

Friends of the Spit

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Master Plan not being followed.
- The Spit Entrance Pavilion: revived??
- In memoriam: John Chamberlin.
- Cell 2 Wetland – Officially “Open”.

NEWSLETTER

November 2016

As an Editorial #1...

Our apologies...

This newsletter has been a long time in the making --- too long! We apologize profusely, and could cite a number of excuses why we have been delayed, but the key thing is that while we have been absent from sending a newsletter, we have not been AWOL on Waterfront matters. Your Steering Committee continues to maintain a high profile through public meetings, stakeholder meetings, citizen participation groups, and other items that affect The Spit specifically, the Portlands in general, and the overall Toronto Waterfront. We've listed them on page 4 in the newsletter.

Generally, we use the newsletter as a tool to keep our membership abreast of any critical items: in the last couple of years there have been no particular threats to The Spit, and, hence, we felt no need for a newsletter. Every mailing does cost us, and until we are fully switched over to an e-mail setup, we continue to watch our loonies. We do promise more regular contact.

As an Editorial #2...

Wither TTPUG?...

Has the Tommy Thompson Park User Group (TTPUG) outlived its usefulness? Meeting only two times a year simply to hear the TRCA's upcoming schedule of work at The Spit, offering very little opportunity for advisory comment, isn't enough.

A brief history is in order:

Originally, the Committee was named an “Advisory Committee”, and was viewed as an aid to the Conservation Authority, as a way to have those who saw The Spit on a frequent basis advise the TRCA staff on micro-management and macro-planning issues.

The Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee (TTPAC) met four times a year, meeting more frequently if there were outstanding issues requiring comment. At that time, generally, the members felt that their voices were being heard, and that policies were being implemented which reflected and incorporated their comments... (cont' page 2)

Cell 2 Wetland Official Opening - Sept 14, 2016

The opening ceremony was high profile and included a large number of senior officials! FOS was pleased to be invited to this ceremony. It is just one more step in a long sequence to protect The Spit as we know it.

Mayor John Tory officially opened Cell 2 and Ralph Toninger, Senior Manager, Restoration Projects at the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) was the Master of Ceremonies. Mayor Tory and several other prominent speakers focused on what a jewel The Spit is and how fortunate Toronto is to be a huge metropolis with an urban wilderness at its doorstep.

Other official speakers included: Geoffrey Wilson, CEO Ports Toronto; Tracey Mill, Deputy-Minister, MNR, Krista Skaldwell, VP, Public Affairs and Communications, Coca-Cola Canada; and Brian Denney, CAO, TRCA.

As anticipated, all of the speakers praised the cooperation of the various levels of government and the private sector. This was vital to enabling the successful transformation of a holding cell into what will become a viable wetland. Coca-Cola Canada was rightly praised for providing \$1million in funding to ensure the completion of this project.

Most of the speakers reflected on the beauty of The Spit and congratulated one another for their cooperation. FOS understands the complexity of The Spit and agrees that this cooperation was critical to the successful construction of this wetland. However, what struck FOS, in particular, was that the speakers appeared unaware that Cell 2 was once slated for hard-capping and other uses, not a wetland!

Fortunately, one speaker stood out from the rest, Brian Denney from the TRCA. He has a long history with FOS and we were impressed that he officially recognized the importance and contributions of FOS in ensuring the establishment and preservation of The Spit as an Urban Wilderness...(cont' page 3)



Official Opening tree planting in front of Cell 2, left to right: Ralph Toninger (TRCA), Geoffrey Wilson (PT), Brian Denney (TRCA), Mayor John Tory, Krista Skaldwell (Coca-Cola), Tracey Mill (MNR).

As an Editorial #2...

(cont' from page 1)... The change to the user group format appears to have rendered the advisory component mute.

Currently, TTPUG is a committee of the TRCA, and is comprised of members of Friends of the Spit, Toronto nature organizations, and Toronto cycling organizations, as well as the other government reps.

By cutting back to two meetings a year only, and by changing the format to simply that of “we’ll tell you what is happening”, a great opportunity has been lost.

As you’ll read elsewhere in this newsletter, the lack of communication regarding the construction work – the habitat destruction – along the Spine Road could have been avoided. Similarly, not being involved at this stage in the request for quotation for an architect for the new entrance pavilion again shows a lack of understanding of the need to involve the user groups of The Spit.

