



November 9, 2021

To: Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
Chris Glover MP, Spadina Fort-York
Mayor John Tory
Joe Cressy, Councillor Spadina-Fort York
Stephen Diamond, Chair, Board of Directors, Waterfront Toronto
George Zegarac, Waterfront Toronto

Greetings All!

Re: Ontario Place Revitalization

Waterfront for All is an umbrella group of residents' association and other groups interested in the revitalization of the Toronto waterfront.

We write to express concerns about the direction of the Ontario Government's current plans to revitalize Ontario Place.

The Ontario government should not enter into contractual relations with the three "partners" recently selected to develop Ontario Place. If it has already done so, it should terminate the contracts before taxpayers become potentially liable for large damages. The partners were selected prematurely without first arriving at a plan for the site as a whole and how it will fit into revitalization of the entire central waterfront. It is essential that this planning work be done before partners, if any, are chosen.

We suggest the Ontario government not proceed on its own. Ontario Place should be developed as an integral part of the existing revitalization effort, run for 20 years by Waterfront Toronto, co-owned by all three levels of government.

The Ontario government should plan and deliver the revitalization of Ontario Place in partnership with the other government levels through its co-ownership of Waterfront Toronto which has a proven track record of successfully delivering complex, but consensus-driven revitalization projects.

Chronology

The Premier announced on July 31, 2021 that three privately-owned “partners”, Live Nation, Therme Canada, and Eco-Recreo, had been chosen to revitalize Ontario Place. Altogether, it was announced, the partners would invest \$500 million in the redevelopment of the site. Completion would be around 2030.

The selection process did not include public involvement nor, so far as we know, input from the City, the federal government, or Waterfront Toronto.

Some visualizations of what the partners proposed to build were released to the public for the first time at an on-line information session on October 13, 2021.

The government announced the Ontario Place site will be “readied for development” by the Ontario government through Infrastructure Ontario in conjunction with the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. Heritage buildings such as the Cinesphere and pods will be preserved, we were informed. The cost to taxpayers is unknown. No mention was made of integration with the CNE grounds.

Although two-thirds of the site will, we are told, remain accessible to the public, the information session made clear that the Ontario government has no master plan or vision for the pods, Cinesphere or the two-thirds of the site that will still be open to the public, after the rest is presumably fenced off by the three private partners.

As about two-thirds of the site is water; the land left for public access may be minimal, and may end up as nothing but a common way for people to travel from one private partner’s fenced-off zone to another.

None of the private partners' presentations attracted much enthusiasm. None of the partners is based in or has any particular connection with Ontario. None seems interested in celebrating Ontario's culture or geography, as Ontario Place was originally intended to do.

We believe it was a mistake to choose "partners" without public input and without arriving at a plan first. Holding public consultations after the partners are chosen won't fix this problem.

No information was provided at the October 13 information session as to the status of contractual negotiations with the partners, nor whether the government is liable for damages if it terminates agreements with them. If there are contracts in place, they should be terminated sooner rather than later.

Let Waterfront Toronto run the project

The revitalization of Ontario Place is necessarily a part of the revitalization of the waterfront as a whole.

We suggest that the government either turn operational control of the revitalization of the site over to Waterfront Toronto or, if not, integrate its efforts deeply with Waterfront Toronto, which so far as we recall, was never mentioned at the October 13 information session. Waterfront Toronto has a track record of success in moving complex waterfront projects forward through public consultation and achieving consensus of the three levels of government and waterfront stakeholders. There is no reason to think the Ontario government will do better on its own in this instance.

The three government owners, including Ontario, recently engaged KPMG LLP to undertake a background study on the waterfront revitalization. KPMG found that Toronto's waterfront revitalization effort continues to be a nationally significant initiative *that requires a tri-government approach and governance*, and that "Waterfront Toronto managed its resources with due regard for economy and efficiency over the 2015 to 2020 study period." (Waterfront Strategic Review Update, Background Study, KPMG LLP April 2021, Final Report, pp. 2, 3).

KPMG specifically expressed concern about lack of clarity over the future of Ontario Place in the future revitalization of the waterfront. It recommended review and clarification of "[the interaction between] Waterfront Toronto and the current and future role of the provincially owned Ontario Place site and its development within the broader context of Toronto's waterfront revitalization." The future of Ontario Place, among other issues, said KPMG, should be "subject to on-going discussions among the three governments, Waterfront Toronto, its Board of Directors and key stakeholders." (p. 9). We agree, and note that Waterfront Toronto was

specifically created to coordinate effort among its three government owners to avoid duplication and working at cross purposes.

Both Ontario Place and Exhibition Place are already in the Designated Waterfront Area (DWA), the area originally designated to be revitalized by Waterfront Toronto. It seems it was always the intent that Waterfront Toronto would have a major role in the revitalization of both.

Yours truly,

Edward Hore
Chair
Waterfront for All