



CENTRAL WATERFRONT BACKGROUNDER

Waterfront Toronto is transforming Toronto's central waterfront by creating a bold new look and unified design for the 3.5 km area running from Bathurst Street to Parliament Street. Soon Torontonians will be able to walk from one end of the central waterfront to the other along a water's edge promenade; enjoy spectacular new open spaces that feature breathtaking views of the lake and city skyline; and bicycle or jog along a new section of the popular Martin Goodman Trail.

Central Waterfront Innovative Design

Waterfront Toronto held an innovative design competition in 2006 to select the best plan to convert Toronto's central waterfront into a spectacular public waterfront area. While there had been much development in the area over the past few decades, there was no coherent look or feel and it was difficult to distinguish public space from private space along one of the most heavily used parts of the Toronto shoreline. The objective of the design competition was to connect and build on existing public spaces like the Music Garden and to provide a distinct and recognizable identity for all public spaces along Toronto's revitalized waterfront.

Thirty-eight teams from 15 countries responded to a Request for Qualifications and five teams were short-listed and asked to participate in the competition. The design team of West 8 from Rotterdam and Du Toit Allsopp Hillier (DTAH) from Toronto was selected as the winner of the competition.

The West 8 +DTAH central waterfront design features a continuous water's edge public promenade and boardwalk for the length of the central waterfront, new wavedecks at the foot of major waterfront streets, a series of pedestrian bridges that will link the gaps in the waterside boardwalk, and the transformation of Queens Quay into a pedestrian-friendly grand boulevard with generous green space and a new four-metre section of the Martin Goodman Trail.

Queens Quay Boulevard

Queens Quay Boulevard is Toronto's main waterfront street, yet in its current configuration it acts as a barrier rather than a gateway to the waterfront. Waterfront Toronto plans to transform Queens Quay into a grand pedestrian-friendly boulevard by reducing traffic to two lanes and shifting it to the north side of the streetcar tracks. The south side of the streetcar tracks would be transformed into a beautiful tree-lined public space featuring a generous new pedestrian promenade and continuous Martin Goodman Trail. After a two-year long environmental assessment process, City Council overwhelmingly approved Waterfront Toronto's plan to revitalize Queens Quay. Waterfront Toronto expects to submit the plan, part of the full Environmental Screening Report for the project, to the Ontario Ministry of Environment in mid-December 2009 where it will be subject to a 30-day public comment period.

If the EA is approved, the project will roll out in phases beginning with schematic design from Spadina Avenue to Parliament Street. Schematic design is the first phase of design for the project and will result in a comprehensive layout of the street from end to end, including traffic

management and construction phasing strategies. Schematic design is expected to take four months to complete and will be followed by detailed design.

The first phase of construction, which will begin in the Central Waterfront, will be determined during schematic design. Phase one construction is expected to begin about one year after the completion of the EA and will take 12 to 18 months to build.

Wavedecks

A key feature of Waterfront Toronto's central waterfront design is a series of wooden wavedecks inspired by the Canadian cottage experience and the shorelines of Ontario's great lakes. These urban docks provide generous public gathering spaces in areas that previously lacked access to the lake.

The transformation of the central waterfront includes three wavedecks located at Spadina Avenue, Rees and Simcoe Streets. A fourth wavedeck will be located at the Parliament Slip in East Bayfront. The three wavedecks in the central waterfront are now complete and open to the public. The Spadina WaveDeck opened in September 2008 to much acclaim and has been honoured with several prestigious design awards. The Simcoe and Rees WaveDecks opened in June 2009 and July 2009 respectively.

Water's Edge Promenade and Footbridges

The central waterfront design is defined by the creation of a continuous water's edge public promenade spanning the entire central waterfront. Today it is not possible to walk from one end of the waterfront to the other. Several sections of the waterfront have been cut-off from the public by development, and public space is not recognizable from private space. Waterfront Toronto is addressing this and working to ensure that the entire central waterfront will be publicly accessible for all to enjoy. Implementation of the continuous boardwalk began with the completion of the water's edge promenade expansions at York Quay in 2005 and John Quay in 2006.

Revitalization plans also feature five timber pedestrian footbridges to link the gaps in the new water's edge promenade. The footbridges will be located at Spadina Avenue, the Police Basin, Rees, Simcoe and Peter Streets. Designs for these footbridges are dramatic and will provide users with unique new views of the lake and city skyline. Planning is underway for the first of the five footbridges.

York Quay Revitalization

Harbourfront Centre operates a four hectare (10 acre site) along Toronto's central waterfront which encompasses York and John Quays. In 2000, Harbourfront Centre developed a master plan for the revitalization of its site designed to reclaim underutilized spaces for recreational, cultural and commercial purposes, and strengthen public access to the water's edge. The master plan also included a vision for Canada Square, an urban plaza at the water's edge.

This project, now known as the York Quay Revitalization Project, has since evolved to include elements from the winning submission of Waterfront Toronto's 2006 Central Waterfront Design Competition. In its submission, the design team, West 8 + DTAH envisioned a vibrant, mixed-use cultural/retail village for the site which would include Canada Square and another urban square bordering Queens Quay.

The planning, design and construction of the York Quay Revitalization Project has been divided into three key phases:

Phase One – Water’s Edge

This phase, completed by Waterfront Toronto and Harbourfront Centre in 2006, improved public access to the lake by completely restructuring the water’s edge around York and John Quays. Phase one also featured extensive landscaping improvements, the widening of the promenade and the addition of a five-metre wide wooden boardwalk at the water’s edge. Two 60-metre finger piers were also constructed for marine uses.

Phase Two – Underground Parking Garage, Canada Square and Overall Planning and Design of the York Quay Project

Phase Two is now underway. Designed by renowned landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh and Associates, Waterfront Toronto and Harbourfront Centre plan to replace the 212-spot surface parking lot — a 1.4 hectare area in the heart of the Harbourfront Centre site — with an underground parking garage (with approximately 300 parking spaces).

Phase Two work includes the planning and design of the overall York Quay cultural village site and any necessary applications and zoning amendments. Also included is the construction of the underground parking garage which opens up the waterfront site for initial landscaping for Canada Square, and interim treatments for the urban square and cultural/retail village.

Phase Three – York Quay Cultural Village and Urban Square Completion

Phase Three will build upon the planning and design undertaken in Phase Two, resulting in the development of a mixed-use cultural village including neighbourhood-scaled retail and commercial space, as well the completion of the urban square bordering Queens Quay.

An accelerated timeline will ensure that the parking garage is complete by spring 2011.

Awards

Design excellence has been intricately woven into all aspects of the central waterfront design – from the bold new innovative look to the selection of materials, furnishings and public art. Waterfront Toronto has received seven distinguished urban design awards for projects stemming from the central waterfront design including three Toronto Urban Design Awards, three Canadian Society of Landscape Architects Awards and one from the American Society of Landscape Architects. In addition, the wavedecks have received two construction-related awards honouring excellence in building and construction techniques.

Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is a key feature of the central waterfront design. The design features the creation of new fish habitats with installations of riverstone shoals, tree logs and embankments providing shelter, and increased feeding and forging opportunities. Waterfront

Toronto considers restoration of marine ecology integral to creating a living ecosystem in Toronto's inner harbour.

Aquatic Habitat Toronto, which Waterfront Toronto is a partner of, has received two Public Sector Quality Fair Awards for the aquatic habitat restoration work currently happening on Toronto's central waterfront. Aquatic Habitat Toronto provides advice on aquatic habitat work and facilitates the approval process for projects.