



## MEETING MINUTES

### WATERFRONT DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MEETING #1

**JULY 19, 2005**  
**WESTIN HARBOUR CASTLE, 1 HARBOUR SQUARE**

#### ATTENDEES:

##### *Panel Members:*

Bruce Kuwabara (Chair)  
George Baird  
Paul Bedford  
Tania Bortolotto  
Peter Clewes  
Renée Daoust  
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##### *Presenters:*

John Campbell  
Claude Cormier  
Christopher Glaisek  
Bruce Haden  
Fred Koetter  
Joe Lobko  
Mary MacDonald  
Eric Pederson  
Mark Sterling  
Doug Webber  
Cindy Wilkey

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## Welcome and Introduction

John Campbell, Bruce Kuwabara, Chris Glaisek, Eric Pederson

The introduction articulated the goals of the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC) and stressed the important role the Design Review Panel will play in achieving them. John Campbell explained that the TWRC is committed to revitalization, which means city-building, not just redevelopment, which will happen on its own. Bruce Kuwabara stated that all of the panel members have proven excellence, and that as a body should be able to have a real, positive impact. Chris Glaisek spoke about the need to exceed expectations in the revitalization process, and that the panel will serve to set the bar high at the outset. Eric Pederson then gave a short presentation on the city's land use review process and how the panel will feed into and enhance that mechanism. The introduction concluded with an outline of the day's agenda.

## West Don Lands Precinct Plan Presentation

Joe Lobko

Joe Lobko gave a presentation of the West Don Lands Precinct Plan, which included the site's history, current conditions and challenges, major features, redevelopment and open space areas, flood control and the community's involvement in the creation of the Precinct Plan. The plan draws upon the distinctive and diverse characters of the surrounding neighborhoods, including Corktown and the Distillery District. Significant components include the 18-acre Don River Park, the Front Street Promenade, improved north-south connections to surrounding areas, and the curved Bayview Avenue, referred to as "the crescent," which sits atop the flood protection landform and is designed to present a positive face to the community and a continuous façade to the park. The Precinct Plan has been in development for over a year and a half, and was recently endorsed by City Council to be followed soon by submission of a development application to the city.

Several comments and observations were made by panel members. There was general agreement that the goal of a predominantly mid-rise neighborhood with family amenities was a good approach. However, some cautioned against placing too much emphasis on "diversity," arguing that some of the best neighborhoods have the same building type and consistency. Others expressed concern that the presentation drawings suggested a nostalgic stylistic image, and encouraged the team to illustrate a broader range of building examples. Others recommended that some of the "pivotal" buildings, such as those along the crescent, be given extra-special consideration in development, to ensure they are up to the aesthetic demands being placed on them. These comments then prompted a general discussion about how to define what "belongs in Toronto" in planning and architectural terms.

## East Bayfront Precinct Plan Presentation

Fred Koetter

Fred Koetter gave a presentation of the East Bayfront plan that identified its key issues, including the design of Queens Quay Boulevard, the water's edge promenade, and the "special places" at the foot of Jarvis, Sherbourne and Parliament Streets. The Precinct Plan proposes public and office/residential uses in midrise form punctuated by higher scale buildings, and blocks structured to permit development flexibility and access to the water's edge. While the Precinct Plan predetermines the structure of the blocks, a gradient of parcel sizes may be arranged within them, and heights within the blocks are flexible, allowing for diverse development opportunities. On Queens Quay Boulevard, building massing is tiered upward from the waterfront to the south side of Queens Quay, and common cornice heights on both sides strengthen the street.

Several comments and observations were made by panel members. One asked if the block and the parcel were being considered one and same thing, and advised that there be flexibility within

the block plan for parcels to consist of multiple blocks or portions of blocks. Another asked about the relationships of each of the buildings to the water, and observed that all of them will want some relationship to it. Others commented that the plan proposes courtyard buildings, which are a relatively rare housing type for Toronto. Fred Koetter responded that the street walls are mandated in order to define public streets, however the inside of each block is open to interpretation. Finally, microclimate analysis was recommended for the planning for the proposed enclosed arcade to consider the impact of solar gain.

