

Our Community Map Making Process:

The Ward 21 Green Map

The Green Neighbours 21 Mapping Team

November 20, 2014



Our map project:

Green Neighbours 21 (GN 21) is a neighbourhood-based environmental group, in Toronto's Ward 21. In 2013, we created a green map of our ward. As far as we know, it is the first ward-based green map in Toronto. We felt that it would be useful to do a map at the ward level because it feels like a scale at which residents can effect change; it helps too that it is a political boundary.

Purpose of this document:

We have documented our project experience here as a record for ourselves, as well as for others who may like to do something similar.

When the project occurred:

The idea for the project was born in January 2013, while the map was completed and unveiled in November 2013. This document was completed in November 2014.

How the project started:

Transition Toronto, part of the worldwide Transition Town movement, came to a GN 21 meeting in January 2013 to guide a "Lemons to Lemonade" visioning session. Doing community mapping was one of the ideas that came up as a way to get to know our community and an important first step towards improving our community. As a result, four GN 21 members met in March 2013 with the goal of making a green map of our ward.

Purpose of the green map:

As stated on the map, the purposes of the map are to:

- educate newcomers as well as long-time residents about the green features of the ward
- document and celebrate Ward 21 as one of the greenest wards in the City of Toronto
- find out what we are missing or want more of in our community (e.g., a vegetarian restaurant?)
- raise awareness of the unique natural features of our ward (e.g., lost rivers)

The people involved in the project:

The initial group of four committed map team members soon grew to five. We met approximately once per month, usually at a local bakery (World Class Bakery). Attendance was usually 100%. It helped that we lived close by. We had a good mix of skills on our team related to digital mapping (GIS), layout, community liaison, research, editing, drawing, organization, and management.

Envisioning the map:

At our first meeting, we looked at an assortment of maps of Toronto to get an idea of what we wanted our map to look like. Throughout the project, we kept printing out drafts of the map so that we could all see which way our map was headed and discuss. Having these drafts at our meeting, however rough they were, was critical. Quite early in our project, we decided on the size and shape of the map. Our ward, which is shaped like a fire hydrant, fits nicely on an 11" x 17" sheet. We also decided we wanted to distribute a paper version of the map – rather than just electronic – because we wanted the map to be accessible to more people and also for people to be able to feel and handle the map.

What points of interest and features to include on the map:

We struggled quite a bit with what to put on our map, and what not to put. In the end, our map included buildings and houses with green features, green businesses, green community organizations, community gardens, green infrastructure, and carsharing spots, as well as parks, trails, and bikeways. As well, it included natural geographic features: the old Lake Ontario shoreline, ravines, and lost rivers.

We did not include points that are solely community-related (e.g., churches), health-related (e.g., yoga studios), history-related (e.g., the Tollkeeper's Cottage) or art-related (e.g., laneway garage art). We wanted the map to clearly be a green map. As well, we kept bike route numbers and transit routes off because they can be found on other, widely distributed maps.

It was also hard to organize all our points of interest into categories. Some points of interest seemed to fit into more than one category. In addition, creating categories, defining them, and giving each an appropriate name was challenging. Below is the definition of the "Green Infrastructure" category, which may not be familiar to many people:

'Green Infrastructure' – Just as this term is used in engineering contexts, on this map it refers specifically to built features that are designed to reduce stormwater runoff from a site, such as green roofs, bioswales, rainwater harvesting, permeable pavement, infiltration trenches/chambers, rain gardens, etc.

Where all the information came from:

Everyone on the team contributed to collecting points of interest and features for the map. Houses with green features were obtained by sending out messages to the GN 21 email list, our city councillor's email newsletter, and to a neighbourhood website/email newsletter (www.mystclair.com). Live Green Toronto, a municipal program that supports green initiatives throughout Toronto, was a good source of possible green businesses to add to our map. Old Lake Ontario shoreline and lost rivers locations were obtained from maps on Toronto's Lost Rivers website (www.lostrivers.ca). Some info was found on Toronto's Open Data Portal. The Canada Green Building Council website was the main source for LEED registered or certified projects in the ward. Walking around the neighbourhood was also a good way to find new points.

How we decided what businesses and organizations to include on our map:

We wanted to ensure the businesses and organizations we put on our map were indeed “green.” In some cases, it was a clear and easy “yes” as to whether we would put a particular business/organization on the map due to their overall environmental focus. However, in other cases, it was not so clear. In general, we only included businesses and organizations to which we could easily say “yes.” To clarify what we were including and not including on the map, we started to develop a criteria document. Some descriptions from that document are listed below:

- ‘Shops & Dining’ and ‘Other Green Businesses’ – Stores, restaurants, and other businesses that mainly focus on environmentally friendly food, goods, or services. Alternatively, if a store or restaurant has a very significant commitment to environmental sustainability in terms of its building or daily operation, it may also be considered for inclusion on the map.
- ‘Community Organizations’ – Organizations that directly promote environmental causes, or spaces that house environmental organizations or events.

