



JACK LAYTON FERRY TERMINAL & HARBOUR SQUARE PARK

PUBLIC FEEDBACK REPORT

March 30, 2015

1.1 Background

In January 2015, Waterfront Toronto launched an innovative design competition to reimagine one of Toronto's most important waterfront destinations. The goal of the competition was to create an inspiring vision and a master plan that will guide the long-term transformation of the Ferry Terminal and Harbour Square Park.

As the gateway to the Toronto Islands – one of the City's most unique and cherished parks – the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal and Harbour Square Park lack the amenities and infrastructure to support the approximately 1.3 million visitors who use the ferry each year. The design competition was intended to produce a master plan that would outline a vision that can be constructed in phases, as funding becomes available over time.

Waterfront Toronto has provided members of the public with a number of opportunities to learn about the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal & Harbour Square Park Innovative Design Competition and to provide input on the five different designs that have been proposed. This report summarizes these opportunities and the feedback that Waterfront Toronto has received.

For more information, please visit www.waterfrontoronto.ca.

1.2 Promotion of the Design Competition

Waterfront Toronto made a concerted effort to inform the public about the design competition and to encourage people to share their views and engage in this important civic conversation. These efforts were comprised of three main approaches:

News Media

This resulted in a large amount of coverage by major news outlets (*The Toronto Star*, *The National Post*, *The Globe and Mail*, *CityNews*, *CP24*, *CBC News*, *680 News*), feature coverage (*The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*), blog and specialty coverage (*BlogTO*, *Torontoist*, *Urban Toronto*, *Architect This City*) and broadcast radio coverage (CBC Radio's *Metro Morning*).

Notable quotes from media coverage include:

It's a strong strategy, and I think when many Torontonians see the proposals – and vote on them this week – they will express enthusiasm, as Mr. Tory himself did in a warm speech at the presentation Monday night.

-Alex Bozikovic, The Globe & Mail

No matter who redesigns the terminal and park, the new docks will have a higher civic profile than ever before.

-Christopher Hume, Toronto Star

See Appendix 3 for samples of media coverage.

Social Media Promotion

Waterfront Toronto used its social media channels to promote the design competition and public feedback mechanisms. Social media were also used to generate discussion and amplify news media coverage.

Facebook – A boosted post reached 73,088 individuals, was shared 137 times, received 339 likes and generated 185 conversations. The post link to Waterfront Toronto’s blog, where users could review the five proposals and submit their feedback, was clicked 2,437 times.

Twitter – Eleven tweets about the design competition and public feedback generated 24,289 impressions. Cumulatively they were retweeted 96 times and generated eight conversations.

LinkedIn – A boosted post reached 17,591 individuals and users interacted with it 26 times. The post link to Waterfront Toronto’s blog was clicked 128 times.

YouTube – A short video explaining and promoting the innovative design competition was viewed 2,094 times.

Waterfront Toronto’s Website & Email Newsletter

The design competition was advertised on Waterfront Toronto’s homepage over the course of the month leading up to the public exhibition and public feedback period. During that time period, the page received 39,336 pageviews from 11,288 unique users.

The competition, exhibition and public feedback were also advertised through Waterfront Toronto’s monthly email newsletter and in a special email blast to our 7,000 newsletter subscribers.

1.3 Competition Exhibition

Waterfront Toronto organized a public exhibit in the Rotunda at City Hall, which included models, as well as the display panels and design report submission from each team. The exhibition was open to the public from March 16 to 20, 2015. Public presentations by the five design teams were made on the evening of March 16 with over 250 members of the public in attendance.

Waterfront Toronto posted all five design proposals online in a blog post and invited the public to review and provide feedback from March 16 to 21, 2015. Each proposal was viewed online an average of 3,669 times and readers spent an average of 2:56 minutes doing so

2. Public Feedback Summary

In order to receive public feedback, Waterfront Toronto placed comment cards and drop boxes at the exhibition at City Hall. Feedback was also accepted through an online survey. Including both comment cards submitted at City Hall and online surveys completed, Waterfront Toronto received 1,196 responses from members of the public. The input received from the comment cards and the survey makes up the majority of the content of this report. Waterfront Toronto also received nine public submissions via email and these comments have been incorporated into this summary report.

The comment cards and online survey asked people to rate the importance of seven design elements in determining a successful proposal. Respondents were then given the opportunity to answer two questions:

- 1) After reviewing the design proposals, what are your preferred design features?
- 2) Are there any other thoughts you'd like to share?

See Appendix 2 for a sample comment card.

Ranking the Importance of Design Elements

Respondents were given a list of the seven elements that competition teams were asked to incorporate into their designs. Respondents were then asked to rank those elements from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important)¹. The results show that all of the design elements were supported by a majority of respondents:

- Creating an iconic Ferry Terminal – 69% supportive
- Promoting continuous waterfront access – 69% supportive
- Improving passenger queuing areas – 65% supportive
- Enhancing Harbour Square Park – 59% supportive
- Creating connections to the rest of the city – 57% supportive
- Promoting sustainable development – 51% supportive
- Providing universal access for people of all ages and abilities – 57% supportive

By a wide margin, respondents showed the strongest support for creating an iconic site along the waterfront, with continuous access to the water's edge and more amenable waiting areas for ferry passengers. 40.8% of respondents rated "Creating an iconic and welcoming ferry terminal" as the most important element for the winning proposal. By contrast, 8.4% of respondents thought that creating an iconic ferry terminal was the least important feature of the proposed designs.

A number of respondents indicated in their comments that "universal access" should not be part of the ranking exercise, as it is already required by legislation and building codes. Other respondents commented that they were very happy to see this design element included, as they felt it signified

¹ In order to maintain equivalence between submissions made on comment cards and submissions submitted via the online feedback form, respondents were not required to submit forced rankings. A given respondent was thus able to assign multiple elements the same ranking. Indeed, many respondents assigned a 1 to all seven design elements, further indicating broad support for all seven of the design competition's required elements.

