



BACKGROUNDER

The Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation has selected international design teams to take part in a competition to produce a bold and compelling concept for the Lower Don Lands that makes the river a central feature while at the same time providing for new development and new linkages to the rest of the city. The overall goals and objectives of the project are to:

1. Naturalize the Mouth of the Don River

The Don River has been constricted, re-routed into the hard-edged Keating Channel and mistreated for decades. A bold and spectacular design should be developed that makes the mouth of the Don River an aesthetic centerpiece, provides natural and sustainable habitat for aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, and brings the river back to Torontonians.

The naturalization of the mouth of the Don River will entail a substantial widening and transformation of the Keating Channel as well as the creation of a lowland plain and possibly a second green spillway channel for accommodating very large flood events. Working with a “menu” of options for ecological and hydrological restoration developed as part of the Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection EA, a design concept should be developed for the river that maximizes biodiversity and ecological robustness and makes it a dramatic part of the urban landscape, while at the same time providing for flood protection and harbour operations.

2. Create a Continuous Riverfront Park System

The Don River valley is one of several complex ravine networks that define the character of Toronto. To the north, this naturally green area forms one of the most heavily used recreational corridors in the city. A design concept for the Lower Don Lands should be developed that creates a beautiful new riverfront park system linked to the existing trails and open spaces and the new Don River Park being designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates for the TWRC in cooperation with TRCA and the City of Toronto, Parks, Forestry and Recreation division. The design concept should explore ways to make the lowland flood plain usable for active and passive recreational uses.

3. Provide for Harmonious New Development

The Lower Don Lands offer a unique opportunity to replace a vacant, post-industrial brownfield with a new community. A bold concept is needed for development on the lands east of Parliament Street to create a vibrant riverfront neighbourhood in harmony with the naturalized mouth of the Don River. Appropriately-scaled development should be proposed that highlights the river and respects its ecology, and an urban design concept should be developed that proposes a coherent built form for this district. The design concept should relate to the approved precinct plan for the adjoining East Bayfront neighbourhood.

4. Connect Waterfront Neighbourhoods

The Lower Don Lands are physically cut off from the city, yet sit at the nexus of three new waterfront communities being developed by the TWRC. The Lower Donlands should be transformed from an unwelcoming outskirt into a thriving destination that connects those surrounding areas with a combination of parks, roads and new development to “stitch” them together while providing a unique riverfront experience.

An eastward extension of Queens Quay Boulevard from Parliament Street should be proposed that creates a beautiful main street through the Lower Don Lands and links with Cherry Street and Lakeshore Boulevard to the east. Working with the preliminary parameters of the Queens Quay Boulevard Extension EA, a design concept should be developed that reintroduces a coherent road network into this area and provides well defined connections to other communities.

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5. Prioritize Public Transit

At the same time that new road access is needed, the TWRC and the City have a commitment to a “transit-first” policy for waterfront revitalization. The design concept for extending Queens Quay Boulevard must provide for the eastward extension of the streetcar line to Cherry Street and into the Port Lands, either within the new road right-of-way or elsewhere. Working with the preliminary parameters of the Lower Don Transportation Infrastructure EA, a bold and compelling concept should be developed for increased transit access to and through the Lower Don Lands.

6. Develop a Gateway into the Port Lands

A dramatic new bridge or series of bridges should be proposed that can carry vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, and streetcars across the mouth of the Don River and into the Port Lands. This structure or structures should serve to celebrate the river mouth and provide iconic yet functional connections into the Port Lands. At the same time, they must respect the clearance requirements of a river whose level can rise rapidly during flood events so as not to impede water flow. A location for one or more graceful new crossings should be proposed that help to extend the local street network into the Port Lands.

7. Humanize Existing Infrastructure

Several pieces of critical regional infrastructure criss-cross the Lower Don Lands with little regard for their impact on the local landscape. The elevated Gardiner Expressway, which serves tens of thousands of commuters daily, passes through on giant columns that rest on barren earth below. Lakeshore Boulevard, which also brings thousands of workers downtown, has the sprawling character of a suburban arterial, particularly around the Cherry Street intersection. The freight rail spur, which serves the Redpath Sugar Refinery to the west, divides the landscape into oddly-shaped and disconnected parcels. A design concept should be proposed for harmonizing each of these important arteries with the Lower Don Lands.

8. Enhance the Martin Goodman Trail

One of the most heavily-used recreational and commuter trails in Toronto, the Martin Goodman Trail takes a zigzag route through the Lower Don Lands with no relationship to the water’s edge. A design concept should be proposed for providing an inviting and continuous riverfront experience for trail users that simplifies the complex route the Martin Goodman Trail follows. Improved connections to existing trail segments to the east and west should also be explored.

9. Expand Opportunities for Interaction with the Water

Opportunities to increase and intensify water-related recreational uses along the river should be explored. The naturalized mouth of the Don River should not only entice people near the water, but should engage direct interaction with it. Drawing upon the TWRC’s Marine Use Strategy, design concepts should be proposed that integrate current and future water uses, such as recreational fishing, kayaking, sightseeing and other activities.

10. Promote Sustainable Development

The TWRC is committed to making the city’s waterfront a national and global model for sustainability. The TWRC has developed a Sustainability Framework to ensure that sustainability principles are integrated into all facets of TWRC planning, development, operations, and decision-making. The design concept should maximize opportunities to incorporate leading-edge sustainable technology and methods throughout. In particular, contaminated soils and groundwater underlying the study area will need to be managed in a sustainable way. The TWRC Sustainability Framework can be downloaded from www.towaterfront.ca.