

OLYMPIC-LESS TORONTO PLANS WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION

By: Michael Bowman and Shari Elliott

Over 800 hectares of strategically located land at Toronto's central waterfront today remains mostly vacant or underutilized.

As more than two-thirds of this land is already in the hands of public entities, progress on redevelopment largely depends on initiatives put forward by the three levels of government (Toronto, Ontario and Canada).

In the lead-up to Toronto's Olympic bid, the redevelopment plans for this property were limitless.

On July 13, 2001, when the Olympic Committee announced that Beijing was to be the site of the 2008 Olympics, many thought that all the redevelopment plans would be forever stalled.

However, on October 9, 2001, the City released Part II of the Waterfront Plan and confirmed that the commitment to redevelop the waterfront is still alive.

Background

In 1999, as an initial step towards waterfront renewal, the City of Toronto, published a report entitled *Unlocking Toronto's Port Lands – Directions for the Future*. This report assessed the challenges and opportunities associated with the Port Lands and acknowledged the need to co-ordinate political, investment and planning decisions to revitalize the area.

The report helped consolidate the necessary degree of political co-ordination, and in November 1999, all three levels of government agreed to work together. Ultimately, by October 2000, with all three levels of government evincing an unprecedented level of co-operation, the public sector committed a total of \$1.5 billion to redevelopment.

To help co-ordinate public and private sector activities and to oversee planning initiatives for the waterfront, the federal government, the province and the City established an interim board in March 2001.

Shortly thereafter a permanent organization, the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation, was established to manage the emerging multi-billion dollar vision.

On July 26, 2001, Robert Fung was appointed as its chair. This corporation is intended to oversee the renewal of Toronto's waterfront over the next 20 years and consult with the three levels of government along with other stakeholders.

Central waterfront plan: Part II

With the revitalization corporation intending to manage the process of co-ordinating public and private sector support, on October 9, 2001, the chair of the Waterfront Reference Group, Councillor Joe Pantalone, released the City of Toronto's draft plan to renew the central waterfront in a report entitled, *Making Waves: Principles for Building Toronto's Waterfront*. The report focuses on the 10 kilometres of waterfront from Dowling Avenue in the west to Coxwell Avenue in the east. This stretch includes:

- Exhibition Place, Ontario Place, Fort York;
- The existing Bathurst-Strachan, Central Bayfront and Harbourfront neighbourhoods;
- The East Bayfront, the West Don Lands and the Port Lands.

The plan prescribes a reconfiguration of the Gardiner Expressway corridor in the central waterfront; substantial upgrades to GO Transit and TTC services; an expanded and accessible public open space system; and a number of public initiatives such as soil and groundwater remediation and flood control.

The report espouses four core principles and proposes 23 "Big Moves" to renew the 10-kilometre central waterfront area. The four core principles are:

- Removing barriers/making connections;
- Building a network of waterfront parks and public spaces;
- Promoting a clean and green environment; and
- Creating dynamic and diverse new communities.

The Big Moves are specific projects to reshape the waterfront. They include a grand waterfront boulevard for Lake Shore Boulevard, a series of new waterfront communities, a pier and public plaza at the foot of Yonge Street and new parks for the East Bayfront, the Port Lands and Fort York.

The benefits of this renewal are said to include over 40,000 new housing units as homes for 68,000 people. The report also anticipates the creation of 900,000 square metres of commercial space and 183 acres of new parkland. To make these developments more accessible, an estimated \$800 million in public transit improvements is required under the plan. Taken together, it is said that these initiatives will help boost local tourism by as much as 10 per cent annually. Moreover, the city says it may gain as many as 35,000 new jobs in connection with waterfront redevelopment.

Members of the public will have an opportunity to comment on the plan at community meetings to be held in November. Subsequently, the report will be presented to the Waterfront Reference Group, the Planning and Transportation Committee and city council for approval.

When the first part of this two-part plan was released, Toronto mayor Mel Lastman said that, "Our vision will give us a new waterfront for a new millennium. We'll reshape this front porch to our city as a seamless whole instead of a patchwork quilt. It's going to happen!"

One can only hope that Mayor Lastman's optimism is shared by the provincial and federal governments and, perhaps more importantly, the private sector.

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