

**Wege Foundation  
Small Cities Sustainability  
Best Practices Award Submission**

**TOWN OF AJAX, ONTARIO, CANADA**

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Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. The Town's project should be considered for the Wege Foundation Award as Ajax has shown environmental leadership in drawing the attention of senior levels of government on both sides of the border to the pressing need to work together and act effectively, as responsible environmental stewards, to rectify declining nearshore water quality in the Great Lakes sooner than later. We recognize that further inaction will only shift the increasing burden onto our children and their living environment, at a much higher per capita cost than addressing controllable problems now.

Should Ajax receive this Award, the funds would be used to continue scientific tracing of the sources of contaminants in the Town's storm sewer system and identify remedial measures, such as physical changes to prevent wildlife from inhabiting the system.

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The Town of Ajax is a Great Lakes community, encompassing approximately 70 square kilometres of land and home to 95,000 persons. We are located on the north shore of Lake Ontario in the easterly portion of the Greater Toronto Area.

For 50 years, Town Councils have worked to establish a continuous, publicly-owned, undeveloped greenspace across 7 kilometres (4.3 miles) of Ajax's waterfront for present and future residents.

However, in 2005, an unanticipated environmental "tipping point" was reached when Ajax's beach was posted for 100% of the swim season due to excessive bacterial levels. Also, the shoreline was coated with decaying algae detracting from the waterfront's appearance and emitting offensive odours.

Possible direct or indirect sources of bacterial contaminants were identified:

- discharges from a large, expanding sewage treatment plant;
- outputs from coastal wetlands and a large watershed;
- waterfowl inhabiting the waterfront and marshes; and
- sporadic flow from municipal storm sewer outfalls (not combined with sanitary sewage).

The Town has since taken the following actions to seek solutions to the problem:

- convinced the Province to impose 13 additional conditions to the expansion of the sewage treatment plant;
- partnered in several water quality monitoring studies focused on the Ajax shoreline with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Durham Region and Ontario Power Generation; and
- managed the local waterfowl population with the TRCA.

In 2006 and 2007, Ajax began a cooperative sampling program of bacteria from the above possible sources. The Town retained a consulting ecologist to interpret initial data and learned that nearshore processes are complex and interlinked.

**We know that storm sewers can contribute bacteria to nearshore waters, but an assessment of outputs during wet weather conditions is needed to assess relative contributions. No significant wet weather events occurred in Ajax in the summer of 2007.**

**In 2008, the Town is investigating possible sources of bacteria and other contaminants within its jurisdiction. Ajax is funding a water quality sampling program and scientific analyses of its storm sewer system. Also, the Town is participating in an international Lake Ontario Study examining water quality along our shoreline, and in the coastal marshes and the Duffins and Carruthers Creeks led by the U.S. EPA and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment.**

**Presently, we hypothesize that our storm sewers contribute relatively minor amounts of bacteria and other contaminants to Lake Ontario under wet weather conditions. By the end of 2008, the Town expects to be better informed as to whether remedial works or preventative measures would contribute to improved nearshore water quality.**

**The waterfront is a vital asset to Ajax By The Lake, and restoration of nearshore water quality would contribute to the Town's triple bottom line as follows:**

- Economic vitality - attracting residents and visitors to our lakefront by providing a desirable, attractive setting for community and Lake-based recreational events;**
- Social Equity - providing free, year-round access to Lake Ontario to provide respite from hot weather through water-based recreational activities; and**
- Environmental Stewardship - reduced contributions of bacteria and contaminants from the Town's storm sewer system.**