



LAKE ONTARIO PARK MASTER PLAN STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

BASE LANDS TASK GROUP MEETING Thursday, December 6, 2007

Meeting Notes

1) INTRODUCTION

James Roche welcomed participants on behalf of Waterfront Toronto and noted that he was taking over from Brenda Webster as project manager for Lake Ontario Park (LOP).

Facilitator, Joanna Kidd introduced herself and reviewed her role. In addition to facilitation, she noted that she would be preparing meeting notes from the session to be circulated to all SAC members. She recalled the background to the meeting, which arose from the concerns raised at the November 6th Stakeholder Advisory Committee meeting about the difficulty of dealing with the scale and complexity of Lake Ontario Park. As a result, Waterfront Toronto had decided to hold three geographically based meetings to focus discussion on issues related to the Bar and Marina Peninsula, the Bay and the Base Lands.

Joanna then reviewed the purpose of the meeting and the agenda (attached as Appendix A) and asked participants to introduce themselves. (Attendees are noted in Appendix B).

2) PRESENTATION

Richard Kennedy gave a presentation that began with the overall organizing ideas and land uses for Lake Ontario Park, and then focused in on the proposals for the Base Lands.

Richard began by describing the Master Plan vision for the Base Lands as “an accessible natural area centred around a diverse swamp forest and marsh”. He went on to describe the potential for improving habitat and potential wildlife target species.

Richard introduced the proposed channel as an element that creates:

- a dynamic water source that enhances the mix and vitality of plant communities;
- a threshold to control access to TTP;
- a wetland interpretive route; and
- canoe access from the Outer Harbour to Ashbridge’s Bay without having to ‘round the horn’.

He showed images from Point Pelee to illustrate the possibilities for experiencing nature in the channel. He described the channel as a green, vegetated and shallow watercourse for kayaks and canoes, and referenced Theissen’s channel at Point Pelee, which was created in the 1930s to provide access to the open areas of the marsh for duck hunters. There is some ongoing maintenance to keep it cleared of aquatic vegetation, either by harvesting floating aquatics or cutting back the cattail mat which tends to grow into the channel. Richard made the point that

even in Canada's oldest and dearest national parks there are human-made and maintained features that have high natural and practical value.

He then described the activities that might take place at the proposed Adventure Centre. These include educational and exploration activities along the water, small watercraft rentals and guided day trips, exhibits, outdoor classrooms and instruction facilities.

He finished by describing Lake Ontario Park as:

- a regional greenway and green waterfront;
- a world-class, signature park for the whole city;
- wild landscapes;
- a vibrant lakefront; and
- "big nature", sports, recreation and culture.

3) IDENTIFICATION AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

The participants then identified the issues that they wanted to address. The comments are presented below by issue.

Statement of Intent for Base Lands

- It was suggested that the proposed uses as articulated in the presentation are contradictory and compromise the Tommy Thompson Park Master Plan notion of "urban wilderness".
- There was concern raised about increased usage of the Base Lands, and more importantly, how people will access it.
- It was suggested that the words "wilderness" be included in the statement of intent, along with the notion of delicate intervention, and the importance of the Base Lands as a knuckle or connector of habitat.
- The Design Team confirmed that the intention is for the area to remain wilderness, but as a more diverse and productive habitat.
- The Design Team also stressed that the Master Plan has to proactively address the future development of the Port Lands. Without structured access, people will make their own trails. The projected population of the Port Lands is 40,000 people over 20 to 25 years. The overall future population growth of the City should also be considered.
- The question of how much manipulation should be done was raised, and it was suggested that the Base Lands is a "success" right now.
- The question was raised whether we know enough about how the Base Lands function to be able to know if diversification will have an impact. For example, will there be a critical mass of water and/or vegetation?
- The Design Team noted that although the Base Lands are important as a habitat area in the context of Toronto's waterfront, relative to natural habitat the Base Lands provide modest ecological diversity. With some intervention, it could support more species, including birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

- It was suggested that we need an improved inventory of wildlife species, better knowledge of their movement and a better understanding of the Base Lands within the context of the waterfront.
- The Design Team noted that a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement would be the starting point for any design process in the Base Lands.
- In response to the concern about lack of knowledge about soil contamination in the area, the Design Team noted that it is impractical to drill every part. Additional soil investigations would take place in the detail design process.
- With respect to the habitats of the Base Lands, the Design Team noted that North South Environmental had been asked to assess the current conditions and the potential for improved habitat. The Master Plan proposal is to increase the diversity and canopy coverage slowly and carefully.
- Background information on the environmental conditions can be found in the Summary Report on Field Work and Key Findings (September 2006), available at Waterfront Toronto. TRCA also provided background information. Waterfront Toronto staff will investigate posting the report on the website.
- It was suggested that the Master Plan do the following:
 - Re-draft the statement of intent;
 - Include statements on how habitat enhancement would take place (i.e., slowly, phased over time, delicately);
 - Include the term “urban wilderness”;
 - Talk about the time frame; and
 - Define “public access”.

