

# PORTLANDS FLOOD PROTECTION



## SUMMARY REPORT Community Consultation February 22, 2018

This report was prepared by Waterfront Toronto with files from Groundswell, an independent facilitator and consultation specialist. If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, please contact:

Waterfront Toronto  
20 Bay Street, Suite 1310, Toronto, ON M5J 2N8  
Telephone: 416-214-1344  
Email: [info@waterfronttoronto.ca](mailto:info@waterfronttoronto.ca)

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

## **1. Introduction**

Background

Past consultation

## **2. Consultation Process Overview**

Purpose of consultation

Promotion

Presentations and activities

## **3. What We Heard**

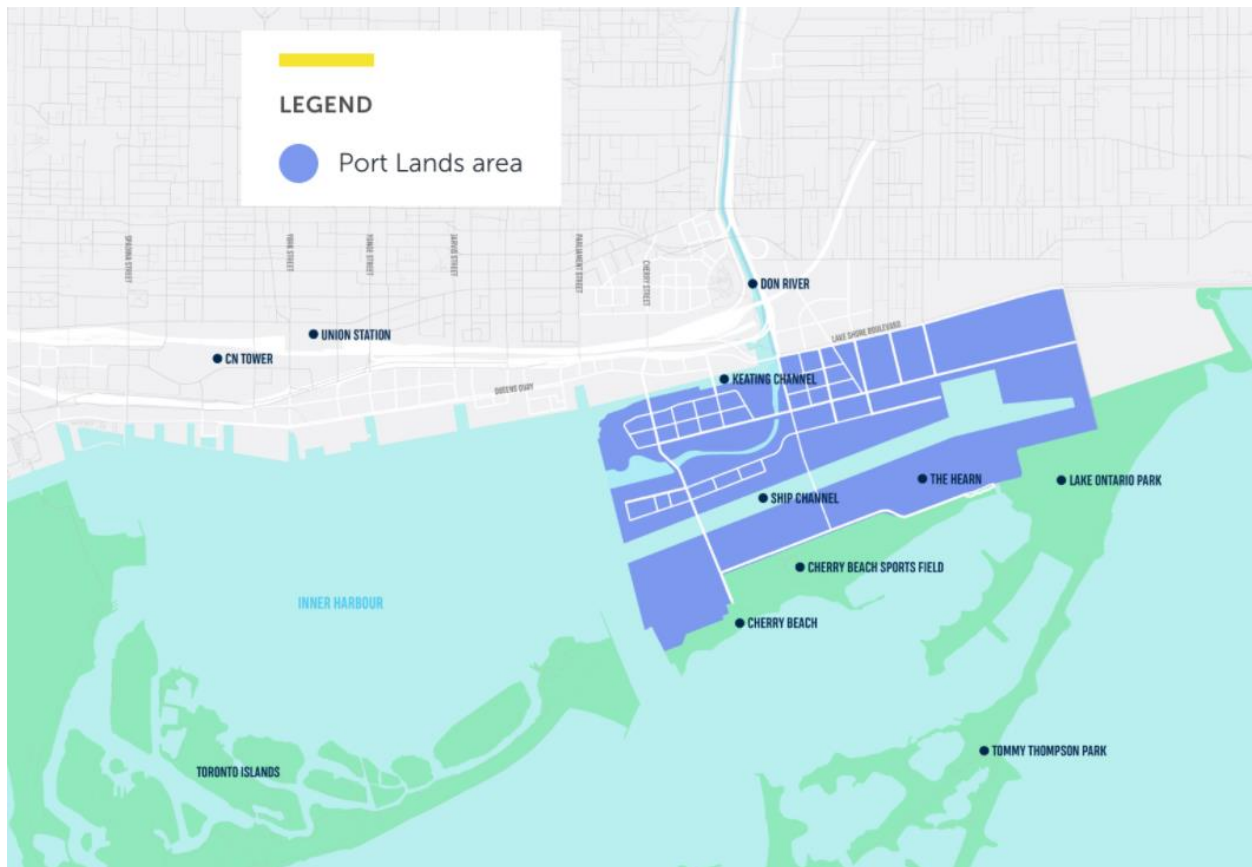
Summary of participant feedback

# 1. Introduction

On February 22, 2018, Waterfront Toronto hosted a community consultation for the Port Lands Flood Protection project. Approximately 275 community members attended, and 900 community members watched the presentations live on Facebook.

