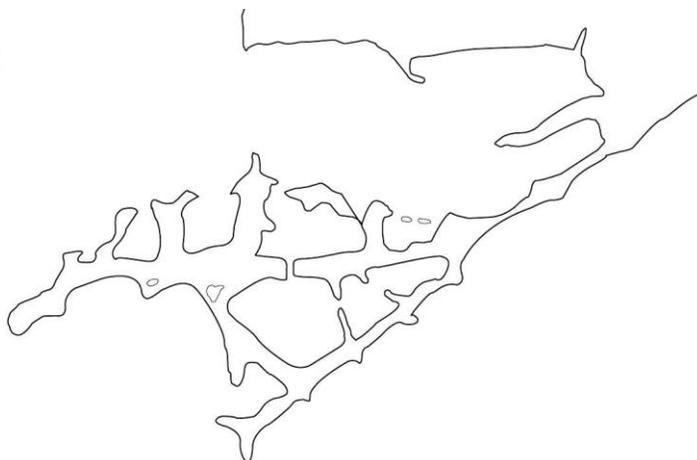


# Friends of the Spit

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## NEWSLETTER

November 2024

**Welcome** to November at The Spit. Dress warmly and enjoy and revel in winter when it comes.

We kept hanging onto this newsletter, hoping that we would we would hear news of the progress of the City's and the TRCA's "Tommy Thompson Park Core Joint Management Committee". This committee, you'll recall, was mandated in 2021 to come up with a viable long-term management plan for The Spit, and a stable long-term funding model, within the existing Revised Master Plan.

So far, we are now told that public meetings - we won't call them consultations - will occur in 2025. We understand that the TRCA intends to hire a facilitator for these meetings, and, we can only wait till then. In the meantime,

## 1319, and still counting.....

### FACEBOOK GROUP...

That's the number of Spit-loving, public urban wilderness-loving people we have in our Facebook group. If you're not already a member, please do join us as we find that it is a fast and efficient way to communicate concerns and notices within the group.

Why does this matter? Well, because.....

### COMMUNICATION..

Communication with governing bodies is at a new low. We were startled to recently hear a TRCA rep say "the template for citizen participation has changed".

Since the TRCA disbanded the Tommy Thompson Park User Group in October 2020, there has been no new stakeholder group established. Hence, no portal for communications between the TRCA, the City of Toronto, and important stakeholders such as Friends of the Spit. For many years, we had excellent communication, which frequently led to collegial discussions about important Spit issues leading to better outcomes. Unfortunately, now we don't have that.

Given these communication issues, please, if you see something that troubles you out on The Spit, don't hesitate to tell us, but also tell Councillor Fletcher at [councillor\\_fletcher@toronto.ca](mailto:councillor_fletcher@toronto.ca), the TRCA CEO John MacKenzie [john.mackenzie@trca.ca](mailto:john.mackenzie@trca.ca) and the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry, & Recreation's new Director Howie Dayton at [Howie.Dayton@toronto.ca](mailto:Howie.Dayton@toronto.ca)

Vandalism, raves, graffiti, injured animals, construction projects, plantings, dogs, whatever, make your concerns known, and, CC us, please [newsletter@friendsofthespit.ca](mailto:newsletter@friendsofthespit.ca) .

We have found, sadly, that representing 1319 members of a Facebook group, and representing our paid membership of over 1000, doesn't bear the weight it should. Your individual enquiries will get attention, so combined, we are stronger...

### **EXCITEMENT IN THE BUTTERFLY WORLD...**

Our warm, dry autumn, has brought great happiness to Ontario butterfly enthusiasts, particularly at The Spit. On October 31, a Gray Hairstreak was seen and photographed by one of our members out at Pipit Point. This would be a migrant from the south. And, just as we were about to go to press, we heard of two late sightings on November 7: a Summer Azure seen just off the Spine Road opposite Triangle Pond, and a Common Buckeye, seen also at Pipit Point. The former is likely a resident, with a very late brood, while the buckeye could be a recent migrant, or, as it's been a good year for buckeyes in Toronto, might be the offspring of an earlier migrant.



Gray Hairstreak

Photo courtesy of Edward O'Connor

### **ASHBRIDGES BAY LANDFORM PROJECT....**

You'll recall that with six days' notice in June, we were told about the Ashbridges Bay Landform Project. As a result of the short notice, the open house held at The Spit entry building was, to be honest, under-attended. And, it wasn't really communication or consultation, but a series of display boards showing what was intended and allowing the courtesy of comment.