A large number of respondents (92) stressed the importance of walkways, paths and boardwalks – elevated or at grade – that would bring people closer to the water’s edge and that would connect seamlessly to other waterfront paths and promenades. Closely related was the desire expressed by a number of people (58) that the new park and pathways should open up new and improved views of Lake Ontario and the Toronto Island.

Comments about Programming & Amenities

Numerous commenters stressed that the winning design must adequately take into account four-season use of the ferry service and the park – making particular note of Toronto’s harsh winter months – and expressed a desire to see a range of winter activities in the park (89). The winter activity suggested most commonly was ice skating (39). Among summer activities, creating opportunities for swimming in Harbour Square Park was the most requested (95) and many liked the proposals for an urban beach (23). A number of people (24) liked the geyser clock enough to mention it specifically: “The geyser feature is the single most exciting thing presented. Everyone on the waterfront will be looking for it to go off,” said one respondent. Many respondents (29) were happy to see kid-friendly play areas in the designs, though some of those felt that these should be located closer to the ferry terminal for the convenience of families making the trip to the Island.

Another popular request (35) was more food and drink in the form of a range of cafes, snack bars, restaurants or other vendors. Some insisted that this should be focused on providing healthy food options and not chain or fast food options. A handful of commenters were highly enthusiastic about the possibility of food trucks serving the park and ferry terminal area.

Comments about Transportation Connections

Some respondents (35) insisted that – with the exception of the Ward’s Island Ferry access – cars had no place approaching the ferry terminal or the park. There was criticism of schemes that brought parking or drop-off/pick-up loops south into the site. Most of these respondents suggested that public transit, walking and cycling should be given top priority with little to no access to the site by cars for the general public.

A number of respondents (39), particularly those who identified themselves as Island residents, hoped for better bicycle facilities, including secure storage and direct cycling access to the ferry terminal. Several residents of the Toronto Island (9) felt their needs for daily transport and access to the ferry services had not been adequately taken into account by any of the five design teams. A few respondents suggested that City staff, Islanders and other daily users of the ferry service who must bring vehicles and bicycles to Ward’s Island should have priority access to the Ferry Terminal, suggesting that this could be provided via the access lane to the east of the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel.

Many respondents (31) noted that modernizing the ferry service’s ticketing system – e.g. online or automated ticketing, timed tickets – will be of paramount importance no matter which team is selected, and urged City of Toronto staff to look at this immediately. A handful of commenters

suggested that integration with TTC fares would be the best solution. A few respondents noted that the current streetcar “connection” to the Ferry Terminal was inadequate and suggested that improving its visibility and accessibility should be an objective of the selected design.

Comments about Budget & Feasibility

A number of respondents (33) advised the competition jury to be bold in their choice, wanting above all else a grand and ambitious vision for this important waterfront site – something that would inspire Torontonians and tourists alike – and saw this as an opportunity to do something memorable, exciting, breathtaking, iconic, daring. One respondent’s advice was “Be bold. Hit a homerun on this project. Connect the city to the water to the islands. Make this a year round destination in and of itself.”

Some commenters (15) expressed skepticism about whether Toronto could afford anything but the most modest of proposals, or, if we can, questioned whether the City of Toronto would be able to adequately maintain these new facilities. A smaller number (9) indicated that they thought that redesigning the ferry terminal and park were a waste of money, suggesting the site and the ferry operations are fine just the way they are.

A handful of respondents (8) noted that the proposed expansion of the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport would put any improvements to the ferry terminal and Harbour Square Park at risk.

Some of the residents of the Harbour Square Condominiums (20) identified themselves and felt they had not been adequately consulted about the designs being proposed. They felt it was not appropriate for the design teams to consider eliminating or encroaching upon private elements of the condominiums, including the parking lot south of their buildings, the tunnel at the foot of Bay Street and the enclosed bridge between Harbour Square Condos and the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel.

2.4 The Five Proposals

While the comment cards and online survey did not specifically ask respondents to identify which proposal they preferred, many respondents nonetheless expressed a preference or support for one or more of the proposals. What follows is a summary of feedback offered by respondents on specific proposals:

Clement Blanchet, RVTR and Batlle i Roig

Those who supported this design (131) were taken with the “big ideas” proposed. Many noted that the grand features of the City Slope, the Light House Terminal and the Belvedere would open breathtaking new views south to Lake Ontario and north to the city, while unifying the site. Others

especially enjoyed the proposal’s botanical gardens inside the ferry terminal, noting the warm respite they would provide in the colder winter months. Supporters appreciated the formal architectural qualities of both the terminal and the new public spaces. “I think that the allusion to a lighthouse is a strong opportunity to create an identity for the ferry terminal as well as a really interesting 'interior' space as part of the greenhouse and larger ferry waiting area,” said one respondent. Many liked the clearly defined landscapes, the pool, the orchard, the playground and the plazas. A number of this proposal’s supporters said that they thought it best met the objectives of the design competition, offering a careful balance of all the needs of the various kinds of ferry terminal users and park visitors.

I love the urbanness, the promenade, sightlines and connections to walkways, ability to queue.

Those who didn’t favour this proposal found it “out of touch” with Toronto. Some found the proposal disjointed, while others thought it was too formal in its layout or called it “rigid.” One respondent pointedly noted that the proposal “offers very little in naturalizing the waterfront” and would have preferred to see more bird-friendly, native flora, bio-swales or other “ecological” approaches. Another liked the idea of creating an orchard, but thought it was “impractical” in a public park on the waterfront.

Diller Scofidio + Renfro, architectsAlliance and Hood Design

Those who supported this design (180) praised the slatted canopy for its breathtaking modern design, its use of natural materials and its ability to provide shade in the hot summer months and allow sunlight to penetrate in the cold winter months. The Civic Canopy’s programmatic elements were also a hit with many individuals, who expressed enthusiasm for the ice caves, the markets, the green wall and the many other “civic” features. The canopy itself was praised as “bold,” “iconic” and “inspiring.” Some supporters likened it to Seville, Spain’s Metropol

This design has a lot of engaging features and diverse ways to inhabit the space, while simultaneously possessing a visual identity that creates a distinctive sense of “place.”

