

New Infrastructure Kick-Starts the Revitalization of Key Waterfront Site

August 28, 2012 – In a dual celebration, Waterfront Toronto, Harbourfront Centre and our government partners, officially opened the York Quay underground parking facility and broke ground on a new landscape that is converting an asphalt parking lot into dynamic new public space.

The revitalization of York Quay is a multi-phased project that is transforming about a third of Harbourfront Centre's 10 acre site into an even more vibrant waterfront destination. In early 2011, construction began on the new 300-stall underground parking garage designed to replace the surface parking lot between Queens Quay and the water's edge. By moving the parking lot underground, the surface area was opened up for the creation of new public space.

"Investing in smart infrastructure on the waterfront goes a long way," said John Campbell, President and CEO of Waterfront Toronto. "At York Quay, this investment means improved parking facilities, it helps Harbourfront Centre retain an important revenue stream for its cultural programming and most importantly, allows for more public space at one of the most important sites on the Central Waterfront."

With the garage now open, construction is underway on a series of public spaces by renowned landscape architects Michael Van Valkenburgh and Associates (MVVA). The design for the 1.4 hectare site includes three components: Canada Square, an impressive plaza space overlooking Lake Ontario; Ontario Square, a large public plaza facing Queens Quay; and Cultural Village, a future, low-scale development area with shops, cafés, restaurants, artist studios and architect offices that will feature temporary landscaping until it is realized.

"With the assistance of three levels of government, this latest transformation gives city residents and visitors spectacular new public spaces to experience adjacent to Lake Ontario," said William J.S. Boyle, CEO of Harbourfront Centre."

MVVA's design brings nature into the plazas in an unconventional way. Canada Square will become a vertical garden featuring 44 majestic Redwood trees. Ontario Square, which features several stands of Ontario Aspen trees, creates a series of miniature forests around the plaza and atop the underground garage's entrance.

"Once again, the Harper Government is pleased to have strengthened our commitment to the renewal of Toronto's waterfront by helping transform this part of Toronto's industrial past into a beautiful public space," said Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance. "These projects are an integral part of the incredible transformation already underway across Toronto's Waterfront. Building new infrastructure, while improving what we have, has been widely recognized as an effective way to stimulate the economy."

"The McGuinty Government is committed to creating accessible public spaces for Ontarians and tourists alike to explore and experience Toronto's waterfront," said Michael Chan, Ontario Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. "Ontario Square, a unique new attraction, will serve as an accessible cultural landmark, transforming the waterfront while drawing in visitors from within our borders and beyond that will strengthen our economy."

"This innovative revitalization project creates more unique spaces for residents and visitors to access and enjoy Toronto's central waterfront," said Councillor Norm Kelly (Ward 40 Scarborough Agincourt), Chair of the City of Toronto's Parks and Environment Committee. "It is an excellent example of how the waterfront can be creatively redeveloped through strong public sector partnerships."

The new underground garage is more than just a functional piece of infrastructure – it has been designed to be an enticing part of the urban experience. The garage was designed around a distinctive art piece, Light Cascade by award-winning architect and designer, James Carpenter. An impressive structure comprised of a three-storey curtain wall of glass and mylar, Light Cascade, will rise over 17 metres above the underground base of the garage through an aperture to Ontario Square above.

Despite the challenges of building adjacent to the lake, the garage was built in just over a year and was on budget – \$25 million. The new surface landscape is budgeted at approximately \$20 million. Budgets for both the garage and landscape include design, construction and other project related costs.

The revitalization of York Quay is part of the overall transformation of the Central Waterfront which is improving the most heavily used and developed part of the waterfront. Work began earlier this year on the transformation of Queens Quay, which will create a vibrant waterfront district by linking major destinations like Harbourfront Centre, Queens Quay Terminal, HTO Park and the Toronto Music Garden.

This is the second time Waterfront Toronto and Harbourfront Centre have worked together to improve the area around York Quay. In 2006, public access to the water's edge was improved by widening the promenade south of Harbourfront Centre and the addition of a wooden boardwalk and two new finger piers. This area has since become a vibrant and much-visited waterfront destination.

Waterfront Toronto

Waterfront Toronto has made major strides in revitalizing Toronto's waterfront. In addition to building and improving 18 parks and public spaces, Waterfront Toronto has finalized development agreements with Great Gulf Group of Companies, Urban Capital and Hines for private sector projects on the waterfront, as well as with George Brown College for the development of their new state-of-the-art Health Sciences campus. The Governments of Canada and Ontario and the City of Toronto created Waterfront Toronto to oversee and lead the renewal of Toronto's waterfront. Public accessibility, design excellence, sustainable development, economic development and fiscal sustainability are the key drivers of waterfront revitalization.

Harbourfront Centre

Harbourfront Centre is a Canadian charity operating the 10 prime acres of Toronto's central waterfront as a free and open public site. We celebrate the multiplicities of cultures that comprise Canada and enliven the city through the creative imaginations of artists from across the country and around the globe. Harbourfront Centre attracts more than 17 million visits to its site each year to experience 4,000 diverse public events and activities. Harbourfront Centre receives operational support from the Government of Canada and the City of Toronto and program funding from all levels of government, the private sector and individual donors.

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