

Friends of the Spit

P.O. Box 51518
2140A Queen Street East
Toronto ON M4E 3V7

info@friendsofthespit.ca
www.friendsofthespit.ca



Spring 2025 Newsletter

Welcome to Spring at The Spit.

Where else in our city would you rather spend time?

Nature is awakening after the long winter of snow, migratory birds are starting to appear in numbers, amphibians are awakening, and the roads are clear for hiking, walking and cycling. The best place in Toronto to get away from it all !



One harbinger of Spring.....

That mound.....

You've probably noticed, for years now, the fenced-off mound to the southwest of the parking lot, and you've also noticed that we've commented on it in nearly every newsletter. The mound was created from polluted and compromised soils dug up from the entrance pavilion project, contaminated soils which were not taken off site! So, remediation had to take place, and we are happy to know that the TRCA spokesperson has told us that once the plantings on the mound have taken hold, then the fence will be removed, and once again the mound will become part of the Baselands. Hooray!!!

That parking lot.....

Once again, expect a wet and muddy potholed parking lot, that is until either permanent rectifications are made, or temporary repairs take place. We were asked if this was an ephemeral wetland project of the TRCA's, but we don't think so. We believe that amphibians and reptiles are well looked after at other areas of The Spit, and there's no need for this parking lot to be an unmaintained ephemeral wetland.

That Visitor Experience Plan.....

All we can tell you at the moment is that we believe that public consultations will be taking place in the Fall, but we aren't holding our breath. Another year going by, continuing the lack of communication by the TRCA with Friends of the Spit and other stakeholder groups!

The City and the TRCA are now well into **year 4 of a 3-year** study to determine how all the responsibilities for The Spit will be handled, with stable and appropriate funding, once the park is open full-time. (That will occur, we believe, when the remaining portions of land are turned over to the TRCA and City.) You've read about this "Visitor Experience Plan" in past newsletters. We will let you know with as much advance warning as possible, when the public consultations will be scheduled.

A senior TRCA spokesperson has told us that an RFP will be out for bids soon, and provided that those bids are within budget, a consultant team will be engaged to lead the work for the *Visitor Experience Plan Engagement Strategy*! They anticipate that the public consultations will be held in the Fall.

We certainly hope that we are given much more notice for the consultations than we received for the Ashbridge's Bay Landform Project Consultations (which was a full 6 days' notice).

That Strada Lane.....

The Leslie Lookout Park, located on Leslie Street, north of The Spit, at the head of the Ship Channel, was opened last year. The park was built immediately to the north of Strada Lane, a pre-existing industrial driveway. Strada Lane sees a constant flow of dump trucks coming south on Leslie, and turning in, and, conversely, a constant stream of trucks leaving and turning north headed up Leslie. Somewhere, someone thought it might be a great idea if this danger were removed, by relocating this entry lane to Unwin Avenue.

Talk about making an already bad situation absolutely worse! We are opposed to relocating the entry lane to Unwin because it will add further danger to pedestrians and cyclists – many who are Spit users - as big trucks around that corner of Leslie and Unwin and head west, and again, on their return journey heading east, then turning left and heading north up Leslie.

We have been assured by the folks at CreateTO that there will be consultations on this proposed change. To that end, we have already logged our objections with Councillor Fletcher's office, and we ask that if you are so inclined, please contact Councillor Fletcher to let her know that you agree that relocating the entry doesn't solve the problem, it only makes it worse.

We think the best way to phrase it is: "let's not make a bad situation much worse".

That Ashbridge's Bay Landform Project.....

We thought we had good news about the opening date for the new acreage adjoining The Spit ... we know that the trail bed is already being prepared, so thought that might mean an opening this summer BUT a senior TRCA rep has stated that the land won't be open for public access and the trails ready for pedestrian use until Summer **2026** ! (This large landform project is primarily for the Ashbridge's Bay Treatment Plant use and also to keep the Ashbridge's Bay harbour mouth from silting in, but, as part of the project, The Spit gains land.)

