



## MEETING MINUTES

### WATERFRONT DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MEETING #2

SEPTEMBER 19, 2005

NOVOTEL TORONTO CENTRE, 45 THE ESPLANADE

#### ATTENDEES:

##### *Panel Members Present:*

	<i>Phone:</i>
Bruce Kuwabara (Chair)	416-977-5104
George Baird	416-978-3089
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##### *Panel Members Absent:*

None

##### *Others Present:*

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George Dark	416-340-9004 x234	georgedark@urbanstrategies.com
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## Status of TWRC Projects

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Christopher Glaisek presented a brief overview of the status of TWRC's projects. The Precinct Plan for East Bayfront will be completed by November, and will then be submitted for Council's approval. The West Don Lands development application has been filed with the City, with approvals expected in the spring. Proposal calls will be issued during the winter, with construction of the flood protection landform starting soon. Qualifications have been requested for the design of Don River Park. In the central waterfront, a request for proposals will address the public realm along the water's edge with particular focus on the heads of the slips at the foot of each street.

While the precinct plans for East Bayfront and West Don Lands are 90% complete, a discussion of the process through which the Design Review Panel will be involved in further precinct plans will be on today's agenda. Robert Freedman commented on the growing general interest in design review panels, and emphasized that the TWRC panel is crucial in leading the charge. The ways it will be working with panels the city develops and within the City's processes is still being determined.

## Design Review Panel Procedures

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Bruce Kuwabara led a discussion on the procedures of urban design review panels, with reference to prototypes in other cities. He briefly described the Urban Design Procedures document for Vancouver that was distributed to the panel members. He noted that, unlike Vancouver's panel, Toronto's waterfront Design Review Panel does not vote, and its role is advisory rather than regulatory. In response to the question of "what does this panel review?" the National Capital Commission's (NCC) panel was raised as an example. The NCC committee reviews items that fall under three categories: design issues presented to Council by staff; pre-application concepts and schematic designs when such early discussions affect a project's development; and advice to the Development Permit Board regarding approval of projects that have been resolved. Projects may be brought before the committee more than once.

It will be TWRC's role to ensure that comments made during the Panel meetings are addressed as design progresses and to document discussions and forward copies to the City, the TWRC Board and the City's Chief Planner. Projects are to be monitored at construction by a TWRC construction division. In Vancouver, the Chair of the design panel sat on the Development Permit Board and ensured projects met their design requirements as a precondition to issuing permits. Development permit conditions were drawn from the design panel's comments. Design Review Panel comments could be integrated into site plan conditions, and could be specified in development proposal calls.

It was suggested that the panel would see proponents on average three times as the project progressed. In Denver, the first meetings only discuss the building envelope and the second meeting the massing. Elevations, materials and fenestration are addressed in the third meeting. In the case of the West Don Lands Precinct Plan, envelopes have been determined, and the discussion should address details of massing, public realm, materials and fenestration. It was suggested that the Panel should know the Terms of Reference for projects in order to understand the basic components and avoid delaying the process.

At the University of Saskatchewan, a palette of materials was built into the Master Plan to guarantee consistent quality. It was suggested that the approach of predetermining some design elements, such as materials, should be tried here. It was also pointed out that the panel should

foster excellence in each designer. Panel members should refrain from prescribing building design. Prequalification criteria for West Don Lands proponents should include demonstrating past experience with the various required components and working in a team environment, as well as making a good proposal.

It was suggested that private sessions with the Panel could help architects advocate for higher quality with their clients but at the same time it is critical that the process be transparent. There needs to be a balance between the panel determining standards versus giving designers flexibility. In Vancouver, the public cannot address the design panel but can comment to Council and to the Development Permit Board, through which public concerns are passed on to the panel. In Switzerland, the community is closely involved with the design review panel, which interviewed stakeholders and consulted the community on guidelines. There has also been a great deal of public input in the development of the precinct plans for West Don Lands and East Bayfront.

