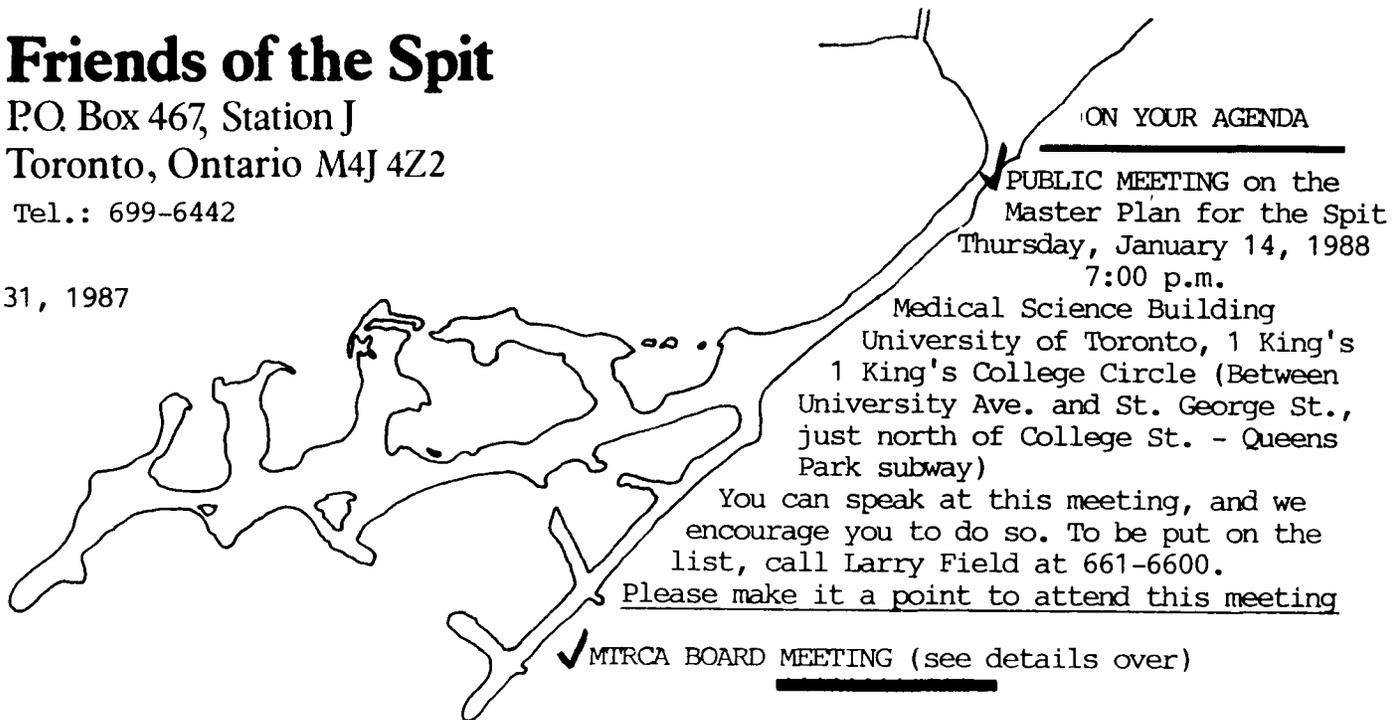


Friends of the Spit

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NEW SPIT MASTER PLAN:
MORE CARS, MORE PARKING, MORE SAILING FACILITIES, MORE INTERVENTION

The detailed Master Plan for the Spit issued by the Metro Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (MTRCA) is a major slap in the face of the thousands of people from all walks of life who have been battling for years to keep this area as a Public Urban Wilderness.

It is now very clear that the MTRCA is intent on developing a showpiece aimed at attracting large crowds, rather than providing a true urban wilderness for quiet, low-intensity recreation and casual enjoyment of nature. It is now very clear that if this plan is implemented the Spit will become just another city park, tucked at the end of extensive boating facilities.