Parasol and felt this structure would “put Toronto on the map.” Still others praised the landscape in this proposal, the creation of floating wetlands and other natural habitats, the sheltered beach, the incorporation of the Yonge Street Slip and the introduction of a north-south route that would open up a view of the ferry terminal from Queens Quay.

Critics of this proposal disliked the drop-off loop for private vehicles and TTC buses. However, many of those insisted that they liked this proposal, except for the provision of vehicular access down to the ferry terminal. Other critics found the canopy too similar to other well-known projects, citing international examples that they had already seen. Still others questioned whether the canopy’s slotted roof would provide sufficient shelter in inclement weather. A handful of respondents thought that introducing wetlands in this area of the harbour would not be the best use of precious waterfront space. Another suggested that the proposed beach was “impractical” because “no one will swim in the harbour.”

KPMB, West 8 and Greenberg Consultants

Those who supported this design (243) praised the undulating waves of the green roof, the use of wood and natural materials and the continuation of the elements from the Central Waterfront Master Plan. Supporters liked how this design “opened up the terminal space” and expanded the park without “over-programming” it. A number remarked

I really like this proposal from KPMB, West 8 and Greenberg Consultants (Harbour Landing). This team gets it!

positively on the proposal’s soft forms and edges, its attention to views of Lake Ontario, and the “naturalized” and “rolling” landscape. One respondent seemed to sum up best the feelings of those who supported this proposal: “Iconic, stunning undulating green roof pavilion provides needed shade, great use of topography in the park, strong on accessibility and sustainability.” The fact that the ferry terminal had a solid roof was a big plus for many respondents who were concerned about protecting passengers from inclement weather.

Respondents who were critical of this proposal felt that it was not iconic enough. Some mentioned that the ferry terminal was hidden away beneath the park. Others took issue with how the raised green roof would block views of Lake Ontario from the north end of the site. A number were opposed to this proposal because it did not entirely remove the tunnel entrance at the foot of Bay Street. Still others were opposed to this proposal because they felt it did not provide enough space for queuing ferry passengers.

Quadrangle Architects, aLL Design and Janet Rosenberg + Studio

Those who supported this design (82) praised its playfulness and whimsy. Many thought the “street creatures” and eye-popping colours would add much-needed vibrancy to the waterfront and encapsulated the full range of what an inspiring civic space can be. Supporters liked the way that the site’s design reorganized the flow of various modes of traffic, accommodating pedestrians, ferry loading and unloading, automobiles and bicycles. Others

really liked the addition of a waterfront bar/restaurant with views of Lake Ontario and the proposal for an urban beach. Still others thought the addition of the undulating raised walkway was a great solution to maintaining a continuous path along the water’s edge. “I can already imagine being there – stunning!” said one enthusiastic supporter.

Critics of this proposal took issue with much of what supporters liked, finding the colours and sculptures too “over-the-top,” or too busy. Others thought the design lacked cohesion and could not see an organizing principle. A handful of respondents suggested that the design’s extreme playfulness would not age well and cautioned against investing money in proposal that they believe would quickly become dated.

This design can bring this city to another level that will not only bring in tourism, but will transform this area into the new hot spot for residents to enjoy.

Stoss, nARCHITECTS and ZAS Architects

Those that supported this proposal (111) praised its atmospheric qualities, the way it opens up the space, the way that the terminal and queuing areas can be reconfigured to meet seasonal demands, the forest and waiting bosques, and the architecture of the ferry terminal building. Many loved the park design and a large and vocal group loved the swimming

pool and hot tubs. A number of respondents found the ethereal quality of Cloud Park very seductive and thought this is exactly what Toronto needs, in terms of an iconic waterfront place. One respondent summed it up by saying: “The combination of a terminal, forested park, open park, and swimming space is something that I think would really benefit the area residents as well as promote a positive image of Toronto & Canada to tourists.”

Those who were critical of this proposal took issue with the unique aesthetic, finding the “fog” and “clouds” to be too weird or unrealistic for year-round conditions. Others thought that the ferry terminal building was too small or that the treed waiting areas would not provide sufficient shelter for ferry passengers in inclement weather. Quite a number of commenters objected to the idea of a public hot tub in a city park, calling it “impractical” and “too hard to maintain.”

Cloud Park ultimately prevails as the preferred framework: for its restraint, respect and measured do-ability and modest operability.

Attachments

- Appendix 1 – Analysis of detailed public feedback and links to raw data
- Appendix 2 – Sample comment card
- Appendix 3 – Selected media coverage

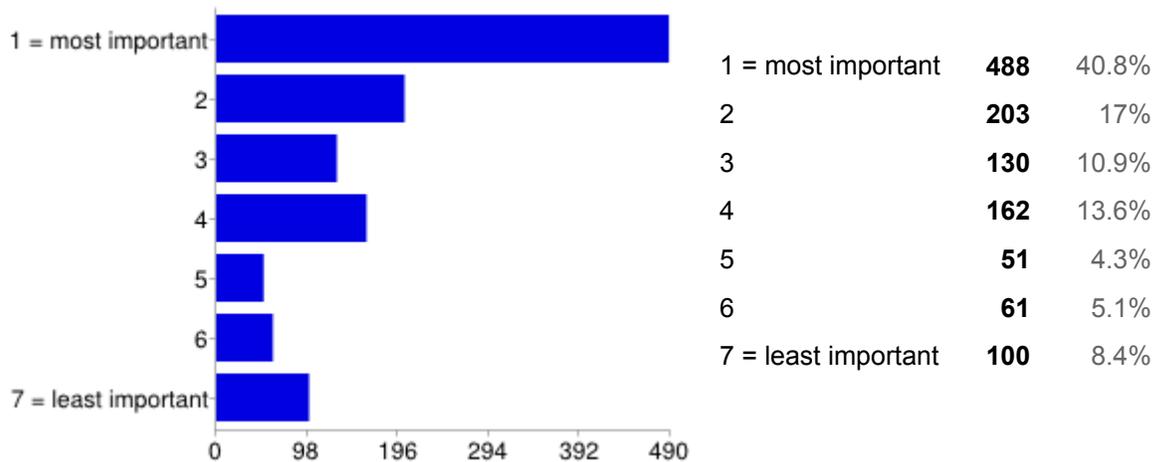
Appendix 1 – Analysis of Public Feedback and Links to Raw Data