### West Don Lands Urban Design Guidelines

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Paul Ostergaard of Urban Design Associates (UDA) presented the West Don Lands Precinct Plan for the Panel's comments. He summarized the history and evolution of the precinct's structure and land uses, its surrounding context, and the key features, opportunities and challenges within the precinct. Paul outlined UDA's approach to creating the precinct plan, which included an analysis phase, identification of objectives and development of alternatives. He identified the steps at which UDA would have engaged the Design Review Panel's advice had it been in place while they were developing the plan. These include the analysis phase as well as at least two times during design development.

The Panel had comments and questions related to several features of the Precinct Plan. The nature of Front Street, its ground level uses and the open space created by the medians was discussed, along with the width of the street and sidewalks and the impact of the Fire Department's and TTC's road width requirements. Paul commented on the crescent at the edge of Don River Park and its importance in defining the edge and lending the site notoriety on a large urban scale. Questions regarding traffic flow around River Square, trails, and the continuity of open spaces leading from District 3 south to the park were discussed. The park design team will be asked to consider adjunct spaces as well as Don River Park itself.

Following questions regarding the Precinct Plan Paul Ostergaard continued with a presentation of the Block Plan for District 1. Paul described the area south of Mill Street, which contains tall point towers with views of the lake and parking structures abutting the rail line. Community facilities such as daycare, a community centre and a school will be located in District 1, as will the district energy plant. UDA believes that the District Energy plant should have a high degree of transparency to engage and educate the public. High floor-to-ceiling heights and direct access to sidewalks will facilitate commercial uses in District 1. North of Mill Street, residential streets will have smaller apartment buildings and townhouses with individual ground floor unit entrances and rear courtyards or laneways.

Questions continued following the block plan review. The need for tall buildings south of Mill Street was questioned and the location of the "heart" of the community debated. It was suggested that Front Street is an important public space which could be considered the signature address, and that it should be built first in order to build a sense of place. The nature of Cherry Street south of the Canary Restaurant was discussed. It was suggested that episodes of greenscape could be created along the street. It was recommended that the intent of Front Street east of Cherry should be defined, including the nature of the open space created by the medians, the intersection conditions and the type of land use. The intended functions of the park and its framing by Bayview Avenue were also debated.

In an exercise to review the panel's procedures, guest Bruce Haden described how he ran the Vancouver panel. He would identify an issue and determine whether there was consensus or not. The Chair should select a specific panel member to start this discussion. Strategically, it should be someone who is not passionate about the item. Panel members are encouraged not to repeat information/commentary already given by other members, but only to reinforce it if critically necessary. Each panel member has one opportunity to comment, and is not permitted to debate or respond to other's comments, or repeat comments that have already been made. Discussion should focus on what needs to be decided, and the Panel should not address the applicant or debate with them. With a disciplined Chair, even a large panel such as this one should be effective.

He then commented on the presentation. He recommended that future presentations be more concise with a focus on filling information gaps and providing broader conceptual information that may not have been included in the application submission. The suggestion was also made to avoid power point presentations and instead opt for boards. Questions should be made first and then commentary. Specific references to things such as street names should be made for minute-taking purposes, and big picture issues should be noted on a short list of items to be discussed.

He then commented on the discussion by the panel members of the plan. He summarized the issues that he felt emerged as central:

1. Create a series of organizational diagrams or an overall story. These should encompass minimum open use strategies, building form density, street types and landscape strategies. These diagrams should incorporate a clear hierarchy of design priorities.
2. Expand exploration of building edge conditions, with particular attention to street sections.
3. Discourage inauthentic façade differentiations.
4. Review transit study with quality of street section, planting, landscape.
5. Re-examine Mill Street parkade from the perspective of safety, building scale, relationship to railway and existing connections tied to north/south streets. Consider east/west pedestrian linkage at the south edge.
6. Re-examine relationship of Mill Street with the pedestrian link to the Distillery with respect to street access and building continuity.
7. Re-examine tower locations.
8. Consider relocation of school to a position of more prominence, possibly along Front Street.
9. Consider redesign of east end of Mill Street to reinforce the park edge.
10. Reconsider the location and visibility of the district energy plant.

