

# A WAY FORWARD FOR A COMPLEX MULTI-USE TRAIL - THE MEADOWAY

# TORONTO COLAB

SAFE PASSAGES: EXPLORING NEW MATERIALS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF LANDSCAPE AND INFRASTRUCTURE





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**RE:** The Meadowway Co-Lab: A Way Forward for a Complex Multi-Use Trail

**EVENT DATE:** April, 2019

## BACKGROUND

The Ecological Design Lab was invited by Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) to lead an inter-professional CoLaboratory (CoLab) workshop to review and respond to the design and Request for Proposals developed to date for The Meadowway greenspace corridor.

A team of practitioners representing TRCA, Perkins+Will, Ryerson University (now Toronto Metropolitan University), the University of Toronto and the W. Garfield Weston Foundation was assembled to support the workshop goals, contribute individual subject-matter expertise and facilitate the participation of the project team, the invited experts, and the community representatives throughout the CoLab process.

The CoLab is an interdisciplinary collaborative workshop, and is used as a team-based method for design research and development across fields including, but not limited to: planning, ecology, landscape, architecture and engineering professionals. The intent is to advance integrated strategies and solutions to complex problems for which there are currently few protocols and little or no agency practice. In this context, the CoLab workshop is an experiential learning process and professional development opportunity to evolve interdisciplinary design solutions.

