

Friends of the Spit

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IN THIS NEWSLETTER...

Lake Ontario Park Public Meeting
July 10th, 2008
Are they listening????? (Page 1)

Thanks to our members
for a great turn-out!!

**BUT...Lake Ontario Park - Dead in
the water, or just treading water?**

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2008

As an Editorial #1

Many thanks:

Many many thanks to all of you who came out and participated in the July 10th Lake Ontario Park Draft Master Plan Public Meeting. Your presence, your comments, your cheers, and your support were all very welcome!! We can only hope that the consultants understand these concerns and these heartfelt feelings and will adjust and refine their master plan accordingly.

Thank you members and non-members alike who followed up on the meeting with correspondence reiterating your concerns about the plan and stating your love for the Spit and Baselands.

Your participation has helped the process and is essential to the ultimate success of this waterfront park.

As an Editorial #2

Blackberry etiquette:

Q. Dear editor: I'm a consultant who often attends and leads public meetings. Is it acceptable to send and receive messages on my Blackberry during a meeting?

A. No, dear reader: stow that device in the darkest recess of your briefcase before the meeting, and only retrieve it at the conclusion: remember, you want both your clients and the public to see you as fully engaged in their issues and not distracted from your role. Using your Blackberry while onstage is definitely not cool.

Quotable Quotes - 1

"2nd Salesman: Now he doesn't know the territory.

1st Salesman: Doesn't know the territory?!?"

– Excerpt from "Rock Island", The Music Man

Did They Listen?? Are They Listening Still??

The well-attended Public Meeting on July 10th, 2008 for the Draft Master Plan for Lake Ontario Park seemed at the outset an entirely predictable affair. The design panels were in place for review, and the consultants arrayed for both the presentation and the subsequent Q and A session.

However, it became apparent early on in the major presentation that it was a high-level broad-brush presentation indeed, but that in terms of words and philosophy, the presentation did not differ greatly from that of the previous public meeting way back in January 2007. Perhaps this was predictable.

The questions from the audience created sparks, particularly around the contentious issue of habitat fragmentation and why the designers felt the wide multi-use trail (transect) needed to be ploughed centrally east-west through the Baselands.

Informed of this issue by the Friends of The Spit postcard "**transect not bisect**" and handout, audience members argued that, based on habitat studies to date, fragmentation of this scale renders habitat much less productive: which is at odds with the consultants' stated ambition. The plan gave no consideration to the Friends of the Spit proposal that the east/west transect be routed along the current Unwin Avenue alignment, thus protecting the Baselands' habitat. Since Lake Ontario Park proposes that a new Unwin Avenue be located north of the existing one, this transect would still be a park trail: however, one that didn't disrupt the existing habitat.

It is our understanding that using input from this meeting, the park designers Field Operations were to complete the Lake Ontario Park Master Plan and submit it to WaterfrontToronto in August. Submission and printing is now anticipated for mid October. Check the WaterfrontToronto website... <http://www.waterfronttoronto.ca>

To quote John Campbell, CEO of WaterfrontToronto (from a letter to a Spit user, used with recipient's permission),

"We are certainly only at the beginning of envisioning the future of the Base Lands. There is clearly much review and consultation needed with ecologists, planners, and existing user groups in order to address issues of access, and protection of sensitive habitats. The feasibility, physical details, locations, and development of multiple design alternatives for any trails, the transect, or wetland features will be evaluated and reviewed further with all relevant agencies and stakeholders in the future detail design stages. It is very important to note that the Master Plan is a flexible diagram, or framework, for establishing a set of principles or guidelines. In addition, the full vision for Lake Ontario Park, including the baselands, will take several years of further study and detail analysis prior to any implementation."

Is WaterfrontToronto listening? We believe it is: the above quote indicates that the Master Plan will be tempered by the reality on the ground. [Thank Goodness!!]

Did WaterfrontToronto listen en route? Yes, partially, but not without concerted effort by the public and organizations such as Friends of the Spit. The bisecting canal proposal is gone from the Baselands, so are the multi-use sports fields: existing habitat is maintained. But, many other issues still are to be resolved.....(e.g. transect)

Conservation Authority Develops Master Plan

The Conservation Authority (TRCA) continues to develop the approved Spit Master Plan, with input from the Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee.