## Background

The Port Lands are an area that extends southeast of Toronto’s downtown core into Lake Ontario and includes 290 hectares of land along the waterfront. Some familiar landmarks include: Cherry Beach, Tommy Thompson Park – one of the best bird-watching spots in the city – and the Hearn Generating Station, an iconic, decommissioned electrical plant. Looking at the map below, you can see that the Port Lands is bounded by the Keating Channel and Lake Shore Boulevard in the north, the Toronto Inner Harbour in the west, Ashbridges Bay in the east and Lake Ontario and Tommy Thompson Park in the south.



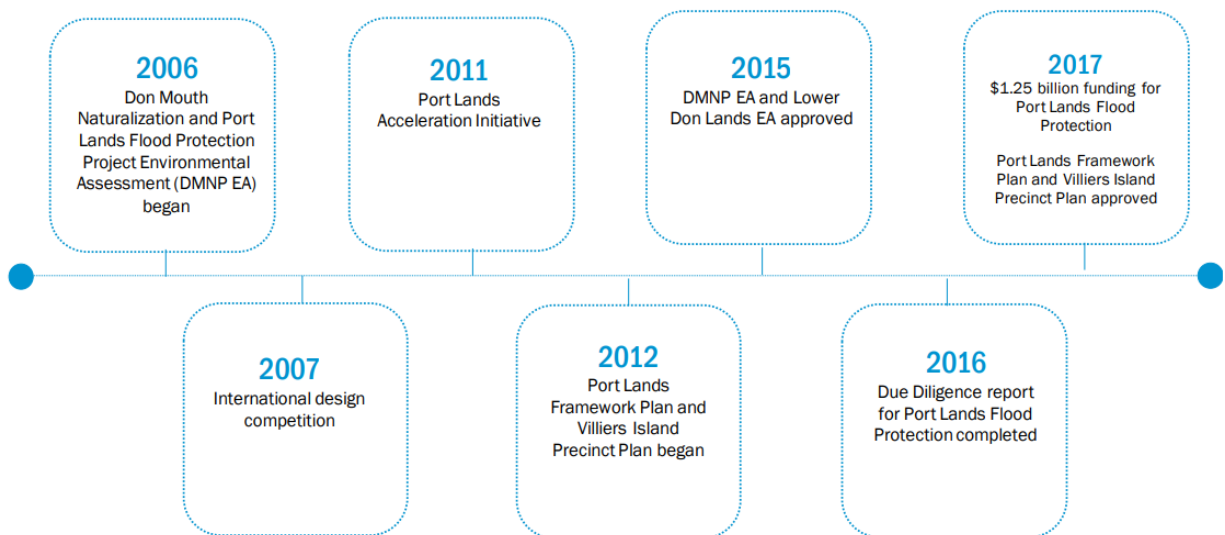
Currently, 290 hectares (715 acres) of southeastern downtown Toronto – including parts of the Port Lands, South Riverdale, Leslieville, south of Eastern Avenue and the First Gulf/Unilever development site that are at risk of flooding. Port Lands Flood Protection is a comprehensive plan for flood protecting these lands.

Working together for more than a decade, Waterfront Toronto, the Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) and the City of Toronto have developed and refined an innovative solution to protect the Port Lands and adjacent areas from costly damage associated with a major flood, to remediate the area's contaminated soil and to better adapt the area to the impacts of climate change.

Port Lands Flood Protection includes a re-naturalized mouth for the Don River in the middle of the Port Lands between the ship channel and the Keating Channel, as well as a kilometer-long river valley that will create a new urban island neighbourhood called Villiers Island. It will restore natural environments, enhance habitat for natural species and re-establish wetlands in the area, which will naturally moderate the effects of flooding and erosion. New parks and green spaces will provide opportunities for people to access the water.

