

Friends of the Spit

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

info@friendsofthespit.ca
http://www.friendsofthespit.ca

In this newsletter...

- Thanks for all your support in opposition to Wind Turbines on The Spit
- OFFICIAL OPENING OF STRUCTURES!
- Airport expansion???????

NEWSLETTER

November 2013

As an Editorial #1 • Thank you

Thanks - tremendous thanks – to all who emailed and called to register their support for Friends of the Spit and their opposition to the contemplated wind turbines on the Leslie Street Spit. The July 30, 2013 Toronto Star Business Section article which further documented a developer's loosey-goosey proposal for turbines on the Spit roused us all. Mercifully, there has been no further action: nevertheless, thank you all for your support! Our membership and the general public want the Spit as a Public Urban Wilderness, unsullied.

As an Editorial #2 •

The Island Airport

In the 36 years of our existence, the tenet of our arguments to keep the entire Leslie Street Spit and Baselands free from development was that the Spit and Baselands had to be viewed in the overall context of the Toronto Waterfront. The Spit was one special place, totally different from Ontario Place, the Toronto Islands, or the Inner Harbour.

Throughout the years we've taken the long view and participated in all Portlands and Waterfront planning exercises. Given the tremendous progress that Waterfront Toronto has made with planning and implementing first phases of work at the harbour and at the Portlands, it makes absolutely no sense to abrogate the airport's existing tripartite agreement to allow the use of jets (and hence an increase in air traffic) at the Toronto Island Airport (aka Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport). Friends of the Spit has gone on record as saying the existing tripartite agreement must be respected and that there should be NO jets at the airport.

Official Opening of the Spit Infrastructure Buildings!!

On Saturday May 11th, the staff booth, the underground environmental shelter, and the environmental research building (aka Bird-Banding Shelter) were officially opened by assembled dignitaries representing all levels of Government, the TRCA, and Waterfront Toronto. The federal government had allocated \$8 million for the environmental work and the infrastructure. The funding was administered by Waterfront Toronto (a partnership of the city, province and feds) and spent by the TRCA.

Ralph Toninger of the TRCA emceed the event, and Brian Denney, CAO of the TRCA spoke on their behalf. The Federal Government was represented by John Carmichael on behalf of Minister Flaherty, Glen Murray represented the Province, and Mark Wilson represented Waterfront Toronto. Our ward Councillor Paula Fletcher represented the City. All lauded the Spit and all remarked how wonderful it was and what a pleasure it was to be opening the modest structures. Many speakers mentioned Friends of the Spit, and, in particular, Mark Wilson, Board Chair of Waterfront Toronto, gave a great-shout out and thanks to all the members of Friends of the Spit. Our local Councillor Paula Fletcher hit the nail on the head when she noted that this great wilderness came about as a result of public participation and consultation and she went on to say "Friends of the Spit: don't mess with them because they are the guardians of this great park..." "always on-guard!"



Opening Ceremony: L to R: Ralph Toninger, TRCA; Brian Denney, CAO, TRCA; Mark Wilson, Chair, Waterfront Toronto; Paula Fletcher, Councillor; Glen Murray MPP, Minister of Infrastructure; John Carmichael, MP, Don Valley West.

The ribbons were cut, and the buildings were officially opened. We state officially opened as it was not until September when the washrooms in the underground shelter were available for use, and the staff booth itself will be ready for public use by December (Staff are already using it).

Continued on page 2.....

Continued From Page 1

Nevertheless, moving forward: the opening of the buildings is important in itself, but more important still is the recognition by all levels of Government of the value of the Spit, and recognition of its importance as a Public Urban Wilderness on the Waterfront. They all recognize the citizen participation of you, our members, and what it has brought to the process. Our Steering Committee gives our thanks to you, our committed membership! THANK YOU.

