



Region of Queens Land Use Planning Update

Shoreline Protection

Background Report (7/7)

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Region of Queens Land Use Planning
Update

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INTRODUCTION



Topic Overview

Watercourses are one of Queen's most defining natural features. The municipality contains an extensive network of lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands that contribute to its environmental health, recreational opportunities, and rural character. Together, lakes, rivers, and wetlands cover approximately one-quarter of the municipality, forming a landscape that supports a wide variety of plant and animal species while also providing important ecological functions.

Two major watersheds shape much of the region: the Mersey River Watershed and the Medway River Watershed. These systems collect and convey water across large portions of Queens before emptying into the Atlantic Ocean at Liverpool and Port Medway, respectively. In addition to supporting aquatic ecosystems, these watersheds play an important role in water quality, flood management, and the overall health of the surrounding environment.

The lands located along shorelines and watercourses are particularly valuable. Natural vegetation

in these areas helps stabilize soils, filter runoff, absorb excess nutrients, and provide habitat for wildlife. These shoreline areas also act as a natural buffer between human activity and sensitive aquatic environments, helping to maintain healthy ecosystems and water quality.

However, these areas can also present high risks for development. Shorelines are dynamic environments that are shaped by natural processes such as erosion, flooding, and changing water levels. As climate change contributes to more frequent and intense storm events, these processes are expected to become increasingly significant. As a result, many municipalities are exploring ways to protect shoreline environments while ensuring that development occurs in a safe and sustainable manner.

Why is this a Topic of Focus?

As development pressures increase, the Municipality wants to ensure that shorelines continue to be protected. Recent development concerns include shoreline alteration, the removal of natural vegetation, and infilling in areas adjacent to watercourses.

The Municipality's current planning framework contains shoreline protection measures in certain locations. Council is considering whether similar protections should be applied more broadly across Queens and whether existing regulations provide sufficient guidance to address current development practices.

This review provides an opportunity to examine how shoreline areas are regulated throughout the municipality and to consider whether additional measures are needed to better protect water quality, natural habitats, and the long-term health of shoreline environments.

Existing Policies and Regulations

The current Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB) contain a series of policies and regulations intended to protect shorelines, watercourses, and the natural vegetation that surrounds them. These provisions recognize the important role that shorelines play in maintaining water quality, reducing erosion, and supporting wildlife habitat.

Shoreline and Watercourse Buffers

The primary tool used to protect shorelines is the establishment of development setbacks, commonly referred to as buffers.

For inland watercourses identified on Schedule B of the Land Use Bylaw (see Figure 1), development is generally prohibited within 15.24 metres (50 feet) of the ordinary high-water mark. These buffer requirements apply throughout the municipality, with the exception of development occurring within the Watershed (W) Zone, which is specific to development related to municipal water supplies.

