

Emailed "NEWSLETTER" . February 8, 2021

Many thanks to all of you who attended Thursday's Webinar on The Spit/Tommy Thompson Park, as hosted by the TRCA.

We've received many comments - for those who couldn't attend, a representative set of comments are as follows:

From an email to us:

"Working at (name withheld) I thought I was prepared for bureaucratic stonewalling but this one took the cake. Sheesh!"

From an email to the TRCA, cc'd to us:

"I really think you need to up your game here, if you are serious about the preservation of this unique site for people who appreciate it for that uniqueness and don't want to see it turned into some kind of theme park cum outdoor film set. And really invite discussion and disagreement, if you are going to use the webinar format during this time of pandemic when in-person meetings are not possible."

From an email to us:

"Why is any filming allowed full stop? "

"...only a notification process rather than "consultation"???"

From an email to us:

"I would have thought that rather than recite the rules and regulations ad nauseum they would have been inspirational. "

For those who attended, please do complete the TRCA survey, if you haven't already.

The following is our Friends of the Spit response to the TRCA. :

8 February 2021

Mr. J MacKenzie, CEO
Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

Re February 4, 2021, Webinar regarding Tommy Thompson Park/The Spit

Dear John,

After considerable thought, discussion, and receipt of responses from our members and allies who attended and for whom the Spit is one of the great places in this city ["Those people", to quote one of the panelists], we wish to comment on last Thursday's Tommy Thompson Park (TTP)/The Spit webinar hosted by the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).

First, thank you for personally attending. We are very appreciative of your personal interest in the Spit, and your attention to its affairs.

The comments we've received, and our own, fall into two categories – the Medium, and the Message.

The Medium: We realize a webinar is as good as anyone can expect in these covid times, but a webinar is truly no substitute for public engagement, or stakeholder engagement. We all look forward to the time when those in-person discussions and debates, which can be so fruitful and beneficial, can be reinstated.

Specifically, many of the responses we received expressed frustration that the setup was too bureaucratic, and did not allow the examination of the issues at hand. Notably, in other web formats, the questions being asked of the presenters appear across the screen. Why were they withheld for this webinar?

Timely communication is importance. This webinar, for its subject matter, should have been held well in advance of the message items' implementation. A day's advance notice of filming is totally insufficient!

The Message: Three issues were dominant – the park use in covid times, the bridge, and commercial filming. The overview of park rules and behaviours, always worth stating, took too much time. As per your poll results, the vast percentage of attendees knew and used the park. [Wonderful, too, that over half the attendees noted they used the park more in the last year. This sure bears out our anecdotal evidence! It's a shame that covid prevented a staff presence in 2020 which would have recorded the numbers increase. Our guesstimate is a 3-fold increase!]. This massive increase in attendance certainly showcases the Spit's popularity; it also points out, notwithstanding the absence of hand-over agreements between the TRCA and Ports Toronto, that *de facto*, the Spit is now open 7 days a week , dawn to dusk. This must be acknowledged by the TRCA and Ports Toronto operations. The desire, demand, need, and use is there: it must be acknowledged.

This massive increase in usage has, unfortunately, resulted in a very small number of visitors taking advantage of the site — with fires, off-road biking, dogs, etc., -- to the point where one friend told us he felt it was like “the Wild West”.

A staff presence at TTP is required for 2021. As you know, we have been advocating that for the last few months. We understood the covid restrictions last year, but a staff presence can, with the knowledge we now all have, be safely maintained. Staff monitoring of the park is essential: reliance solely on 311 calls by park visitors is an unworkable premise. (There seems to have been an unreasonable dependence on the public for monitoring TRCA rules and policies. While most users are willing to report infractions at the Spit, it is for the most part after-the-fact “historical” information. It would also be of value if the results of enforcement activities (whether successful or not) are provided to Spit users.)

The Bridge: We understand that infrastructure requires repair. What we don't understand is the process that has lead to the bridge's removal. Were repair-in-place options examined? Why won't there be a temporary bridge crossing? (We all are aware there are many options in this regard.) The absence of a temporary bridge will mean more pedestrian and cycling traffic on the endikement road: something that the Ports Toronto panelist seemed uncomfortable about, and avoided discussing. Timely notice should have been given to the public prior to the removal of the bridge.

Commercial Filming: Our position is known: we oppose commercial filming on the Spit. It is an activity at odds with the Master Plan's stated goals, it is at odds with the wildlife and the park's urban wilderness concept. We believe that you, the Conservation Authority, should continue your fine conservation and stewardship roles at TTP/The Spit, and not act as a film development agency.

Reference was made to filming at The Spit in the past. Correct us please if we are wrong, but none of those in the past required the substantial clearing, tenting, structures, etc., that were proposed (and some implemented) by the now abandoned Netflix production last Fall. Clearly the difference now is in size

and scale and invasiveness. Now, we learn of another production, of a month-long occupancy for a 4-day shoot, that involves the erection of a structure at the intersection of the endikement road with the spine road (cell 1 area).

Given that these contracts are signed (much to our dismay) the manner of your, and Ports Toronto's, oversight, is key. We all received extensive assurances at the webinar; yet, as a small but telling example, the very next day, the film signage posted for the film crew traffic speed exceeded that of the posted TTP regulations. Where was the oversight? Strong oversight is absolutely key.

To reiterate, the issue of lack of communication - one day's notice given to the public prior to the start of filming on Feb. 5th - is inadequate. Communication to the public regarding activities at the Spit has to be improved.

We understand that film is important in Toronto BUT we believe that when it comes to the Spit/TTP, a signature urban wilderness, the Conservation "hat" must be the one worn. Our position is that promotion of a commercial activity must not come at the expense of our precious greenspace.

In conclusion, we are dismayed that there will be no temporary bridge crossing during the bridge repair period.

In conclusion, we are dismayed that commercial filming, something that the Master Plan never countenanced, will proceed. Being realistic, we ask that this upcoming production be monitored closely and in detail, with the urban wilderness concept foremost in all decisions. Moving forward, we ask that the TRCA declare an end to any and all further commercial filming at Tommy Thompson Park/the Spit.

Yours sincerely,
FRIENDS OF THE SPIT

John Carley and Garth Riley, Co-Chairs,
Friends of the Spit

Celebrating 44 years: since 1977, Friends has been advocating for the entire Leslie Street Spit and Baselands to be a car-free Public Urban Wilderness.

Without Friends of the Spit advocacy, The Spit and Baselands would not exist as they do today: a wonderful urban wilderness, enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of visitors yearly.