



WATERFRONTToronto

Waterfront Design Review Panel (WDRP) Minutes of Meeting #181

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Meeting held in-person hybrid at Waterfront Toronto

Present

Paul Bedford, Chair
Pat Hanson
David Leinster
Janna Levitt
Fadi Masoud
Brigitte Shim
Kevin Stelzer
Eric Turcotte
Emily Mueller De Celis
Pina Petricone
Matthew Hickey

Regrets

Betsy Williamson, Vice Chair
Nina-Marie Lister

Representatives

Chris Glaisek, Waterfront Toronto
Lara Tarlo, On behalf of James Parakh, City of Toronto

Recording Secretary

Vail Zerr

OVERVIEW OF REVIEW AGENDA

The Chair opened the meeting by providing an overview of the agenda, which included review of:

1. Bentway Islands – Stage 2: Schematic Design
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GENERAL BUSINESS

The Chair asked if there were any conflicts of interest for disclosure; none were declared.

The Chair then asked Vail Zerr, Project Coordinator, to give an update on last month's projects.

Design Review Panel Report Back:

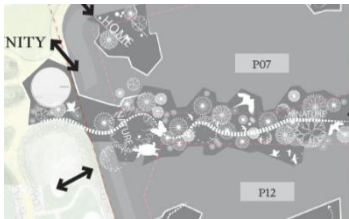
Ms. Zerr, noted that the Consensus Comments have been shared with the **Ookwemin Minising** team and they are working to address Panel comments, anticipating a return to WDRP in June 2026. She concluded by noting the tentative agenda for April DRP.

Chair's remarks:

The Chair concluded the General Business segment and motioned to go into the project review sessions.

PROJECT REVIEWS

1.0 Bentway Islands – Stage 2: Schematic Design

<i>Project ID #:</i>	1149		
<i>Project Type:</i>	Public Realm		
<i>Review Stage:</i>	Schematic Design		
<i>Review Round:</i>	Two		
<i>Location:</i>	Central Waterfront		
<i>Proponent:</i>	Bentway Conservancy		
<i>Architect/ Designer:</i>	Field Operations, Brook McIlroy		
<i>Presenter(s):</i>	Trina Moyan, Indigenous Engagement Lead, Monumental Projects Heather Inglis Baron, Waterfront Secretariat, City of Toronto Josh Harskamp, Senior Manager, Bentway Conservancy Isabel Castilla, Associate Partner, Field Operations Cal Brook, Principal, Brook McIlroy Ryan Gorrie, Principal, Brook McIlroy		
<i>Delegation:</i>	Ilana Altman, Bentway Conservancy Cezzane Ilagan, Bentway Conservancy Trish Clarke, Brook McIlroy Alejandro Vazquez, Field Operations Willie MaCrae, City of Toronto Liz Trenton, City of Toronto David O'Hara, City of Toronto Pamela Pietrusiak, MTO Iqbal Suhail, MTO Chankavi Karunanandan, MTO Anna Ingebrigtsen, Waterfront Toronto		

Josh Hilburt, Waterfront Toronto
Margot Shafran, Waterfront Toronto
Pina Mallozzi, Waterfront Toronto

1.1 Introduction to the Issues

Heather Inglis Baron, with the Waterfront Secretariat, introduced the project by situating it within its policy, funding, and approval context. Council endorsement of the Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan in 2024 established a long-term, corridor-wide vision developed collaboratively by the City and The Bentway, while funding for this project's schematic design was approved in October 2023. A multi-divisional Technical Advisory Committee was convened in 2024, with ongoing coordination across City divisions and engagement with the Province as part of due diligence related to the Gardiner rehabilitation and upload. The schematic design was previously reviewed by the Design Review Panel in January 2025 for Issues Identification and received Conditional Support.

She continued explaining the project scope, which includes a continuous multi-use trail, recreational and cultural programming spaces, dog off-leash areas, support buildings for operations and programming, and integrated stormwater and bioremediation infrastructure. The site is organized into three distinct "Bentway Islands" east of the already-completed Phase One, each with unique environmental conditions and opportunities, ranging from more open, sun-exposed areas near Canoe Landing Park to the larger spaces beneath the Gardiner defined by long views, noise, and limited light. The introduction also framed key considerations for Panel discussion, including the critical role and phasing of the bridge, continuity of material and design language with Phase One, siting and activation of buildings, and how previous DRP feedback is being addressed through refinement of access, programming, and overall site strategy.