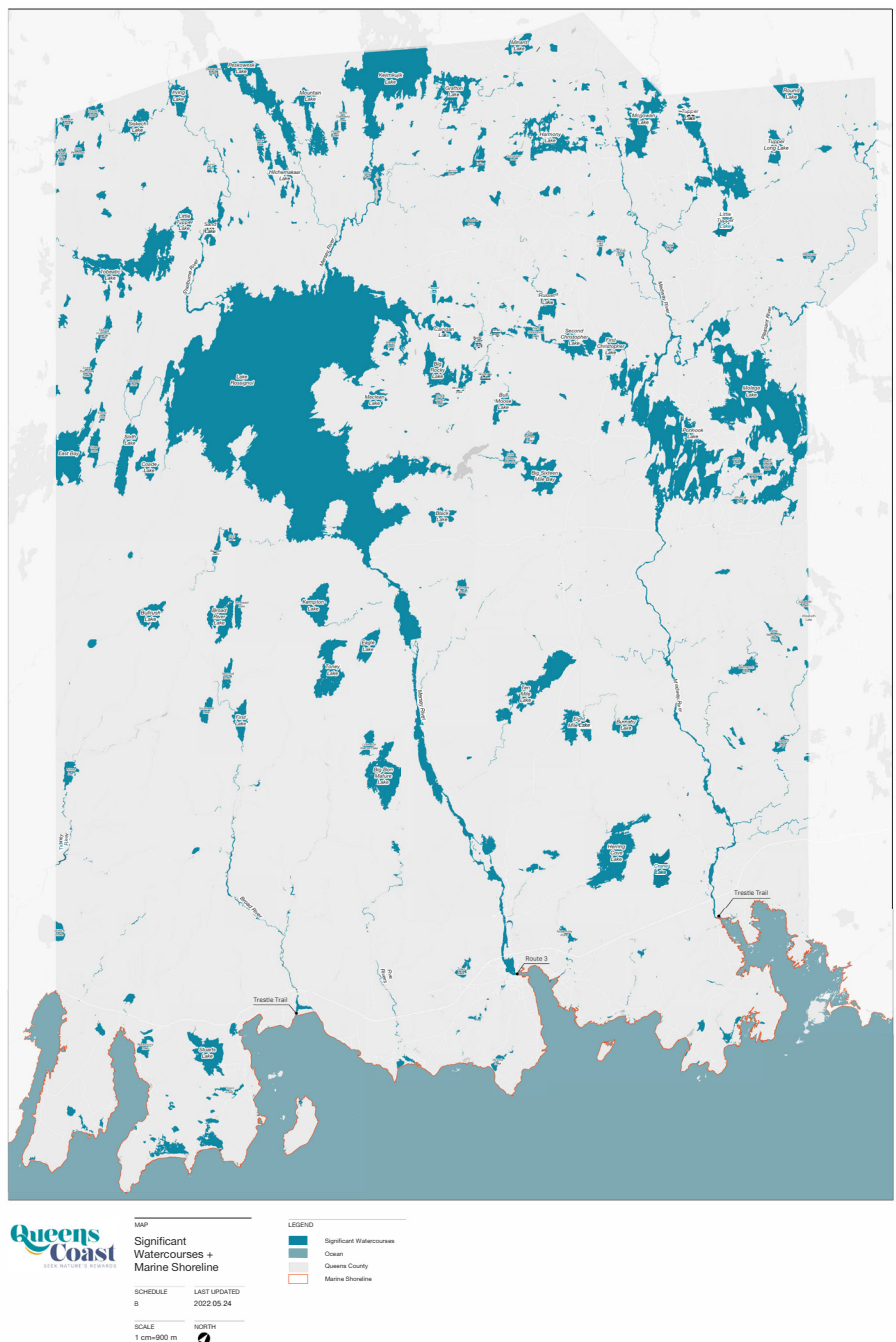


Figure 1. Schedule B of the Region of Queen's Municipality Land Use Bylaw.

Vegetation Protection

In addition to restricting development, the Land Use Bylaw also limits the removal of natural vegetation within shoreline and watercourse buffers.

Vegetation may generally not be removed during development within 15.24 metres (50 feet) of a significant inland watercourse, except where necessary to accommodate permitted developments within the buffer.

Property owners may also remove vegetation from up to 25 percent of their water frontage to create views of the water. Where excessive vegetation has been removed, the Municipality may require natural vegetation to be reinstated.

Limited pruning, the removal of hazardous trees, and other activities necessary for safety and maintenance are also permitted.

Permitted Developments Within Buffers

While most development is prohibited within shoreline and watercourse buffers, certain uses are permitted because they depend on direct access to the water or serve environmental, recreational, or public purposes. Permitted developments include:

- + Docks, wharves, piers, slipways, boat houses, and fishing gear sheds;
- + Boardwalks, walkways, and trails with a maximum width of 3 metres;
- + Pumphouses;
- + Scientific research structures;
- + Erosion control and flood protection measures located above the ordinary high-water mark;
- + Safety fences not exceeding 1.9 metres in height;
- + Public roads and infrastructure.

Flexibility for Existing Lots and Buildings

The planning documents also contain provisions that recognize the challenges associated with older waterfront lots that may not meet modern development standards.

Where a lot was created prior to July 29, 2009 and is of a size or configuration that would otherwise prevent development, the Development Officer may reduce setback requirements to allow a main building of up to 100 square metres, provided specific criteria are met.

Similarly, existing buildings located within a shoreline or watercourse buffer may be renovated, repaired, reconstructed, relocated, or replaced, provided the work does not increase the building footprint within the buffer or further reduce the buffer area.



Reductions to Required Buffers

Property owners may also apply for a reduction to the required shoreline buffer through a site-specific review process.

To obtain a reduced buffer, the applicant must provide a detailed study prepared by a qualified professional demonstrating that the proposed development will not create environmental risks or increase shoreline hazards. Among other requirements, the study must show that the development is located outside areas subject to seasonal flooding, maintains a minimum setback from the shoreline or watercourse, and will not increase the risk of shoreline erosion.

This process allows flexibility in circumstances where site conditions may support a reduced buffer while ensuring that environmental and safety considerations are appropriately addressed.





Introduce Green Shores

Incorporating “Green Shores” into the Municipality’s shoreline protection framework would shift some of the focus from regulating shoreline development through setbacks alone toward actively encouraging or requiring nature-based shoreline design and restoration practices.

Green Shores emphasize the use of natural vegetation, gradual slopes, and bioengineering techniques to stabilize shorelines and reduce erosion, rather than relying on hard shoreline structures such as concrete walls or large-scale infilling. It also promotes the restoration of previously altered shorelines to improve habitat quality, water quality, and ecological function over time.

Under this option, the Municipality could develop policies and guidelines that:

- + Encourage shoreline buffers for new development;
- + Promote the use of native vegetation and shoreline planting plans;
- + Discourage hard shoreline armoring where natural solutions are feasible; and

- + Provide guidance or incentives for property owners to retrofit existing developed shorelines using nature-based techniques.

However, the Municipality does not have the authority to require Green Shores. Any approach would need to be based on education and encouragement.

Expand Shoreline Protection Requirements to all Watercourses

The Municipality could expand its existing shoreline protection requirements to apply to a broader range of lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands. Currently, the Land Use By-law focuses on significant watercourses identified on Schedule B. This option would apply setbacks and vegetation protection requirements more consistently throughout the municipality.

This approach would help ensure that smaller lakes, streams, and wetlands receive protection alongside larger and more prominent water bodies.

KEY QUESTIONS

Questions to Consider

As the Municipality reviews its approach to shoreline protection, community input will help determine how best to move forward. The following questions are intended to encourage discussion and gather feedback during the initial engagement period:

- + Do the current shoreline and watercourse buffer requirements provide adequate protection for lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands?
- + Are there particular shoreline areas, lakes, rivers, or watercourses that you feel require additional protection?
- + Are the current provisions that allow reduced shoreline buffers for existing lots and site-specific circumstances appropriate, or should they be modified?
- + Do you have specific concerns related to shoreline alteration activities, such as infilling, grading, retaining walls, or other modifications to the natural shoreline?

