists, roller blades and e-bikes. This is envisioned as an area where birdwatchers and others keen to see wildlife can view the landscape without worrying about potential conflict with other users. The Meewasin Trail is to stay setback from the top of the river bank, much like it does for most of its length.

Protecting the natural integrity of the site was the most important driving idea for this group, perhaps because the team was comprised of several individuals from various conservation groups. At many points along the process of developing this conceptual master plan, items were removed from consideration after respectful and thorough discussion. Consensus among team members was always met.

The team discussed offering overnight camping at Maple Grove several times. It was generally thought that it wasn't a desirable potential program at the site, because of the need for services, lack of demand (it is not at capacity at Wanuskewin) and the limitations in terms of operating this type of operation profitably. Later in discussions the team agreed that supervised overnight tenting would be allowable, especially if it supported the goals of education and land based learning and potential non-profit partners.

The idea of a Food Forest was discussed from the beginning and was an idea the team kept returning to in different variations. At first it was conceived as an Indigenous food forest, to be planted and maintained where the ball fields used to be, and evolved to become an area of mass plantings in the middle of the

site, with interpretation, where visitors can learn about native plant species that have traditionally provided food and medicines for humans. Trees, shrubs and perennials would be planted in mass groupings, where people can learn to identify them. One could then go see them situated in more natural settings in other areas of the site.

The team decided to apportion the site into zones that dictate allowable uses. These zones came to be the Restoration Zone, the Conservation Zone, the Hybrid Use Zone and the Service + Education Zone. The Hybrid Use Zone corresponds to the area where the former trailer court used to be located; this area has already experienced some man-made disturbance so this was designated as an area where some low-impact development could occur. This zone would be the location for the Food Forest plots and would also include benches and picnic areas.

The Conservation Zone corresponds to areas of the site that are currently in a primarily natural state, the Restoration Zone are areas that aren't currently in a natural state but could be rehabilitated to return to one, and the Service + Education Zone is located up near the road, in a current agricultural area, adjacent to Township Road 362.

Team #3 spent a significant amount of time discussing Yorath Island and, specifically, whether to restrict human access or allow it in a controlled manner. Ultimately, we decided that it should all be included in the Conservation Zone, with no future accommodation for human access. The team worried that access would happen anyway, but decided that interpretation at the Maple Grove site should focus on educating the public about why Yorath Island is ecologically important, particularly as bird and waterfowl habitat, and that building respect for Yorath Island through education would go a long way to preserving it as a wildlife area. We also thought that the entire island should be treated as a whole entity, despite multiple owners, and protected with conservation status in the future.

We envision a potential partner organization renting the Riparian Education Building, using it for full-time programming. We discussed potential non-profit organizations that would be a compatible fit, including local school divisions for outdoor learning excursions. A suitable non-profit partner, with compatible goals for the site, would strengthen this proposed conceptual site plan. Team #3 eventually decided that supervised, overnight camping could be accommodated at this site, particularly if it fit well with potential partner programming. Locating the camping in the Hybrid Use Zone, which also includes the White House and its associated amenities, would be preferred.

Team #3 discussed the future of the White House and decided that it would be a good place to locate the Education Centre in its earliest stages. Besides offering educational opportunities, shelter and gathering space, it could also support overnight camping and general site visitors by providing drinking water and bathrooms. Given the team's interest in offering inclusive and accessible access, it was also suggested that electric carts be available for rent at the White House. Once momentum and interest has been established for the Education Centre, funding can be secured to build a new, purpose driven building as indicated on the site plan, just back from the riverbank and on the triangle of land adjacent to Township Road 362 (the area noted as the Service + Education Zone). At that point the White House can be repurposed or relocated/removed.

The Education Centre is to serve as the trail head to a network of trails at Maple Grove. Team #3 envisions a viewing platform at the top of the slope, adjacent to the Centre, where visitors can view up and down the river and look down over the site before they continue on with their visit. Stairs and an accessible ramp would then lead visitors down the riverbank slope to the river terrace area. Smaller river viewing platforms are to be situated at key overlooks along the trail network, offering educational and viewing opportunities. The trail network proposed makes use of existing paths and roads, including those that are currently mowed. From the Education Centre there is a paved, accessible trail that visitors with mobility constraints can easily maneuver; this path makes a large loop around the Hybrid Zone and includes one lower viewing platform at the river's edge. It was felt that these platforms should be designed so that they could serve as resting spots for non-motorized watercraft, including canoes, kayaks and stand-up paddleboards.

Team #3's Conceptual Site Plan includes a Meewasin Trail south extension which continues south from the Maple Grove Site. This was an important element for the team, expressing a desire not to set limits on potential for trail expansion in the future.

Team #3 envisions the Maple Grove site functioning on a revenue neutral basis. Small rental revenues from the Education Centre will hopefully offset site improvements and maintenance costs.

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Guiding Principles:

1. Conservation & education
2. Utilize all 4 seasons
3. Sustainable & adaptive design
4. Passive recreation preferred to active
5. Avoid duplicating existing park programming
6. Tell a story that strengthens the journey from Maple Grove to Wanuskewin
7. Accessible and Inclusive trail

Zones

- Restoration
- Conservation
- Hybrid
- Services and Education

Legend

- Maple Grove
- Pedestrian Trails
- Accessible Trail
- Meewasin Trail
- Service Road

Maple Grove Trail Terminus

- Interpretive panels that starts here, tell the story of First Nation's history along the Meewasin Valley, from here to Wanuskewin
- Secure bike parking

Maple Grove Riparian Education Centre

- Low impact building with facilities to host educational classes & group retreats
- Washrooms and water fountain
- Partnership potential with local schools & non-profit organizations
- Green Roof
- Demonstrate innovative stormwater & parking lot design.
- Theatre
- Outdoor classroom space
- Base for potential Maple Grove Foundation, a non-profit organization assisted with financial initiatives
- Rentals for non-profit & small corporate events, including environmental education & team building
- Operate to achieve overall revenue neutral status

Gate:

- Restrict access to service & emergency vehicles

Viewshed Platform

Stairs, Ramp, Overlook/Observation Deck

- Access to river terrace area
- A place to view up and down the river

Yorath Island

- Restricted access
- Pursue long term protection status

Viewshed Platform

The White House

- Find a partnership that would co-exist with native food forest initiative
- Use as teaching huts, until funding is available for the Education Centre
- Provide electric carts, to facilitate inclusive site participation
- Public washrooms & potable water offered

Hybrid Use Area:
Designated for habitat restoration & low impact activities, including:

- Managed, group plantings of native vegetation, with focus on use as traditional foods & medicines
- Hiking
- Bird watching
- Picnic tables & benches

Viewshed Platform

- Small scale, using rustic materials
- A place to pause, sit, observe & learn
- Educate the public regarding Yorath Island, its conservation status, importance & unique features
- Design platforms to accommodate rest stops/shelter for non-motorized boats kayaks, canoes, SUPs)

Longterm trail expansion