We could go on: surprise! : in summer 2014, we suddenly noticed a huge pipe laid out, virtually the entire length of the endikement, through the bird loafing areas. The response we got said that this was not a TRCA project, but was a green energy project undertaken by HydroStor to install a 3 km permanent air line into Lake Ontario. They used the endikement with the permission of the Toronto Port Authority. In a number of e-mails, we pointedly noted it sure would have been nice to have been informed about this and understand the ramifications of the construction phase damage to The Spit.

A New Archaeology for the Leslie Street Spit

Friends of the Spit was pleased, in March of this year, to assist a Toronto artist in his presentation of ‘A New Archaeology for the Leslie Street Spit’ as part of the Myseum of Toronto programme. For ten days, Ben Watt-Meyer’s installation was on display at the Enoch Turner Schoolhouse. His fascinating look at the rubble (with which we are all familiar) traced it back to its previous life as Toronto buildings.

To quote from the artist:

“Toronto’s largest constructed breakwater is literally built of rubble from the demolished walls of its lost architectural heritage. To see this place as a burial ground provides a moment to mourn our losses. Yet to celebrate it as the material evidence of Toronto’s dramatic post-war urban reconstruction is an opportunity to rediscover the transformation of lake fill into a landscape.”



Photo of installation at Enoch Turner Schoolhouse

New entrance pavilion at The Spit: A promise? Or a reality?

To all our surprise, this August saw the release of a Request for Proposal for Professional Services (RFP) for the entrance pavilion at the Leslie Street Spit. A City of Toronto initiative, with the TRCA as a secondary player, this proposal went out without the comment or knowledge of the TTPUG.

Going back in time, this pavilion was one of the original structures debated and vetted at length by the TTPAC. The entrance pavilion had been designed as a low-key structure, modest in scale and size, and would have served a terrific function as an entry gateway to The Spit. At the time of the construction of the other buildings, the entry pavilion was shelved for lack of funding.

Suddenly, funding is available, and off we go... who knows if the commentary made by Friends of the Spit and other members of the TTPAC/TTPUG will have an effect on the design this time? Why pay for another design when the first was approved by TTPAC, Waterfront Toronto, and the TRCA?

We have been assured by the TRCA, and, subsequently, by the Director, Parks Development and Capital Projects; Parks, Forestry & Recreation, that “The open call RFP specifically acknowledges and promotes Friends of the Spit as a critical stakeholder in the ongoing management and preservation of the unique shoreline asset that is Tommy Thompson Park”. The Director stated that “Parks, Forestry & Recreation – Capital Projects and TRCA partnership has every expectation of Friends of the Spit involvement in the design process for the realization a new park entrance!” [sic] PHEW!!

We hope that this involvement, together with those of the other user groups, will be early in the process, be ongoing, and be heeded by the Architect the City selects.

We’ll keep you posted.



Photo Credit: Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

In memoriam: John Chamberlin

On March 2nd of this year, we lost a true friend of The Spit: John Chamberlin passed away at the age of 82.

John and his wife, Jacqueline Courval (a former co-chair of Friends of the Spit), joined FOS in the mid-80’s, and, shortly after, John took on the onerous task of Membership Secretary and Treasurer, positions he filled so ably up until his final illness.

John worked as an avionics technician, and, as well as his volunteer work with Friends of the Spit, was a volunteer at the Toronto Grace Health Centre’s Palliative Care Centre Program for over 25 years. The Toronto Grace Health Centre recognized his empathetic and compassionate nature, and his strong sense of commitment: characteristics that we were highly aware of and valued. John had a wry sense of humor, and a wonderful smile.

We at Friends of the Spit will miss him. His sister and family in New Zealand, and his many friends and acquaintances, miss him greatly.

West side of Spine Road:

What was described as shoreline enhancements and creation of fish habitat became a full scale clearing of existing natural vegetation, including cutting and injuring mature trees along the Spine Road.

Friends of the Spit say “Habitat Destruction!!” the TRCA claims “Habitat Creation”

While visiting The Spit back in March, both co-chairs of FOS were astounded to see the level of destruction on the west side of the Spine Road leading about 800 meters south from the staff booth/control structure. Urgent phone calls and emails to the TRCA resulted in a response that we had been informed about this work at the December 1st, 2015 TTPUG meeting. A check of the minutes of this meeting showed that indeed “shoreline enhancements” had been noted for the winter work. In a response to a question, recorded in the minutes, as to what work was planned for the winter and if the work would involve removing shoreline vegetation, the staffer responded “that shoreline enhancement work, including the placement of woody structures, was planned for the winter. She said that removal of existing vegetation would be **minimized** [our emphasis] and staff would try to restrict removals to project access points”.

**WOW: if this is minimal disruption,
then we’d hate to see maximum disruption.**

We had no idea that “shoreline enhancements” required the construction of a parallel access road and destruction of existing habitat from the Spine Road to the shoreline!! To say that we were upset by this habitat destruction would be a mild understatement!!

The two co-chairs subsequently had a lengthy meeting with TRCA staff about this and no agreements were reached. The TRCA agreed to involve Friends of the Spit and TTPUG in any further work scheduled proceeding south along the Spine Road.

[Ed. note: we were told that 2017 work is “on hold” due to lack of funding.]



The existing vegetation and succession is fine – no need to “improve” it with deliberate naturalistic plantings! The City and the TRCA should also be called to account for cutting/injuring trees greater than 12" diameter: if a homeowner does that, they are in deep trouble: if the City and the TRCA do it, is it just part of the project?

The Master Plan for The Spit is clear – minimal intervention.

E.5.1 Spirit of the Plan – from the Master Plan
*“The key premise for the natural area upon which the 1989 Master Plan and this modified Master Plan have been developed, is the adoption of the natural succession or ecological approach which relies on natural processes, **augmented by minimal intervention** [our bold] and management of the park to achieve over time, the diversity of community types as outlined in the Master Plan.”*

Although the Master Plan is a couple of decades old, it espouses a landscape allowed to develop by nature – the “Let it Be” vision.

Now the bigger issue is whether the Master Plan vision for The Spit will be allowed to survive. That vision of The Spit is endangered if existing habitat is simply razed for haul roads and construction.

Friends of the Spit have always argued to let Nature vegetate The Spit: it doesn’t need to be dug up and redone.

We will keep you posted and if a protest needs to be arranged, we will let you know.

Cell 2 Wetland Official Opening - Sept 14, 2016 (cont’ from page 1)...

The other speakers may be forgiven for overlooking the contributions of FOS. They are relatively new to the intricacies of The Spit and this may explain their apparent lack of knowledge of the history of The Spit.

The ceremony was also an important reminder that Friends can never let its guard down. As the players change and new development proposals are put forward, Friends of the Spit, with your help, will be ready to meet those challenges head on and educate the new players.

The Spit gets international recognition:

“A View From Afar” The Guardian

Welcome to Toronto: the most fascinatingly boring city in the world.

By Stephen Marche, 4 July 2016.

“In Toronto, for a hundred years, the authorities let the construction companies just dump their landfill into Lake Ontario, until it turned into a pile of rubble so large that it attracted deer and coyotes and warblers in migration. So, reluctantly, they turned it into a rather gorgeous little park, the Leslie Street Spit.”

Ed note: the “they” is all of us who fought long and hard for The Spit as a Public Urban Wilderness.

A Brief History of Friends’ Evolution at The Spit

- 1977 – Access: Struggle to even get onto The Spit
- 1982 to 1992 – Master Plan Struggle – finally, the concept of an Urban Wilderness enshrined!
- 1996 to 1997 – Baselands Saved & Zoned Gr (Golf Academy avoided)
- 2000’s – Waterfront Planning/ Portlands: endless meetings and park planning
- 2016 – Details – “Preserve the Master Plan”

The Spit could be damaged permanently by all the well-meaning “fixes” and add-ons

– LET IT BE –

Common Ringed Plover:

New Species for Ontario found at The Spit

The annual Tommy Thompson Park Butterfly Festival, August 20, hosted by the TRCA, took second place to a frenzy of birders when a TRCA staffer observed a Common Ringed Plover in the new Cell 2 wetland. This European bird, closely resembling a Semipalmated Plover, remained for a number of days and many avid birders trekked out in the heat to see it. Not only was this a first for The Spit, but a first for Ontario! This



Common Ringed Plover at Cell 2

sighting, if accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee, brings The Spit Checklist of Birds to 320. The Checklist Fourth Edition notes 316: since then Swainson's Warbler, Fish Crow, and Ross's Goose have also been sighted.

