

Friends of the Spit

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Quote #1

"The community values the existing "wild character" and supports the preservation of this landscape type as a needed place for walking, cycling, experiencing nature and escaping the stressors of urban living."
- from a written submission to TWRC, from a supporter

New website

The former website has been updated and modified and improvements are still ongoing. Go to www.friendsofthespit.ca to see for yourself! If you have photos which you would like to add to the photo gallery, please email them. Note also that plant, bird and butterfly checklists are available at the website.

Do you want to become more involved? -- email us through the website.

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2007

As Editorials

Three for the Price of One!

Editorial #1 Lake Ontario Park

A big heartfelt thank you to the many Friends of the Spit members and supporters who came to the Lake Ontario Park Public Meeting on January 17th. Your presence, and your vocal and written comments, suggestions, and criticisms will, we hope, positively impact the park plan. Certainly, your voice keeps the park designers aware of the imperative for a public urban wilderness in Toronto. There is strength in our numbers!

Editorial #2 Development takes many forms

Long before the name Tommy Thompson Park was expediently placed on the Spit and long before the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (MTRCA) took control of a portion of the Spit, there was the Spit itself.

And long before Tommy Thompson Park and long before the MTRCA's responsibility for the park, Friends of the Spit was working diligently to preserve and protect the Leslie Street Spit from development.

Back then, development meant umpteen sailing clubs and wind-surfing clubs, it meant historical museums, it meant giant interpretive centers, it meant car traffic, it meant golfing ranges. These development proposals were all repulsed.

Now, our fear and concern is that development by incremental "features" may mean the Leslie Street Spit will be homogenized and reduced to looking like any other park in the GTA.

Friends of the Spit continues to be active – a rare thing for a citizens' advocacy group to still be going strong after 30 years – and Friends of the Spit is still against development of the Spit, whatever form that development takes.

(Continues over...)

WAITING, WAITING...STILL WAITING

We're all waiting: still waiting, and it isn't for Godot! In fact, we delayed this newsletter, hoping for news...

The well-attended January 17th Lake Ontario Park Public Meeting left us all waiting for the planners' response. Many of you sent long and detailed commentaries and observations to the TWRC (now Waterfront Toronto). So far, many of you have not received replies to your letters and emails. In the absence of detailed responses, what weight will be attached to the comments and observations? It seems only time will tell.

Formerly scheduled for June, the next public meeting will be held in the Fall. Brenda Webster, Project Manager of the Master Plan of Lake Ontario Park, noted that they (Waterfront Toronto) are "intending to present [the park plans] again to the public in the Fall. The workbook of public comments from the January public presentation has been completed and those comments are being evaluated by the park designers Field Operations as they draft their master plan."

And as for the impact of all our comments and observations, we won't know until the Fall whether the public meeting was indeed an exercise in collegial planning, or whether that public meeting was simply a facade and charade.

Friends of the Spit responded in detail: the two most worrisome proposals: the 20m wide canal through the Baselands, and the sports fields on the Baselands – were soundly rebutted in our response. However, we too have received no substantive reply (we did receive a perfunctory "got your letter" letter). Anecdotally, many agree with our view, but the TRCA itself has not issued a formal opinion.

As we write this, we understand that detailed soil investigation studies are being taken through the Lake Ontario Park area. It is these studies that apparently will determine the success or failure of the design initiatives proposed.

We will advise you of the next public meeting and keep you informed.

(By the way, if any of you should get a response to your comments, please forward a copy to us!)

Quote #2

"The integrity of the important Baselands, an area frequented by many migratory birds which rest and feed there, will be compromised by this artificial, unnecessary, water-filled scar. Please don't tinker with this valuable wildlife habitat by opening the possibility that boats, maybe even motorized boats, may gain east-west access through it. You can save a huge amount of money by leaving it as it is. Let it be!"

- from a written submission to TWRC by a Spit user

The Spit is a unique and amazing place, and any attempt to render it part of the overall monolithic park culture will be met with our opposition.

Editorial #3

1½ staff aren't enough!

Now that there's lots of money for construction projects, and lots of eager workers out on the Spit, why can't the TRCA find the money for at least two full time staff to man the park on weekends and holidays? Next time you see a TRCA employee: ask them.

