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NEWSLETTER

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As an Editorial #1:

Democracy Triumphs! We all win!

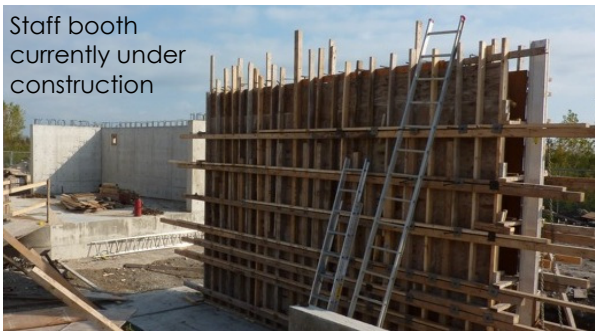
We were totally heartened that the citizenry of Toronto rose en masse and convinced the Councillors to unanimously defeat the mayor's resolution to, essentially, strip Waterfront Toronto of its power and responsibilities and turn it over to the TPLC (formerly TEDCO). The mere thought of hotels, ferris wheels, and other circuses usurping the well-thought-out, carefully considered Donlands and Port Lands planning- all of which had significant public input- caused the revolution! Well done to the Councillors, and to citizens led by CodeBlueTO!

As an Editorial #2:

Construction begins at Spit...

It's been a long wait, but now, with construction underway of three small structures out on the Spit, the Master Plan is well on its way to completion! Now, to find funding for that fourth and final small piece of the puzzle: the entry shelter for Leslie and Unwin.

Staff booth currently under construction



In Memoriam: Jack Layton

For so many years, Jack Layton represented the Spit: first as Councillor, then as M.P. He threw his support behind us on so many occasions! So much has been said about him; he will be missed. The steering committee fondly remembers a day in the late 80's, when Olivia, Jack, and the steering committee- some of whom were non-cyclists- all cycled out on the Spit to show Olivia and Jack the wonders of a car-free public urban wilderness! His support will be missed.

3½ weeks in the Life of a City...

Sometimes things happen as if out of the blue, and it pays to be diligent! Late Friday, August 26th, 2011, a seemingly innocuous recommendation EX 9.6 was filed for consideration by the Executive Committee on September 6th. That recommendation asked that the City provide notice under the Memorandum of Understanding and enter into discussions with Waterfront Toronto and the provincial and federal governments to review the revitalization delivery model for the Port Lands; and added a series of recommendations, which essentially advocated that the City withdraw from the current framework of operation with the federal and provincial governments, reconstitute the TPLC with a new board, and then, revise TPLC's mandate to be the lead agency for the revitalization of the Port Lands. Couched in this innocuous language was a full-scale power-grab by the City, which would have rendered meaningless all of the public participation and all of the work Waterfront Toronto had done to date on the Port Lands and the mouth of the Don.

Immediately, a number of groups and individuals who had been involved in the public participation planning process of the Port Lands (for the last ten to fifteen years) gathered to oppose this measure: blogs, Twitter and Facebook accounts were set up, and a group was formed called CodeBlueTO. The people's plan for Toronto's waterfront was in jeopardy. The extent of that jeopardy was then revealed when, on September 6th, 2011, the motion was passed and then sent to council, unanimously, with one Executive Committee member abstaining. At that Executive Committee meeting, a plan prepared in secret (but with public money) was unveiled. A plan with a monorail, a megamall, an "iconic" boat-in-hotel (how do you spell 'casino'??), and even a Ferris wheel: all there to make Toronto a "world-class" city, to compete with Chicago or London. The fact that this plan had no foundation in financial or environmental reality and lacked support from the public did not seem to faze the Executive. In a way, it was good news for us (the opposition) that this plan had been circulated: sometimes, it is hard to work up opposition to a dry item such as rescinding a Memorandum of Understanding; however, when confronted with such a poor exercise in urban planning, the population became engaged and arose!

Friends of the Spit, with our long experience on the waterfront, and our continued participation in all Port Lands planning exercises since the 90's, was ideally placed. Both co-chairs participated in an ad-hoc organization called CodeBlueTO, which led the citizens' response. Ultimately gathering over 7000 signatures: both on old-fashioned paper, and by website petition, the organization contacted councillors, and gathered up a grassroots opposition, which, accompanied by notable planners and politicians, ultimately defeated the measure at council.

