

Friends of the Spit

P.O. Box 51518
2140A Queen Street East
Toronto ON M4E 3V7
info@friendsofthespit.ca
www.friendsofthespit.ca



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Letter, by email, to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority:
Att'n: J. MacKenzie, A. Wijesooriya, R. Toningner, K. McDonald, A. Chreston, J. Kyte

Ashbridges Bay Landform Project. New Natural Areas. Commentary from Friends of the Spit

Good afternoon, John, Anil, Ralph, Karen, Andrea and Johanna.

Our comments regarding the Ashbridges Bay Landform Project New Natural Areas can be placed in two categories: the process, and the proposed design.

Last Wednesday, June 19, with only six days' notice, one of us was fortunate to be able to attend the drop-in for the Ashbridge Bay Landform Project, which was held at The Spit entry pavilion at Tommy Thompson Park. The drop-in event was woefully under-attended. By rough calculations, it seemed that TRCA staff outnumbered those who came to view the panels displayed.

We believe this poor attendance is a direct result of the minimal six days' notice that was given to us, to get the word out to our membership. As we wrote you earlier, you are aware that our membership exceeds 1200, and our Facebook page exceeds 1300 members. We are by far the largest user group, advocating for The Spit/Tommy Thompson Park as a car-free Public Urban Wilderness.

In the future, please give us at Friends of The Spit far more notice of upcoming events. Secondly, be aware that reliance on your website is a passive approach: it does not get the word out: it depends totally on someone wishing to look at your website.

The more serious concern is that people stayed away because they knew the result was going to be a foregone conclusion. A drop-in event is different than a planning session. Hard to get excited when one's participation has no bearing on the outcome.

The on-line questionnaire is unfortunately rather simplistic and anodyne. It does not discuss options, and seems set up only to reinforce decisions already made. The four questions are fine as far as guiding principles go, but, again, they offer no sense of other possibilities within those guiding principles.

We look forward to better communications in the future.

All that being said, let's now turn ourselves to the Design Proposal, which as part of the process noted above, should have been reviewed and consulted upon earlier in its design development.

First, we are pleased that the Master Plan principles for Tommy Thompson Park are being upheld with the design, and we are very pleased that the pedestrian trail, which had been eroded and washed out, is being restored as a continuous route, roughly paralleling out of the Spine Road.

With the planting plans suggested, the minimal amount of meadow indicated is totally insufficient. Meadows are an important ecosystem, and as you know, with the TRCA's recent compensatory planting of trees on existing meadows on the Baselands, (which should not have happened), meadows are fast disappearing at The Spit.

The allocation for meadow space needs to be tripled at least or quadrupled, if you wish to have success in attracting fauna species requiring meadow habitat.

With regard to the trails, the Level 1 trail should be fine, but the dead-end trail extension needs careful consideration. Generally, we are aware the trail planners like to avoid dead-ends as that can leave a user feeling trapped and vulnerable if they sense approaching danger. If, as we were told at the drop-in, there is no option but the dead-end, then we suggest strongly that the sightlines be kept totally open so that anyone at the far terminus can see who is approaching and in turn can be seen by all. Of course, the other risk of a dead-end is that it would be taken over as a party site or an encampment. We're sure you're aware of all these party and encampment issues.

Returning to the lack of proposed meadow habitat, keeping the whole area open as meadow would not only boost the meadow acreage but mean too that views would be had to that terminus of the dead- end, and that park users would feel safer.

We realize the rock "hardpoints" that extend out from the shore will be attractive to those who wish a vista: consideration should be given to designing a path out on one, as for certain, people will want to venture out.

The fence bordering the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant (ABTP) is currently indicated to be planted with willows to make a "green wall" (hedge). It is our understanding that there will be a berm constructed to the north (ABTP side) of the fence, to hide the treatment plant's new construction from view. We also understand that the berm will be planted by the TRCA. Again, meadow and low shrub habitat consistent with The Spit would be most appropriate.

Finally, at the drop-in, in reaction to the third panel's title "New Natural Area – Restoration Approach", when we noted that this project is habitat *creation*, not restoration, it was blithely brushed off as "semantics"! Descriptions *do* matter, and the description actually needs to be accurate, to describe what you are indeed doing. The TRCA had great success with the *creation* of the habitats in Cells One and Two. There is no shame in terming this project habitat *creation*: to call it restoration is a falsehood.

We look forward to the next steps, and we will watch carefully to see if our suggestions and those of others are incorporated into a final design that functions well within the overall TTP Master Plan.

As always, these comments are given knowing that our organization's advocacy for The Spit remains undimmed, and our members' love of The Spit must always be in your consciousness.

Yours sincerely,

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

Celebrating 47 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.