Urban Fishing

As this newsletter goes to press, there has been a public meeting regarding an Urban Recreational Fisheries Plan for the Greater Toronto Region. The participants are the Ministry of Natural Resources and four conservation authorities: Toronto, Credit Valley, Central Lake Ontario, and Ganaraska.

As you might expect, the Leslie Street Spit figures strongly into this: much to our horror, and amazement, neither Friends of the Spit nor members of the Tommy Thompson Park User Group were invited to the preliminary GTA Recreational Fishing Summit Toronto meeting! Only from our sources and contacts in other groups did we find out about this omission. Currently, we are participating and trying to make our voices known in this process.

Friends of the Spit have not yet formulated a position and would welcome your input. Please email us through our website and we will take your views into account.

Issues raised within our steering committee are protection of fish spawning grounds from fishing; ensuring that fishers do not disturb important habitats on the Spit or disturb breeding bird colonies, that there be a public information campaign about litter: whatever you take in, you pack back out; and essentially, maintaining the public urban wilderness.

Aerobiologists on the Spit

In late July of this year, a small meeting of North American academic aerobiologists took a trip onto the Spit to collect some air samples for pollen and fungal spores. They noted that the Spit was ideal for this because of the prevalence of ruderal species and the availability of an exhaustive list of flora and fauna (thanks in part to their friend Verna Higgins). [Professor Higgins compiled the Plant Communities of the Leslie Street Spit (1992) (along with Susan Denzel and Nancy Fazari.) The Spit truly is something to everybody!

Wind Turbines at the Spit Continued

You'll recall that our May 2013 newsletter indicated a *Stop the Press* item regarding an anonymous tip we received that a for-profit wind turbine farm proponent was proposing the Leslie Street Spit as a home for their commercial wind turbines project. We researched this further and notified the Conservation Authority.

The Conservation Authority wrote, on May 22nd, to the proponent and outlined the importance of the park and stated categorically that...“A wind farm is not appropriate at this site. You should discontinue any further reference to this proposal as a possible project”. This would have seemed to have ended it, but an enterprising Toronto Star reporter noted the story in Business and Careers on July 30th, in an article titled Leslie Spit Plan Seen As Ill Wind.

It must have been a slow news day as the writer went on to comment that the proponent had little public profile with no phone number or address beyond “Mississauga”, and that the proponent did not respond to messages left! It was interesting to us that the article appeared in The Star because our newsletter had been quite specific in avoiding using the name of the proponent! So once again we became nervous as The Star reporter would have received this information from another source. Why?

Friends of the Spit was besieged immediately by media requests for comment and, most gratifyingly, received a great groundswell of support from members, friends, and allied groups: all expressing their opposition to the turbines, and all wanting to be notified and instructed as to how to protest.

We at Friends believe we shouldn't fire our cannons too early and acknowledged, with thanks, everyone's support but felt that until the proponent attempted to advance further, that a waiting game was and is the plan. To date, there has been no further hint of the proponent attempting to proceed.

It boggles our mind that someone just picks a piece of land for their project, irrespective of use or ownership, and cloaks it in a “green mantle”, just to achieve their end.

Cell 2 Habitat Creation

Cell 2 has now reached its capacity for accepting dredged material from the Keating Channel and Lower Don. Continuing on with the Master Plan, and similar to Cell 1, this 9.3 hectare basin will be transformed into a coastal marsh wetland through a five-year project beginning in early 2014. The TRCA will cap the cell to isolate any contaminate sediments and then construct a series of marsh and wetland habitats. The TRCA hope to improve habitat for northern pike, bass, walleye, and provide tern nesting islands and reptile and amphibian nesting areas. The recreational aims include nature watching, hiking trails and fishing nodes. The partners in the project are the TRCA, the City of Toronto, and The Port Authority. The funding partners include Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Coca-Cola Ltd.

Concern was expressed about the involvement of Coca-Cola but members of the Tommy Thompson Park User Group were assured empathetically by the TRCA that this was simply a generous donation with no “strings” or encumbrances attached.

