

Friends of the Spit

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Inside:
- Politics, parkland
and (Portland) cement
- Report on Advisory
Committee work

Walk on the Spit Saturday July 17

Toronto Field Naturalists walks on the Spit are a good way to learn about its wildlife. Anyone is welcome to join.

Time: 10 am Place: Meet at the foot of Leslie Street

Bring lunch and water. Dress for the weather (including a hat and sunscreen), and don't forget your binoculars.

This all-day walk, led by Ann Gray, will focus on birds and butterflies.

For more information: (416) 593-2656, or www.sources.com/tfn

NEWSLETTER

Spring-Summer 2004

AS AN EDITORIAL

Without subscribing to conspiracy theories, we wonder whether all that dithering about the Portlands is not a deferring strategy, by all levels of government, to reserve the area for the next great undertaking that will confer "world-classness" to Toronto (World Fair, Olympics in 2028, International Tiddly-Winks Championship, etc...)

The community has worked long and hard to nurture the idea of a large, continuous area of greenspace between Leslie and Cherry Streets, south of the Ship Channel. Many are now expressing their frustrations about what they view as planned inaction. Toronto could have an iconic park there, for generations to cherish and enjoy.

Why can't Toronto just be itself? Why can't it celebrate, enhance, and delight in the great things it possesses — including a unique Public Urban Wilderness?

Our leaders should remember that glory is transitory and soon forgotten, but that parkland is for ever, and is the best monument one can have.

Another year...

First, thank you to the many Friends who have renewed for 2004 before being reminded. This is much appreciated.

If you have not renewed for the current year, a Renewal Slip is enclosed. Your prompt renewal is always welcome.

If you have renewed, you will find "REN/04" on your mailing label. Non-members who are mailed a Newsletter for information, will see "COMP" on their label.

Another day, another politician, another grand plan...

Will Dennis Mills "Save Our Waterfront"?

In April, Dennis Mills, MP for Toronto-Danforth, issued sweeping recommendations for the Toronto waterfront and, recently, announced a federal "gift" of \$125 million. These largesses — if they materialize — have mixed repercussions for the Spit, the Baselands, and the area in the Portlands that many want preserved as greenspace.

We met with Mr. Mills in February, to discuss Friends of the Spit's vision for the area. Surprisingly (for some), our broad vision is similar: parkland and greenspace for a range of recreation activities, as well as the need to protect the area from sole dependency on city zoning, which can eradicate parkland with one stroke of the pen (remember the close call when a golf driving range came within a hair of being built on the Baselands!)

However, we part company on the implementation. In particular, giving the Toronto Port Authority — a "gift" from Mr. Mills, for which we are NOT grateful — a large role, and

(Article continues over)

Concrete operations to abut the Spit Baselands

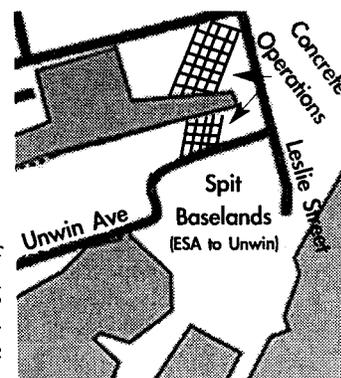
Another example of piecemeal planning

The Planning Department recently held a meeting regarding an application to change the permitted uses under the zoning to allow several concrete companies to move onto land on both sides of the Ship Channel (see map). This has shocked and angered the community.

Friends of the Spit is among them. We believe that this application should be deferred until certain basic planning issues are resolved:

- There must first be a precinct plan in place. Typically a precinct plan must be in place prior to a zoning change. Why was the normal procedure by-passed?
- The lands between the Ship Channel and Unwin Ave. affect the Spit Baselands directly. A green buffer must be provided for the Spit and the Baselands.
- Noise and dust will have an immediate impact on users of the Spit and of the recreational trail as well as on the natural habitat of the Spit.
- These lands are biologically part of the lands south of Unwin Avenue designated as Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) by the TRCA. It is essential that the TRCA be consulted.
- The Leslie Street green corridor must be preserved.

"We continue to believe that green space designations as far north as the south side of the ship channel are the most desirable. It is time for the City to take the lead, defer this item, and prepare an overall master plan before proceeding with any siting of uses. We strongly suggest that you build on the success of *Unlocking the Portlands* and on the overwhelming desire that the community participants have expressed for maximizing greenspace in the Portlands", we wrote in a letter to the Planning Department.



a large sum of money, is unconscionable. As well, while we view as "interesting" the protection that could be afforded by Parks Canada, we do not give it "approval", knowing the numerous pitfalls of local facilities being designed in an Ottawa office tower.

