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STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Theresa DiMarco (left) and her friends Lynn Goldman and Maryanne Strano enjoy a ride through Eldred King Forest, part of the regional forest system.

York's greening strategy failing miserably: environmentalist

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protect that image, as well as our communities."

Waller admits residents are concerned about the pace of growth. York, now home to 700,000, is expected to have a population of 1.2 million by 2021.

But Waller said growth has to be balanced with protecting the environment.

"I think what we have to do is see if we can accommodate a reasonable amount of growth, but at the same time, take action to protect our communities and enhance the environment," he said.

"What we're looking for is a balance between healthy communities, a sustainable natural environment and a strong economy."

Waller said government, the public and the private sectors must work together to protect greenspace.

York is hosting a symposium June 12, inviting anyone interested in saving the environment to brainstorm on the Greening of York plan.

Officials will work on the strategy over the summer, with a final document expected to be adopted in the fall.

"I think we need to put together a practical, straight forward strategy that has a number of action areas," Waller said.

"We need to have the ideas and visions of the public and stakeholders to put together a good strategy. The point is, we're doing a lot of good things. We need to find new partnerships and innovative ways to enhance our natural heritage."

But Glenn De Baeremaeker, the chairperson of Save the Rouge Valley System, doesn't share Waller's glowing account of the region's environment

policies. "They keep using beautiful words, but they've done virtually nothing to protect the environment," he said.

"Right now, York Region is failing miserably to protect the environment. It's not just getting a low grade, it's failing miserably."

A good place to start, according to De Baeremaeker, would be to stop the unbridled growth in York.

"They're paving over everything. In York Region, their legacy will be one of concrete and pollution," he said.

De Baeremaeker wants to see southern Ontario municipalities tap into the province's \$20-billion SuperBuild fund, which is supposed to be used to build infrastructure such as roads and water pipes.

Investing \$1 billion would give the municipalities about \$80 million a year for land acquisition.

De Baeremaeker argues the environment should be considered part of the infrastructure needed for healthy communities.

He's not the only one who finds fault with the region's management of York's environment.

The first-ever report on the state of York's environment, released last year, was also critical.

"They (natural resources) are a rich legacy, one that should be celebrated, cherished and protected for future generations," said the draft report, called Our Environment, Our Home.

"The stresses on our natural resources come from hundreds of different sources — the tailpipes of our cars, the solvents we pour down the sink, the housing development beside the wetland, the storm water that flows from our city streets."



IF I CAN STOP ONE HEART FROM BREAKING,
I SHALL NOT LIVE IN VAIN;
IF I CAN EASE ONE LIFE THE ACHING,
OR COOL ONE PAIN,
OR HELP ONE FAINTING ROBIN
UNTO HIS NEST AGAIN,
I SHALL NOT LIVE IN VAIN.

— EMILY DICKINSON

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