

Friends of the Spit

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NEWSLETTER

JULY 2011

As an Editorial #1:

Friends welcomes the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation to its management role at the Spit, and looks forward to Parks becoming a strong advocate of public urban wilderness, equal to or greater than the TRCA's advocacy. From Parks' perspective, it must be exciting to assume management control of the largest park in Toronto, the most exciting and diverse park, one with a completely different mandate than the other parks in the city. This will also mean that Parks will have to adapt, to change, and to recognize different strategies of management for the unique place that is the Spit. That's why Friends will continue to be involved and to provide advice to Parks in this time of transition.

As an Editorial #2:

We believe that we can officially call Lake Ontario Park dead. Nary a word is heard from WaterfrontToronto. Once again, months and months of citizen involvement, consultants' time, and energy and effort by all involved have come crashing down on the realities of an unbuildable scheme and an unbelievable budget. Friends of the Spit have always stated that, in the case of the Spit, less action and less expenditure equal more enjoyment, as the land and its succession continue to develop the Spit in nature's way. To recognize that the wet woods and the Baselands right now provide the best birding opportunities in Toronto, bar none, is to recognize what the Lake Ontario Park consultants did not. So, for the time being, the Baselands are safe: that is, until another generation comes along with "bright new ideas" for the space and then, there will be another round of public meetings... and another round of reports...

For 33 years now, Friends have fought long and hard for a Public Urban Wilderness. That struggle continues...

Transition...

In accord with the 1972 memorandum agreement between the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the former Metropolitan Toronto, once TRCA has prepared and implemented master plan work, the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation Department is obligated to maintain the land for park, recreation, and conservation purposes, with the necessary administration and supervisory accommodation as required.

The transition of the Leslie Street Spit through to Parks, Forestry and Recreation for management occurred on July 1st, 2011. This transition occurred without the need for the TRCA Board's assent: the Joint Management Plan was simply received by the TRCA Board.

The Joint Management Plan states that the TRCA remains in control of the conservation items, the interpretive items, the terrestrial and aquatic habitats, and the park field staff; while the City will handle such things such as nuisance wildlife, park facility and structural maintenance, emergency items, 311 items, the enforcement of the City of Toronto Parks bylaws, and will handle the license agreements with the Aquatic Park Sailing Club.

We had always known that this memorandum would be instituted at some point: however, Friends of Spit were quite startled when the news was presented with its accelerated handover date, at the Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee meeting in March.

Given the current climate in the city, which is not favourable to citizen advisory groups, we were nonetheless disheartened to know that Parks, Forestry and Recreation did not see a need for the continuance of the Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee. That initial decision has been rescinded, and there now appears that there will be a park user group which will meet two times a year!! (Edit Note: our emphasis). The previous Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee met at least four times, if not more, a year, and was able to offer advice in a concrete and helpful manner.

While the Spit's borders appear relatively secure, we are concerned that the entire nature of the Spit could be altered by seemingly minor management decisions. For instance, who wants garbage containers placed every 100 metres like the awful gigantic half-domes at Sam Smith Park? No one wants intrusive signage: but a risk manager's aversion to risk may try to overrule the "public urban wilderness" concept at Tommy Thompson Park. These are speculative items, but at any time of transition, worthy of attention and concern. We will monitor this closely and certainly will be ready to involve the membership in a campaign should it appear that the basic principles of the Tommy Thompson Park Urban Wilderness are being disregarded.

Stop Press: !! Infrastructure Projects Finally Receive Building Permit! [mid July 2011]

At the recent Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee meeting, members were told that the infrastructure projects had been sent to the City for review for the issuance of a building permit, and, that in July, the projects would be put out for competitive tender. According to the TRCA, final completion of the staff booth, environmental shelter, and the ecological resource station will be by March 31st, 2012. Finally!!!!!!!!!!!!

The TRCA's own forces will begin the front entry clean-up and parking lot redesign in July.

All of these projects were extensively profiled in the double-fold-out newsletter issue of April, 2010, which, if you've lost your copy or misplaced it, can be seen at www.friendsofthespit.ca - just click on "Newsletter"!

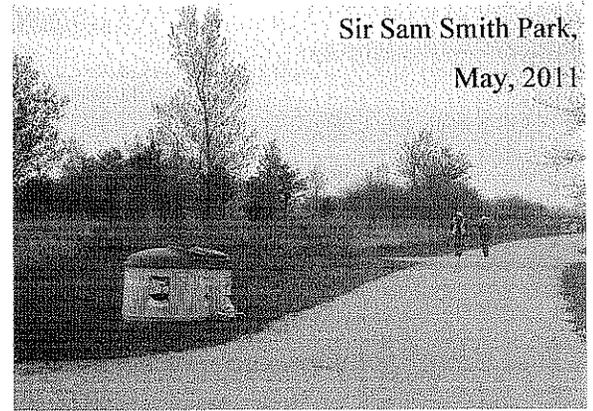


Carp Exclusion Gate:

Taken in May 2011, this picture shows a large group of Common Carp in Cell 2, prevented from entering Cell 1. The fish gate is designed so that the bar spacing permits our largest native fish (Northern Pike) to pass

through, but prevents the larger invasive carp from entering. Common Carp are excluded because of the significant damage they do to a wetland ecosystem.

[Thanks to TRCA for the photo and background information!]



Sir Sam Smith Park,

May, 2011

Not Wanted on the Spit- Garbage Containers Every 100 yards!!

Park Shuttle Van:

In the transition agreement, the City has clearly stated that they have no desire to provide a park shuttle van service. This is highly regrettable: Friends of the Spit has voiced their disapproval of this decision. We believe that a shuttle is a very low-key, barely intrusive way to take the elderly, children, and those with some minor disabilities well out on the Spit so that they can enjoy the peace and solitude offered there. The shuttle of course, also provides a necessary service by transporting sailing club members to their club, thus relieving the demand for private automobile traffic to the sailing club.

2011 Renewal: After last year's free membership, we ask that you fill out the enclosed renewal slip and mail it in. We are an all-volunteer organization and the minimal membership fees go straight to advocacy mailings, and our website. Continue to be a part of Public Urban Wilderness advocacy – renew today! THANK YOU!

Principles of a Public Urban Wilderness

At a recent Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee meeting, Friends of the Spit advanced a set of principles which we thought was important for Tommy Thompson Park. Key to the list of principles and aims is the Conservation Authority's decision that all decisions related to the park should be viewed through the lens of the "Urban Wilderness" definition. The list of principles listed below has been accepted by the TRCA.

Tommy Thompson Park as an "Urban Wilderness Park"

All Decisions related to Tommy Thompson Park will be evaluated through the lens of Urban Wilderness

Principles

- Ensure that all activities that take place within the Park will not have a negative impact;
- Prohibit private vehicle access to the park;
- Ensure free admission to the Park;
- Ensure natural succession will continue: "Let it Be";
- Ensure human influence on the Park is light-handed;
- Ensure minimal signage;
- Provide only minimal amenities;
- Ensure visitor experiences at the Park are unscripted, "organic";
- Ensure wildlife living in the Park is unscripted;
- Focus on passive park uses;
- Proclaim a "wilderness" attitude towards garbage collection: what you carry in to the Park is carried out with you. [Garbage receptacles will be provided at the Staff Booth and Front Entrance.];
- Ensure appropriate management takes place at the Park to protect habitat and species.