So we reached out recently and asked: had comments been received? and had they been integrated into the designs? The reply we received, from a TRCA representative was:

*"Some comments asked the team to consider features outside the scope and budget of the City's ABL project or features not technically feasible at this time such as headland access, water access, and new trail connections to the east. These comments will be considered as part of the Visitor Experience Plan which will help prioritize future park projects and investments.*

*Some comments also asked the team to considered alternate trail types and expansion of specific restoration types. These comments were considered but ultimately did not align with guiding park implementation documents like the TTP Trails Master Plan and the TTP Natural Area Enhancement Plan, and as a result the design team did not recommend any major shifts in the trail and restoration strategy. A summary of comments will be available online shortly."*

## **THE MOUND:**

For years now, a pile of contaminated soil has sat, fenced off from the public, at the SW corner of the Spit parking lot. And, for years now, we've been asking when it would be dealt with. (This contaminated excavated material came from the pavilion construction, and was unexpectedly left at the Spit, not removed by the Contractor.)

Finally, the mound has been cleared and topped/capped with a layer of topsoil and subsoil. Someday soon you'll be able to go to the top of it and sky watch or birdwatch or butterfly watch. Or just hang out. Thank goodness, action has occurred: we were beginning to think it was a bicentennial project.

## **EAST COVE GROUNDED YACHT**

Over the past year, we are certain many of you have seen, and many of you have commented to us, about the seemingly abandoned yacht in East Cove.

As we understand the information we have received, the way the rules go, as long as someone is living on the boat, it is their home and they can't be removed. Various authorities have been involved. The City and the Marine Unit, Ports Toronto, the TRCA, and the Coast Guard all indicate their hands are tied with regard to the individual living on the boat. There also appears to be jurisdictional confusion as to the waters' "ownership".



photo courtesy of a member

Recently, though, the Coast Guard visited the boat and we have been assured that all noxious substances: gas, oil, sewage, etc., have been removed from the boat. This is good, as the boat is increasingly listing, and we fear that it will soon break up or sink. (Unaddressed was the question about how ongoing sewage would be managed.)

Once the boat becomes truly abandoned, then there are procedures the Coast Guard follows for abandoned vessels. The marine unit has already registered the vessel with the Coast Guard.

## THE DON RIVER'S NEW ROUTE..

Congratulations to all those involved with the mammoth amount of work needed to achieve the new route for the Don River. For those of you haven't been down to the site, it is truly wonderful to see the river in its new configuration that has created the island Ookwemin Minising.

We have noticed that while the press releases and political statements give kudos to the exceptional work of Waterfront Toronto and the commitment and funding levels of the three government, they are unfortunately silent on the role of citizen advocacy.

**Without the citizens** who advocated and who formed the ***Task Force to Bring Back the Don*** and other activists who worked, deputized, and advocated, we doubt that the achievement seen today (and its future evolution) would've been reached.

This is truly a case of a project driven from the ground up, by the citizens. We at Friends of The Spit (FOS) were pleased to play our role in supporting those activists. Through the countless public meetings and planning sessions, FOS continued our support and added our concerns that this project not stop at the Ship Channel but have a viable green connection through to The Spit.

The fact that we all were listened to is a testament to the skills of Waterfront Toronto and then to their persuasive skills in getting the funding, managing the project, and hiring great consultants.

**But make no mistake about it, it was citizen advocacy that started the ball rolling and built up the pressure and the consensus for this solution.**



Looking north, to the meeting of the "new" Don with the "old".. photo by a friend

Much of the focus of the news releases and the politicians' newsletters is on the creation of land for more and more housing (good!). We happily direct attention to the new parks, the river itself, and the new wetlands, all of which go some way to redress the park imbalance in our city. This will go some way to redress the loss of Ashbridges Bay marsh, which was once the most productive 1000-acre wetland on the Great Lakes.

Congratulations again to Bring Back the Don and all those involved in the project !! In this new era of waning consultation, and disregard for citizen involvement, this project is a true example of the importance of engaging citizens. Let it be a valuable lesson regarding future projects.

**Well done to all.**

### **LESLIE LOOKOUT PARK**

As you come down Leslie Street, you'll have noticed the new Leslie Lookout Park, the new park built by CreateTO at the east end of the ship channel.

The park certainly affords great views west down the Ship Channel, and certainly provides a different kind of park experience than The Spit.

Friends of the Spit were consulted about this park and we filed detailed comments. It is a pity [an understatement] that the washroom was axed from the design after the first iteration, and pity [another understatement] that *despite* the plea for Bird-friendly buildings, a fully mirrored door was constructed on the only structure in the park. What a bird-killer! (this flies fully in the face of the City's own regulations!). However, through concerted advocacy, we've now learned that this month the door will be treated to be non-reflective. Hooray!



Leslie Lookout Park: the view!

And the bird-killer mirror finish door

pictures are not a substitute for a park  
Photos by a friend of the Spit

The plantings and greenery are welcome, and it will be interesting to watch them thrive. This brief section of greenery along the west side of Leslie makes you wonder what might've been, and what might've become, had the **Greening of Leslie Street** plans of a decade ago been implemented. The land immediately north of this new park, where the postal facility is located, had originally been zoned parkland !! We at Friends had written letters in support of that zoning and of a park. Imagine if that land had been a park .. what we got instead was a post office building with bird stamp pictures on the side: Whoop Ty Doo !