Thin edge of the wedge already thickening

We have always argued that if cars, parking lots, marinas and facilities were allowed anywhere on the Spit, they would gradually take over the whole area. This is already happening:

- The MTRCA Phase III Master Plan (Plan "D"), issued last year, provided for 415 parking spaces. The new Phase IV Master Plan has 600.
- Boardsailing facilities, with 50 parking spaces, have been added.
- The new Master Plan mentions the provision of refreshment facilities and food service.
- Privatization of a large area of the Spit (for boating) is confirmed in the new plan by the provision of a control gate, which, to all intents and purposes, will prevent public access to the whole of Embayment D, where there is now a public beach, and to Dredger's Bay, where Aquatic Park Sailing Club is located.

Other highlights of the new Master Plan include:

- A 4,000 square feet interpretive centre, with a "public area", classroom, laboratory, offices... and a dock. The MTRCA calls this interpretive centre, located at the endikement, "a key element of the plan...to provide a focus for the environmental resource programmes of the school systems and the public's education of ecology and natural succession".

Comments - This is massive development. Friends of the Spit was the first to recognize and promote the Spit as an educational resource, for children and adults. However, we have always felt that the concept of Public Urban Wilderness should first and foremost foster informal nature education for all ages, allowing the pleasures of discovery, and encouraging respect for the natural environment through the enjoyment of quiet pursuits. While we agree that the Spit should be part of the environmental curriculum, we are very worried that "instant access" will fail to instill this most critical component of nature education to our young people.

Environmental education of children and the quiet, informal enjoyment of the Spit for all ages should be complementary and do not require private vehicle access nor locating the interpretive centre half way up the Spit. The Spit will be the only "natural experience" for many city children and adults. They should have the opportunity of enjoying it as an oasis of calm and be exposed to what nature can do rather than to what humans can achieve if money is spent.

- The MTRCA estimated capital cost of the plan is \$4.9 million. This includes \$1.1 million to service the sailing areas with running water, electricity, sewage and roads and \$840,000 for shoreline work at the sailing sites. Building the interpretive centre is estimated at \$600,000 plus \$640,000 for bringing services.

Comments - It is a sad reflection of our society that some \$5 million of public money should be spent to destroy what nature has achieved on its own (and that the vast majority of the public wants to see left alone) when many other areas - environmental and others - are desperately in need of funds.

For instance, we estimate the capital costs for sailing facilities to be more than \$5,000 per boat. This means that as taxpayers we are paying for the "privilege" of privatizing a large part of the Spit for the enjoyment of a very small number who have opportunities for practicing this activity at other locations.

Other red herrings

Among the MTRCA claims to justify heavy development on the Spit, we note the following:

- "Allowing private car access to the endikement will make the park more accessible to more people."

Comments - This should be rephrased as "more accessible to more cars". With parking at the base and public transit all the way to the lighthouse, the park would be accessible to all (as it is now), including people unable to walk even short distances and schoolchildren taking outdoor education. And stopping private vehicles at the base would prevent the problems associated with an open road while enabling users to enjoy the park as a retreat from noise and car fumes.

- "90 percent of the park will be maintained in its natural state."

Comments - With half the length of the Spit open to car traffic, this is a strange statement. To arrive at that figure, one would have to count as "natural" any surface that is not actually covered by asphalt. Harbourfront also provided a lot of "public open space"... by counting sidewalks, loading ramps and parking lots.

Public input to the MTRCA

If you are unable to attend the public meeting of January 14, please write your comments to the MTRCA. They should be received by the 14th and addressed to:

The Chairman Water and Related Land Management Advisory Board
MTRCA, 5 Shoreham Drive, Downsview, Ontario M3N 1S4

———— MTRCA BOARD TO VOTE ON NEW MASTER PLAN JANUARY 29 ————

On Friday, January 29, at 10:00 a.m., at the Black Creek Pioneer Village Visitors Centre, the MTRCA Board will vote on the new Master Plan. Please attend to show your objections to the plan. To speak at this meeting, your request must be in writing and received at the MTRCA 8 days prior to the meeting.

———— MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT RENEWAL ————

We have enclosed a 1988 renewal slip with this newsletter. Your renewed support would be appreciated.

———— T-SHIRTS STILL AVAILABLE ————

Friends of the Spit T-shirts are still available in sizes S (fits child), M, L and XL. Cost is \$10.00 per shirt, or 2 for \$19.00, including postage. Order yours today.