#### Portlands Implementation Strategy

Mark Sterling

Mark Sterling gave a presentation of the Portlands Implementation Strategy, explaining that due to its very large scale, the Portlands is best considered as ten distinct precincts. A brief overview of each precinct area was provided that touched on land ownership, tenure, current use, and time frame for development. The Secondary Plan identifies an extensive network of open spaces, linkages and regeneration areas within the Portlands. The area has a long planning horizon (30-50 years), with challenges being to provide access roads, balance the benefits of development with the costs of providing infrastructure, and relocate existing businesses. Regarding current and future uses, the Docks entertainment venue has a very long lease, and two concrete batching plants are expected to relocate or consolidate in the Portlands. The open spaces have been established first in order to respect existing regional open space planning initiatives and extend open space planning from other areas into the Portlands. Because this is a long-term plan, when the development of the Portlands happens, it will not be in competition with other precincts such as the West Don Lands or East Bayfront. Once development starts it is likely to accelerate quickly, and by purposely delaying development in selected areas it may be possible to direct development to create functional communities in other areas.

Panel members commented that this could be a very desirable place to live if developed in precincts to create individual communities.

#### Commissioner's Park Concept Design

Claude Cormier

Claude Cormier gave a presentation of the Commissioners Park concept design that explained its environmentally sustainable, open-ended, multi-use concept, its location within both an environmental corridor and recreational corridor, and the two alternatives that were considered for its concept design. The ecological values of Toronto are expressed in this park. The park is an important connector as part of the whole city's park system, as well as for the open spaces of West Don Lands, East Bayfront, and the Portlands. An important issue was the location of a community centre in the park, however it was not included within the park's design because indoor facilities and buildings are considered to be too urbanized for this park. The concept is that Commissioners Park will be open on all sides, not closed in with buildings. The connection between the Don River and Lake Ontario will include a re-naturalized waterfront north of the Gardiner before it flows into the Keating Channel.

Panel members expressed their enthusiasm for the overall design approach and the design integrity of the plan.

#### Keynote: "Learning from Vancouver"

Bruce Haden

Bruce Haden, former chair of the Vancouver Design Review Panel, gave an overview of how the design review process works there and offered observations on important factors to consider in constructing the Toronto Waterfront Design Review Panel. He noted that although the regulatory context of design panels varies, the procedural approach is transferable. The process in Vancouver consists of presentations of the project and key design issues, a round table

discussion, and a vote to accept the proposed design or send it back for revision. The Vancouver panel's structure allows design concerns to be addressed without prescribing specific design solutions because the panel's comments are addressed either in the conditions of approval conditions, or in subsequent presentations to the panel.

The principles of well-run panels consist of integrity, transparency, blindness to glamour, precision without prescription, and urbanity. The successes and failures of design panels are dependent on attention to detail, therefore it is important to be meticulous about minuting and explicit about all major concerns raised. These should be limited to the top five or six, and the focus should be on issues, not solutions. It is also important for the panel to acknowledge decisions that have already been made and strive for excellence in the next phase, rather than trying to undo previously-approved steps.

The benefit of this type of peer review process, when run publicly and openly, is that applicants avoid bringing forward bad projects. This is why it is important to achieve a high standard in the first few projects. It is also important for developers to understand that hiring a good designer does not guarantee a "rubber stamp" of approval, and that even top architects who are committed to creating excellent buildings are subject to criticism in this forum. In light of this, it is important to point out the advantages and disadvantages of having developers on the panel. Symbolically, it is good for developers to know there is someone who will speak for them, but the value of the input depends upon who the person is. Any conflicts of interest, whether on the part of developers or designers, should be dealt with by stepping out of the discussion if there is a direct conflict, or by disclosing a conflict of interest to the group if there is an indirect conflict, such as working for a developer on an adjacent site.

The panel's role with regards to the West Don Lands Precinct Plan would be to review the Precinct Plan, the neighbourhood plan, and individual buildings. If it disagrees with a plan already in place, the panel should flag policies that it believes result in bad design, but it cannot change them. Proponents have a right to know what has been decided already and what has not. Given that the design guidelines for West Don Lands have not yet received final approval; there may be some opportunity input though it will likely be limited.

#### Discussion of Roles and Responsibilities

Chris Glaisek, Bruce Kuwabara

This moderated discussion addressed what the Panel will review in terms of development applications, design competitions, etc. The level of detail to which the panel can comment on building design is a big issue. For competitions, rather than acting as a design jury reviewing alternative design schemes for the same sites, it will look at team qualifications and comment on how competitions are juried. The panel has an advisory role, not an approval role. With no binding municipal powers, the panel will influence decisions more through moral suasion than legal authority.