Based on this list, we then conducted a practice discussion. He selected a topic, Mill Street, and a panelist to begin. The first member commented that there was not a clear sense of the structure of the overall plan and that the urban design guideline document needs to be clearly structured to address open spaces, buildings, streets and other elements within areas of Mill Street. There is also a problem with the hierarchy of the buildings, ie. where the taller buildings are located. There was concern about locating a school in this area. It was asked what the function of each street was. In a round table format, the other panel members commented on underground parking, "sustainability", how grade level relates to streets/parks, how buildings front onto the street, where street trees and bike racks will go, appropriateness of the towers, the façade facing the railroad tracks and the Cherry Street frontage.

Other comments addressed the focus of the public realm, the "soul" of the plan, the need for a story and "magic", having diagrams to show traffic and uses, and the character/role of each street, mandating of floor-to-floor heights, and connections to other areas. Comments were raised about the heights of the towers, consistency in the urban fabric, embracing the railway, storm water management, a walking-distance analysis, view corridors, the view to the west, the

feel of the streets, and greening the streetcar right-of-way by landscaping. Additional comments addressed sidewalk width, trees on the median, the pedestrian link to the west, and the location of the District Energy plant.

Bruce Haden then summarized the main issues where he felt consensus was evident. These included a re-examination of the Mill Street parkade from the perspective of use, safety and the relationship to the railway; a re-examination of the towers; a consideration of the re-location of the school and consideration for the potential burying of the district energy plant. There was no agreement as to what the right tower height was. UDA responded briefly to the comments and will consider them in revising the Block Plan.

It was suggested that a vote be taken to identify points of consensus. Some panel members were amenable to vote on the overall plan, using the terms “agree”, “disagree” and “unsure”. However, other panel members disagreed with the idea of a vote, and following discussion on the meaning of the vote at this stage, it was decided not to vote.

### Sub-Committees

The question was raised as to whether the panel will always meet with all of the members present or if sub-committee meetings will be held. Overall it is hoped to have all participants present though sub-committees may be a possibility. The sub-committees would return to the panel with their recommendations.

### Open Space Framework/Lake Ontario Park

George Dark gave a presentation on the Open Space Framework and Lake Ontario Park, which includes Tommy Thompson Park and extends east across to Ashbridges Bay. A Parks Canada Discovery Centre will engage people who may not go to national parks. Three levels of government are involved in the project, with the City, the Province, Parks Canada, TRCA, Toronto Port Authority and The Mississauga of the New Credit Nation working together on the plans. There is an active group of boaters in this space and Friends of the Spit continue to fight to preserve the park. Hundreds of thousands of people use the Martin Goodman Trail to travel between the Beaches and Harbourfront. Industrial uses are very visible in the area. Trucking has decreased and there is a possibility of converting the truck route to public use. The Don Greenway is part of the Lake Ontario Park system. Tommy Thompson Park is a complicated land/water interface with cells still being filled with sediment dredged from the mouth of the Don River.

Eight million dollars has been earmarked to TRCA through a contribution agreement to implement the Master Plan, with a further \$1 million for a feasibility study for the Discovery Centre and \$1 million for the master plan for Lake Ontario Park. A proposal call is due over the next two months, with consultation beginning by the end of the year. Gap analysis has started and a land survey is underway. The team should come before the Design Review Panel regularly. Parks Canada will do their own protocol/call for architects for the Discovery Centre.

### Wrap-up and Conclusion

Bruce Kuwabara then asked for any other items to be discussed. It was asked when the next meeting would take place. A regular schedule and location was requested and will be proposed at the next meeting. It was recommended to obtain 6 more easels for presentations, and that a larger room was needed to accommodate the public. Other panels met every two weeks or every month. The schedule should be in sequence with City committee meetings, or alternatively, a

sub-committee could meet with other groups, such as TWRC, so that two levels of meetings could take place. Two meeting dates, in October and December, were proposed.

There was consensus that the public realm is extremely important. Panel members want beauty and the public wants it too. Public pressure is needed to push good design forward. The concept of the public sector taking care of the public realm should be promoted. A manifesto on the panel's role and the importance of public space could be a mechanism to get the message out. Queens Quay was suggested as a good demonstration project for an improved public realm.

It was announced that the next meeting will be held at the end of October, and the next in early December. The meeting was then adjourned.

*Notes prepared by Jennifer Andrews  
Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation*