



2020 Year in Review

Ed Hore, Chair, Waterfront for All, February 10, 2021

Waterfront for All is an umbrella group of residents associations and other groups interested in the revitalization of the Toronto waterfront from the Rouge River in the east out to the Etobicoke boundary in the west. We love the waterfront and are interested in what happens to it.

Here's a brief run-down on things that happened in 2020.

Water Levels

Before the pandemic, a major concern along the waterfront was whether 2020 would bring flooding as happened in 2019 and 2017. There was a well-attended meeting about this at the Brigantine Room at Harbourfront on March 3, 2020, attended by politicians and hundreds of residents. This was the last crowded big meeting I went to before Covid shut-down public meetings.

In early 2020, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) carried out some quick projects on Toronto Island to alleviate the effects of future floods. For example, they built "beach curbs" east and west of the Ward's Island ferry dock. These consist of rectangular stones weighing three to five tonnes laid end to end to provide some protection if the water rises. The beach curbs were in place by the end of March. TRCA also raised some sections of the roadway from Wards to Hanlans Point around six inches, so that emergency vehicles could get through in the event of a flood.

But in fact no flood happened; the water level of Lake Ontario peaked on May 5, 2020, around 20 inches lower than the peak level in 2019.

The Lake Ontario – St Lawrence River Board, which controls the outflows down the St Lawrence River at the Moses-Saunders Dam in Cornwall, Ontario, let record amounts of water down the River in January through March of 2020. It was able to do that because there wasn't already flooding around Montreal as there had been the year before. Of course, we don't know how often flooding will happen in years to come. Water levels seem reasonably low this year so far.

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Other projects on the Island address erosion from wind and waves. In 2020 TRCA completed an artificial reef, basically lots of boulders under the waterline, to shield Gibraltar Point at the southwest tip of Toronto Island. A groyne – a breakwater extending south, perpendicular to the shore - was also built over the course of the summer and fall at Gibraltar Point. You can walk on it. It has great vista of the lake.

This year, TRCA plans to spread 15,000 cubic metres of sand around Gibraltar Point (that's a lot of sand: the cubic root of 15,000 is around 25; imagine a cube of sand 25 metres on each edge). It will also plant vegetation to slow erosion of all the new sand. About the same quantity of new sand may be needed in that area every three to five years.

Other projects to guard against flooding and erosion are under consideration, such as a new promenade, groynes and beaches to the east of the Ward's Island ferry dock.

Villiers Island: The biggest project on the waterfront is Waterfront Toronto's Flood Remediation Plan, a \$1.2 billion project, the largest of its kind in the world. The project will enable development of the Port Lands, which have been underutilized for a century or more because they are in the flood plain of the Don River. Members of the Waterfront for All Board and its member organizations have been involved in this project for decades.

The project involves digging a second river mouth of the Don River, creating a flood run-off area and a new island, Villiers Island. Construction started in 2018, and is slated to be complete in 2024, so this year we are coming up to the half-way point. Construction continued in 2020 despite Covid. A beautiful new bridge, the first of four that will connect Villiers Island to the mainland, was delivered and installed around November 8, 2020.

Waterfront Toronto released a detailed design for the parkland on the west and south side of Villiers Island in December. You can find it on Waterfront Toronto's website.

Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport: Neither Porter nor Air Canada were flying out of the island airport for most of 2020, due to Covid. Smaller planes were still flying.

In the summer of 2020 Ports Toronto upgraded the dock wall beside the airport, the south seawall of the Western Gap. The upgrades included some yellow safety ladders up from the water. I applaud Ports Toronto for installing these.

We need more safety ladders all around the harbour. The seawall is often six or eight feet high, impossible to climb in the absence of a ladder. For much of the year the water is cold. If someone falls in, it could be a death sentence. As more people are around Toronto Harbour, more safety ladders are essential. Yet there are none in many places. Where safety ladders exist, they are often far apart or in such poor repair as to be useless.

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Long-expected draft federal regulations were published in the Canada Gazette, Part I on March 6, 2020 requiring Canada's busiest airports including BBTCA to install a “runway end safety area”, a run-off area so an aircraft can stop safely in an emergency. The regulations will bring Canada into line with international guidelines.

We don't yet know how Ports Toronto, the airport's owner and manager, proposes to respond to these regulations when they become law. The ends of the Island Airport runways are unusual in that they are surrounded by water. Will Ports Toronto propose lake fill, or might some kind of arrestor system be enough? The City of Toronto, as partial landlord of the island airport under the Tripartite Agreement, has a role in approving whatever build-out Ports Toronto proposes in response to the new regulations.

Scarborough Bluffs Project: The Environmental Assessment of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's Scarborough Bluffs Project was approved on November 6, 2019. The project will bring accessible community green spaces, enhanced shoreline protection, and habitat improvements along an 11-kilometre shoreline multi-use trail between Bluffer's Park and East Point Park. Nancy Gaffney of TRCA is our guest and may tell us more about it

Throughout 2020 TRCA was working on the Detailed Design project, in particular for the “West Segment” east of Bluffer's Park. A paved trail will soon be built up the east side of Brimley Road South, the steep road that goes down to Bluffer's Park.

Ashbridges Bay Landform Project: Work is well underway on the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant Landform Project, a \$96 million undertaking by the TRCA, to reduce erosion and prevent silting up of the boating facilities there. This large landfill project will create acres of new land, which may be parkland one day. Construction will continue through to 2024. Nancy Gaffney will talk about it.

A long breakwater will be built to protect the water at the Coatsworth Cut, helping flat water paddlers from the Balmy Beach Canoe Club.

Ontario Place: This year is the 50th anniversary of Ontario Place. The buildings, designed by Eb Zeidler, still seem like something out of the future. It seems odd to talk of them as heritage buildings, but of course they are.

For a long time, no one knew what the Ford government planned to with Ontario Place. There seemed to be the possibility the land might be sold to private developers.

Waterfront for All spawned a kind of spin-off organization, Ontario Place for All, to fight to maintain public ownership and preservation of the heritage buildings. It scored an important victory when Lisa MacLeod, Ontario Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture

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Industries, issued a White Paper on December 17, 2020, setting out the government's plans for heritage and tourism across the province.

As "Action Item No. 1" the government said it planned to "develop Ontario Place as a World-Class, Year-Round Destination", making no reference to selling it off. Most important was this sentence: "As we modernize the grounds, key heritage and recreational features will remain, such as the Cinesphere, the pods, Trillium Park and the William G. Davis Trail."

No more detailed plans have been released so far.

Sidewalk Labs: In 2020 Toronto's three year flirtation with Google's sister company Sidewalk Labs came to an end. Sidewalk Labs planned to build a high tech neighbourhood called Quayside at the foot of Parliament Street featuring sustainable wooden hi-rises, heated sidewalks and high-tech sensors gathering information. A letter from Sidewalk Labs CEO Dan Doctoroff dated May 7, 2020 announced that Sidewalk Labs was pulling out, due to "economic uncertainty" and Covid.

Many were not surprised; Sidewalk Lab's 1600 page Master and Innovation and Development Plan (MIDP), released in 2019, seemed impractical and muddled.

A mixed use development still to be called "Quayside" will be built at the site. Waterfront Toronto is engaged in consultations as to what the new Quayside project should look like. It will issue a request for proposals seeking a new development partner soon.

Rebel, Cabana Pool Bar Nightclub liquor license: Some years ago, the owners of the existing Rebel nightclub and associated outdoor patio Cabana Pool Bar, at the eastern end of Toronto Harbour, sought a new liquor license allow more people, longer hours and fewer restrictions on amplified music on the outdoor patio. This was opposed by the City, the Islanders and one of our members associations York Quay Neighbourhood Association (YQNA), which I represented. There was a 17 day hearing before the License Appeal Board (LAT). In a decision released in August 2018, the LAT permitted a new liquor license, but with conditions much worse for the nightclub than the liquor license already in place: amplified music on the outdoor patio was prohibited. The nightclub appealed, but the appeal has been moving slowly. Covid caused more delay. The appeal will now be heard in the Divisional Court on March 24, 2021.

Ports Modernization Review: In response to widespread concerns across Canada about the management of the 18 federal ports which include the Port of Toronto, managed by Ports Toronto, the federal government announced a Ports Modernization Review in 2018. Waterfront for All filed a written submission in late 2018, to be found on our website. We pointed out Toronto Harbour is no longer primarily a port for freighters, and raised concerns about a lack of accountability at Ports Toronto, whose statutory mandate seems out-of-step with the

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revitalization of the Toronto waterfront. We met with a Transport Canada official involved in the Review in early 2019. We are told a work product will be forthcoming soon from the government. I wrote to the relevant officials when preparing this year end review, who said they would provide an update, but I hadn't heard back as our Annual General Meeting.