A complete summary of the public feedback can be viewed here: tiny.cc/JLFT-DATA

The raw data collected through public feedback (including transcriptions of physical comment cards) is available here: tiny.cc/JLFT-RAWDATA

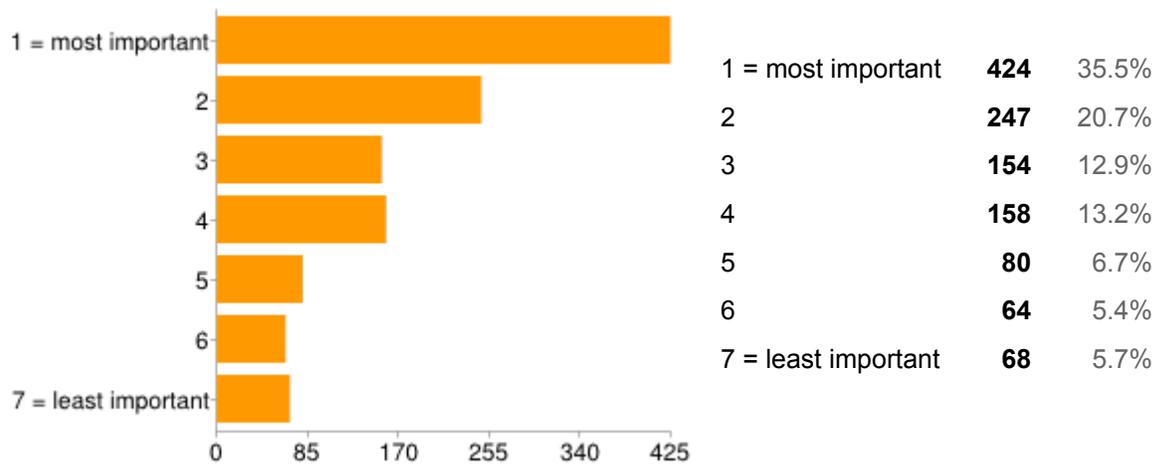
Respondents were given the seven required elements that the competition teams were asked to incorporate into their designs and asked to rank those elements in order of their importance. Below is the result of tabulating the 1,196 submissions made via online feedback form and comment cards submitted at City Hall. Some analysis of the results is provided.

Creating an Iconic and Welcoming Ferry Terminal



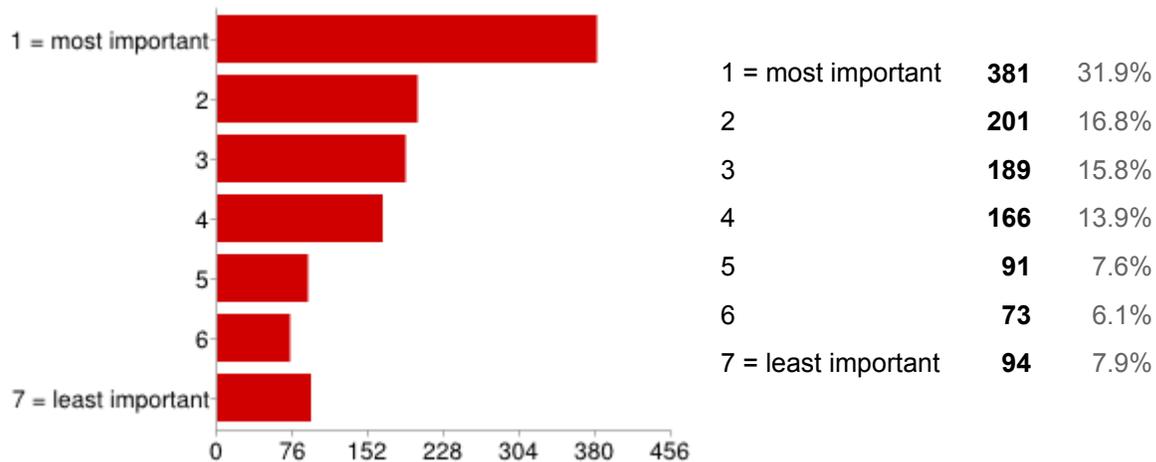
This was seen as being a top priority for 58% (691) of respondents, who ranked “creating an iconic and welcoming ferry terminal” as 1 or 2. 13% (161) thought it was not a top priority, giving this design element a rank of 6 or 7. Overall 69% of respondents were supportive, giving it a rank of 1, 2, or 3.

Promoting Continuous Waterfront Access



This was seen as being a top priority for 56% (671) of respondents, who ranked “promoting continuous waterfront access” as 1 or 2. 11% (132) thought it was not a top priority, giving this design element a rank of 6 or 7. Overall 69% of respondents were supportive, giving it a rank of 1, 2 or 3.

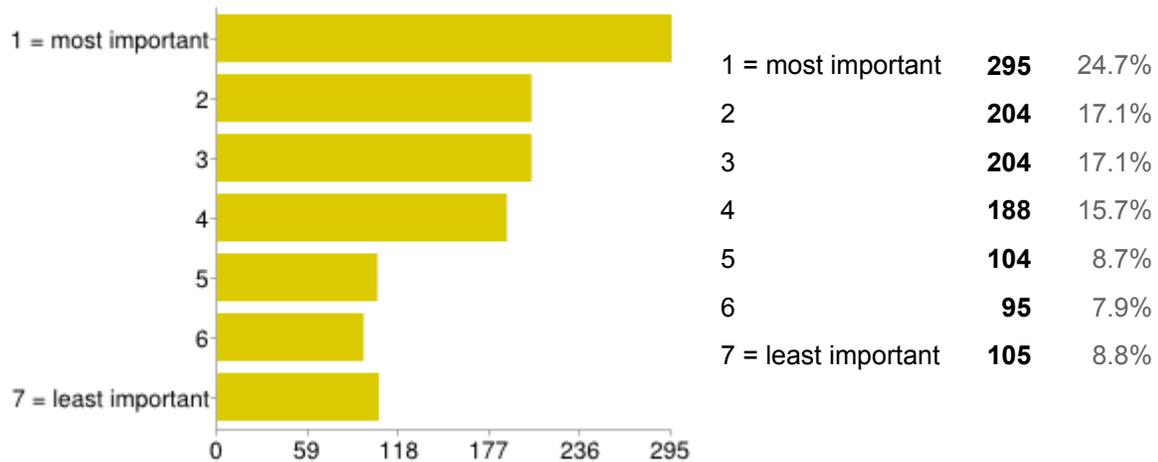
Improving queuing areas for ferry passengers



This was seen as being a top priority for 49% (582) of respondents, who ranked “improving queuing areas for the ferry passengers” as 1 or 2. 14% (167) thought it was not a top priority,

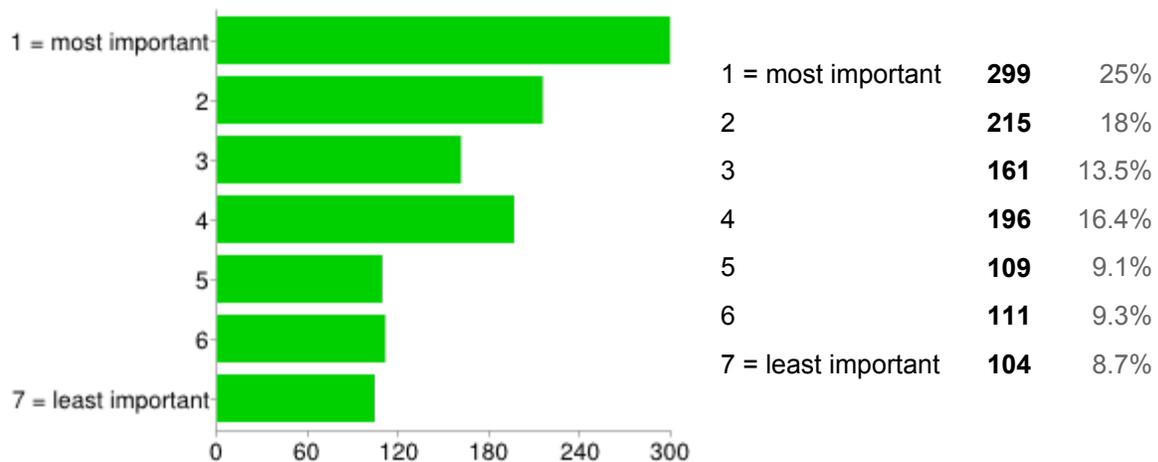
giving this design element a rank of 6 or 7. Overall 65% of respondents were supportive, giving it a rank of 1, 2 or 3.

Enhancing Harbour Square Park



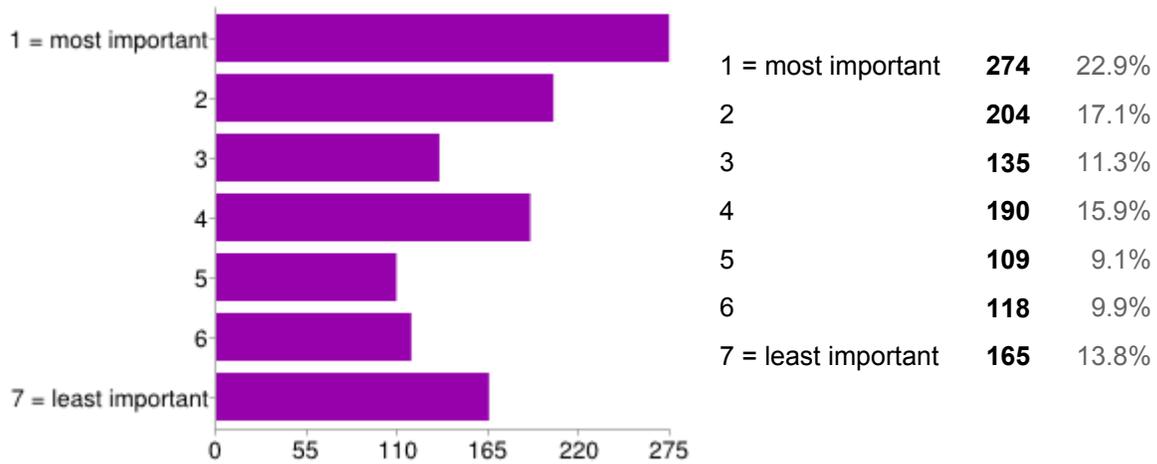
This was seen as being a top priority for 42% (499) of respondents, who ranked “an enhanced Harbour Square Park” as 1 or 2. 17% (200) thought it was not a top priority, giving this design element a rank of 6 or 7. Overall 59% of respondents were supportive, giving it a rank of 1, 2 or 3.

