



Celebrating the Biodiversity of Swan Lake Park

by Fred Peters

On June 7th, over 100 area residents joined Friends of Swan Lake Park (“FOSLP”) for a fun day in the park celebrating the Biodiversity of Swan Lake Park.

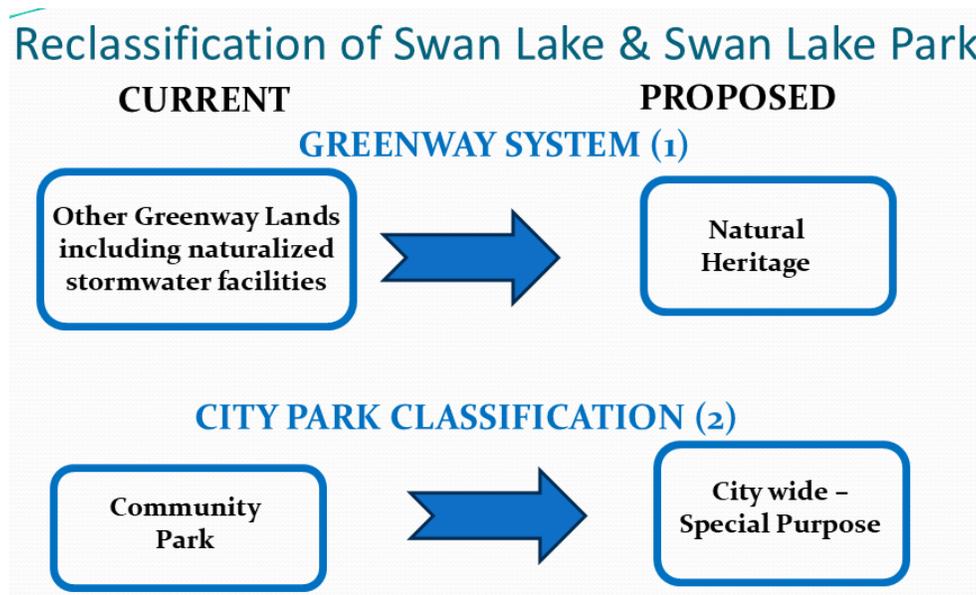
FOSLP members Sheniz Janmohamed and Kathleen Elizabeth Noel led birding, and nature walks while FOSLP’s York University partners in the Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab displayed drones and Virtual Reality simulation of the features in Swan Lake Park.



What’s in a Name?

In June FOSLP was successful in having the Markham Subcommittee review the status of Swan Lake Park. To support its request, FOSLP submitted its recently completed Biodiversity Report that detailed the 184 different bird species and 290 different plant species identified by FOSLP volunteers in Swan Lake Park . The full report is available on FOSLP’s website.

Under Markham’s Official Plan there are two different classification systems that impact the oversight of the park. Environmental status is determined by its classification under Markham’s Greenway system. The park is currently classified as “Other Greenway Lands” and FOSLP has requested that it be reclassified as Natural Heritage Lands, a higher category used for ecologically sensitive areas like Milne Dam Conservation Park and Toogood Pond Park.



Under Markham’s city park system, Swan Lake Park is categorized as a “community park”. FOSLP’s 2024 request for additional shoreline enhancements was rejected because of “equity with other parks” – but there are no other community parks with a lake in the middle. Only Milne and Toogood have major water bodies with similar issues. FOSLP requested that the park be reclassified as a “City-wide- Special Purpose Park” to underscore its ecological sensitivity and significance to the residents of Markham. Our thanks to the 313 area residents that filled out the FOSLP questionnaire to support the reclassification review and to Regional Councillor Alan Ho who was instrumental in advancing the review before Council. We expect the staff recommendations in 2027 as part of the new Markham Official Plan process.

Funding Secured to Support Water Quality Review

In December 2021, Markham established a 25-year lake management plan for Swan Lake and has initiated a process starting in the Fall of 2025 for the 5-year review of the initial Phase 1 and the development of a plan for the next 5-years (Phase 2).

FOSLP was successful in getting Markham to agree to a Workshop as part of the 5-year review of the water quality program to be undertaken by a consulting firm hired by Markham. FOSLP is working to encourage technical input from various sources including the York University researchers supporting the Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab.

In 2024, FOSLP launched an initiative to raise \$60,000 to hire professional advisers to support the water quality review and for guidance on the rehabilitation of the habitat in the park. Hydro One recently awarded FOSLP a \$25,000 grant to support its efforts. Combined with the \$15,000 raised from major contributors UA Local 46, CaTECH, Walker Parker Real Estate and Amica, FOSLP is now able to engage professional advisers to support the water quality review. FOSLP will continue to pursue other funding sources so it can secure professional guidance in 2026 for the rehabilitation of the park habitat.

There are two dimensions to a successful long-term rehabilitation plan for both water quality and aquatic habitat:

- 1) the undertakings required **to improve** the levels
- 2) the undertakings required **to sustain** the levels over time with minimal human intervention.

The Friends of Swan Lake Park's acknowledge the significant improvements from the Phase 1 activities but more is needed in terms of both water quality and the aquatic environment to achieve FOSLP's goal of the sustainable rehabilitation of Swan Lake

Discussions for Phase 2 will shift to how best to build upon and sustain the Phase 1 improvements over the long term. Markham staff will submit the revised water quality plan for the rehabilitation of Swan Lake to Markham Council in 2026.

