

Friends of the Spit

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IN THIS NEWSLETTER...

- Waterfront Toronto Design Review Panel - They Want **BIG???**
- Thursday, **May 21**-TRCA's Park Information Session
- Saturday, **May 23**-Tommy Thompson Park Spring Bird Festival
- 2009 Membership Renewal Attached

THINK SMALL...

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2009

As an Editorial: Edifice Complex:

The Spit is not a place for ego-driven "signature" designs, or for monumental structures: the land itself is the monument, nature the caretaker, and the interventions that the Conservation Authority makes should be the modest minimal ones the approved Master Plan envisaged.

Waterfront Toronto's Design Review Panel is "thumbing its nose" at the Spit Master Plan: their comments show that they do not understand the Tommy Thompson Park Master Plan. By refusing to approve the modest infrastructure projects (projects which have been reviewed by the TTPAC and which are in accordance with the approved Master Plan) they are stonewalling a public participation process that, to date, has been highly successful for the Spit. Have the Spit designs become a pawn in the overall scheme of things? One cannot help but wonder how many of the architects, landscape architects, and planners on the panel have **actually** been to the Spit and spent time there, have understood its incredible value as a wilderness?

If you know anyone on the Design Review Panel, beseech them to recognize the Spit as the urban wilderness it is, successful as it is, not needing a destination architectural monument. Instead of "go big or go home", we say,

"small is beautiful".

Go Big?? or Go Home???

Design Review Panel Just Doesn't Get It...
Doesn't Understand the Spit!!

Waterfront Toronto Design Review Panel Nixes Modest Tommy Thompson Park Infrastructure Projects...

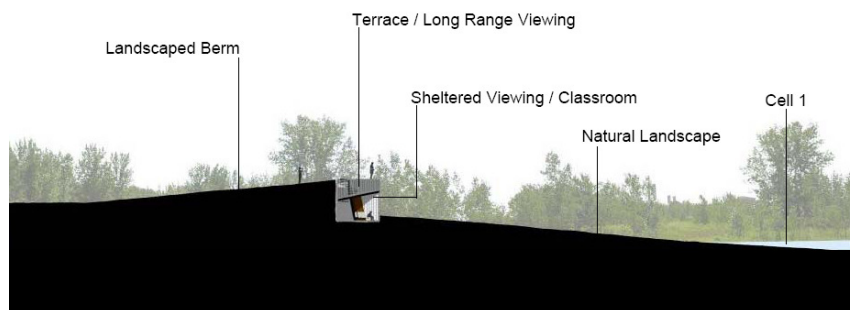
For the third time, Waterfront Toronto's Design Review Panel has denied approval for the modest infrastructure projects planned at the Spit as part of the original provincially-approved Revised Master Plan for the Spit.

We've heard that the Design Review Panel exhorted the TRCA's architect consultant to think big, to plan big, to take the modest structures and...well, you get the idea. Other advice and comments were quite contradictory! We say "whoa, the Spit doesn't need an architectural monster-piece; what the Spit needs are low-key structures to satisfy the specific needs of the visitors: washrooms, a staff booth, a few interpretive panels, a sheltered meeting place, etc."

The consultants, on April 8th, presented three buildings (one of which, the Bird Banding/Education Research Building, is still being planned). All are extremely modest in scale: the environmental shelter at Cell One, in fact, is buried into the bank, with a deck above and underneath, looking out onto Cell One, an open gathering space and two washrooms (see sketch below).

Environmental Shelter: Section

Architect's rendering of berms and small viewing area at north end of Cell One. Drawing from Montgomery/Sisam. Used with permission of TRCA.



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Even with these modest structures, Friends of the Spit criticized the proposed 20 ft. height of the Staff Booth planned at the area of the current control booth.

Imagine, then, our surprise, that rather than agreeing with us and saying “reduce the height”, the Design Review Panel thought bigger might be better. Since WaterfrontToronto is the overall paymaster of the waterfront developments, the Design Review Panel does review these designs, even though the designs stem from the previously approved Master Plan! For the Panel to be at odds with the stated objectives of the TTP Master Plan indicates to us that the Panel members don’t realize Tommy Thompson Park is a public urban wilderness, not a conventional urban park.

As a result of this defeat, we understand the TRCA has suspended work on these structures until it can get a clarification from the CEO of WaterfrontToronto as to what exactly is happening. Frustration and confusion are evident.

Winter Bird Counts...

The Christmas Bird Count on December 14th, 2008, saw Spit counters record 36 species, predominantly waterfowl and raptors. Highlights were four Great Horned Owls, one Long-eared Owl, and one Saw-whet Owl. The Spit is known as an excellent spot for winter viewing of owls.

The Mid-Winter Waterfowl Count took place on January 11th. 17 species were seen in minus 10°C weather, with the bays all frozen. The highlights were three King Eiders, seen close to the lighthouse. Although certainly not waterfowl, a Bald Eagle was seen soaring over the lighthouse!

What were they thinking???

The concrete light poles beside the spine road have deteriorated, and have been pulled down: GREAT! However, because the occasional hawk would perch on them, the TRCA did not want to deprive the hawks of man-made perches: hence the odd pole and bracket in the meadows on the west side of the spine road. More were planned, but pending discussion with the Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee, they are on hold. Gosh, the Spit abounds in raptor perches (trees!): no need to construct such patently obviously man-made interventions!

Staffing at the Spit

TRCA has indicated that as of May 1st there will be two staff on Saturdays and Sundays: this should help to turn back the tide of errant drivers and dog-walkers (who forget that the Spit is not open to dogs or other pets).

What is WaterfrontToronto’s Design Review Panel?

From the WT website: WaterfrontToronto created the Waterfront Design Review Panel to “provide objective, professional advice and contribute to a culture of quality by signalling to developers and designers that high quality design is a critical consideration for the development of Toronto’s waterfront.”

The panel will be **advisory** [our emphasis]. Its members are appointed by WaterfrontToronto, and currently consist of seven architects, three landscape architects, two urban planners, and one engineer.

Don’t forget...

The Tommy Thompson Park Information Session will be held on Thursday, May 21, 2009 from 6:30 pm – 9:00 pm at Metro Hall, Room 308. Visit the TRCA website www.trca.on.ca/ttp or call 416-661-6600 ext. 5770 for more information.

Lake Ontario Park:
Gasping for Air or Hibernating?

On March 10th, we received the following email from James Roche, Senior Project Manager at WaterfrontToronto, regarding the Park’s status:

“Dear Lake Ontario Park Stakeholders,

Recently there have been inquiries regarding when phasing will be announced for Lake Ontario Park. The process is taking longer than what was hoped, but rest assured it is proceeding.

As mentioned in my last group email, once this process has concluded, Waterfront Toronto will contact all parties and establish a schedule for moving forward.

Any changes to this process or revised updates will also be conveyed to each of you.

Thank you for your continued support.

I look forward to working together in the near future.

Sincerely,

James Roche”

We guess the answer is: merely hibernating!

In this case, no news to report is good news: go ahead, continue to enjoy the Spit as it is.

Tommy Thompson Park Spring Bird Festival

Saturday, May 23rd, the Conservation Authority is hosting a bird festival, including park walks with naturalists. This is all free, come and join in! For further information, go to the TRCA website www.trca.on.ca/ttp or call 416-661-6600 ext. 5770.

For 32 years, Friends have fought long and hard for a Public Urban Wilderness. That struggle continues...