1.2 Project Presentation

Josh Harskamp, Senior Manager Bentway Conservancy, opened the presentation by outlining the project background, procurement process, partnership with the City of Toronto, and the overarching goal of transforming the Gardiner Expressway from a barrier into a connected, publicly accessible landscape supported by a capital campaign model.

Isabel Castilla, Associate Partner Field Operations, walking the Panel through the evolution of the Schematic Design since January 2025, including site organization, mobility and accessibility improvements, microclimate analysis, planting and lighting strategies, program distribution, and the detailed spatial sequence across Islands A, B, and C.

Ryan Gorrie, Principal with Brook McIlroy, presented the Indigenous design integration, describing how Indigenous knowledge systems, ecology, language, and cultural

narratives are embedded throughout the site through medallions, perforated screens, enamelled panels, and gathering spaces.

Cal Brook, Principal with Brook McIlroy, spoke to the architectural approach for the pavilions, emphasizing human-scaled, net-zero buildings that reinforce the Bentway identity, incorporate durable materials and integrate Indigenous storytelling.

1.3 Panel Questions

One Panel member asked about the emphasis on youth and adults rather than children. Ms. Castilla explained that Canoe Landing Park to the north already includes a large children's playground, while community feedback showed a gap in youth-focused programming in the neighbourhood. She added that features such as sports courts, skating, and the community hub are intended to be multi-generational, with the plaza envisioned as an after-school programming space for nearby school children. Mr. Brook noted that the Nest bridge improves access for children coming from the school and park.

The Panel member also asked about strategies for managing water and maintaining cleanliness beneath the bents. Ms. Castilla responded that assessments of the existing Bentway show sediment from downspouts as the primary source of dirt buildup, and that the team is exploring layered filtration within downspouts to reduce sediment at the source. She added that vegetation and engineered soils will provide additional filtration, with stormwater either infiltrating the subgrade or being directed to storage tanks and slowly released to the storm system after sediment removal.

Another Panel member asked if there will be a more detailed presentation of the buildings at a future meeting. Mr. Brook responded that the architectural approach is still evolving, with building placement and massing currently driven by operational, maintenance, and access requirements, including Gardiner servicing and ventilation. He noted two building conditions—freestanding pavilions and spaces beneath ramps—with the latter expected to be more utilitarian in character, and added that building programming responds to adjacent uses, avoids key planting areas, and is generally sited in darker or constrained zones, with fuller architectural resolution to come in later stages.

One Panel member asked if noise is considered in the site design and programming, particularly given the proximity to the roadway and active uses. Ms. Castilla responded that wherever possible, vegetation is used to help buffer roadway noise. In areas where planting is not feasible, rubberized materials with noise-attenuating properties are incorporated into pavements and walls. The team also acknowledged that some programs, such as the DOLA, ball play, and skateboarding, generate their own noise, and materials like wood and other softer elements are being used within these areas to help absorb sound. As the design progresses, the team will continue refining these strategies, including consulting with acoustical specialists and using architectural elements to further mitigate noise across the site.

Another Panel member asked if the bents close to Spadina are going to be replaced given their state of poor repair. Mr. Harskamp responded that the rehabilitation work to replace any concrete in a state of disrepair will kick-off in Q2 2027.

The Panel member also asked if the lighting strategy consistent across the park and seasons, and how does it balance programming needs, safety, and impacts on nearby residents and wildlife? Ms. Castilla responded that the lighting approach is consistent but calibrated by use, with higher levels for trails and sports courts and lower levels in plazas and passive areas. She noted that dimming controls will reduce lighting later in the evening to maintain safety while limiting late-night activity, minimizing impacts on nearby residents and wildlife and supporting seasonal variation in use.

Another Panel member asked for clarification on the traffic barriers shown in the diagrams and how they will function within the site. Castilla responded that the barriers were requested by the City to protect active recreation areas in the event of a vehicle leaving Lake Shore Boulevard, and that while the exact type is still being coordinated, a standard solution is anticipated. She noted that the barriers will be located along site edges and positioned behind planting or architectural elements, so they perform a safety function while remaining visually unobtrusive within the park.