Several panel members asked about the mechanism for translating the West Don Lands Precinct Plan into an architectural reality that meets the highest expectations. The level of specificity in the West Don Lands design guidelines will be critical not only in obtaining political and civic support for the plan, but also in giving the panel the appropriate tools to evaluate proposals. For example, building the Bayview crescent will be challenging, and a successful design will require keen attention to the geometry of the block and the relationship of the individual building to the whole. The design guidelines will consist of a set of requirements supplemented with recommendations. The requirements will prescribe specific envelope controls, whereas the recommendations will raise issues and set out a palette of possibilities and illustrative examples. The benefit of having some fixed parameters is that more energy will go into designing the buildings rather than trying to maximize square footage through envelope manipulation. Although the West Don Lands and East Bayfront Precinct Plans are already in the process of being

submitted to the City and have buy-in from City Council and the community, the panel will have opportunities to comment on other plans and design guidelines.

Developer interest in the waterfront is not expected to lessen with the addition of the design review process, and in fact is being taken quite seriously by them. The developer proposal calls will put good design front-and-center in the selection criteria. All parcels will go through the same process, and the overall quality of the new community will make it a privilege to build in the area. Because most of the land is publicly owned, a fair amount of control can be exercised to ensure that developers follow the established guidelines and meet the expected standards. Value will in fact be added by having a precinct plan, zoning, etc. in place that gives developers certainty as to what they are allowed to build and when. While realizing the value of the public land is important, city-building is the overriding concern, and great buildings and public spaces are the main components of that, not simply the revenue from land disposal.

The Mayor supports the creation of a City-wide Design Review Panel. The stakes are high for the waterfront and this panel is an important precedent. The relationship between the City panel and the waterfront panel, and how the panel review will work within the City approvals process, is still to be fully worked out. The City's viewpoint regarding applications will be brought before the panel but the City has the final say. The City-wide panel would only be involved in processes where zoning is already in place and would not overlap with the waterfront.

#### Community Participation

Cindy Wilkey

Cindy Wilkey described the on-going involvement the community has had in the planning process, specifically with regards to the West Don Lands Precinct Plan. She summarized the current context, community, uses and issues. The Precinct Plan is very strongly supported by the community. The community likes the crescent and the way it is framed by the curved buildings around the park. The Precinct Plan tries to incorporate the building types of the St. Lawrence neighbourhood and Corktown, and to reflect the eccentricities of older neighbourhoods so valued by local residents. The community understands the Precinct Plan will undergo modifications, and hopes for public discourse on design and an explanation of the basis for decisions. The Design Review Panel's help will be needed to implement principles that seem contradictory, such as cohesion versus diversity, both of which are valued by the community.

#### Sustainability Framework

Mary MacDonald

Mary MacDonald presented the sustainability framework being developed to guide all of the revitalization efforts, explaining that sustainability encompasses environmental, social, economic, cultural and aesthetic aspects. It is a creative challenge that requires innovation and progressive thinking. International examples of sustainable buildings were presented to illustrate the range of possible options. For example, developers in Stockholm are required to meet certain standards; but it is up to them to decide how. By contrast, LEED certification provides a verifiable standard that prevents "greenwashing." The challenge is to select the appropriate standards to apply from within LEED and elsewhere.

#### Green Building Specifications

Doug Webber

Doug Webber gave a presentation of the draft Green Building Specifications being developed for the waterfront. He noted that developers are now seeing the marketing advantage of building greener, as well as financial returns. Part of the TWRC's efforts will have to include a "Sales Centre" in the West Don Lands that will focus on Green Building, in order to raise public awareness and help create consumer demand. A credible process with transparent third party accreditation, technical support for developers and clear, enforceable guidelines need to be

provided to ensure green building takes place. Monitoring compliance is a big job but it is necessary. Development credits for West Don Lands can be provided for a host of things, from bike facilities, light pollution reductions, and energy efficiency.

Closing Remarks

Bruce Kuwabara

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Panel chair Bruce Kuwabara closed the meeting, explaining that the next meeting will be scheduled for sometime in early Fall. He stressed that panel members need to feel comfortable working with the plans already underway, as the goal is not to re-open past decisions but to move the projects forward in a positive and productive way. He suggested that panel members talk to each other and resolve their positioning around this issue prior to the next meeting.

He also asked that panel members read the Roles and Responsibilities document provided at this meeting; as this will be an agenda item at the next meeting. He also stated that the next meeting will include a presentation of the design guidelines for West Don Lands, and that this will be followed by a practice review session intended to help establish the panel's review procedures. He then thanked everyone for attending and reminded them that the waterfront boat tour would depart in half an hour and that dinner would be served.