Creating connections to the rest of the city



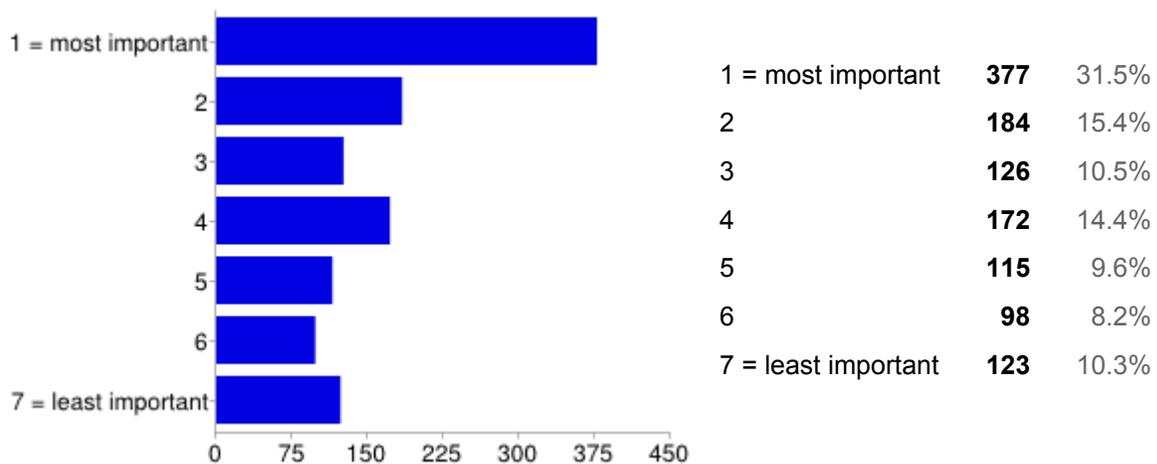
This was seen as being a top priority for 43% (514) of respondents, who ranked “creating connections to the city” as 1 or 2. 18% (215) thought it was not a priority, giving this design element a rank of 6 or 7. Overall 57% of respondents were supportive, giving it a rank of 1, 2 or 3.

Promoting sustainable development



This was seen as a top priority for 40% (478) of respondents, who ranked “promoting sustainable development” as 1 or 2. 24% (283) thought this was not a priority, giving this design element a rank of 6 or 7. Overall 51% of respondents were supportive, giving it a rank of 1, 2 or 3.

Providing universal access for people of all ages and abilities



This was seen as a top priority for 47% (561) of respondents, who ranked “universally accessible for people of all ages and abilities” as 1 or 2. 18% (221) thought this was not a priority, giving this design element a rank of 6 or 7. Overall 57% of respondents were supportive, giving it a rank of 1, 2 or 3.

Appendix 2 – Sample Comment Card

Comment Card

The jury will consider the team's approach to each of the following design elements in making their final selection.

Please rank the following design elements from 1 to 7 in order of their importance to you.

1 = most important, 7 = least important

	Create an iconic and welcoming Ferry Terminal
	Promote continuous waterfront access
	Improve queueing areas for Ferry passengers
	Enhance Harbour Square Park
	Create connections to the city
	Promote sustainable development
	Provide universal access for people of all ages and abilities

After reviewing the design proposals, what are your preferred design features?

Are there any other thoughts you'd like to share?



The public comments will be summarized and provided to the Design Jack Layton Ferry Terminal and Harbour Square Park Innovative Design Competition Jury. To be included in the report your comments must be received on or before March 20, 2015.

For more information or to submit comments online visit our website at www.waterfrontoronto.ca or email info@waterfrontoronto.ca.

Appendix 3 – Selected Media Coverage

The Toronto Star

News / GTA

Ferry terminal competition could be the berth of a new Toronto: Hume
No matter who redesigns the terminal and park, the new docks will have a higher civic profile than ever before.



/ DILLER SCOFIDIO+RENFRO, HOOD DESIGN AND ARCHITECTSALLIANCE

Civic Canopy, a proposal prepared by Diller Scofidio+Renfro, Hood Design and architectsAlliance, presents a sinuous wooden roof woven around living trees and an elevated walkway as part of its proposal for a new Jack Layton Ferry Terminal and Harbour Square Park.

By: Christopher Hume Urban Issues, Published on Tue Mar 17 2015

Who would have thought the remaking of the Jack Layton Ferry terminal would have become a matter of international interest?

But when the [five finalists](#) in the competition to redesign the nondescript facility and Harbour Square beside it were announced Monday, architects and landscape architects from as far away as London, Paris and Rotterdam were included — along with some of the best local practitioners.

What all these short-listed submissions share is a clear understanding that this project goes beyond boarding a boat. The docks are part of a larger waterfront revitalization that has been underway for more than a decade.

Suddenly, the possibilities seem endless. That's what's exciting. That's why the competition attracted some of the best designers in the world. This isn't just a ferry terminal or a chance to make a statement; it's an occasion to change how a city sees itself.

For Torontonians, the proposals stand in stark contrast not just to the old structure, but our expectations of the city. Is a ferry dock a strictly utilitarian concern that serves its purpose and nothing more? Or could it be a destination in its own right, a celebration of a waterfront city?

Until now, Toronto has opted for the former. Cheap but rarely cheerful, we have been content to make do with the merely useful, as if that were all that counts. These five schemes re-imagine Hogtown as a grown-up city that takes maximum advantage of an opportunity such as this. After the Rob Ford ([open Rob Ford's policard](#)) debacle, that's a hard line to swallow. Like the former mayor, many Torontonians think of the city as someone else's problem, certainly not theirs. The sort of advanced urbanity the submissions assume has appeared only recently in Toronto, and with much hand-wringing.

When Mayor John Tory ([open John Tory's policard](#)) appointed Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong ([open Denzil Minnan-Wong's policard](#)) to the board of Waterfront Toronto, he showed himself to be another in a long line of politicians suspicious of anything that isn't banal. The argument is timid, tired and tedious and always the same: We can't afford better. What's wrong with concrete, chain link fencing, asphalt and railroad ties, anyway?

These plans will frighten them. None more so than the spectacular entry from aLL Design (Will Alsop, London) and Quadrangle Architects and Janet Rosenberg (Toronto). They envision a bright red pavilion overlooking Lake Ontario and an elevated footbridge bisecting the site east to west. Pools, terraces, footpaths, a boardwalk and series of large sculptural objects would transform the site into a display of lakeside exuberance never seen in this city.

Diller Scofidio+Renfro (New York), architectsAlliance (Toronto) and Hood Design (California) have come up with an extraordinary wooden canopy that shelters the dock and provides an elegant focal point for a bigger scheme that includes a pond/skating, an all-weather kids' play area, a lookout and even a beach.