Those sound cannons...

You've probably heard them: they are being fired at the TTC's Leslie Barns building to try to deter Ring-billed Gulls from nesting. According to TorontoToday.ca, "*Health and safety concerns are apparently posed by the seagulls [sic]. The TTC says the sound cannons may sound like distant fireworks and the tool will be used at random for a maximum of 4 times per hour daily starting from 30 minutes before sunrise until 7 PM. These measures are expected to be in place from March to June*".

That wonderful green roof just proved to be a wonderfully attractive nesting area. Design great habitat, and they will come! (but probably, the designers weren't thinking Ring-billed Gulls). At times, you wonder what it's like for urban wildlife in this city.

That deteriorating Hearn plant.....

Heralded by many as an iconic structure, the Hearn power generation plant was stripped of its equipment, and for many years has been derelict and deteriorating. Now the owner/proponent has put forward a plan for a multi high-rise tower development of the site: that plan is currently being evaluated by city planners. Here is the description that is on the City of Toronto Planning and Development Application Information Centre portal for 440 Unwin Avenue, Application Number:24253487STE14OZ :

Official Plan Amendment proposing redevelopment of the Hearn Power Generating Station. The site is subject to the Port Lands Area Specific Policies of the City's Central Waterfront Secondary Plan, which envisions the Hearn as a catalytic destination for cultural, sport, entertainment, recreational and institutional uses within a revitalized iconic heritage building. The Hearn is surrounded by power generation and distribution infrastructure, port and heavy industrial uses and natural areas. Residential uses are not currently permitted. The application proposes 739,567 square metres of Gross Floor Area (GFA) including adaptive reuse of the existing power station building and development of seven new buildings with tower elements across the site. A mix of retail, commercial and other non-residential uses are proposed, together with 8,400 residential units and 2,522 vehicle parking spaces."

Good grief: 7 new buildings!!! 19 towers in total arising from these buildings and the Hearn! A proposal that demands land south of Unwin for some of the towers, thus reducing the green connection east-west to a sliver of land! 2522 parking spaces! 8400 residential units! Almost ¾'s of a million square metres of space! (For those metrically challenged, that's just shy of 8 Million Square Feet!!) Rest assured, we soon will be filing our concerns with the City!

Residential uses are currently not permitted. The site is unserved by utilities, unserved by transit, and poorly serviced by any type of road connection. The easterly neighbour is a power plant! We trust the city planners will frame their commentary well.

Friends of The Spit have participated in Portlands planning studies since the '90s on and we've consistently advocated for all land south of the Ship Channel, where the Hearn is located, to be green space, of one designation or another. The lands closer to The Spit would be urban wilderness designation, the lands as one progressed west could be more conventional parkland, and eventually this green space would link to the new Ookwemin Minising project of the Don River Greenway. It is crucial that a green connection -as wide as possible -as green as possible - be made to link The Spit to the Don Valley. Here's part of our presentation from **MAY 2012 !**



"PARKLAND IN THE PORT LANDS": This map has been prepared using the Port Lands Acceleration Initiative mapping in order to illustrate the parkland imperative for all lands south of the Ship Channel.

Friends of the Spit



Sadly, avian flu has hit The Spit.....

Two snowy owls, observed in December at The Spit, were found dead there in January, and their carcasses tested positive for avian flu. The assumption is that the owls preyed upon ducks, and as ducks are the most susceptible to avian flu (according to published data), the transmission occurred. Sadly, another dead snowy owl was found a few weeks ago. We don't know the test results for that bird. Avian flu protocols are on the City of Toronto website, and please do take extraordinary care when you see dead birds.

That police sniper training exercise on The Spit.....

In late November last year, two volunteers who census Spit birds and wildlife were turned back by the Toronto Police force, and were told sniper training was underway and they could not proceed.

