



Images from Alexis Wright/The Pointer/Steve Noakes

ENVIRONMENT

Part Two: Erin residents cite dire environmental concerns, outrageous connection costs in fight against wastewater treatment facility

By Rachel Morgan - Local Journalism Initiative Reporter & Alexis Wright

Jan 14, 2023 - Brampton, Mississauga, Niagara

[Tweet](#) 

In Part One of the series, The Pointer detailed the controversial dealings ahead of the decision to create a wastewater treatment facility.

After a decade of 'planning' – including closed in-camera council sessions, questionable land sales, and rushed consulting and construction – the build for Erin's Wastewater Treatment Facility is underway and predicted to be completed by 2028.

Hooked up in phases, the Town of Erin and the private sector partner have stated new developments will be connected initially, leaving current residents, who have for decades been happy using septic tanks, at the end of the line. After selling the lands for the Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF) to the Town for \$2, Solmar Development Corp. is one of three builders that will be serviced first.

The West Credit begins its steady flow in the northwest part of Caledon that borders the Town of Erin. It meanders through various municipalities snaking its way toward the picturesque Forks of the Credit River which continues south to Lake Ontario.

Just before the tributary crosses under Winston Churchill Boulevard in Erin, the watercourse joins a pipe that carries the flow under the road where a cleverly constructed pile of mud, branches and other materials marks the home built by beavers.

The small but stocky mammals have captured the attention of videographer Steve Noakes, a member of the Coalition for the West Credit River, who has described many active family groups of beavers along the river for decades.

“The beaver dam at Winston Churchill has been there for many years although they have rebuilt it in slightly different locations during that time,” Noakes tells The Pointer.





This beaver dam is a staple of the Credit River and its surrounding tributaries, with residents noting their presence for at least half a century. Beavers have been reclaiming their old territory since the end of the fur trade, when they were almost wiped out.

(Alexis Wright/The Pointer)

Beavers play a vital role in their wetland ecosystems. Their work supports the development of ecological niches and encourages species diversity for land, water and air species, and microbial bodies.

Those along the West Credit are drawing a lot of attention, not for the sight of their furry brown bodies and unique, elongated paddle-like tail, but to rally to protect their homes.

Effluent from the Town of Erin's yet-to-be-completed wastewater treatment facility is currently planned to discharge right at the location of the beaver dam at Winston Churchill. The Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVC) has said the dam must go.

The eviction of these wetland architects will have profound impacts, not only on their ability to find a new home, but on the entire ecosystem. Removal of the dam will increase the speed the water flows, ultimately thinning the stream.

With no consultation, plans are being made to force the beavers out of their home while residents of Erin will be forced to pay a small fortune to remain in theirs.

Ed Delaporte, one of many residents concerned about the costs of the project, says the Town is not treating many of its oldest community members fairly. "We should be working with them to build an Erin that is good for the residents and profitable for the community."

At \$114.4 million, the projected cost of the entire construction of the wastewater treatment facility, paid for jointly by the Town's property taxpayers and the residential home developers, is a price tag that has created sticker shock in the small municipality.

The figure does not include the cost for individual homeowners to connect to the main

sewage line, once the project is completed. Erin has always used septic tanks and many homeowners have expressed their frustration over being forced to switch to an exceedingly costly municipal wastewater system.

According to the Town's website, current residents will pay a significant portion of the infrastructure costs for the underground pipes that will run below local roadways, and associated costs for road repair. Each resident will have to pay between \$15,000 and \$18,000 depending on the location of the property and the work needed. On top of that, the initial hookup cost will be between \$4,000 and \$8,000 depending on the distance from the home to the main pipe. Once the construction of the facility is complete and homes have been connected, residents will be required to pay an annual user fee of \$500 to \$600 per year. With all of these costs combined, homeowners can expect to pay between \$19,500 and \$26,600 the first year.

Delaporte said he is lucky he can pay for a hookup but it is not the way he hoped to spend his hard earned life's savings. He will have to forgo things like family trips in order to cover the costs.