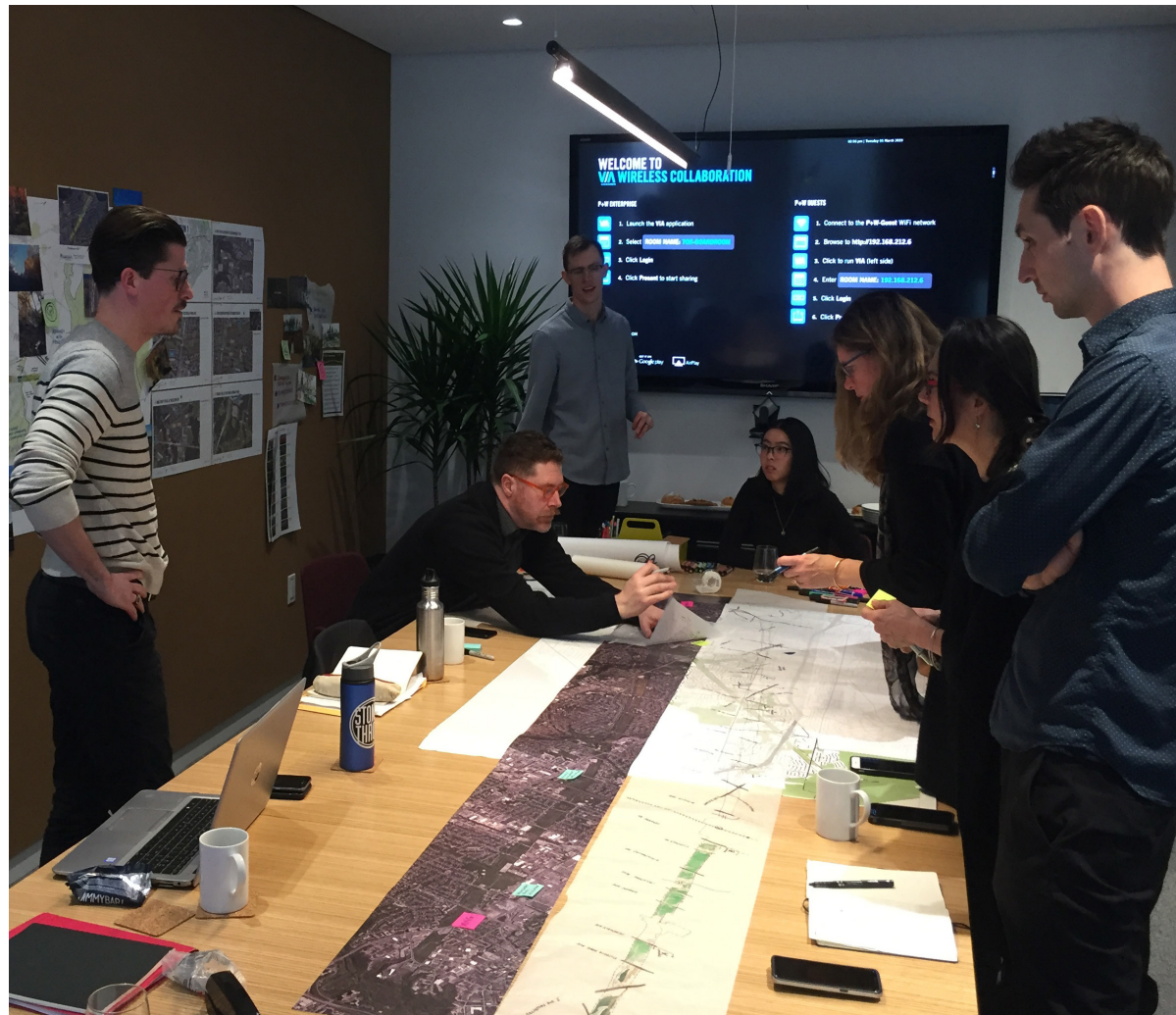




# COLAB ATTENDEES

Participants were divided into three working groups, balanced in the range of expertise represented on each team, including but not limited to: engineering, ecology, wildlife biology, landscape architecture, urban planning, road ecology and community engagement.

- The Ecological Design Lab
- Project team: Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Perkins+Will, Weston Foundation
- Project managers and restoration services managers
- Landscape architects
- Education, training, communication, community engagement and outreach coordinators and managers
- Ecologists, monitors and researchers
- Parks and culture division representatives
- Urban designers
- Architects



# PURPOSE

The Meadoway project will see the transformation of 16 kilometers of underutilized greenspace between Rouge National Urban Park and downtown Toronto, into a more cohesive and revitalized active transportation network and community gathering place. Envisioned to provide a green, active, east-west link in the City, it will build off of existing infrastructure and lessons learned from previous successful revitalization projects. Though the Meadoway represents just 10% of hydrological corridor lands across the Toronto region, it acts as a starting point to establish a connected greenspace network across 4,200 acres in the region.

By engaging in the CoLab process, the project team sought to ensure that the Meadoway will showcase the scale, design excellence, engineering, quality and effectiveness of greenspace revitalization that is possible in an urban setting. In turn, this will serve as a model example for cities world-wide. The stated objective of the Meadoway CoLab was to discuss guiding principles and design directions for the project. Specifically, participants discussed existing studies, Requests for Proposals and engagement principles framed through guided questions and discussion. Discussion questions were split into two main themes: uses and landscape typologies, and reconnecting landscapes.

The CoLab format provided a peer-review mechanism for internal and external experts to provide feedback to the project team, identify opportunities, challenges and collaboratively work towards solutions. The design concepts and implementation recommendations generated in the workshop are outlined in this report.



# CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE 2019-03-26 COLAB SESSION HOSTED BY THE TRCA:

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## USAGE CONSIDERATIONS:

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Participants were asked to discuss uses and landscape typologies through a series of guided questions. As a result, a significant portion of the CoLab was dedicated to discussions around users and land uses. The following recommendations were identified and capture this discussion:

- There is greater need to balance inherent conflict of uses, specifically between the ideal of a restored landscape and the realities of this space
  - In particular, groups discussed that the Meadoway would be used for places of play, as well as for informal trail uses
- The final project will need to balance restrictions, conflicts and existing users
  - It will need to ensure compliance with Hydro One's management restrictions, and incorporate, move or manage existing and well-used sports fields
- Greater clarity is needed to define acceptable uses within the corridor