We stated our position to Mr. Mills in a letter following our meeting. Here are some of the highlights:

"[...] At the very outset, we recognized that the continued success of the Spit and the Baselands as a Public Urban Wilderness would be contingent on the way in which the Portlands were developed. The Spit and Baselands need a buffer from future development, and require ecological connections to the city's ravine and river system.

"In that regard, it is very encouraging to us — and, we might add, for the large number of city-dwellers who rely on parkland to provide the recreational room to roam necessary to their well-being — to know that you favour complete greenspace south of the Ship Channel, as well as extensive greenspace elsewhere in the Portlands. We strongly believe that the Ship Channel is a logical divider, and that it makes no sense from a planning, parkland, and infrastructure cost perspective to build on the lands south of that watercourse.

"[...] Regarding ownership and management of what could be the most marvellous public parkland any city has, we concur with your opinion that the Portlands greenspace could forever be in jeopardy as long as it remains dependent on the process of city zoning. We also concur that the parkland needs to be protected by an arms-length agency that transcends political vagaries, and has sufficient strength to resist the blandishments of monetary gain.

"You mentioned Parks Canada in this respect. We think this is one interesting possibility. Another possibility is the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, with whom we have been successfully working for a number of years. We think that their extensive experience and knowledge of the area could prove very useful.

"What is extremely important regarding the management/ownership of this kind of greenspace is sensitivity towards the land itself and to the people who will be enjoying it. Therefore, we would like to propose that a committee of stakeholders be formed to work closely with the agency that is ultimately selected to administer the parkland.

"[...] this is indeed the opportunity to create an iconic park of great urban significance; a chance that will only occur once, and a chance that is not to be frittered away."

As for the answer to the question asked by the headline to this article, we suggest you don't hold your breath!

Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee news

Park gateway, signage, viewing platform and more

The Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee (TTPAC) is now fully operational and its monthly meetings are nothing short of lively.

The committee was established by the Board of The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) with the mandate of keeping the Board informed about issues concerning the Spit. The committee includes representatives from stakeholders, such as Friends of the Spit, and public agencies, such as City of Toronto Parks.

A very important issue is the upcoming selection of the firm that will design the entrance to the Spit, which must be low-key while engaging the public and promoting a sense of respect for the park. Another hot issue is that of signage. Friends of the Spit's position is that there should be a very limited number of signs in a wilderness park, and that education is better done through means such as descriptive brochures and guided walks.

You may have noticed work in progress at Embayment D. A viewing platform is being built at this very busy spot, partly to prevent visitors from damaging the surrounding vegetation. Casual visitors go there for the view of the city, and since many of them do not venture further on the Spit the platform will include a low-key educational component. It is hoped that this information may encourage some casual visitors to become regular 'explorers' of the Spit. The platform will also serve as a gathering point for participants in walks.

About and around the Spit...

Updates and news

HARDY BIRDERS AT THE SPIT CONTRIBUTE TO ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

The 79th Annual Toronto Christmas Bird Count took place last December 21st. The counters who traversed the Spit in cold, but sunny, conditions spotted 34 species on the Spit and Baselands. A sighting of a male Eurasian Wigeon — a first in the 79 years of Christmas Bird Counts in Toronto, was the highlight. This handsome duck was seen in Embayment B, swimming with other ducks, including American Wigeon. Once again, Long-tailed Ducks were high at 1,871.

On January 11th, the annual waterfowl count took place. The six counters on the Spit, in -3°C weather with high winds, saw 17 species, again with a high count of Long-tailed Ducks (616). Alas, the Eurasian Wigeon had left, with the American Wigeon, presumably to less frozen areas! Three of the embayments and all three cells were frozen. The adage "dress warmly" certainly applied on this day.

ALL THE SPIT BELONGS TO ALL. WILDLIFE WELCOMES HUMANS WHO ARE GOOD GUESTS

The only "private" areas on the Spit belong to wildlife — animals, birds, and plants — a fact we are all well aware of and respect as Friends of the Spit.

Sadly, some inconsiderate individuals flaunt the rules of proper behaviour and spoil the enjoyment for the rest of visitors.

If you witness conduct that is inappropriate in a wildlife park open to the general public — for instance dog walking, disorderly or unsafe behaviour, blocking entry into areas with a claim they are "private" or "reserved for research", picking wildflowers, etc. — please inform the park attendants. It is better not to confront these individuals.

FEDERAL \$ TO GO TO THE TRCA

The \$125 million "gift" from the federal government includes \$8 million to The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. We view this as both good news and bad news. Assuming the money materializes, the good news is it will fund completion of the capping of Cell 1 at the Spit (at present in the red for \$490,000).

The bad news is that where there is a money tree, the locusts will flock to it. Will the TRCA have the strength to resist calls to build, build, build, including the humongous "park centre" proposed for the Spit Baselands by Dennis Mills?