"I'm an auditor, and I see – repeatedly – people stealing stuff," he says. "The simple way of describing my job is I try to give you what I have, which is security, safety on the job, and a good contract that you can rely upon. That's what we do [with] the bare minimum wages and working conditions. And then you come home, and you're faced with a bunch of clowns, like we have running this town, and what they've done to this town."





Ed Delaporte has spent countless hours cultivating a garden that grows with the natural landscape of his property with few manicured touches. His septic system has been worked into the plans, with plants and other flora that thrive in waterlogged soil.

(Alexis Wright/The Pointer)

Delaporte loves his gardens. He has also spent a lot of time helping make the Town of Erin look beautiful, planting wildflowers and other flowers throughout the municipality. He is disheartened to see what's happening because of plans to rip up so much of his community to make way for a sewage system pushed by developers.

He says, unlike many in the town, he is fortunate to be able to cover the looming costs

to individual homeowners, many of whom feel they are being forced to shoulder the burden created by private interests and previous local politicians.

Bob Pearson is a longtime resident of Erin who has taken it upon himself to stand up for his family and friends in the community. He has become an investigator of sorts, spending much of his time looking into the costs and inner workings behind the controversial sewage treatment plant.

Currently, homes in the Town of Erin are hooked up to septic tanks. The Town has claimed a handful of septic tanks were not functioning properly. Pearson does recall one neighbour who had the lid on her septic tank completely disintegrate, leaving a hole in the backyard full of sewage.

But according to Pearson, the majority of septic systems are working and there simply is no pressing need to build an entirely new system, other than to accommodate the subdivision developers like Solmar, who want their new homes to feature municipal sewage connections, to make them more appealing to buyers.

"It'll cost me less to replace my whole septic system than it will to connect to the sewer system. And I can have a new state of the art, much more efficient system," he says.

Another neighbour of Pearson has a septic tank that is 14-feet below the grade of the road and received an estimated cost of \$63,000 just to get from the house to the main pipe. That does not include the connection cost.

"He can be looking at closer to \$100,000. And they're saying you've got to do it immediately," Pearson says. "The town cannot force somebody to go into debt."

Allto Construction Ltd. is a company that has been installing septic tanks in southern Ontario for over 50 years. According to estimates from its website, a septic tank for a two-to-three-bedroom house would cost between \$1,500 and \$2,500. On top of that is the installation fee which is on average \$18,000. Replacement or repair of the septic bed can range between \$500 and \$5,000, but if well maintained can last up to 40 years. All together, the cost for a fully equipped, new septic system would be less than the total cost downloaded onto residents for the sewage treatment plant.

Delaporte also pointed out the struggle for families on a single income. According to the 2021 Census, the median total income in Erin in 2020 was \$48,000.

"We love Erin," Delaporte says. "I'm a minute away from everything that I need. I'm 20 minutes away from every box store that I can need. I'm 40 minutes away from the airport. I'm an hour away from downtown. It's perfect."

A recent [report](#) highlighted problems and massive backups that have come up during the ongoing construction being done by Enbridge Gas. The Town will now be surveying main street businesses to learn how the disruptions affected them, knowing they will be much more impactful once the piping installation begins.

"Growth is inevitable but Erin is not moving forward in a way that is socially or ecologically sustainable," Delaporte says.

The Pointer contacted the Town of Erin requesting any updates about the hookup demands, and if any financial compensation is being planned, but did not receive a response ahead of publication.

Tony Aleluia is not worried about the cost of hookup. Living outside the town centre he will not be able to connect to the new sewer system. His concern is over the investment in his property.

Aleluia purchased the almost five-acre parcel in the spring of 2016. He was told by Wellington County there was no survey of the property on file. He said his attorney

asked for one multiple times but was denied and told he would have to get a survey done himself.

"It's kind of sketchy. But sometimes with these smaller towns, it's not a big deal," Aleluia says. The property is just north of the corner of Winston Churchill which borders the portion of the West Credit River where the Town plans to dump the effluent from the new wastewater treatment plant.

"You can back out if you want to, but we were in love with the place, we were ready to move forward. And we didn't know about the treatment plant. So we moved forward."

Aleluia recalls one day when someone came up onto his property talking about Brook Trout and asked him if he had heard anything about the wastewater treatment plant.

Aghast, Aleluia had not.