In June 2017, Waterfront Toronto received \$1.25 billion in shared funding from the governments of Canada, Ontario and Toronto to naturalize the mouth of the Don River and flood protect the Port Lands.

### Summary of what's happened so far



### Past consultation

We've been working with our partners for a decade to gather feedback on parks and green spaces in the Port Lands. We've collected lots of useful feedback through the Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection Environmental Assessment (EA) and Lower Don Lands EA. This included meetings, workshops, walks and surveys, all of which helped us understand people's aspirations for the naturalized areas, parks and public spaces in the Port Lands.

With our partners at the City of Toronto, we also collected feedback through the development of the Port Lands Planning Framework and Villiers Island Precinct Plan. This helped us make decisions about where amenities like schools, community centres and green spaces should be located, and what types of connections people will need to move through the Port Lands.

Decisions about where certain types of green spaces will be located are also guided by design parameters set through the environmental assessment (EA) process.

Now, we're taking those guidelines and working out the specific details. For example, if we know there's a place for an open, accessible green space, what should we put there? It could be a soccer field, or it could be a lawn where people can relax or picnic. We are making these decisions now so that we can tell the constructor what to build.

In 2017, we popped up at locations across the city to talk about the Port Lands and hear what's most valuable to people as we revitalize the waterfront. We also launched a survey to collect public feedback about what makes a great park. All of this input informed the early designs presented at our February 22, 2018, community consultation.

### *Early results of "What Makes a Great park" Survey*

What are people missing in park experiences?

- Engage in environmental stewardship (tree planting, gardening)
- Meet my neighbours / socialize in my community

What influences you to visit a new park?

- Ease of getting there
- To experience a new place
- Special features or amenities

Other experiences or programming

- Farmer's markets
- Nature or wildlife walks
- Music
- Places to run or walk
- Flexible, open areas

## **2. Consultation Process Overview**

### **Purpose of consultation**

In addition to creating a naturalized river valley, a crucial part of this project involves building new public spaces, roads and bridges, as well as flood control weirs and flood protection landforms. The work we need to do as part of Port Lands Flood Protection can be grouped into four larger categories: parks, roads and municipal infrastructure, bridges and earthworks/flood protection.

The focus for the February 22, 2018 public meeting was the design of parks and naturalized green spaces. The project team is currently finalizing schematic design, after which detailed design will start.



## Promotion of February 22, 2018 Community Consultation

### *Online Presence*

The project page at [waterfronttoronto.ca](http://waterfronttoronto.ca) for Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection includes links to relevant documents and resources, information about consultation events and upcoming opportunities to participate in public meetings.

### *Social Media*

Waterfront Toronto's Twitter and Facebook accounts (@WaterfrontTO, Facebook.com/Waterfronttoronto) were used to increase awareness about this event. A Facebook event for the meeting was created. These combined promotions reached 99,038 people.

### *Public Notice/Invitation*

A save-the-date notice was included in [February 2018 edition of Waterfront Toronto's newsletter](#). Invitations were also sent to members of the Port Lands Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

### *Pre-Event Media Coverage*

[Waterfront Toronto's Next Great Park Takes Shape, The Globe & Mail](#)

[Waterfront Toronto Seeking Input on Port Lands, UrbanToronto](#)

[BlogTO event listing](#)



## Presentations and activities

### Presentations



Julie Dabrusin, Member of Parliament for Toronto–Danforth, and Councillor Paula Fletcher (Ward 30) welcomed members of the public. Waterfront Toronto’s Senior Vice President of Planning and Design, Chris Glaisek, began with a history of the Port Lands and an overview of the feedback we’ve gathered in partnership with the City of Toronto and TRCA over the last ten years. Chief Project Officer, David Kusturin, then walked us through the Port Lands Flood Protection project. This included an overview of our 15-month Due Diligence exercise. Presenters Herb Sweeney and Matthew Urbanski from Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates Inc., walked participants through their proposed programming for the 16 hectares of parkland and their approach to creating natural green spaces.

