

Friends of the Spit

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We Apologize

We're still very active - just too active to promptly issue newsletters!

In this newsletter...

- The "Benign Neglect Doctrine"
- Port Lands Acceleration???
- Infrastructure update.

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2012

As an Editorial #1 • Apology

We're late with this newsletter: awfully late: no excuses. Please accept our apologies.

As an Editorial #2 • The Excuses

There are some excuses though: we have been busy, very busy. We are all working at day jobs, and we are all volunteers. Members of your steering committee have been active and have participated at length in the following issues:

1. Tommy Thompson Park User Group committee meetings.
2. Port Lands Acceleration Initiative Stakeholder Advisory Committee and public meetings as well as much behind the scenes politicking.
3. TTC liaison and meetings regarding the greening of Leslie Street.
4. Simply out enjoying life on the Spit!

As an Editorial #3 • who's in charge?

Has anyone noticed that we've already passed the one year anniversary of the changeover to have the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation department as the lead agency in charge of management of the Spit? Has anyone noticed indeed? For at least 6 months, there wasn't anyone assigned from Parks to manage the Spit... this position went unfilled for a long time!

We haven't noticed anything different, as the TRCA still continues their work. Maybe it is all for the better: all we ask is a **benign** presence from Parks, so that the Spit can remain a public urban wilderness, unimproved, and not be turned into a conventional park.

Memberships:

Those who renewed for 2012 will automatically be credited for 2013 membership; for all other members, the 2013 renewal slip will be in the next newsletter.

"Benign Neglect Doctrine"

Since the joint management of the Spit/TTP seems so laissez-faire, we've coined a new operative phrase: "**Benign Neglect**".

The "**Benign Neglect Doctrine**" has a great ring, eh!!!

The "**Benign Neglect Doctrine**" acknowledges that the Spit fares best with the least amount of interference. A natural partner to our other slogan, "**Let it Be**".

New Parking Lot Configuration

You may have noticed that, months ago, the TRCA started construction of a new parking lot configuration with a separate entrance for automobiles off Unwin, thus leaving the main entrance for pedestrian, bicycle, and emergency vehicles only. However, this project seems to have gotten bogged down, again, and who knows when it will be complete. [Late breaking news: the TRCA indicates that "all the entrance work [will be] completed this fall for a grand opening at the Spring Bird Festival in May"] [sic]

Greening of Leslie Street

To its credit, the TTC continues to involve members of Friends of the Spit in commentary regarding the boulevard design for Leslie Street south of the Lakeshore. The mandate for the work has now been extended directly down to the entrance to the Spit. In our consultations, we continue to advocate for plantings of vegetation that reflect the biology of the Spit and of the Baselands. In particular, we advocated the transition of the plantings from the urban street trees of the north at Lakeshore through to a mix of trees and shrub understory that resemble the Spit. We'll see if our advocacy has results!

And as you've noted, the work at the plant for the new LRT facility has caused some rerouting of the Martin Goodman Trail. We are told that these intermittent interruptions will occur between September 2012 and April 2013.

Changes:

Please note that our address has changed while our box number has stayed the same.

We are in the process of converting to an email format, with hardcopy mailings available for those who wish them. This will save us money and quite possibly speed up things! We have some of your email addresses on file already. Please send us your email address (or your updated address) c/o the email address at the header of this newsletter and we will assemble our email mailing list!

As always, check our website <http://www.friendsofthespit.ca> for up-to-date announcements.

Port Lands Acceleration Initiative

You will recall that in response to the Mayor's ill-advised foray into waterfront planning last September, (whereby he proposed speeding development up with a boat-in hotel, a monorail, a Ferris wheel, etc. etc. etc.), the Port Lands Acceleration Initiative was begun as a tripartite arrangement between Waterfront Toronto, the City of Toronto, and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).

As part of this process, a Stakeholder Advisory Committee was established. Friends of the Spit was represented on that committee.

To make a long long story short, after many Stakeholder Meetings, discussions, and Public Meetings, it was by and large agreed that market forces would inevitably dictate the speed of development in the Port Lands: that acceleration was a misnomer. The area of concentration for the first phase of development would be the area around the mouth of the Don River. Some design changes were made to the configuration of the mouth of the Don in order to save money, and generally these were seen as improvements. The new scheme "4WS Re-Aligned" is an excellent resolution. There is still a great fear, however, that the development in stages will occur without the final stage of the wonderful Don River ultimate reconfiguration and Parkland creation.

Great credit must go to all the Stakeholder Advisory Committee members, especially those of CodeBlueTO, who advocated strongly and successfully for the three agencies to "stay the course" and not be deflected by mayoral whims. Excellent planning and an eye on the "long game" will win out. Kudos also to all the councillors who supported CodeBlueTO ~ in particular, the "Locals" ~ Councillors Fletcher, McConnell, and McMahon. Friends of the Spit were pleased to play a role in the CodeBlueTO protest and ongoing advocacy – hats off to this ad hoc organization's tireless advocacy!