"I went inside and spoke to my wife and to be honest, I was really shocked because we purchased the place with no intention of ever really selling until someday we retire," he says. "But if I had known that they were going to put the town's effluent pipe in my yard, essentially, I might not have purchased the home."

The Town has offered little information to residents, he says, something many others have echoed. The first contact he received from the Town was recently when engineers wanted to go down to the river on his property with the conservation authority to assess the location of a monitoring facility.

According to those present during the visit an employee of the CVC stated the beavers and their dam will have to be "evicted".

The Pointer contacted CVC to confirm why a member of a conservation authority would make such a statement despite having no jurisdiction. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MRNF) and Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) are the only regulatory agencies who are able to make such determinations. In a statement sent to The Pointer after this article's publication, CVC denies that a staff member made these comments.

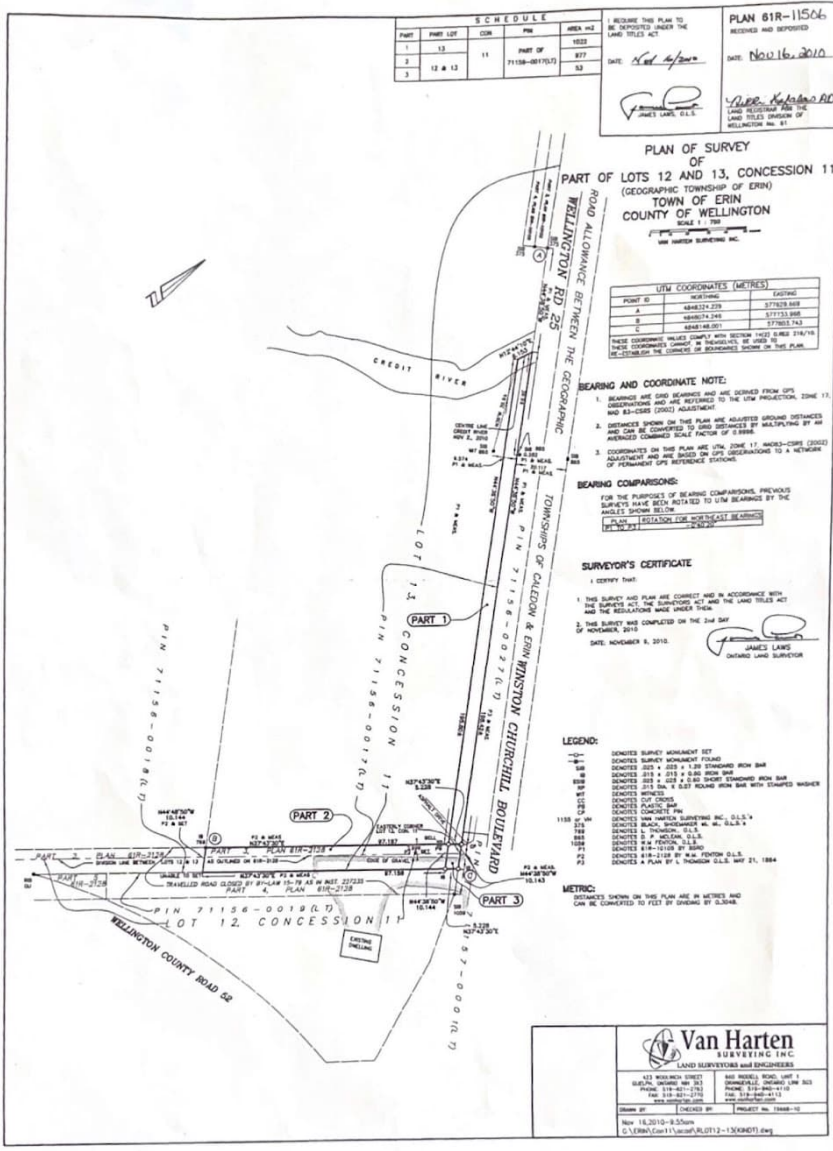
Neither the DFO and MNR have been contacted by the Town of Erin or the Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks (MECP) about the impacts on the Brook Trout or the removal of the beaver dam, The Pointer confirmed.