The same Panel member asked if additional public connections explored from Canoe Landing Park and Brunel Ct, including potential ramps or stair connections to increase site permeability. Ms. Castilla responded that while additional potential ramp and stair connections were studied, topographic constraints, limited head clearances beneath the Gardiner ramps, the need to avoid impacts to Gardiner foundations, and community concerns about visibility and safety led the team to not pursue these routes for public circulation, though limited access may be retained for maintenance and operations

One Panel member asked if the operations area intended to serve multiple Bentway sites or only this site? Mr. Harskamp confirmed that it is only intended to serve this site. The Panel member followed up asking whether the washrooms will be open 24-7 or closed when the site is not in operation. Mr. Harskamp responded that based on experience from Bentway Phase One, the washrooms will be open only during staffed operating hours. He explained that this approach has proven to be the safest and most effective, and the same operations procedure will be applied to this site.

The same Panel member asked the team to clarify which aspects of the design would need to change if provincial approval is not granted. Mr. Harskamp responded that there has been no indication from the Province that approval is at risk or that design work should pause, noting that the primary area of uncertainty relates to future asset ownership beneath the Gardiner. He added that while land-use configurations could be adjusted if needed, the team is proceeding confidently and expects the project could advance under different ownership scenarios.

Another Panel member asked what the overarching concept for this phase of the Bentway is, and how it relates to Bentway Phase One in terms of permanence, temporariness, and continuity. Ms. Castilla responded that this phase is intended to complement Phase One by emphasizing self-activated uses such as the dog off-leash

area, sports courts, and skate plaza, while still supporting flexible programming. Ilana Altman added that the core concept continues the Bentway's mission of unlocking the Gardiner as a community asset by improving connectivity and reducing barriers to the waterfront. Bentway Islands carries forward principles, materials, and signage strategies from Phase One while tailoring the mix of permanent and adaptable elements to the specific context of this site.

One Panel member asked the team to clarify material of the perforation panels? Ms. Castilla responded that it is corten steel. The Panel member also asked if the ice rinks will have a plant to chill the surface. Ms. Castilla clarified that the team is envisioning synthetic ice, learning from operational experiences at Bentway Phase One.

Another Panel member asked if there is an intention to work with Indigenous artists on the Indigenous design elements, and if that selection process has begun. Ms. Castilla responded that while the artist selection process has not yet begun, Indigenous artists are envisioned to be involved in both permanent design elements as well as rotating or temporary artistic installations throughout the site.

The same Panel member asked what measures are being taken to prevent dogs from escaping the off-leash areas, particularly along the edge adjacent to Lake Shore Boulevard. Ms. Castilla responded that fence and wall heights along this edge exceed City standards, with seating, mounds, and other topographic features set back from the perimeter to discourage climbing, and a planted buffer provided behind the fence for additional protection.

The same Panel member asked if given the length of the ramp and bridge, there are safety measures or intermediate exits if someone needs to leave partway along the route. Ms. Castilla acknowledged the concern and noted that while an accessible mid-point exit is not feasible due to grade and accessibility requirements, there may be opportunities to introduce an auxiliary stair along the route and noted this is something they can explore further as the design develops.

One Panel member asked how phasing is being considered for this project, particularly given approvals, funding constraints, and the importance of achieving placemaking and connectivity early on. Ms. Altman responded that, drawing from Bentway Phase One, the approach prioritizes delivering core infrastructure early while fit-outs and program elements can be phased over time, with the three-island layout providing flexibility if full build-out cannot proceed at once. She emphasized that key access and circulation elements are critical to viability, and that delays to approvals—particularly related to the turning lane—could require a more substantial redesign of the western edge and entry sequence.

The same Panel member asked how Indigenous languages are intended to be incorporated into the signage strategy and if they will be combined with English or presented separately. Mr. Gorrie, responded that Indigenous languages will be integrated alongside English throughout the site rather than separated, allowing layered communication that combines wayfinding with learning opportunities. He noted that host Nation languages will be prioritized, followed by others with strong local

presence, and added that digital tools such as QR codes and programming can complement physical signage and support deeper, especially aural, engagement with language.

1.4 Panel Comments

One Panel member requested that the next presentation include clearer north-south sectional drawings and topographic analysis, starting from Canoe Landing Park and extending south past Lake Shore Boulevard, to better explain level changes, the relationship between ramps, stairs, and programmed areas, and how the site functions spatially as a whole. They emphasized that this would help clarify the east-west experience across the site and the logic behind the arrangement of programs.