## PARTNERSHIPS CONSIDERATIONS:

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The Meadoway is a large, complex project involving multiple stakeholders, experts, community groups and the public. As such, robust partnerships should be considered for the successful implementation of the project. The following recommendations were identified for further exploration:

- The Meadoway should build partnerships with institutional facilities for management and educational initiatives
  - This could result in allotment gardens, medicine gardens as well as 'showcase' gardens
- Revenue streams - particularly those that are ongoing and sustainable in nature - will need to be generated through partnerships and events. These partners need to align with the project to deliver events that are creative and desirable
  - E.g., the Bentway - another public realm initiative in Toronto, hosts a variety of creative events ranging from public art and skating rink facilities, among others

## PUBLIC EXPECTATION CONSIDERATIONS:

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Related to the partnership considerations above, public expectation needs to be considered in the development of the Meadoway project. The following key recommendations were discussed:

- Community members must be engaged in the design of the project gardens
- To promote the existence of wildlife and nature along the Meadoway, public education campaigns and practices must be created and proliferated
- Extra attention will need to be paid to neighboring properties along the Meadoway, especially those that have extended backyards into the corridors
- Overall, there will need to be clear and effective messaging and management of public expectations as to what will be proposed with this project

## PROCESS CONSIDERATIONS:

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Through the CoLab process itself, it was observed that the presence of individuals with different and unique expertise strengthened the discussion. Specifically, collaboration and knowledge sharing across disciplinary boundaries allowed for a diverse and robust range of expertise to be shared. This was particularly evidenced around certain, specific subject area topics (e.g., ecological functionality, plant species, urban wildlife management, etc.)



# CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE PRELIMINARY 2019-04-24 MEETING HOSTED AT CENTENNIAL COLLEGE:

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## CONNECTIVITY CONSIDERATIONS:

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With the Meadoway project spanning a vast distance, there are inherent challenges regarding connectivity. During the preliminary meeting, TRCA noted that seamless, multi-use trail connections will be made, and key crossings will include ravines, railways, four lane roads as well as highways. The following recommendations were identified for further exploration:

- Leverage connections within and outside of the corridor
  - This includes both physical connections, as well as institutional and community partnerships and connections (relates to considerations from the wider session hosted at TRCA)
- Leverage the physical connection to the Ontario Greenbelt and beyond Rouge Park
  - This can also be used to further public understanding of the project
- Consider opportunities for wildlife connectivity and crossings
  - The TRCA has acknowledged that facilitating wildlife movement is a priority; however, the main, current priority is human connectivity through the multi-use trail
- Consider integrating the Meadoway into the surrounding urban fabric, to provide more public frontage to the corridor, facilitating increased access

## MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE:

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The management structure of the Meadoway was a key issue identified, which needs greater clarification. The fragmentation of management and ownership will need to be addressed in subsequent phases of the project. A thorough understanding of how the TRCA constructs and manages its existing meadows will need to be defined, and can be used to inform the management structure of the Meadoway.

## NEXT STEPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ONGOING COLLABORATION

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The Ecological Design Lab remains interested in ongoing collaboration with the TRCA and with the Perkins+Will team in supporting the implementation of the Meadoway project.

The CoLab workshops (of which the Meadoway was one in the series) are now concluded as they were funded through a SSHRC Partnership Development Grant (2016-2019). However, continued funding may be possible for a follow-up workshop in the spring of 2020 pending a successful grant application along with continued interest and support from TRCA.

The Ecological Design Lab continues research and professional practice design research through a variety of platforms and is a willing partner on the Meadoway project. Several possible avenues for collaboration might include:

- Participation of Ecological Design Lab representatives on an advisory committee to the project team as the project design and implementation progresses
- Referral of additional expert advisors to support decision-making
- Supportive peer review of ongoing design development to address challenges identified;
- A dedicated graduate studio project at Ryerson University (now Toronto Metropolitan University) to explore more aspects of a Visualization Toolkit in depth, as the planning of the project develops

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