Size of the Baselands

- The Design Team confirmed that the Base Lands are approximately 90 acres in size.

ESA Map

- The Design Team confirmed that “ESA” refers to an Environmentally Significant Area as designated by TRCA. There are restrictions on development in such areas.

Channel – Design Response to Contamination

- The Design Team confirmed that the only difference between the channel cross-sections relating to soil contamination was the presence of a liner in the lower example.

Sports Fields

- The Design Team confirmed that the proposed sports field north of the Adventure Centre was intended as a senior soccer field. It is outside of the Base Lands.

- The kind of turf and whether or not there would be lighting will be decided by City Parks, Recreation and Forestry.
- The junior soccer field, previously shown in the Base Lands, has been moved to a location west of the circulating channel. The FOS member indicated that the group was pleased with the re-location.
- The Design Team confirmed that the number of sports fields has not changed and is still eleven.

Compatibility with TTPMP

- SAC member stressed the need to ensure that the LOP Master Plan for the Base Lands was consistent with the Tommy Thompson Park Master Plan (TTPMP). The language used should be consistent.
- It was noted that the Base Lands are zoned “GR”, which allows only conservation uses, bathing stations and arboretums.

Location and Use of the Spit Transect

- The Design Team confirmed that the Spit transect is in fact the main road on the Spit.
- Vehicle use on the Spit transect through the Base Lands will reflect that in the TTPMP (i.e., it will eventually allow only service vehicles and the park shuttle).
- The Design Team reaffirmed the intention of promoting LOP as a largely car-free park, with important roles to be played by the proposed LRT along Unwin and the park shuttle.
- The kind of surface used on the Spit transect will reflect the TTPMP.

Adventure Centre

- It was suggested that the purpose and function of the Adventure Centre needs to be better defined, and that the number of functions seem somewhat contradictory to its scale.
- It was suggested that the rendering of the Adventure Centre should be revised to make it look less like a mirrored building.
- In discussing the location, a number of rationales were put forward. These include:
 - It is near the Bar transect;
 - It is near a point of vehicular access (Marina Drive);
 - It has frontage on the Outer Harbour;
 - It is a central location in the Park;
 - It is close to the outdoor educational opportunities of the Base Lands and Spit; and
 - The eastern end of the Outer Harbour is sheltered, relatively unused, and is away from the sailing clubs, therefore good for canoeing and kayaking.

- Disadvantages of the proposed location include:
 - Potential conflict with the multi-hulls on their moorings.
- The Design Team confirmed that the Adventure Centre was not intended to be a staging area for sailing or to compete with the sailing instruction provided by the OHSF. It would serve as a referral centre for people wishing to sail, but would have canoes and kayaks for rent, would provide canoeing and kayaking lessons, and would have the ability to guide trips.
- The Design Team noted that the Adventure Centre was inspired by similar centres in New Brunswick, developed as part of the Tourist Strategy for the Provincial Parks in St. George and St. Andrew.
- Parks staff indicated that they support the idea of the Adventure Centre but need to meet with TRCA and others to flesh out the proposal.
- An interpretive centre in Lock Levin, Scotland was cited as a good example of how birdwatching opportunities can be provided at an interpretive centre.
- It was noted that the Portlands Energy Centre will have an adverse visual impact on the area.
- It was suggested that the LOP Master Plan should describe the process of what needs to happen to move the Adventure Centre proposal forward.

Boardwalks

- It was suggested that the circular shape of the proposed boardwalk in the Base Lands was an arbitrary design, and not in keeping with the wild nature of the area. Trails at grade would be more naturalistic.
- In response to a question about the ability to use mown trails, the Design Team indicated that this may be appropriate for some trails in the Base Lands.
- The Design Team noted that the primary role of the boardwalk, whether elevated or not, is to function as a mechanism for controlling and organizing access to the Base Lands. Without direction as to how to access the site, people will create their own trails. A planned trail network can also help keep people away from sensitive areas. The Design Team noted that this is especially important in the context of increased future development.
- The Design Team agreed that it is possible to build the trail network over time as usage increases. This would mirror the evolution of the landscape over time. Trails could be based on existing trails.
- It was suggested that the Master Plan document include the principles of developing both habitat and the trail system over time in a gradual process.