Another Panel member noted that while the project is clearly well developed and thoughtfully programmed, they are missing a stronger experiential and conceptual link to Bentway Phase One—particularly the spatial quality and intimacy of moving under the bents, and the way Phase One engages directly with the structure through art, surface treatment, and visual texture. The Panel member suggested that if this phase is intended to be more formal or distinct in character, that intent should be more clearly articulated as an overarching concept (defining what is shared and what is intentionally different across phases). They also flagged concerns about the Nest ramp, noting that accessibility requirements may result in a reduced slope grade, potentially compromising the intended spatial experience if not carefully resolved.

One Panel member noted that the “big idea” behind the design could be articulated more clearly to elevate it beyond a well-organized collection of standard park programs. They suggested that the narrative focus more explicitly on what makes this site unique - namely, a year-round, climate-sheltered park beneath the Gardiner that offers comfort from sun, rain, and wind, and supports seasonal use in ways other parks cannot. The Panel member encouraged the team to emphasize how being under the bents shapes both program placement and visual experience, including long views beneath the structure and opportunities to heighten spatial drama through lighting, surfaces, and colonnade-like conditions. They also highlighted winter and shoulder-season potential, suggesting warm lighting, activated pavilions, and amenities such as cafés could make the space inviting even without active sports. Overall, he felt all the ingredients are present, but a clearer narrative tying program, microclimate, and the expressive presence of the Gardiner together would strengthen the project’s identity.

Another Panel member emphasized the importance of addressing noise in the next design iteration. They also stressed that traffic barriers should be designed as an integral, well-considered part of the overall design language—rather than appearing as standard public-works add-ons—to reinforce continuity across Bentway phases. The Panel member encouraged a more detailed exploration of the pavilion architecture in future submissions, including material palettes and how building placement can help mitigate noise and climatic conditions. Lastly, they underscored the critical role of the Canoe Landing Park bridge connection, noting that limited access points make this

bridge essential for activating the site and ensuring strong east–west and north–south movement to animate the space.

One Panel member noted that the project is thoughtful and well developed and highlighted the perforated screens and ribbon-like ramp wrapping around the bents as particularly strong architectural gestures. They suggested this language could be extended to other pavilions and structures to strengthen cohesion across the site and further emphasize the Gardiner as a defining framework. The Panel member also cautioned that the use of weathering steel requires careful technical consideration, noting potential corrosion and staining at thinner gauges, and advised addressing this through appropriate material selection, sealing, or intentional acceptance of patina as part of the design.

Another Panel member strongly encouraged early and meaningful engagement with Indigenous artists to enrich the project and fully realize its cultural potential, particularly in relation to key elements such as the bridge, which was noted as essential to both visual and physical connectivity across the site. They emphasized the importance of integrating safety considerations— hostile vehicle mitigation, dog containment, and safe egress from ramps—directly into the design rather than treating them as add-ons. The Panel member also stressed the need for a clear lighting strategy that supports safety and wayfinding at night, including in service and in-between spaces beneath the bents. Finally, they identified acoustics as a critical and currently underexplored issue, strongly recommending a comprehensive noise study to inform program placement and guide architectural, material, and landscape strategies, noting that effective noise mitigation will be a defining factor in the long-term success and comfort of the park.

One Panel member expressed strong enthusiasm for the project and emphasized the opportunity to use phasing as a design strength rather than a constraint. They encouraged the team to lean more deeply into the concept of self-activation as a defining distinction from Phase One, suggesting that phased delivery, movable elements, pop-up retail, and a mix of permanent and temporary interventions could reinforce user customization and evolving use over time. The Panel member noted that early delivery of key spaces such as the Nest could help establish the tone, material language, and sense of place for the project as it unfolds. Echoing earlier comments, they highlighted acoustic mitigation as a potentially transformative aspect of the design and encouraged further exploration, suggesting that horizontal elements—such as the soffit of the Nest bridge—may play a critical role in addressing noise while shaping spatial experience.

Another Panel member encouraged the team to further emphasize how the design engages with the structure of the bents themselves, alternately aligning with them and, at key moments such as the Nest, deliberately contrasting them to create distinctive spatial experiences. They also encouraged deeper examination of the micro-forest, noting concerns about the clarity, safety, and experiential purpose of gaps and gathering points within it, and whether the intent is primarily movement rather than occupation. The Panel member expressed appreciation for the breadth and diversity of programming, emphasizing that its everyday use will ensure continuous activation and allow each Bentway segment to develop a site-specific identity.