This year, the TRCA engaged architects to plan the four small structures indicated in the Master Plan: an entry structure which would direct traffic onto the site, provide a gateway experience, and list the regulations for the park; a staff observation and display pavilion to be located on the isthmus relatively close to the existing control booth; an environmental shelter at the Cell 1 wetland; and a fourth structure for a nature research and bird banding facility on Peninsula D.

The members of the Advisory Committee directed the architects (as did the TRCA), to provide the lowest impact, least intrusive solutions possible: in other words, no need for a ROM Crystal at the Spit!

The first presentation by the architects indeed showed that the consultants had listened: the entry gateway was mostly subtle earthworks, and the education/observation pavilion was low-key and unobtrusive. The cell 3 environmental shelter was tucked in to the landscape in such a way as to place the shelter on a lower level and allow the land to simply rise for a vegetated roof-deck viewing area. The research and banding pavilion is still being designed.

It was very encouraging to see local Toronto consultants understand the nature of the Spit and understand that their work must be subservient to the overall wilderness. The structures and amenities depicted in the drawings would have unobtrusively added to the enjoyment of the experience of the Spit, without detracting from that wilderness experience.

However, and unfortunately, the consultants felt they had to revise these plans, in response to the WaterfrontToronto Design Review Panel comments. At the time of this newsletter, these designs are still being revised. More about this in our next newsletter...

"Dead in the Water??" or "Treading Water??"

In 2003, TWRC (now WaterfrontToronto) identified Lake Ontario Park as one of the corporation's signature projects!

Yet now, that signature is looking pretty small – In 5 years, Lake Ontario Park has gone from "signature" to "Other Projects".

The published estimate for Lake Ontario Park is \$380 million, but...

Factoid – Lake Ontario Park enters "Other Projects" Category

"Other Projects (cont'd):

Lake Ontario Park - \$9M (\$2M for Master Plan & \$7M for Phase 1)*

- Request to complete the master plan and a small phase 1 build out to create the interconnectivity for Lake Ontario Park. The total estimated budget for the complete build out of the LOP master plan is currently estimated at \$380 million.

*Potential of \$8M may be available for release from City's reserve for EBF"

From: Long Term Plan Update, pg 33

WaterfrontToronto

Board of Directors Meeting

September 3, 2008

So does this mean that after all the work, all the paid consultants, all the endless meetings, and all the volunteer contributions, Lake Ontario Park goes the way of every other scheme?????

Meanwhile, we continue to enjoy a park that meets our needs: the Baselands and Spit as they are - a proven success with proven enjoyment. Maybe, just maybe, we don't need Adventure Centres...and all the rest!

**A revolutionary thought – leave the Spit and
Baselands as they are!!**

GOOD PRESS!

"Step into the Wild "One of the great things about Toronto is the proximity of urbanity to wilderness, which is very rare in continental North America,"... "The Leslie Street Spit is one of the most remarkable parts of Toronto..." "

-National Geographic Traveler magazine
September 2008, p 71

Quotable Quotes - 2

"Urban wilderness gone

The draft master plan refers to an "urban wilderness". Unfortunately, by the time the transects are built, "amenities" installed, and a path system and signage are introduced into the Base Lands, there won't be any "wilderness" left, and all we will have is a managed, formulaic park, duplicating numerous other facilities in Toronto. The unique, uncultivated, raw state of the Base Lands will be destroyed forever."

-Taken from an email to J.Campbell, WaterfrontToronto, with the writer's permission.

**"Big Nature" already exists...
it's called The Spit!**

Quotable Quotes - 3

"The notion that the Baselands must be criss-crossed with paths and transects in order to provide "public access" is completely inconsistent with your stated objectives. As others have pointed out, there will already be adequate access without having the Bar transect cut the Baselands in half."

-From the Toronto Field Naturalists' letter to WaterfrontToronto, quote utilized with the Toronto Field Naturalist's permission.

**Setting the politics aside;
Enjoy the Spit now, as it is!
Autumn colours, monarchs.....**