We've been busy

Here is a partial list of the things we've been up to since our last newsletter. Some of these are simply commentary items, others involve lengthy meetings with the authorities in charge. Some are controversial (think Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport), others are part of the ongoing management of The Spit (think Cormorant Advisory Group).

We've listed these to reassure you that, while we failed to keep you abreast via newsletter, we have been out there representing your interests.

- Tommy Thompson Park User Group
- Portlands Biodiversity Working Group – City of Toronto
- Ports Toronto – Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport Master Planning Exercise
- BBTCA Runway EA – Stakeholder Advisory Committee
- Museum of Toronto
- Ashbridge's Bay Erosion and Sediment Control Project Class Environmental Assessment (EA)
- Cormorant Advisory Group (TTP)
- Port Lands Planning Framework – Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meetings
- State of Bird Conservation in Toronto – commentary supplied
- Future of the Gardiner East – public meetings
- City of Toronto – Tree Planting Strategy
- Jane's Walk 2014 at The Spit

If you are still receiving a paper copy of the newsletter, and would like an electronic copy instead, do send us your e-mail address! It'll save us money! (The e-mail is in colour!!)

Park Hours: NEW:

At present, the park is open 7 days a week, with the following hours.

Monday – Friday: 4 pm to 9 pm

Weekends and holidays: 5:30 am to 9 pm (with staff on-site from 9 am to 6 pm)

City By-law officers may enforce the park hours, and can issue fines to individuals in the park outside of these hours. [ed.note!!!]

When??

When does anyone think the new parking lot entrance off Unwin Avenue, promised for years now, will actually be opened? This entrance is important, as it will then separate the automobile traffic from those entering the park via foot and cycle. We are told that it all depends on the resolution of the Martin Goodman Trail along Unwin Avenue, but, as that doesn't have funding (see below), who knows??

When will the Baselands Trails, planned two years ago, be started? We are told that one trail along the Outer Harbour Marina Road, which will cross through the Baselands over to the staff booth, will happen this year. The others, who knows? No funding! Particularly important, to us, would seem to be the resolution of the Martin Goodman Trail along the south side of Unwin Avenue: safety for cyclists is needed and the separation of dog walkers from the Baselands is crucial.

What will they think of next...??

At a recent development day hosted by a well-known Toronto organization connected with The Spit, a speaker, when asked how his experience could relate to Toronto, noted that he wanted, "more tourism at Tommy Thompson Park, perhaps a lodge so that more people can see the bird migration".

Wacko ideas are still out there!

Another bonkers idea...

A respected landscape architect firm had the temerity to suggest that the entire endikement arm be twinned with another arm to the east and an enclosed water-level-controlled kilometers-long rowing course be established, with a clubhouse at the Baselands!!! Notwithstanding the fact that this would cost a bazillion dollars and present enormous hydrological and construction problems, it simply is a totally inappropriate use for a place recognized as a Public Urban Wilderness. The TRCA had the same reaction, and the proposal went away. Shame for even suggesting it! We continually see everyone's pet project suggested for The Spit: we are continually telling those people: "hands off"

LET IT BE.

The Spit is recognized again on TV!

TVO Ontario hosted a Mystery Files segment out on The Spit, in which one of the Steering Committee members was filmed. Although entertaining, he won't be giving up his day job. Other members appeared in segments being shot for Bell Media, titled "The Spit".

Our website has been updated and refreshed! And, as well, the Bird and Butterfly Checklists have been updated: and, as always, if you have any photographs which you would like to add to our site, please send them.

You can say that again!!

Amber Ellis, Executive Director, Earthroots, spoke of what 30 years has taught them (401 Richmond Update, Spring 2016, Volume 23, Issue 1).

"One of the key lessons we have learned is that campaigns never end, even after major changes in environmental legislation have been achieved". "History does repeat itself and we find ourselves having to fight the same battles over again".

We can certainly agree with that – the same battles to preserve The Spit as a Public Wilderness get fought again and again.