Stoss Landscape Urbanism (Boston), nARCHITECTS (New York) and ZAS Architects (Toronto) have devised a simple but elegant set of solutions highlighted by the planting of hundreds of trees. Called Cloud Gate, its elements include an "ice plaza," a "swim basin" and a soaring light-filled terminal with views across the lake.

West 8 (Rotterdam) with KPMB Architects and Greenberg Consultants (both Toronto) would put a massive undulating green roof over the terminal. All three members of this team have extensive waterfront experience and know what's possible and what's expected. Their submission is no less poetic for being coherent and urbane.

Clement Blanchet Architecture (Paris), RVTR (Toronto) and Batlle i Roig (Barcelona) suggest a long, low, horizontal terminal clad in glass. The park comprises two large ponds, trees and several distinct gardens.

Any of these would be a welcome addition to the waterfront. Given that 1.3 million visitors move through the ferry terminal annually, a remake could have a hugely positive impact.

The submissions will be on display in the Rotunda at Toronto City Hall until Friday at 5 p.m. Once you've had a look, send your thoughts on these brave new proposals to waterfrontoronto.ca. The deadline is Saturday at noon.

Christopher Hume can be reached at chume@thestar.ca

The Globe and Mail

Ferry tales: How Toronto's terminal could make magic on the waterfront

ALEX BOZIKOVIC

The Globe and Mail

Published Thursday, Mar. 19 2015, 1:32 PM EDT

Last updated Thursday, Mar. 19 2015, 1:33 PM EDT

The Toronto Islands are a magical place, a world apart from the city. And yet getting there is a grim and disorienting experience. You walk past the two-lane maw of a parking garage, along a narrow plaza, and – after lining up to buy a ferry ticket – you are steered into an open-air holding pen. Visitors have no choice but to be pushed along by the mob. Locals, as in so many other parts of Toronto's public realm, take the dysfunction for granted.

But that could change. This week, a [design competition](#) run by Waterfront Toronto brought forth five distinct visions for the site from five teams of top-flight designers. The proposals represent the rich state of landscape architecture today: bold in form, sometimes whimsical, attentive to ecology and hard-headed about the way people use public space. It's a set of ideas as deep and nourishing as a Great Lake.

Some of the proposals, presented publicly at City Hall Monday night, dramatically reshuffle the site, which comprises Jack Layton Ferry Terminal and Harbour Square Park. Two effectively make the terminal disappear, merging it into large multi-purpose structures: KPMB Architects' Bruce Kuwabara calls this "a fusion of terminal and park." They assume that new ticketing technology would likely eliminate the need for a holding area, thereby freeing the whole park to serve as a waiting area full of lures and attractions.

One turns the park's ground into a roof: the proposal by KPMB with landscape architects West 8 and local urban designer Ken Greenberg creates a lawn and then pulls up part of it, like an enchanted carpet, to form a green roof on top of a complex and beautiful skeleton of wood.

Another, "Civic Canopy," by the New York architects [Diller Scofidio+Renfro](#) (with landscape architects and Hood Design and Toronto's architectsAlliance), imagines a sculptural canopy that spans the site – a parametric trellis, that would provide shade for passengers and, at other times, for farmers' markets or other community events. "There is an amazing opportunity to cap Bay Street with a new civic building that should be an icon," DS+R's Charles Renfro said in an interview. But that iconic quality "should grow out of a close read of the islands themselves. We tried to develop a building image which is distinctly architectural, but also tapping into the DNA of natural structures and systems." Their canopy does that, evoking a whale skeleton while fitting into the architects' oeuvre of digitally enabled formal explorations.

The five proposals



Cloud Park: Stoss Landscape Urbanism, nARCHITECTS and ZAS Architects

The opening move of this plan would be a literal cloud – mist, to provide a sense “that this is a fantastical place, a place like no other,” Chris Reed said. A series of treed mounds generate a rolling landscape that surrounds a splash pool/skating rink, and a play area. A new terminal building – relatively small in size – would serve as a park pavilion in the cold months. The designers imagine a swimming pool set within the water of the harbour, providing visitors the chance to feel immersed in the lake. The basin to the west would become a site for kayaking, active recreation in the water itself.

(summary and full proposal)



Clement Blanchet Architecture, RVTR and Batlle i Roig

The plan’s central element is a long pier-like platform that extends the line of Bay Street up a grand stair (“social carpet”) and reaches out south over the lake; this would meet a belvedere – an open, elevated platform, shaded by trees, that runs east-west across the site. To the east, a new glassed-in terminal building that Blanchet compared to a new Crystal Palace would be brightly illuminated and form “a lighthouse,” a beacon at night. To the west, a new swimming pool (which converts to a skating rink in winter) and playground would help keep the park busy year round. A formal garden that samples the landscapes of the region – orchard, forest, wetlands and sand dunes.

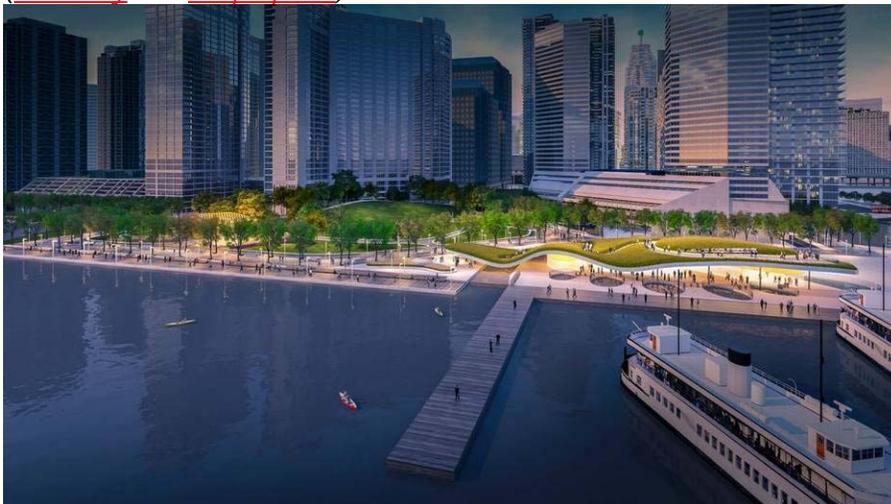
(summary and full proposal)



Civic Canopy: Diller Scofidio+Renfro, architectsAlliance and Hood Design

The site, Charles Renfro said, “has an obligation to become Toronto’s new civic icon.” The proposal eliminates the need for a terminal and holding area by wagering on new electronic ticketing technology. Its main element is a soaring wooden structure, “a lifted boardwalk” that will serve as a gateway to the islands and the harbour. Underneath the canopy, a smaller glassed-in “grow house” provides enclosed waiting area. Soft naturalized landscape along the water’s edge, designed by the landscape architect Walter Hood, would also include a large swimmable beach across about half of the site.