One Panel member emphasized the dramatic urban transformation of the area, suggesting that the surrounding residential density could help inform the scale and mix of programming. Strong support was expressed for the bridge, which was described as both an essential circulation element and a powerful visual identifier visible from multiple vantage points. The Panel member encouraged clearer communication of the site's constraints, such as maintenance, servicing, and structural limitations, through diagrams, to better explain why certain design decisions are unavoidable. They also called for more detailed exploration of the relationship between buildings and adjacent programs, and greater clarity on how Indigenous design elements are integrated into architectural form, rather than appearing as applied motifs. Finally, they highlighted public washrooms as an important but under-articulated component of the project, encouraging the team to develop them as an exemplary and visible part of the design that responds to everyday urban use.

Another Panel member emphasized the importance of strengthening the north-south relationship between this project and its neighbors, particularly in reinforcing visual and experiential connections to the waterfront. They suggested that revisiting the original intent of Canoe Landing—using landform, views, and storytelling to reveal the lake—could help shape a stronger dialogue between the two parks, further supported through Indigenous design perspectives. The Panel member also encouraged greater consideration of family-oriented and intergenerational use, noting opportunities to embed play value throughout the site beyond designated program areas. They also raised concerns about environmental performance under the Gardiner, specifically the potential for extreme dryness, long-term vegetation health, accumulated airborne sediment, and ongoing maintenance demands, and encouraged clearer articulation of water, cleaning, and life-cycle strategies to support a sustainable and welcoming public realm over time.

1.5 Consensus Comments

General

- Strengthen architectural linkages to Bentway Phase 1 and future Bentway expansions.
- The bridge is critical and should remain a clear identifier of the project.
- Provide clarity on constraints affecting design (noise, microclimate, municipal and provincial constraints).
- Provide more detail on retail intent, location, and role within the project.
- Provide more information on project phasing and delivery.
- Investigate whether an additional north-south connection is feasible through the site.

Public Realm Design

- Ensure strong east-west and north-south connections throughout the site.
- Prioritize maintenance, programming, and safety to support long-term activation.

- Ensure the space is active, vibrant, and well-used across different times of day.
- Provide sectional drawings to better explain how the design addresses topography.
- Emphasize the unique experience of being under a sheltered structure.
- Consider adjacencies and the number of people who can access the site within a short walk.
- Undertake an acoustic study to address noise from the Gardiner and Lake Shore Boulevard and inform siting of different programmatic elements
- Consider the opportunity to further integrate Indigenous elements into the design of the buildings to strengthen their presence.
- Address safety risks related to dogs jumping the DOLA fence.
- Explore sediment conditions beneath the Gardiner downspouts and opportunities for filtration and site cleanliness.
- Provide more detail on winter activation, maintenance, and strategies to keep the space welcoming year-round.

Mr. Brook thanked the Panel for the feedback. He added that meaningful acoustic mitigation will likely require collaboration with the Province, as large-scale interventions at the Gardiner (e.g. modifying or suspending treatments from the soffit) would be most effective.

Ms. Altman added that Bentway Phase One is not a quiet site but has successfully embraced urban noise by creating a mix of louder and quieter pockets. She noted that goal is not to create a silent park, but a lively city park supported by material choices, design, programming, and operations.

Ms. Castilla thanked the panel and noted that much of the requested analysis and rationale already exists but was not shown in the condensed presentation. She welcomed the feedback as a catalyst for the next design phase and committed to more clearly demonstrating how the project represents an evolution of Phase One, shaped directly by community input and the needs of the site's future users.

1.6 Vote of Support/Non-Support

The Panel voted unanimously for Conditional Support.

CLOSING

There being no further business, the Chair then adjourned the public session of the meeting.

These Meeting Minutes were formally adopted and approved by the Panel on April 29th, 2026.

Signed–

Paul Bedford, Waterfront Design Review Panel Chair

Lara Tarlo, Project Manager, City of Toronto (on behalf of James Parakh, Acting City Urban Design Director, City of Toronto)

Chris Glaisek, Waterfront Toronto Chief Planning and Design Officer