

# Friends of the Spit

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## NEWSLETTER

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### WELCOME TO WINTER AT THE SPIT !!!

### HAPPY NEW YEAR !!!!

Dress warmly and enjoy these months in all their glory and light...

### What's on the horizon...

Friends of The Spit has received an invitation to participate with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the City of Toronto's Joint Management Committee for Tommy Thompson Park/the Leslie Street Spit, at a meeting time to be determined in either February or March. This committee was established as a result of both City Council and TRCA directives from mid-2021. It was created to establish integrated management by the respective owners of the property components that comprise the Leslie Street Spit, and Tommy Thompson Park. The Joint Management Committee was then assigned the task of developing a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the operations and maintenance and visitor experience across the lands; creating a visitor experience plan to strike a balance between public access and ecological integrity; undertaking community and stakeholder consultations, including engaging with the broader Indigenous communities, to inform the visitor experience plan; and developing coordinated policy and enforcement approaches related to filming, dogs, trail conflicts, and similar issues.

You'll also recall that the Tommy Thompson Park User Group was disbanded by the TRCA in October 2020 (pre-pandemic!) so there have been no regular committee meetings since then to discuss matters of mutual concern at The Spit and ongoing issues. Over two years without a citizen committee has meant that, all through the pandemic, the City and the TRCA missed out on input from actual Spit users, information that could have assisted them greatly. Similarly, we all missed out on hearing of their planning. Clearly, the committee has been greatly missed, but Friends of the Spit has continued to have regular discussions with TRCA and City staff since 2020.

Until February or March, we won't know details for 2023 and beyond: but, we can say that we understand that the funding increase from 2022 has been maintained for 2023. We also know that there has been no funding provided for a shuttle vehicle (one had been provided in the '00's).

The somewhat ominously titled *Visitor Experience Plan* is being prepared by the City and the TRCA. We have been assured that there will be public consultations. These consultations will deal with that visitor experience plan as well as the planning of the 2.7 hectares of new land to the east of The Spit base, which will be turned over by Toronto Water to the TRCA for incorporation into The Spit.

From our contact at Ports Toronto, the current schedule for the opening of the Youth Rowing Facility on the Outer Harbour side of the Outer Harbour Marina (OHM) peninsula (i.e. away from The Spit) is scheduled to open at the end of summer 2023. Ports Toronto also has let us know that they will be replacing the marina fuel tanks, to comply with current legislation. This work will occur before the 2023 boating season begins. As well, we can anticipate their usual maintenance and upgrades of docks, etc., *BUT* as of this writing, no new developments on the OHM peninsula are being planned.

**...as an editorial #1:** With tongue-in-cheek, in the 1990s, we suggested that the conservation authority had adopted the doctrine of “benign neglect” for The Spit, which meant defining “neglect” in terms of letting The Spit be, to grow and evolve, as a habitat without interference. This already was happening: our suggestion was that due to lack of funding, this could continue: Nature was rapidly taking over. However, that tongue-in-cheek exercise did not presuppose the other form of ‘neglect’...that of neglect of infrastructure. It is our hope that the Joint Management Committee of the City and TRCA will come up with a modest but properly funded model that will keep The Spit a wonderful place for unscripted activity: activity compatible with the public urban wilderness: activity compatible with The Spit and its Nature. Visitor Experience Plans always sound ominous and perhaps it is just bureaucratic talk for letting the current activities continue, but nevertheless that terminology worries us. We’ll learn more in the next two months, and we’ll communicate it to you, our members.

### **The state of current repair...**

Maintenance and repair: for the structures at The Spit is an ongoing discussion issue for the aforementioned Joint Management Committee. In the meantime, we’ve been strongly advocating that the maintenance programs at The Spit be upped. When one’s first experience upon entering the park isn’t good, if that visitor sees the buildings in disrepair and sees broken or damaged items, including graffiti, they won’t respect The Spit in the same manner as if all systems are functioning well.

*The parking lot:* this is the greatest issue: to poorly paraphrase the Fred Penner song about the remedial work done last fall on the year-old new parking lot... “the potholes came back the very next month: we thought they were a goner, but the potholes came back.”

A long-term solution has to be found for this problem: it’s a brand-new lot, and it needs attention. When??

*The washrooms:* the City closes two for the winter due to reduced usage, but all the washrooms were closed to the public on December 24 for a mechanical problem. Following our inquiry, as we had been concerned about vandalism, we were told “It most certainly was not vandalism nor any nefarious activity that caused the problem. A heating-sensor issue resulted in a freeze and subsequent burst pipes. In addition to the plumbing damage, fixtures in all washrooms were destroyed beyond repair.”

To the City’s credit, the repairs were expedited, and were done within a month’s time. The washrooms, including the accessible washroom, are now open again.

*Visitor Centre:* You've probably noticed that the visitor centre/staff booth further out the spine road is still without power and operating on power from a temporary generator. It's now over two years ago that the pavilion lost power. Seemingly an agreement is unable to be reached as to how to re-supply it. To us, this lack of resolution leads only to a building decline.