As this proves, any zoning gains for Parkland can be quickly undone by the whims of city councillors, and repurposed for buildings. Bird photographs on a wall are a poor substitute for habitat for real birds.

### **TRANSPORTATION ITEMS** for which all of our voices need to be raised:

1. Getting the TTC to extend their bus service to the corner of Unwin and Leslie: we keep getting the brush-off from the TTC , saying that this request will be passed to next year's management plan visioning (or something like that).
2. Many of you have commented on the lack of a bus or van to convey those who are seniors or those with motor disability issues out onto The Spit, perhaps to the red bridge like the service used to be up until 2012. Make your voice is known to Councillor

Fletcher, as she had proposed this bus/van service before Covid, but it remains unfunded. We need the current council, led by the councillor, to fund this service.

## **CORMORANT MANAGEMENT 2024**

In 2023, all efforts to manage Double-crested Cormorants at Tommy Thompson Park were abandoned on May 12<sup>th</sup>. The protection of the Spitr's vegetation and other colonial nesting birds were no longer a priority and all of the management resources were diverted to management of the new cormorant colony at Toronto Island Park (TIP).

As you may have heard from media reports, the colony at TIP appears to have started in 2022. Some fears expressed by a few of the island residents were that the colonization by the cormorants might expand to Ward's Island near their homes. The most vocal concerns appear to be from the local yacht club members complaining about the smell of excrement from the birds at this new colony. The TRCA maintains that the colony poses a risk to other species-at-risk at this location.

In early Spring 2024, an artificial cormorant nesting structure was constructed on Peninsula B at The Spit. According to the Toronto Star Oct. 3, 2023 "In the spring the Toronto Region Conservation Authority is hoping to erect scaffolding in Tommy Thompson Park as an alternative roost for the cormorants, to persuade them to stay in the park, instead of checking in at the islands"



Screen grab from the TRCA 2024 Youtube video "Cormorant Update".

The TRCA indicates it plans to further expand this structure prior to the 2025 breeding season!

The Tommy Thompson Park Research Station breeding bird surveys and reports were discontinued after 2023, but we obtained the following information.

When contacted about current cormorant management at TTP, the TRCA provided this update: *"Cormorant management success at Tommy Thompson Park continued in 2024. 90% of the population nested on the ground, with the remaining 10% in trees and on the new cormorant nesting structure. The total nest count was 7,739, with 6,993 on the ground, 596 in trees, and 150 on the nesting structure. Black-crowned Night Herons and Great Egrets were not recorded*

*nesting at the park this year, but they are regularly observed in the wetlands. Both these species are confirmed nesters at Toronto Island Park”.*

Here are the number of cormorant nest sites at both locations for the most recent years.

	<b>Tommy Thompson Park (TTP)</b>	<b>Toronto Island Park (TIP)</b>
<b>2021</b>	10,737	?
<b>2022</b>	8,860	1,667
<b>2023</b>	10,841	902
<b>2024</b>	7,739	1,267

The lower number of nests at TPI in 2023 vs 2022 and was attributed to active cormorant management. The higher number in 2023 vs 2022 at TTP were attributed to the lack of active cormorant management. The numbers increased at TPI in 2024 as management area was restricted due to the presence of a Bald Eagle nest which required a buffer zone of 100m. There is an overall drop in total numbers (TTP and TIP combined) for 2024, which the TRCA attributes to their belief that “carrying capacity” has been reached.

Wildlife management activities designed to maintain a natural area in its current (desirable?) state are often doomed to failure. Evolution of a natural area is a constant and ongoing process. This means that over time, species that breed in an area at one point in its natural evolution will no longer find it attractive and give way to new and different species which find the newly evolved ecosystem meets their needs.

Witness Toronto’s first successful Bald Eagle nest this past season in the midst of the Islands’ cormorant colony. Nature continues to succeed despite the best efforts of people to control it.

The politics and distraction of attempting to manage the new cormorant colony at Toronto Island Park may just be what The Spit needs and what Friends of the Spit have long advocated for The Spit... **“Let it Be”.**

**MORE NON-COMMUNICATION**..... just as we were going to press.

Were you aware that City Parks was conducting a [Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan and Parkland Strategy 5-Year Refresh Community Survey ??????](#) with the survey due by December 18<sup>th</sup>? We didn’t: thanks to a good friend who informed us just as we went to press with this. Whew!.

Wow... where was the publicity?, yet the results and subsequent actions could have major effects on our parks, including the Spit? Why we weren’t notified?

Please visit this link below, and do the survey.. you’ll have to go through a lot of blather BUT when you get to the **Ideas and Inspirations** page, PLEASE type in how much you love The Spit, and why! <https://cotsurvey.chkmkt.com/?e=416688&d=l&h=66D856CDC3F0CD6&l=en>

Best Wishes for a great Holiday Season and Winter at The Spit!

We’ll be in touch with you with as much notice as possible, before the promised 2025 Public Meetings.