“Along the Shore”

Received: Along the Shore, Rediscovering Toronto's Waterfront Heritage by M. Jane Fairburn. This new book looks at the history of the Toronto shore and its waterfront. Filled with interesting pictures and commentary, the author relates stories, events, and addresses the mythology and pull of our waterfront. The Spit gets a fine mention, and the write-up is accompanied by a photo of a Northern Saw-whet Owl by one of our photographer members. We particularly liked the quote that the author, Jane Fairburn, has used from Christopher Hume, who described the Spit's evolution as “a dump gone wild, an accidental nature preserve, partly industrial, partly natural, but above all, a huge civic asset.”

Greening of Leslie Street:

As anyone who has been near Lakeshore and Leslie knows, the construction for the “Leslie Barns” continues and the disruption continues. As we noted in May, should you find that signage is lacking or that temporary routes are inadequate or unsafe, contact the TTC directly at lesliebarns@ttc.ca, and cc us, to express your concerns.

Still no word about the Public Art competition for Leslie Street.....



Cyclist and airplane, 2013

Poison Ivy on the Spit:

Poison ivy is a fact of life in any wilderness, and there is indeed some at the Spit, particularly in the Baselands. Do watch carefully and note its characteristic glossy three-leaved nature, and give it a wide berth: stay on the trails!

Speed bumps on the Spine Road

By now, we're sure you've noticed that the speed bumps on the southern section of the Spine Road have been replaced with "gentler" elongated bumps. This change was made to assist the recreational cyclist, while still deterring high-speed racing (which had been occurring on the Spit). Please let us know if you think these bumps are adequate and/or satisfactory.

Public Consultation on the Use of Jets at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport

Unless you've been out of the country, it would be hard to miss the furor and controversy over Porter Airlines' request to permit jet airplanes at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport. The proponent's request has sent the City into overdrive: reports, studies and a series of public meetings and workshops held in September.

Your Friends of the Spit representatives attended two of the three public meetings and noted the strong opposition to the proposal to expand the airport to include jet aircraft, and noted also the chaotic nature of the meetings and, at times, the lack of preparation.

The third meeting held at the Direct Energy Centre, for example, was split into two rooms; the second "overflow" room did not have a direct visual feed: only an audio feed from the other room. It was also curious, that for that meeting, the Port Authority sent no official representative: The panel of experts did not have a Port Authority presence!

Currently, the use of the airport is governed by a tripartite agreement reached between the City, Federal Government, and the Port Authority. That agreement stipulated that no jets were to use the airport (unless a medical emergency).

Since 2007, commercial air traffic has increased exponentially, and the proponent has now applied for the right to use jet airplanes and, correspondingly, because of the jet airplanes, the right to expand the runways 200 metres east and 200 metres west.

Friends of the Spit have gone on record as opposing a change in the tripartite agreement since any increase in traffic and noise will detrimentally affect the experience at the Spit and reduce Spit user's enjoyment. On a larger scale, the success of the planned Portlands' development, and the use of the Inner Harbour, are both jeopardized by increased air traffic with its attendant noise and pollution.

In general, we believe that our waterfront is the entire city's asset and should be developed in a different manner from the airport "vision": it should be developed in a manner that benefits the greatest number of citizens by providing great recreational opportunities, living opportunities and workplace opportunities. Friends of the Spit have supported the No Jets TO position. If you wish to support them, go to nojetsto.ca and sign the petition!!

Manicuring at the Spit



"Mown" wilderness:
aaack!

Throughout the summer, Friends have been advocating that Parks and the TRCA not manicure or mow any portions of the Spit: with some success, and some other failures. Notable was an area mowed near the Underground Environmental Shelter: mowed so that it would be planted as butterfly habitat! (See photo) Frankly, with all the nectaring plants out on the Spit, the entire Spit is fine butterfly habitat! Quoted from the TRCA: "This is a wildflower planting area...The area was mowed to allow for the children to plant and will help increase the diversity of native plants around Cell 1". We thought the area was doing just fine without the mowing!