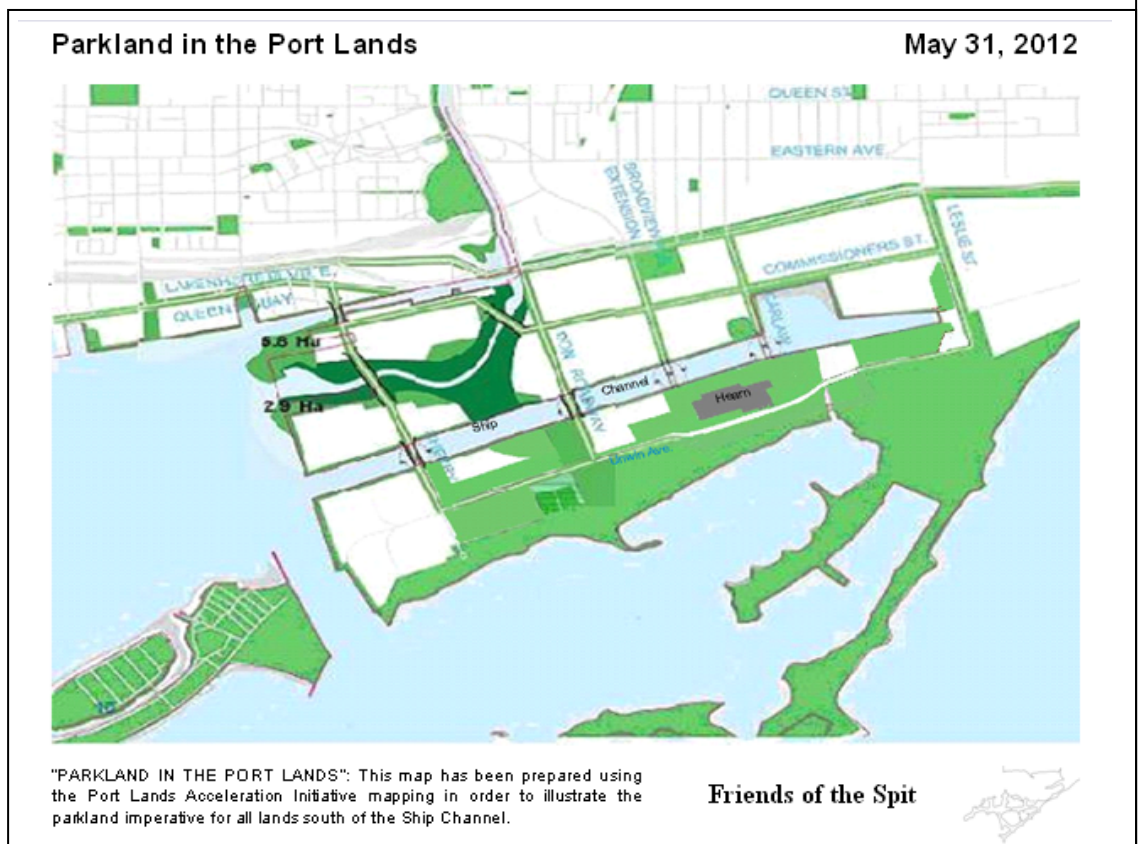
Often there is an added benefit to a controversy such as this – in this case, the citizenry at large became engaged in waterfront planning. Hooray! and thanks to all those participants who have joined in! Welcome!!

Further, what became clear is that the timeline is so long that development won't occur south of the Ship Channel for at least 30 years. This is both a pro and a con: pro in that the Spit will not have any pressure on it from Port Lands' development to the north and west; a con in that nothing ever gets resolved and there is no finalization of boundaries and borders for the Spit.

When it became apparent that the emphasis of the P.L.A.I. was solely on the mouth of the Don and on the north-west quadrant of the Port Lands, Friends of the Spit stepped in and on May 31, 2012, issued *Parkland in the Port Lands* which was our proposal for far more green space south of the Ship Channel, on the assumption that as the Ship Channel south wall industries finished up and leases ended, the land south of the Ship Channel could be converted to Parkland. Our mantra has always been that the Parkland uses would range from active uses in the west through to the passive recreational uses at the Spit and Baselands in the east. You will see by the map what the *Parkland in the Port Lands* proposal does: it gives a great emphasis to the green connection from the Spit through to the mouth of the Don. Our scheme met with some interest, gained some responses, and then seems to have died on the order paper, as they say, since planning south of the Ship Channel is so far away.

However, in all of this there is one giant **beware**: the three agencies speak of a "catalyst" use: something that will jump-start development, something upon which development can group around and...wait for it...what gets mentioned? The Olympics! A World's Fair! Just the sorts of things that need a lot of parking and vacant land upon which to put the "great" structures!!!! Yikes!! You can rest assured that we will remain vigilant to keep these catalyst uses away from the Spit.

In particular, the Hearn holds great interest for catalyst uses, we fear, and we have gone on record that the only catalyst uses for the Hearn must be green ones with access for transit and pedestrians by new bridges over the Ship Channel.