In an email statement to The Pointer, the MRNF said it has not been contacted about the removal of the beaver dam located at the proposed site of the discharge pipe. The ministry stated that dams can be removed without authorization only by a landowner or agent of the landowner for the sole purpose of protection of property under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (1997). An authorization is required for destroying a dam for any other reason. Aleluia said he has no problem with the existence of the dam which is not causing any harm to his property.

In Canada, unless the Crown applies for a change, the middle of the river to the end of his property belongs to Aleluia.

Aleluia was told the Town had an easement on his property which is a nonpossessory right to enter or use the property without owning it. His lawyer has made multiple requests for documents to prove this but has not received them. The claimed easement would allow the Town to dump the effluent into the river at the edge of his property and build a monitoring station.

"And when we brought up the matter of the survey, he plucked out an eight-by-ten piece of paper," Aleluia says, when he questioned the engineer who came to his property.



According to the plans by the Town of Erin, the main pipe will travel between Aleluia's property line and the Town's easement, crossing right through his driveway.

He said it will be very disruptive once the pipes and monitoring station are constructed, but he's most concerned about his investment in the property and the impacts on his family.

"I'm going to lose the value of my property because I'm the recipient of the effluent corridor. And I don't even have an email from the town to say, 'Hey, we're sorry, it sucks for you a lot'."

He says his wife is dead set against moving and while he too does not want to leave the property, the only other option may cost him millions of dollars.

"If my property is worth two-and-a-half [to] four-million, and it becomes worth less than a million dollars, then we won't be able to sell it and buy another one that we can all move into. That's a problem," he says. "I think for me, it's really trying to understand what are my options to deal with the depreciation factor?"

Despite living outside of the Town, meaning he will not be able to hook up to the sewer system, Alleluia made it clear he is willing to work with the Town, but has received very little communication back. He wants some compensation for the work being done adjacent to his property.

Other than the potential decrease in value, dumping the effluent at the edge of Aleluia's property will also change his family's relationship with their property. He says he used to frequently take his eldest son down to the river to fish. With his permission, many others would join them in keeping an eye out for the Brook Trout. Once effluent is dumped, the desire to go down to the river will be lost.





The wetland architecture that beavers are known for can be seen at the bottom of Tony Aleuia's property. The dam creates a barrier that contributes to natural, stable flooding that animals like frogs and muskrats thrive in.

(Alexis Wright/The Pointer)

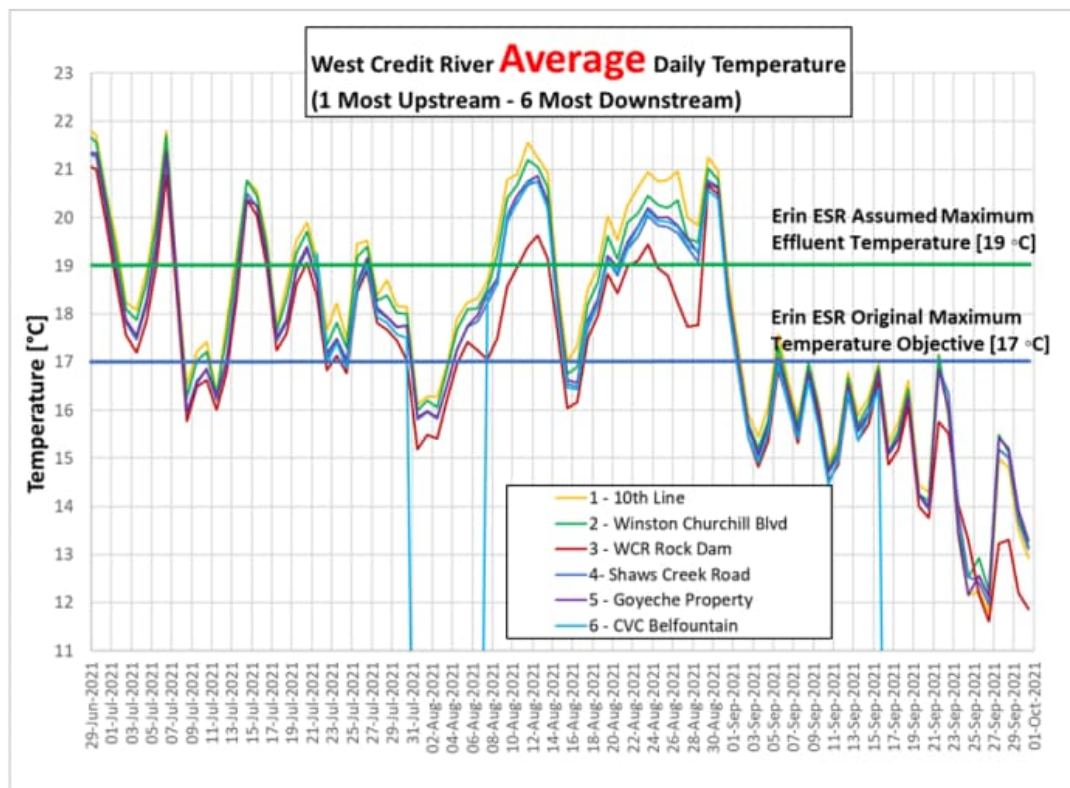
Among the many risks to those associated with either hooking up to or living nearby the wastewater facility, the survival of the Brook Trout is quite literally on the line.