Friends of the Spit believe that these set-aside specific land uses are valuable, perhaps, in downtown or neighbourhood parks, but as the entire Spit is designated as a public wilderness, these specific initiatives should fall by the wayside in lieu of the larger picture. In other words, no need to mow, prune, or trim: it's a wilderness! (Plus, maintenance budgets are reduced!)

Who to call:

- In an emergency, dial 911.
- For maintenance items, vandalism reports, absentee staff from control booths, etc., call 311.
- For dogs on the Spit, call 311. On the information board, the number of the attendant at the staff booth will be listed: also call it if you see dogs in the park.
- For questions not as urgent or pressing, send us an email at info@friendsofthespit.ca. We will respond as quickly as we can to your email and, if necessary, send it on to the TRCA and to the City of Toronto, anonymously, so that they might have your comments.
- Finally if you do feel that you wish to comment directly to the TRCA, we suggest that you contact the CAO, Brian Denney, at 416-661-6600 ext. 6290 or bdenney@trca.on.ca. Mr. Denney cut his teeth on the Spit with the Waterfront Board of the MTRCA and has risen through the ranks to now run the TRCA. Brian's heart is still with the Spit, and he will direct your concern to the staffer best suited to handle that enquiry. We're sure he would like the feedback of your perception of what is happening at and on the Spit!

TOMMY THOMPSON PARK URBAN WILDERNESS PRINCIPLES

- All actions must be in accord with the Tommy Thompson Park Revised Master Plan, 1992;
- Park activities do not have an overall negative impact on the natural resources, and passive recreational activities are the focus;
- Ecological communities are formed through natural succession with strategic habitat enhancements;
- Appropriate adaptive management takes place to ensure habitat and species protection, while minimizing human disturbance;
- General visitor experiences are natural and self-guided;
- Signage and amenities are minimal;
- What you carry in with you is also carried back out (garbage/recycling receptacles may be located at the Front Entrance, Staff Booth and Ecological Research Station);
- Unauthorized private motor vehicle access is prohibited;
- Pets are prohibited; and
- Admission is free.



Unauthorized access!!! (Sept. 2013)

Embayment D and the Berm: Follow-ups:

In our May newsletter you'll recall that Friends of the Spit are urging that a trail be constructed on a new Berm at Embayment D. This trail would obviously be seasonal and closed during the colonial waterbirds' nesting season. We notice already that many people are availing themselves of the berm connection to Embayment D and of the wonderful views to downtown. Our most recent response from the TRCA about this was "however, we understand that there is a stronger desire to venture into this area than the forested net lanes on Peninsula D. We will continue to monitor this situation and *adaptively manage as necessary.*" [Italics ours] We assume this means possibly...!!

Mink predation of common tern nesting:

Unfortunately, as in 2012, the common tern nesting success was zero due to predation of the nests and young by the mink on the Spit. As a result of this, the TRCA promises a complete review of the nesting platforms and their suitability, now that mink are on the Spit to stay.

Ashbridge's Bay Erosion and Sediment Control Class EA

Friends of the Spit have been ably represented at the two meetings of the Community Liaison Committee for the Class EA. This Environmental Assessment is a continuation of two previous assessments which were greater in scope and, ultimately, both were abandoned due to the estimated high construction cost of the project.

Currently under consideration are three alternative configurations of either two or three breakwaters, to create landforms that will reduce the necessity to continually dredge Coatsworth Cut.

None of the three options will impact any other initiatives (e.g. sewage plant expansion). At this time, we identify no adverse risk to The Spit!!



A 2013 Toronto Monarch

Monarchs at the Spit:

Consistent with observations throughout Ontario, Monarch numbers were low at the Spit this year. Reports that their Mexican wintering numbers were down by 80% sound alarm bells.