(summary and full proposal)



Harbour Landing: KPMB Architects, West 8 and Greenberg Consultants

In this proposal, a new terminal building becomes part of the landscape – its undulating wooden structure topped with a green roof that serves as space for play, recreation and a route for meandering across the site. Underneath this roof would be a glass-walled waiting area. As a quieter counterpoint, the adjacent green space would be planted with a mixture of lawn, glades of trees and flowerbeds, and the main pedestrian route would be a piazza paved in brick. To the west, an enclosed slip would be used for kayaking and, in the winter, converted to a skating rink. The promenade along the lakefront, which was designed by West 8, would be strongly defined here as a treed corridor across the site.

[\(summary and full proposal\)](#)



Quadrangle Architects, aLL Design, Janet Rosenberg & Studio

This proposal, led by the English architect Will Alsop, clads fairly straightforward buildings with some wild forms and hot colours. It would create a new terminal building, running east-west along the lake – open at the ground, with a “bar (juice or real)” upstairs, overlooking the harbour and connecting to a long, covered elevated walkway. The terminal building is hot pink, and both the paving of the pedestrian plaza and the roof would feature a bold waveform pattern. And the ground would be spotted with the designers “street creatures,” blobby, vaguely humanoid shapes that enclose waiting areas and ticket booths. The proposal also calls for a wading pool with an “urban beach” that borders a wading pool/skating rink; a swimming pool, at the level of the lake, would occupy the west end of the site.

[\(summary and full proposal\)](#)

Innovation to impress

DS+R are the closest thing to star designers in the competition – they are best known for their work on [The High Line](#) in New York, and will be in the spotlight for the new Broad Museum in Los Angeles later this year. (The office once contrived a “[building](#)” that consisted entirely of mist, a precedent that came up in its own proposal and another one, too.)

But the competition field includes a healthy mixture of well-known innovators, such as the English troublemaker Will Alsop, who led the design of OCADU’s Sharp Centre for Design, and West 8 and nARCHITECTS; skilled but under-the-radar practitioners, such as landscape architects STOSS; and seasoned locals, such as KPMB and ZAS. It’s pretty much the ideal blend to produce a mixture of careful analysis and new ideas.

Which is precisely the point. The site belongs to the city proper, but Waterfront Toronto – an arm’s-length agency that is charged with redeveloping much of downtown’s eastern waterfront – was brought in to run the design competition thanks to a push from local Councillor Pam McConnell. The waterfront agency has both the expertise to run a good competition and the backbone to make it happen, which is crucial since a competition such as this one doesn’t necessarily produce a finished and buildable design.

“We want it to be something exceptional,” says Waterfront Toronto vice-president Christopher Glaisek. “Our record is of using competitions to bring ideas that maybe haven’t been seen in Toronto before.” He cites Sugar Beach and [Corktown Common](#) – both the products of international competitions, both first-quality works of urbanism and landscape. And they have been controversial: Sugar Beach was the topic of more than one attack from Rob Ford, as mayor, and councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong, in each case claiming, falsely, that the parks were unreasonably expensive. Mr. Minnan-Wong now represents Mayor John Tory on the board of

Waterfront Toronto. Given the political and economic realities of the city today, how likely are any of the schemes to be realized?

In the short term, they won't. In the first place, the competition's jury will recommend a winner or a combination of proposals. A first phase will use up a modest pot of money that the city's parks department had allotted to improve the park, making sure that spending serves a long-range strategy. That larger strategy is unfunded, but Mr. Glaisek suggests that the strength of the ideas may drive the popular and political will to make it happen.

It's a strong strategy, and I think when many Torontonians see the proposals – and vote on them this week – they will express enthusiasm, as Mr. Tory himself did in a warm speech at the presentation Monday night. From there, a jury will help develop a master plan for the area, which the city can then use to move ahead with rebuilding of the park.

If one proposal gets approved as is, it is likely to be Cloud Park, from the team of Stoss, nARCHITECTS and ZAS Architects, which appears to require the smallest budget and the fewest major moves. It is handsomely detailed, carefully considered and efficient – using a new terminal building to serve as the centre for the park's new skating rink. Seeing even this built would be a victory.

But there are a range of other ideas – including hot tubs and swimming pools set into the lake, and the grand civic staircase suggested by Clément Blanchet's team – that deserve to be considered. Not to mention the grand ambitions of the DS+R and West 8/KPMB proposals. I hesitate to argue on their behalf, simply because they would require a very un-Fordian vision of what the city needs and deserves. But the mayor and the jury heard a good counterargument from Will Alsop, whose team offered a pragmatic and clearly considered design dressed up in hot pink accents and blobby "creatures."

It's difficult, Mr. Alsop suggested, to talk about fun when you talk about public space; no architect or politician, he implied, wants to be seen as frivolous. "But fun is very serious business," Mr. Alsop continued. "Fun is how a space is judged, in the long term: Whether people enjoy being there."

Call it fun, call it beauty, call it wonder – these qualities deserve a place in Toronto, and may yet find one.

Follow Alex Bozikovic on Twitter: [@alexbozikovic](https://twitter.com/alexbozikovic)

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