

# Thamesford Lions plan \$1.4 million park project

By MICHELLE MUYLAERT

The Lions Club are certainly packing a big roar in Thamesford.

The 75-member service club have a massive project underway involv-

ing the clean-up and beautification of the Thames River and its banks through town at an estimated cost of \$1.4 million.

The detailed plan includes major dredging of the river and an adja-

cent pond to eliminate algae build-up and the construction of islands developed from the river bottom to help control erosion.

Trees and shrubs will be planted to encourage wildlife usage and

eliminate the deadwater zone. A manicured fishing zone with interlocking edging will produce a clean break at the water's edge.

Once complete, the project will increase the size of the current park

area three times.

The Lions hope to make the long-stagnant waters usable for boating, fishing and waterfowl development.

"Everybody knows what kind of mess that is," Larry Taylor, Lions Club member and co-ordinator of the project said. "It has been neglected for a long time."

Esthetic features planned include a series of floodlights, spotlights on the dam and waterfall, foot bridges over the pond area, asphalt walkways, the removal of scrub brush to plant evergreens and public water fountains.

Taylor nixed initial reactions that the project was too ambitious for a small town service club. An employee of General Motors in London well-versed in project development procedures, he created a detailed proposal of the plan and began investigating the requirements of all the controlling authorities last November.

Officials, including those from the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, the Ministry of Transportation and various land owners were contacted for their input.

One major stumbling block, however, came at the municipal level. Zorra Township Council shot down a request to have all the involved land put into their name, action necessary to receive any government funding.

According to Taylor, council was concerned about the annual maintenance of the park area following completion. When Taylor calculated the maintenance costs at only \$8,500 annually, the vote was turned around eight to two.

"Their arguments virtually collapsed," he said.

Taylor is currently involved in the complicated process of creating ease agreements in order to transfer the land and acting as mediator bet-

ween the village of Thamesford and Zorra Township. He expects to make his fifth appearance before Zorra council in the near future.

Following this, he will call for consultant engineering studies on some of the more complicated project features.

A lot of responsibility for a man who joined the Lions Club only three years ago.

"I want to do what the people want to do," Taylor said. "This is a Lions Club project."

The first physical work to be done is the dredging of the mill pond adjacent to the Thames. This alone will cost \$300,000 to \$400,000. It is hoped the dredging work, the islands and a bottom draw off could save the pond that is gradually filling in with silt and vegetation.

Without intervention, the pond will become extinct within the next few decades.

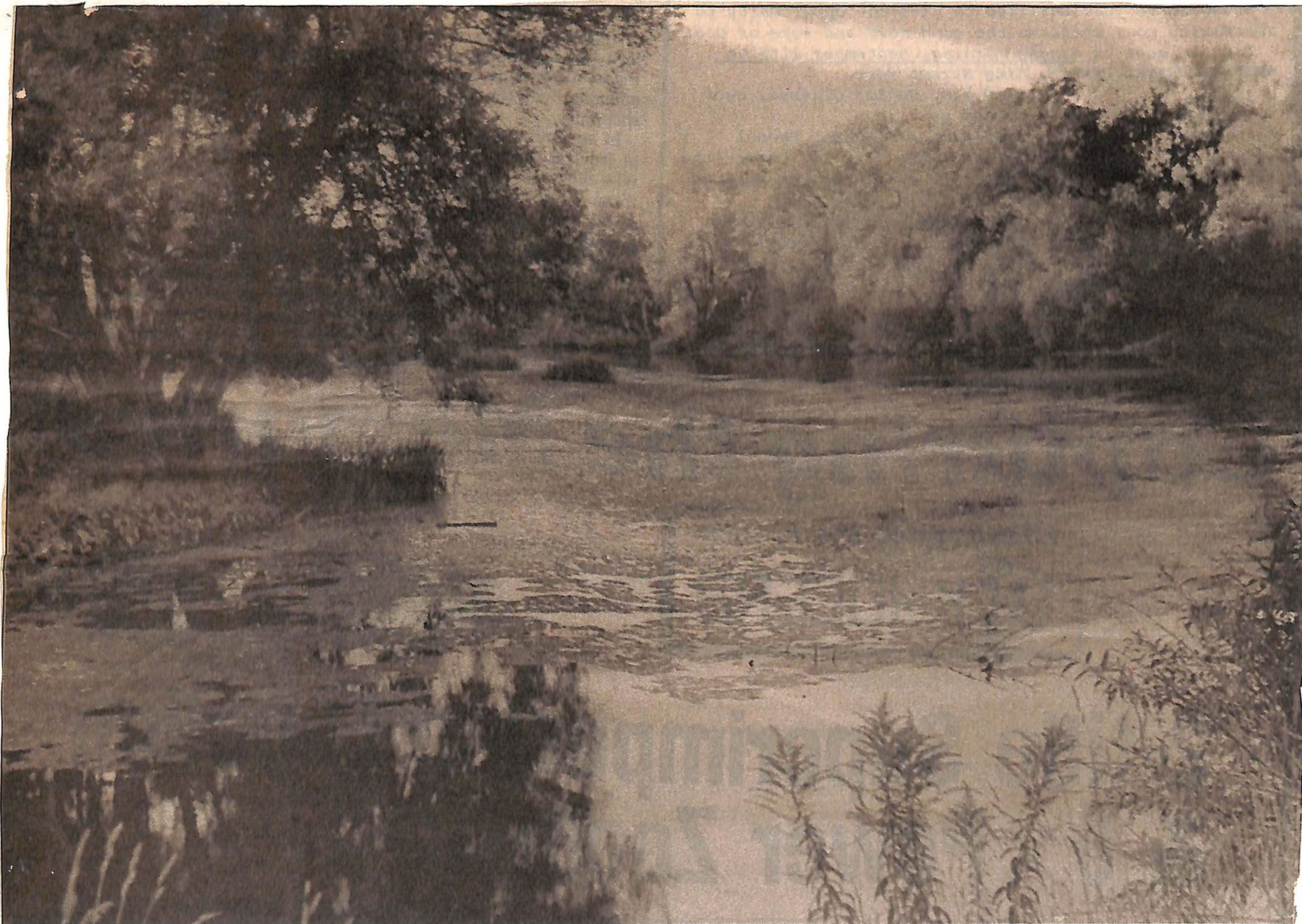
Taylor will look toward provincial government funding for this work. He anticipates dredging will begin next August.

"It's anybody's guess," Taylor said of the start-up date. "We had originally hoped to start some minor things this year. We have to clean out the swamp and do other things afterward. It's a natural progression."

Funding will come from the provincial government and ambitious fund-raising projects within the community. Club members will cut costs by doing as much of the work as possible themselves.

Taylor is hoping for substantial support from Thamesford residents and business people whom he believes will be the major beneficiaries.

"A lot of people drive through Thamesford and don't realize it. There is nothing to attract their attention. When this is done it is going to look awful darn good. People will get out and walk around the park and wander into the businesses. It's going to do a lot for this town."



The Thames River and adjacent pond running through Thamesford will be the location of a massive clean-up and development project taken on by the village Lions Club.

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