To watch the presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1COPLMIUoZ0>

To watch the Q&A: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJnOjcUn4oc>

All display material and presentations are available here:

- Presentation (Waterfront Toronto Introduction) [PDF](#)
- Presentation (Design Team) [PDF](#)
- Display Panels (Context) [PDF](#)
- Display Panels (Aerial) [PDF](#)
- Display Panels (Perspectives) [PDF](#)
- Display Panels (Proposed Programming) [PDF](#)
- Display Panels (Scale Comparison) [PDF](#)
- Display Panels (City-Wide Open Space Program Inventory) [PDF](#)

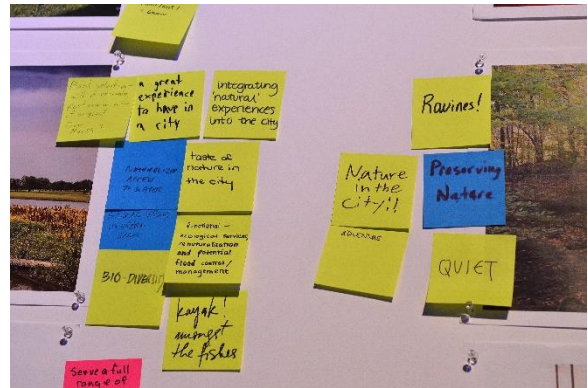
## Activities

### Map Scavenger Hunt



This interactive activity introduced participants to four park types identified by the design team: city-wide destination, neighbourhood park, sports, and accessible nature. Participants were asked to point out on the map one or two of their favourite places that match one of these four park types. Participants place pins on the locations they identified and share with the facilitator why they like those places.

### Tell Me More



Participants were shown images of existing parks and were asked to choose their three favourite images, then use post-it notes to describe why they think the park is noteworthy.

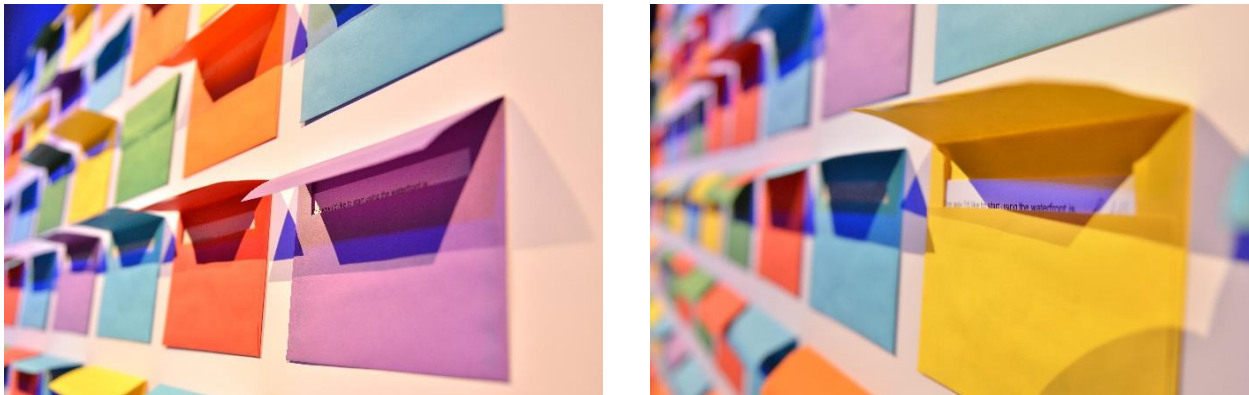


## Meet Your Neighbours



Participants partnered up with strangers and used a conversation guide to interview each other. Based on the conversation, they wrote their partner's story using a template we provided. The guide asked participants to describe new experiences they would like to see on the waterfront, things that are not working well and things that are working well.

## Envelope Wall



This activity invites participants to write comments on post cards with open-ended prompts and place the cards in envelopes posted on a board. The prompts were: “one way I’d like to start using the waterfront is;” “I would visit a new park if;” “I’m curious/hopeful about;” and “My fear is.”

### 3. What We Heard

#### Summary of participant feedback

The following is a high-level overview of the key themes from the February 22, 2018, Community Consultation. It provides a synthesis of participants' input across four consultation activations and during the Q&A that followed presentations.