Infrastructure Update: New construction nearing completion

For those of you who haven't been on the Spit recently, we have included pictures of the staff booth, the Cell One gathering shelter, and the bird banding station. Of the three, the Cell One structure, to us, seems the most successful: it allows great views to the distance and, as one approaches from the north, it has very little impact while affording a new lookout from the viewing area sculpted onto its roof. The push for this structure to be underground stemmed from the Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee.

Unofficial Contest: "Name Those Buildings"

Just in case naming rights are being sought for the new buildings at the Spit, we thought we'd poll you, our membership, for your comments and your names for the buildings. All three need informal colloquial names: first: the staff booth: the jelly bean? Secondly, the underground shelter: the cave? And finally the bird banding station (Ecological Research Station). Aw heck! a nickname defeats us for this one.

So... we have no prizes other than publication of the best entries emailed to us for "Name Those Buildings". See next newsletter...



Photo by Friends of the Spit

Cell One Gathering Structure aka Environmental Shelter:, Photo taken looking north



Photo courtesy of TRCA

Bird Banding Station aka Ecological Research Station. Pemisula "D"



Photo by Friends of the Spit

Staff Booth: photo taken looking north.

It's never safe...

Just when you think that universally people have accepted the Spit as a public urban wilderness, along comes another proponent of another scheme to build on the Baselands. In a submission to the Port Lands Acceleration Initiative, one proponent proposed that their development be given a 38 acre lot "taken from *vacant land* [italics ours] adjacent to the [Hearn] station..." "the site is a gateway to the Port Lands and Tommy Thompson Park from Leslie Street".

Well, when we saw the site plan, this 38 acre used up half of the Baselands and included lands north of Unwin. Unrealistic: yes. Landownership issues ignored: yes. But most galling of all was that this proponent saw the Baselands as "vacant land". Far from it: the educational process must be continued: there are still people who just don't seem to understand... just don't get it!

Publications:

Hikes and Outings of South Central Ontario

We were pleased to see that Tommy Thompson Park a.k.a. the Leslie Street Spit is featured on 8 pages in this new publication authored by Glenn Perrett. The chapter on the Spit evokes the feel of the Spit and, hopefully, will attract even more visitors. The author credits Friends of the Spit for the tremendous advocacy to keep the Spit as a public wilderness. Interestingly, the author admits he's not a big fan of urban areas and yet, by the end of the chapter, he marvels at this public urban wilderness in such close proximity to a huge city.

Bird-Friendly Glass Reaches the Spit: When you pass the staff booth, or see the Banding Station, you may notice the grid of white dots on the surface of the glass. This Surface One treatment of the glass, according to research, renders the glass Bird-friendly and greatly reduces the chances of birds striking the glass due to reflection or fly-through conditions. The product used is a patent-pending product from a Toronto firm, The Convenience Group. This film was applied at the insistence of both the Tommy Thompson Park User Group and the TRCA: the TRCA has recognized that the city regulations regarding Bird-Friendly design could successfully be applied to their pavilions. These pavilions are now leading-edge!



Questions? email our website and one of us will get back to you: perhaps not instantly, but as long as the email is not an incoherent rant, we will try our best to reply and answer your questions. There have also been some unanswerable questions, such as what are the effects of Fire Ants on nesting birds? And some questions that resolve themselves in the weeks, after the email, such as the one with regard to the ongoing construction at Embayment D which will become a carp-excluded lagoon, eventually.

Van Service

One of the very regrettable results of the transition from management of the Park by the TRCA to that of the City's Parks Department is that the City discontinued the van service. No amount of cajoling or entreaties would cause Parks to change their mind: they simply said that they weren't in the business of running van services, they couldn't afford it, and they didn't wish to. The TRCA, in handing over management of the park, handed over this responsibility and stated also that they didn't wish to run a van service. With the new Disabilities Act in place, and given that the van service afforded many people the opportunity to get further out on the Spit and to accommodate their energies for a return trip, we certainly regret its passing. We hold our hope for its return, especially since the sailing club needs transportation of this nature in order to accommodate their rental agreement which states no private cars during park opening hours. When the park increases the number of days open a year, this agreement will impact the sailors even more. This year, you have seen the golf cart apparition that the APSC has used to ferry passengers.

Butterflies at the Spit

2012 has been a stellar year for butterflies in terms of rarities arriving here from the south. Our hot dry early weather, and the continent's drought, brought waves and waves of rare species here. The Spit Butterfly List is over 55 species! One of the less common species is illustrated in the photograph: a Common Buckeye photographed on July 14 during the Toronto Centre Butterfly Count, an annual census of butterflies in the Toronto area conducted under the auspices of the North American Butterfly Association. This beautiful butterfly can be found on the Baselands and along the Spine Road, generally from July on, in "good" years!



Photo courtesy of Margaret Kelch

Publications:

On Nature Spring 2012

On Nature Spring 2012 acknowledges Tommy Thompson Park/ Leslie Street Spit as one of the Top Ten Toronto Birding Sites and notes how accessible it is by public transit.

Common Buckeye