"Wild Brook trout strains are part of our natural heritage and have developed and adapted to an ever changing environment over thousands of years. Any hope Brook trout have of dealing with climate change will come from preserving the historical, genetically unique native strains that are continually adapting to their environment," Noakes tells The Pointer.

He is an expert on the Brook Trout and one of five partners from various community based groups who came together to create the Coalition of the West Credit River (CWCR) in 2019. Prior to the formation of the coalition, two concerned citizens in Belfountain, Judy Mabee and Ann Seymour, filed a complaint to the Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks regarding the Erin wastewater treatment facility. They formed a small group within Belfountain that caught the attention of the Ontario Rivers Alliance and some fly fishing groups. From there the movement grew into the CWCR. Throughout its work, the CWCR has been communicating with the Ministry, the Town, the Region and the Credit Valley Conservation authority.

"This has morphed into dialogues and delegating, and garnering support from different sources," Mabee says. "And most haven't been extremely cooperative."

The Coalition began by reviewing the environmental study report to identify any gaps that existed. The thermal assessment was conducted by Hutchinson Environmental Ltd. and stated the Brook Trout will acclimatize to 23 degrees, contrary to the CWCR's research information that says the maximum temperature for the Brook Trout to survive is 19 degrees; it needs to be much lower for spawning.



In a public statement, the Coalition of the West Credit River released its findings that at least five stations along other rivers reached consistent average temperatures above 21 degrees celsius, which is when acute harm starts to affect aquatic – especially cold water – species.

(CWCR)

The Coalition made arrangements to meet with the Town of Erin and the mayor to discuss its concerns about the thermal assessment. Members made it clear there was no ill will and that they wanted to work with the Town to address the concerns. The Town responded, stating it has no concerns based on work by its consultants.

After more effort to communicate concerns with the Town, Mabee said representatives responded patronizingly, saying the water would be perfectly safe to drink. This is not the issue they tried to address.

“We’re trying to ensure that the composition of the appropriate chemicals for survival of the Brook Trout remain and are not impacted by temperature increases and chemical fluctuations,” Mabee explained.

Over 24,000 people have signed a petition created by the CWCR requesting further thermal studies.

Another action that garnered a lot of support from citizens was a House of Commons Petition to have a Federal Environmental Assessment done on the wastewater project, started by Belfountain resident, the late Jenni Le Forestier.