While the vote at the end was unanimous, many councillors worked tirelessly to lead the opposition and convince the other councillors that the mayor and his brother's scheme had little basis in reality. That opposition was very capably led by Paula Fletcher, Pam McConnell, and Mary-Margaret McMahon. (continued on page 2...)

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Ultimately, City Council rebutted the mayor's proposal, rescinded the Ex 9.6 proposal stemming from the Executive Committee, and acknowledged a supplementary report, which essentially upheld the primacy of Waterfront Toronto as the lead agency, and, kept the process on-track, with Waterfront Toronto agreeing to look at ways in which they could speed up the development of the Port Lands. We at Friends of the Spit note that many of our members became highly involved in this opposition, and, on behalf of Code Blue TO, and Friends of the Spit, we thank them.

Our Friends of the Spit involvement stemmed not only from our familiarity with all the waterfront issues, but from self-interest as well: we had heard rumours that the Hearn Plant would be renovated for sports' complexes, we had heard talk of a NFL stadium, and we know that those things must come with massive parking lots. We had to defend the Spit and Baselands, and in doing so, we had to help the City find a way out of a power-grab which would have been disastrous for the Port Lands and the Spit.

Thanks to all for the strength of the opposition, and for joining in the victory.

And as always, just as we must with the Spit, now with the Port Lands, we must remain forever vigilant.

Something is Happening at Lakeshore and Leslie...

By now, you have seen the equipment hard at work removing the large berm at the southeast corner of Lakeshore and Leslie, in preparation for the future TTC Light Rail Transit maintenance facility. As part of that facility, the frontages on Lakeshore and Leslie will be landscaped. In 2010, a limited design competition was held, and the winning scheme put forward. Friends of the Spit met with the TTC and the consultants in November 2010, and voiced a number of concerns with the traffic flow of bicycles and pedestrians, and with the compatibility of the landscape to that of the Spit, recognizing that this landscape would lead one into the Spit's public urban wilderness. We are pleased to report that after another meeting in October 2011, the scheme has changed fairly dramatically, and seems much more in keeping with the landscape of the Spit! Construction will follow in mid-to-late 2012.

Not Wanted on the Spit

Invasives... of a different kind

The cycling community of Toronto, and Friends of the Spit, have become concerned about the increasing number of so-called "e-bikes" on City paths and trails. From their birth as a power-assisted bicycle, to the more recent forms of electric Vespa-type scooters, their numbers are increasing. Because they are a power-operated vehicle, Friends of the Spit oppose the use of e-bikes on the Spit.

Recently, City of Toronto policy has been changed to reflect concerns about e-bikes, and the TRCA, who run the Spit, along with the City, have confirmed their instructions to their staff:

"Staff have been instructed to follow the City of Toronto policy regarding e-bikes. Only e-bikes that resemble conventional bikes with small motors are allowed, and these e-bikes must be powered by muscle while on the trails (including the Multi-Use trail) at TTP. Any staff that see infractions to this policy will attempt to flag down the rider, explain the policy and ask them to either turn-off their motor or leave the property. A sign explaining the e-bike policy has also been posted in the bulletin board"

Should you see an e-bike being operated out on the Spit, please report it to the closest TRCA or City representative so that they can direct those people off the Spit.



Not wanted: e-bikes on the Spit!

Infrastructure Projects: Now under Construction...

You will have noticed as you cycle, or walk, that foundations are arising for the staff booth on the Spine Road, the underground environmental shelter at Cell 1, and the bird-banding nature study lab on Peninsula D. Friends of the Spit has supported these structures in their current form... a process which, through the design phase, honed and whittled these structures down to the very low-key designs they now are... so low-key, that the environmental shelter is underground! Part of the Master Plan, these structures were endorsed by Friends of the Spit, and the other members of the Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee. These structures will give the park identity, some necessary facilities, and will enable the TRCA and the City to have a presence on the Spit. Further, for those unfamiliar with the Spit, it will signify that the land is indeed a cared-for park, and that the wilderness indeed has a purpose.

Through the process of the design of these buildings, the challenge has been to keep them small and simple, and to keep the "hand of man" on the land light and easy. The next challenge will be to make sure that the improvements are limited to these structures, and that other so-called improvements are not required, or not added, throughout the Spit and Baselands.

Renewals: if you haven't already renewed, please do so. Your renewal slip was included with the July 2011 newsletter.

Your membership signifies that you want us to advocate on your behalf for the Spit as a public urban wilderness, free from cars, and helps us with our mailings and outreach. We are all volunteers: no one takes a salary, stipend, or expenses.