Many of you have commented on what appears to be a new dual carriageway extending out onto the Spit: that is, a new graveled road which parallels the existing paved spine road. Once completed, the new road will be a 10 ft wide multipurpose trail. Also, near the sailing club on Peninsula D, you will have noticed a trail, ultimately scheduled to be 6 feet wide, leading out to the embayment, and an earthen bridge which unfortunately was built in a manner that will kill some of the surrounding trees (due to the soil being piled up). These trail widths and trail locations were part of the Tommy Thompson Park Trails Master Plan which was brought before the Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee. The actual construction methods and realization of these trails has caused a great discussion of this Master Plan within the committee. Friends of

What's in a name?

As many of you know, the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC) recently changed its name to Waterfront Toronto. We called up Kristin Jenkins, VP, Communications and Marketing, to ask her what this name change signified. Her response was " The new name is part of our efforts to raise awareness about waterfront revitalization and to establish a revitalization brand that easily links all the various projects we now have underway, from parks to the new districts across the harbour and to the central waterfront promenade."

Quote #3

"...the previous paths, paths which were simply worn into the earth by folks on foot, were used in a somewhat contemplative manner. Their integration into the surrounding vegetation made them intimate, ideal "venues" for observing the many natural processes that go on throughout the year on the spit..."
- from an email to F.O.S.

the Spit hope that the TRCA will revisit their Trails Master Plan and reduce the widths and lessen their impact. What's built so far is built, but any new construction need not be as wide nor as "urban". The addition of topsoil and type of planting mixtures have also been questioned: Friends of the Spit and supporters are strongly in favour of native material; and are philosophically opposed to the inclusion of non-native seed in the mixes used.

The trails, if ultimately usage requires, can be widened in the future: **Friends of the Spit say: start small, treat the trails as paths, and only when necessary expand their width.** Tommy Thompson Park is unique and was never meant to look like the other GTA parks. Its flora and fauna are serendipitous; too easily, the ephemeral charms of this place called the Spit could be reduced to the basic common denominator of any other park.

As we move from protection of the Spit (although with the Lake Ontario Park planning process underway, protection is still paramount) and move towards implementation of park planning policies for a full-time, year round park administered by the TRCA, examination and attention must be given to every detail and initiative so that the Spit doesn't lose the qualities that make it so unique.

From Friends of the Spit perspective, this rebranding simply means "new name, same folks!"

Finally...New Bird Checklist

After almost three years of planning, a 3rd edition Bird Checklist, Tommy Thompson Park/Leslie Street Spit has been issued. Put together by volunteers, including Friends of the Spit, assisted and published by the TRCA, this checklist lists the 302 species seen at the Spit, and indicates their seasonal abundance. You may pick up a free copy from the TRCA, or download one from our website.

Quote #4

"I have been walking, biking, and birding on the Spit for more than twenty years. Whenever I go down there, I make a point of speaking to the people I meet along the way, whether they are fellow-birders or not. I've spoken there with men, women, and children from Great Britain, Germany, Australia, Indonesia, China, the United States, and Japan. Many of them were visiting Toronto from large cities in their native countries.

The most amazing thing to me has been the consistency of their response to the Spit. Almost without exception, they have all said something to this effect: "You know, where I come from, we don't have anything like this." They're referring, of course, to the ungroomed wildness of the Spit, a wildness that has developed and exists within walking distance of Canada's largest urban centre.

I'm convinced that the Spit in its present state is part of what makes Toronto *sui generis*, or unique to itself and unlike any other city in the world. It is part of what sets tourists marvelling over our city and gives them something to talk about when they go home, thereby encouraging other visitors and helping to drive the city's economic engine.

What we don't need on the Spit is one more groomed, antiseptic, and simple-minded theme park of the type already present at Ashbridges Bay and Humber Bay East and West. What we don't need is the kind of intrusion represented by a wide canal and catwalk through the Baselands, with multiple soccer fields nearby. What we do need is to respect the wild habitats that have developed there almost in spite of human endeavours, and the wealth of animal, bird, and botanical life that now thrives there as a result."

- from a written submission to the TWRC by a Spit user

Wouldn't you know it! After it went to press, three species new to the list have been reported: Western Grebe, Ruffed Grouse, and Yellow-throated Warbler! These bring the grand total to 305 species! The Spit is an internationally recognized IBA (Important Bird Area) for sure!

Membership Renewal:

We thought we'd have this newsletter out a lot sooner. We thought that the Lake Ontario Park planning process would proceed much faster, so we held off on the newsletter, and hence held off on the renewals request. As we are a volunteer group entirely funded by our membership subscriptions, we appreciate your continuing membership and support. Since 1977, our members have certainly hung tough!