Naturally, we were very upset and wrote the Chair of the Police Services Board to express our complaints. Our letter noted our two main objections: there had been no communication with the TRCA, and City Parks & Recreation also had said they had not been consulted either. We stated that if an event such as this has to occur, there must be complete communication so that no visitor (or staff for that matter) is ever put in harm's way.

Secondly, and the more important issue, we stated that The Spit is **not** the venue for this type of activity... Too many people still view The Spit as a leftover land and do not accord it its proper significance as Toronto's pre-eminent park. There are other areas, notably, Camp Borden or other firing ranges where police activities like this can take place. The Spit must be recognized and protected... both the human and the natural world's inhabitants! In addition to the real

danger to people, who, if encountered, could be asked to leave, there is complete danger to wildlife: animals and plants are always on the Spit!

In late February, we received a very considered response from a Detective Sergeant in the Public Safety Command- Specialized Operations Command , who acknowledged the training exercise for “highly dynamic situations involving extreme risk”, and detailed the communications and precautions they had taken. However, they went on to apologize for their lack of communication with the TRCA and indicated that that would be rectified. Alas, no mention was made of not using The Spit in the future.

We posted this response on our Facebook page as we had promised to get back to members, and then we were gratified to see that news outlets picked up on the story. The outlets – the Toronto Star and TorontoToday.ca -gave extensive coverage to this, and repeated our statements that The Spit is **not** the place for this type of activity.

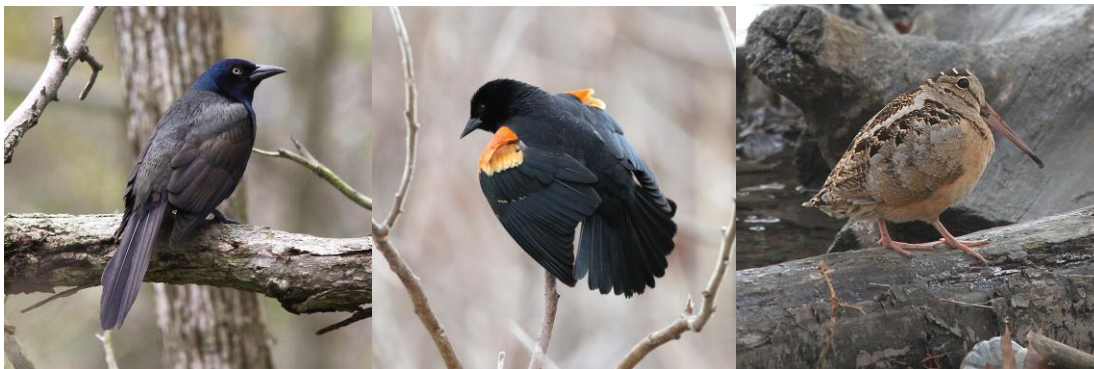
We appreciate the work the Police do, but in this case, we truly hope that the attention to this issue makes it clear to the Police Services Board that The Spit must be off-limits for training exercises – that The Spit is a true wilderness, not vacant land.

Dates to remember:

The sailors are, under the terms of the Master Plan, allowed some private automobile access weekends in the Spring to put their yachts in the water. This year the weekends will be the Saturdays and Sundays of April 12 and 13, 19 and 20, and 26 and 27. If you see any negligent driving , report it immediately to the TRCA, 416 661 6600, please!

Also, we are informed that there will be charity runs on the following dates: Friday May 9, 2 to 8 pm; [ed note: did no one think it might be problematic to schedule a run at peak Spring bird migration?] and Sunday June 22, 7 am to 1 pm. The organizers are obligated to pick up all trash etc., and are prohibited from playing music. Again, if you witness any negligent behaviour, report it immediately to the TRCA, 416 661-6600 please!

And on that note, spring is here and nothing is better to clear the head of all the bad-news-cycles of the day, than meandering, walking, hiking, jogging, running, or cycling on The Spit.



And three more harbingers of Spring...