How we drew our map:

We are fortunate because one of our members is a GIS expert, and has ArcGIS software. We used several city datasets including the Toronto Centreline (TCL) to create a base map, erased street names outside of the ward (to make the map look cleaner), coloured the ward a peach colour, and layered onto it the parks, trails, and bikeways; all of which were available on the Toronto Open Data Portal. The lost rivers had to be drawn in manually.

Rather than enter all points of interest directly onto the GIS map, map team members entered them into a Google Map online. All map team members had access to the Google Map and could easily add points of interest by category. At a certain point, we froze the addition of any further points and then the GIS expert transferred all the points to the GIS map. This method worked well because everyone could use Google Maps, but only the GIS expert knew how to use GIS.

The icons were obtained from the massive amount available for free online. It was difficult to settle on the best icons. We wanted sharp-looking, well-defined icons that depicted well the categories they were to represent.

Designing all other parts of our map:

We considered having an artist/designer to help us with layout, but instead ended up doing it ourselves. Figuring out where to put everything was a challenge. We ended up putting the natural feature descriptions on the map front, and all the points of interest descriptions on the map back. Putting the natural feature descriptions on the front worked well because it allowed us to point to the natural features. As well, we had to put considerable thought into how the map would fold up.

It was important to us to include the blank space for “Things I love about my community, Things I would love to see in my community.” We want the map to start a conversation about how to improve our community, and have the map making be an interactive, living community process.

We wanted a bit of art so that the map back was not all text. Two of our map team members drew two drawings. An idea for the future is to possibly solicit artwork from the community.

Printing:

In looking for a printer, we considered several factors: price, whether or not they were in our ward, and environmental practices. In the end we went with an eco-friendly printer outside our ward (Warren’s

Waterless Printing). We used a FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified, 100% recycled, 100 lb. paper (Rolland Enviro100 Satin Text). Our initial print run was 350 copies of which we paid to have 320 folded (total cost: \$346 not including tax). We also ordered a 22" x 34" enlargement of our map front for community interaction (\$30 not including tax). In April 2014, we printed an additional 250 copies.

How our project was funded:

We were fortunate to have financial support from GN 21, a private donation from a GN 21 steering committee member, and funds from selling an ad to our city councillor. None of these were available at the start of the project, but came along as the project progressed. Our only cost was for printing, so we did not worry about money until it came closer to printing. In the future, some additional options would be to see if there are perhaps some non-profit grants available; or we could ask some of the green businesses for support.

It should also be mentioned that there were a number of in kind contributions. Beyond everyone on our map team needing a computer, we also needed access to paid software licenses for graphic design software and ArcGIS. One of our map team members had the ArcGIS home use license (\$100 per year), which was part of his contribution to the project.

Unveiling of our map:

Our map was unveiled at the 5th annual EcoFair at the Barns in November 2013, organized by GN 21. We had set this EcoFair date as our deadline, which was very effective in keeping us on track. At the EcoFair, we displayed the enlarged copy of our map, onto which we had attendees add points that we had missed. The response to our map was very enthusiastic. We handed out our maps to those interested.

Distribution of our map:

We selected two official places to provide paper copies of the map: a green business on our map (ecoexistence), and our city councillor's office. An electronic version (PDF) was made available on the GN 21 website at www.gn21.ca. We stated that anyone can print the map from the website, as long as they don't use it for commercial purposes.

Spreading word about our map into the community and beyond:

Since the EcoFair, our map has made it out into the community and beyond in various ways:

- Blurbs about the map were featured in our city councillor's email and paper newsletters. See page 6 & 7 here: http://www.joemihevc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/14111_JoeMihevc_Newsletter_July2014_singlepage.pdf
- We gave copies to our provincial and federal political representatives.
- We sent the map link to the City's planning department.
- We had a table at the Ward 21 Environment Day (April 27, 2014) where we gave out 95 maps.
- We gave a copy to the Farmers' Market manager who is also on the local business improvement association.
- We gave the map to Artscape (proprietors of Wychwood Barns) and the Wychwood Barns Community Association, and at Green Doors Open at the Wychwood Barns on October 4, 2014, GN 21 gave 3 tours of the Barns and gave out copies of the map to interested attendees.
- Copies of the map were given to our public school board trustee.