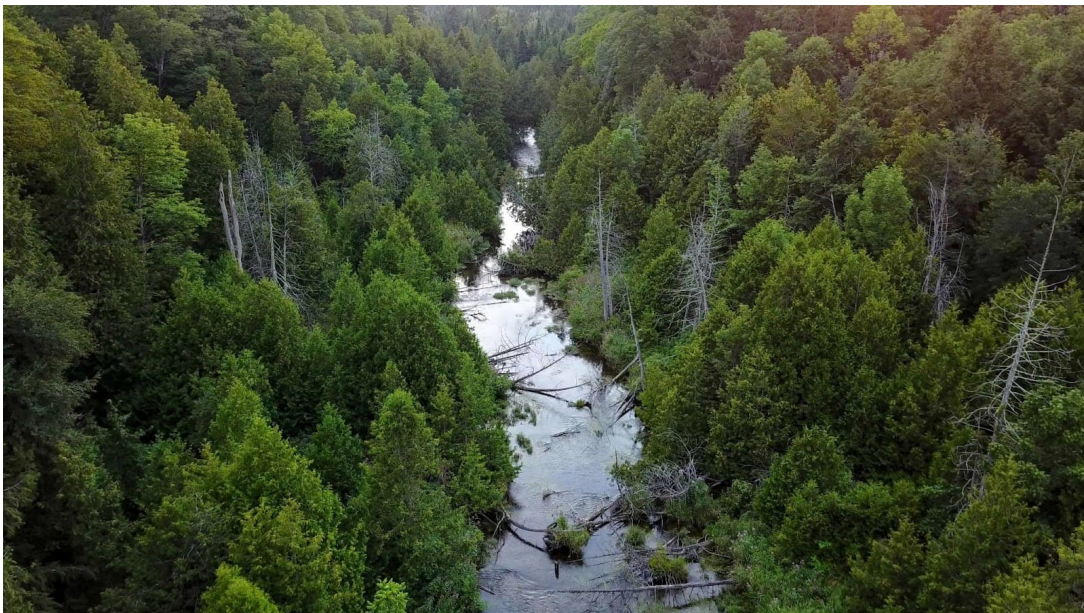
It was then brought to the House floor by Dufferin–Caledon MP Kyle Seeback.



Pictured standing over the Credit River, the late Jenni Le Forestier (left), who started the House of Commons e-petition, with the help of MP Kyle Seeback (middle) and Dufferin–Caledon Green President, Stefan Weisen.

Despite the signatures and 90 days on the floor, it was tabled on May 10, 2021—meaning no action was taken.

No further study has been completed on the effects of the effluent on the West Credit ecosystem, particularly on the Brook Trout.





Top, the West Credit River; bottom, Brook Trout swimming in its waters near Erin.

(Steve Noakes/Coalition for the West Credit River)

[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [CONTACT](#) [SHARE NEWS](#) [FILE A COMPLAINT](#) [PRIVACY](#) [TERMS](#) [SIGNARDS](#)
[LJI & AID TO PUBLISHERS](#) [ACKNOWLEDGMENT](#)



Noakes says a cold water stream that warms from human development from below 19 degrees into the low-to-mid-twenties causes dramatic ecological change.

Within a watershed, coldwater streams are important regulators. They improve water quality and biodiversity by reducing excess sediment and nutrients from traveling downstream.



Copyright © 2023 The Pointer Group Incorporated. All rights reserved.

“Stenothermic species – those that can only exist in a narrow temperature range – disappear,” he explains. “Brook Trout are not the only species in this category. Cold water dependent species in many cases have a low adaptive response because warm water holds considerably less oxygen. Amphibians and insect species are also sensitive to temperature shifts.”

“Many unique species and communities are permanently lost as average stream temperatures increase and their habitat becomes urbanized.”

The Credit River system is one of the last remaining spawning ground for the Brook Trout.

Its survival, along with the impacts on homeowners, continue to motivate Erin area residents, who say the battle around the wastewater system is not over.

“We don't have to do things to the residents of Erin that are unpleasant,” Delaporte says.

- With files from Natasha O'Neill

Email: rachel.morgan@thepointer.com

Twitter: [@rachelnadia_](https://twitter.com/rachelnadia)

Email: alexis.wright@thepointer.com

Twitter: @lextoinfinity

COVID-19 is impacting all Canadians. At a time when vital public information is needed by everyone, The Pointer has taken down our paywall on all stories relating to the pandemic and those of public interest to ensure every resident of Brampton and Mississauga has access to the facts. For those who are able, we encourage you to consider a subscription. This will help us report on important public interest issues the community needs to know about now more than ever. You can register for a 30-day free trial [HERE](#). Thereafter, The Pointer will charge \$10 a month and you can cancel any time right on the website. Thank you

[Submit a correction about this story](#)