#### *Themes*

##### **Integration of the natural and the urban**

Participants were interested in and intrigued by the potential of integrating natural and urban landscapes in the new parks in the Port Lands as evidenced by their focus on precedent images that showed a mix of green/natural-looking spaces and constructed spaces (bridges, paths). Urban landscapes include the integration of industrial heritage, public art and music with natural landscapes characterized by large masses of plantings, new riverways and a variety of proposed micro-ecologies. Comments on these images focused on the interaction between these two landscapes, for example "relinking nature and city," "softening the city scape," "a taste of nature in the city," "cusp of natural and city," and pointing out the transition in one image.

Another way participants saw the integration of urban and nature is through experiencing views of the city while being in a natural landscape. This was evident based on conversations with participants about their favourite park places.

A common fear expressed in written comments was that urban landscapes and buildings would encroach on park space and block views of the lake.

##### **Naturalization**

When asked about their favourite places on the waterfront, in all categories except for sports, participants pointed out parks with naturalized areas: Tommy Thompson Park, Corktown Common, Ward's Island, and Cherry Beach Park.

When going to a park, participants expressed a desire to feel like they've escaped the city, while still being in the city. A few participants mentioned an interest in interacting with nature, mostly through the feeling of being immersed: lying on the grass, accessing the water or using naturalized trail systems.

Note from Groundswell: Engagement designed to better understand what people mean by interaction with nature, what the spatial requirements are, and whether the proposed design meets that criteria would offer more detailed feedback for the design team.

##### **Access to water**

The ability for people to easily access the lake featured prominently across all four activities. Participants mentioned swimming, access to water sports and craft boating for users of all skill levels, "getting your feet wet" and unobstructed views. Precedent images with water features received a positive response. One comment from the audience with a spatial implication was, "when considering increased access to water sports, it would be important to consider parking, storage and mooring spaces."

There were also a number of comments fearing poor water quality and curiosity about remediation measures in the design.

### **Connection to surrounding neighbourhoods and the broader waterfront park system**

There's an impression that park spaces, especially on the eastern waterfront are fragmented, so there's interest in seeing more connection among existing and new spaces. Continuous green pedestrian and cycle pathways close to the water uninterrupted by buildings was a frequent example cited.

Participants wanted to better understand how the new parks will help to connect and integrate different neighbourhoods in the area.

### **Accessibility by transit and multiple modes**

This theme builds on the comments around connectivity, but with a more specific focus on getting to the new parks. Participants expressed their desire for a multimodal transit system that includes walking and cycling paths and ensures comfort in all seasons.

There were concerns about equitable access for different users coming from different parts of town. Separation of different transit modes was noted as something that needs to be improved on the waterfront in general.

### **Accessibility for diverse groups of people**

Ensuring new park spaces are accessible to diverse users was noted in many of the comments left on precedent images that depicted diverse age and demographic groups. These comments were essentially saying: "Yes, this is the kind of park that we want, something for everyone." Among favourite existing spaces, people noted lively parks that served as gathering spaces for diverse groups such as the Grange Park and Trinity Bellwoods Park. A few comments suggested that programming could ensure activities are available for users of all ages and diverse skill levels – another way to describe diversity.

### **Integration of history**

Protecting and addressing history came up as a reason why participants would visit a new park. Written comments mentioned decolonization and integration of Indigenous content into the park as a desired feature of the new park.

Further research is needed to better understand what this means for parks and specifically the spatial and programmatic implications of such.

### **Maintenance**

Participants made several comments about park maintenance. They wanted to ensure pre-emptively the design is sensitive to the idea that great park spaces need to be maintained properly; for example that trees don't die because of conflicting use and that the materials chosen don't deteriorate with overuse. They also wished that post-build maintenance maintains the integrity of the plan.

### **All-season use**

Participants expressed an interest in spaces that are adaptable and provide opportunities for active use in all seasons. This was a theme seen in the stories produced by the "Meet Your Neighbours" conversations. Participants are looking for more winter activities by the water and access to four season

support facilities, such as washrooms. The precedent image depicting a winter outdoor activity was among the images that received the highest number of comments, and during the live Q&A there were several comments about Toronto's climate realities.