- Starbucks Coffee shop (on the map), Freshii (restaurant on the map), and Qi Natural Food (health food store on the map) put the map up in their stores.
- We posted the map in several streetcar stop community bulletin boards.
- We talked about and handed out maps at a Lost Rivers walk (on November 17, 2014, about the Nordheimer Ravine).
- Cycle Toronto's Ward 21 chapter organized a neighbourhood bike ride (June 22, 2014) and gave out 25 copies of the map during their event.
- Friends of Cedarvale, an organization featured on the map, have taken copies of the map to give out at their events.
- We sent the map and an accompanying letter to all the condo developers in the ward, to encourage making their work as sustainability-oriented as possible. Consequently, the condo development The Nest by the Rockport Group referenced our map on their website where they discuss why they went for Tier 2 Toronto Green Standard:
<http://blog.thenestcondos.com/aiming-tier-2-nest/>
- We sent the map and an accompanying letter to staff at Metrolinx and the City who will have a hand in the redevelopment of Eglinton, to encourage making their work as sustainability-oriented as possible.
- One of our team went on the University of Toronto radio station to talk about the map (The Green Majority on CIUT 89.5 FM, Episode #382 - Jan.3, 2014):
<http://greenmajority.ca/category/green-majority-presents/89-5-fm-radiopodcast/>
- CREW (Creating Resilience to Extreme Weather) Toronto, a network to help Toronto's residents, households and communities prepare for extreme weather events, wrote a blog posting about the map: <http://crewtoronto.ca/blogs/green-maps-build-stronger-communities>
- The map was written about in an online real estate magazine, REM Online:
<http://www.remonline.com/documenting-communitys-green-evolution/> and in Village Living (June/July 2014 West Village Edition, pg 13): <http://villagelivingmagazine.ca/online-edition/>
- We entered the Toronto Live Green Awards, a city-wide environmental award contest, in the 'Group' category. We did not win, but we had 224 votes (during the contest) and had 3750 views (as of August 4, 2014) of our 90 second video entry:
<http://awards.livegreentoronto.ca/entry/18908289-Green-Neighbours-21-Map?offset=13&sort=hits%20DESC,%20oid%20ASC&channel=25879>
- The map was linked to by the Toronto Urban Photography Festival as part of their Community Mapping Project 2014: <http://hoods.tupf.ca/>
- We gave a map to the head of York University's map library, who will catalogue it.
- We gave a map to the University of Toronto's map library, where it is now catalogued.

Some further distribution actions we have thought of but not gotten around to are:

- have a table at the Farmers' Market featured on the map
- have a table at local school fairs
- contact more community groups in our ward

Response from public:

So far, response has been great! Many people in our community really like the map. Also, some people outside of our community ask how they can make one happen in their community, which is wonderful. On our map we have an email address for people to send comments to, and we have received some messages providing feedback and additional information.

Future plans for the map:

- We are planning to make a revised map in the future. We are collecting new points in an Excel sheet. We may like to add additional kinds of points of interest (e.g., apartment or condo buildings with 3R Ambassadors who are volunteers trained by the City to promote recycling and environmental practices in their building).
- We'd like to help other green neighbourhood-based groups if they want to make a similar map for their ward. This document can help. A road trip to other wards to share our experience is another possibility.
- We may like to run a workshop on "Things I love about my community, Things I would love to see in my community" to generate ideas on how to improve our neighbourhood.

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

- We all gained excellent experience in community mapping, as well as in map design. It seemed like a simple project at the start, but we all agreed later on that we had no idea how much work it would be. Creating a map involves a lot of technical work, but also is like making a piece of art. It required a lot of holistic thinking.
- We had two instances of group disagreement that took some time to resolve. First, we had some different ideas on what should and should not be included on our map, in terms of whether the map would have a strictly green focus, or could include some general community features. We ended up having a strictly green focus, so that it would be easier for people to understand what the map is for. Our second disagreement had to do with balancing the use of open data with concerns about privacy and sensitivity to homeowners. Part of the group felt that we did not need to get permission from homeowners with regards to their house if the info was obtained from Toronto Open Data. Another part of the group felt it was important for community building and accuracy to get permission from the homeowner. In the end, we only included homes who's homeowners we talked to.
- Another problem we had was that between meetings we exchanged large amounts of email. It was quite overwhelming to all of us, who were busy in our daily lives. Messages that were long-winded, or that changed subject without starting a new message thread, especially caused problems. Our meetings, on the other hand, were very productive and enjoyable. (We are currently trying Trello, an online collaboration space, as an alternative to email.)
- One of our reflections after finishing the map was that our decision-making process was not clear. It tended towards use of consensus decision-making in absence of any formal structure, and this made progress slower and more time-consuming. In the future, we could have a clearer decision-making structure.

Conclusions:

In the end, we were for the most part very happy and proud about the results of our map project! It was exciting to try something new and we all learned a lot about our community and gained new skills in the process. We hope that our project inspires people in our ward to further build on the great greening work that's been done in our ward. We also hope it inspires others, beyond our ward, to do similar work.