Marine Use Study: Waterfront Toronto is about to release the final version of its Marine Use Study, an update of a 2006 study, which has been on-going for some time. Rei Tasaka of Waterfront Toronto is here to talk about it.

The MUS looks at mooring, management and movement. The mooring issue is how to allocate boat and ship mooring around the harbour. The management question is: who owns what and who is in charge? The movement issue relates to people getting around on the Harbour: who wants to do what and go where on the water? What docks, promenades and infrastructure are necessary?

One valuable work product of the MUS is an ownership map of the harbour. This is sorely needed because ownership of and jurisdiction over the seawalls and adjoining land has been confused and opaque for decades, sometimes impeding even routine maintenance, let alone long-term planning.

I have been making a pest of myself with Rei and others involved with the MUS by continually demanding more infrastructure and space around the waterfront for small craft like kayaks, and canoes.

Canadian National Exhibition Master Planning Process: A master planning process has been on-going at the CNE at the urging of various neighbourhood groups which make up the West Side Community Council, one of our member organizations. While nothing is yet formalized it seems that new ideas are in the air aimed at using the space in all seasons, not just when there is an event scheduled in one of the buildings. Possible ideas include a skating rink near the band shell, or perhaps a farmer's market in one of the buildings.

Jack Layton Ferry Terminal: Many of you will recall that a beautiful design for a revitalized Jack Layton ferry terminal was selected some years ago, after a design contest conducted by Waterfront Toronto. You can see the plans on the wall in the shelter at the terminal while waiting for the ferry.

A small landscaping project, known as Phase 1 at the entrance area from Queens Quay was completed last year, but there was no funding for the rest.

It seems that the ferry terminal revitalization may now go ahead at some point. Developers QuadReal and Barney River propose to demolish the Westin convention centre across the street,

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and put up an office tower, 11 Bay Street. The arrangement would include redeveloping the ferry terminal. Plans are still under discussion with the City.

Toronto Island Park Plan: This study is on-going, it will look at how to accommodate the growing numbers of island visitors. It will include public consultations.

Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood Plan: This involves beautifying the area around the malting towers at the Western Gap. Phase 1 was unveiled on December 22 2020, without ribbon-cutting or dignitaries due to Covid.

Bryan Bowen is here to tell us about it; I am grateful that he invited me to have a look just as they were removing the construction fences in the dark (it being the shortest day of the year). This project is an inspiring step forward for the waterfront. Phase 1 involved rebuilding the seawall, refurbishing Ireland Park, placing cobble stones along the walkway at the water's edge, and rebuilding the taxi stand and parking areas. Phase 2 will go ahead next year; it will involve involving animating the public space west of the malting towers, and turning the crumbling building that used to house the malting tower offices into an exhibit and event space, with money raised from donations.

Waterfront East LRT: In 2020 the TTC worked on a detailed design for the LRT that will one day go east along Queens Quay from Union Station to a loop at the Distillery District, mirroring the LRT that now goes west along Queens Quay. A plan has been in place for years, but the TTC recently changed its plan: it now proposes that the “portal” (where streetcars will come up out of the tunnel to Queens Quay) will be outside the Westin Hotel, that is, west of Yonge. The old plan, environmentally assessed around a decade ago but never built, put the portal east of Yonge, in front of 1 Yonge Street. Due to the congested streetscape in front of the Hotel, the newly proposed configuration means lake fill for parking and some public realm space in the Yonge Street Slip where Captain John's Restaurant ship used to be. About a third of the slip would be filled in. Putting the portal east of Yonge as previously proposed, on the other hand, would not require lake fill, but there's more tunnelling involved so it's more expensive. A question we may be hearing more about is: should we lake fill the Yonge Slip, if there's an alternative?

New waterfront storage for kayaks and canoes? The Marine Use Study highlighted the growing number of paddlers and rowers along our waterfront, now almost equal to the number of sailors, yet there's very little storage and launch space for paddle sports compared with the shoreline and facilities devoted to sailing. Is there somewhere such storage could go? Thanks to the efforts of Councillor Paula Fletcher of Ward 14, the Director of City Parks will present a report “to identify any potential new locations where storage for non-motorized crafts like canoes and kayaks and paddle boards could be accommodated” at the March 23, 2021 meeting of the Infrastructure and Environmental Committee of City Council. I look forward to reading it.