Channel

- A number of concerns were raised about the proposed channel. These included:
 - It will destroy the Base Lands;
 - It will fragment habitat;
 - It will destroy the green link to the Don;
 - It will release soil contaminants that are currently capped;
 - There will either be no flow or poor water quality from Coatsworth Cut;
 - Jet skis will inevitably get in;
 - It does not consider Lake Ontario lake levels;
 - If racing canoes and kayaks use it, coach boats will come as well;
 - It will become the north boundary of the Base Lands and therefore reduce the amount of natural area;
 - It raises the spectre of admission fees;
 - It is not a good way of dealing with soil contamination;
 - It may lead to a loss of International Birding Area status;
 - It will compromise the Environmentally Significant Area; and
 - It conflicts with the existing zoning for the area.

- It was suggested that the design of the channel should include feedback from all stakeholders.

- Other SAC members noted the benefits of having canoe and kayak access across the Base Lands, rather than having to go “around the horn”. It is very difficult for canoeists and sometimes tough for kayakers to get around the Spit in poor weather.

- The concept was raised of having an incomplete channel, with portages at the ends. As well as keeping out jet skis, the land bridges/portages would also allow wildlife movement.

- It was suggested that creating the channel was a risk we shouldn't take because of the vulnerabilities associated with it.

- The Design Team addressed a number of the concerns that had been raised. It was noted that:
 - The existing contamination on the site (mostly fly ash and arsenic) is not capped. It lies on the surface and below and must be addressed, to protect both humans and prevent bioaccumulation in wildlife.
 - The channel provides options for addressing soil contamination.
 - There is great potential for improving the habitat values in the area.
 - ESA policies allow for the improvement of habitat;
 - The marshlands at Silent Lake Provincial Park contain an example of a meandering channel through a rich habitat;
 - While the fragmentation concern is correct, a 4-hectare area can support interior habitat; and
 - Water quality from Coatsworth Cut should not be an issue, as the channel wouldn't be built until the Coatsworth Cut wetland is in place.

- It was noted that the Base Lands have the potential to provide the biggest block of interior habitat in Toronto.

- It was suggested that hydrologic studies would need to be done to address the fluctuations in Lake Ontario water levels. The levels may be fluctuating more these days than previously.
- There was support for the idea of breaking up the channel with land bridges/portages.
- The Design Team noted that the channel could be pushed north of the transect.
- It was suggested that some of the language and concepts suggested for the Base Lands as a whole be applied to the channel. This includes concepts such as slow development, phasing over time, and delicate intervention, and the notion of the sensitivity of the Base Lands.
- The Design Team confirmed that the Base Lands extends up to Unwin Avenue. The shading used in the presentation will be extended to communicate this.

Process Issue

- Waterfront Toronto will check with Chris Glaisek on when the Master Plan images can be shared with groups.

4) NEXT STEPS AND WRAP UP

Joanna Kidd noted that she would be preparing the Meeting Notes from the Task Group meeting and would be circulating them to the SAC along with a PDF of the presentation. She finished by noting that the next full SAC meeting was tentatively scheduled for the first week of February 2008.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 pm.

APPENDIX A

LAKE ONTARIO PARK MASTER PLAN STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE BASE LANDS TASK GROUP MEETING Thursday, December 6, 2007 6:00 to 9:00 pm

AGENDA

Purpose of the Meeting:

- To increase understanding of the Lake Ontario Park Master Plan proposals for the Base Lands;
- To discuss and resolve, where possible, key Master Plan issues relating to the Base Lands.

6:00	Welcome	Chris Glaisek, Waterfront Toronto
	Introduction	Joanna Kidd, Kidd Consulting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitator's Role• Purpose of the Meeting• Agenda Review• Introductions	
6:10	Presentation	Richard Kennedy, Field Operations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LOP Master Plan -- Focus on the Base Lands	
6:45	Discussion	Joanna Kidd
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying issues• Deciding on time allocation and order	
7:00	Discussion of Issues	Joanna Kidd
8:55	Next Steps and Wrap Up	Joanna Kidd
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting Notes• Next Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting	

Handouts:

- **Presentation**

APPENDIX B PARTICIPANTS

Members

Dennis Findlay	Portlands Action Committee
Garvie Brown	Outer Harbour Sailing Federation
John Carley	Friends of the Spit
Bob Stuart	Balmy Beach Canoe Club
Barry Mitchell	Toronto Field Naturalists
Margaret Kelch	Toronto Ornithological Club

Observers

Cathryn MacFarlane	Outer Harbour Sailing Federation (Aquatic Park Sailing Club)
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TRCA

Ralph Toninger	Coordinator of Environmental Projects
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City of Toronto

Leslie Coates	Parks, Recreation and Forestry
Wayne Reeves	Parks, Recreation and Forestry
Ron Winn	Parks, Recreation and Forestry
Pinelopi Gramatikopoulos	Waterfront Secretariat

Waterfront Toronto

James Roche	Planning Project Manager
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Design Team

Richard Kennedy	Field Operations
Michael Flynn	Field Operations
Mark Schollen	Schollen and Company
Joanna Kidd	Kidd Consulting