*The newest mound:* to the south-west of the parking lot there is a mound of contaminated soil generated during the construction and stored behind fencing. We were told by the City that "The impacted soil stored behind the protective fencing will remain until such time as it can be capped with a cost-effective barrier layer. Possibly Autumn 2023. "

The soil conditions were known – this soil should have been taken off-site immediately as it was excavated, not simply expediently dumped on site and then fenced-off. Why the delay now for its treatment?

### **Bill 23...**

Friends of the Spit filed an objection with the provincial government about Bill 23. In particular, we cited the proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act. Friends asked that those proposed changes to the Act be withdrawn in totality from the bill. Unfortunately, as Bill 23 was rapidly passed, these and many other pernicious Bill 23 measures have made their way into legislation.

### **Winter birds....**

The Spit is always a great place to look for birds and other wildlife even in winter. It is particularly good for waterfowl, especially when the bays are relatively ice-free as they have been this winter. Visitors are reminded to be well-prepared for changing weather conditions and especially for times of extreme cold and icy paths.

On January 8<sup>th</sup> volunteers took part in the annual Ontario MNR sponsored Lake Ontario Mid-Winter Waterfowl Inventory. This was the 77<sup>th</sup> year that this inventory has been held. Highlights from The Spit included almost 1200 Redheads, all three species of swan... Mute, Tundra and Trumpeter ... and singles of Red-necked Grebe and Ring-necked Duck. A non-waterfowl highlight was a fly-over Glaucous Gull.

Winter is a tough time for all wildlife so please enjoy what you see but do not linger with individuals for long periods of time as undue stress on animals can be fatal.

### **The Spit in other publications:**

The current issue (#61/2022) of *Spacing* magazine, still on the newsstands, is devoted primarily to the problematic development proposed for Ontario Place. The writers draw a number of parallels to the history of The Spit and how it became an Accidental Wilderness.

On page 4, Dylan Reid's editorial "Accidental Playground" makes the case that citizen engagement shaped The Spit, and calls for the people of Toronto to engage in the current struggle for Ontario Place.

We were very pleased and gratified to see the recognition that the citizen involvement and the struggle to keep The Spit "Natural" received by way of comparison. To quote: "*The provincial*

*government has plans to wrest the space [Ontario Place] back to private use and impose grand schemes on it – just as governments once had plans to come up with “practical” uses for the Leslie Street Spit. It’s the classic urban conflict between organic evolution from below versus planning imposed from above. As with the Spit, it will be up to the people of Toronto to stand fast and insist on letting this outcrop’s own messy path emerge naturally as people use it.”*

**...as an editorial #2:** well said! citizen involvement can force changes...

Later in the issue, John Lorinc’s provocative article (pp32 and 33) uses The Spit process and the citizen engagement and involvement as his taking off point when he writes *“Would we think of constructing a luxury spa and a 16,000 seat stadium at the end of the spit? Of course not. The idea is ludicrous, and a political non-starter. It’s worth saying, over and over, that the most important explanation for Tommy Thompson Park’s resilience is that decades of Torontonians have breathed life into this defiantly public, non-commercial space using only their feet and the tires on their bikes. So it should be with Ontario Place.”*

**...as an editorial #3:** What is now “accepted wisdom” as referenced by Mr. Reid and Mr. Lorinc (and many others) is the result of a long struggle by Friends of the Spit and our allies. It was, in the traditional sense, a “long game”, and took a lot of hard slogging. You, our members, supported and led the charge which is a significant and memorable accomplishment. Certainly, experiencing The Spit today, one can’t imagine it as any other type of park. If not for all our collective efforts, it would’ve been lost.

It is tremendous to see the accomplishments of our members recognized by the editors and writers of Spacing magazine. Thank you, Spacing.

We hope that those struggling to keep Ontario Place for all as an urban park on Toronto’s waterfront will be successful and the heritage components, the natural components, and the physical structures will all be preserved for the benefit of all Torontonians.

### **Upcoming events...**

Toronto Field Naturalists (TFN): Beginning in 2018, you may have noticed the TRCA undertaking Phragmites’ control at the cells, embayments, and triangle pond on The Spit. The Toronto Field Naturalists are hosting a zoom event Sunday, February 5 at 2:30 PM on Phragmites Management. This is a free panel discussion which will interest those who are concerned about this invasive species.

[Free Panel Discussion: Phragmites – Eradicating a Troublesome Invader – Toronto Field Naturalists](#)

The TRCA has scheduled three February events at The Spit: Birding by Snowshoe, Winter Waterfowl by Snowshoe, and an Owl Prowl. These are paid events run by the TRCA. We shared our concerns about the owl prowling in relation to the Spit’s owl viewing protocols, and the TRCA has assured us that these protocols will be followed. For more information on these three events, go to: <https://tommythompsonpark.ca/events/>

**Moments in History....** In late November, we received a letter from one of the original founders of Friends of the Spit, Alan Hollett, who now lives in Halifax. Alan sent us some snapshots from the late '70s. Truly, the changes to The Spit - and to Toronto's skyline - have been staggering. What a change! It is a pleasure to receive a note from someone who was there at the start of what is Toronto's greatest longest-running citizen participation success. We stand on the founders' shoulders.



Photos by Alan Hollett from late 1970's



**SEE YOU ON THE SPIT !!!!!**