



2021 up to the present: Year in Review

Ed Hore, Chair, Waterfront for All, May 24, 2022

Waterfront for All is an umbrella group of residents associations and other groups interested in the revitalization of the Toronto waterfront from the Rouge River in the east out to the Etobicoke boundary in the west. We love the waterfront and are interested in what happens to it.

Here's a brief run-down on things that happened since my last update on February 10, 2021.

Water Levels: Everyone remembers the flood years in 2017 and 2019. Luckily, Lake Ontario's water level seemed to peak a few weeks ago about two and a half feet below the 2019 peak. That is around a foot above the highest point last year. Of course we don't know how often flooding will happen in years to come. The assumption, of course, must be that there will be flooding again at some point.

The effect of flooding was felt most particularly on Toronto Island. A Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) initiative, the Toronto Island Park Flood and Erosion Mitigation Project, recently held public consultations that closed in March 2022. The goal is to develop long-term flood and erosion mitigation measures to protect the Island park from shoreline erosion. Three options are being put forward for comment. Each involves some combination of walls, berms, artificial beaches or groynes.

Erosion Control on the Island: TRCA had been planning erosion mitigation control on the Island long before the floods. There was already lots of erosion due to waves and storms, particularly around Gibraltar Point, at the southwest extremity. In 2020 TRCA completed an artificial nearshore reef, that is, it put lots of boulders under the waterline at Gibraltar Point. It also built a groyne nearby, an artificial peninsula-like structure extending into the lake perpendicular to the shore. We hope these will stop the Island from gradually getting eroded away completely.

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TRCA is now working on Phase 3, a Sand Dune. This involves planting a marram grass beach dune habitat, with wetland features and native tree and shrub plantings. Marram is a kind of beach grass native to this region. As we speak, big piles of sand and some earth moving equipment are visible on the beach west of Gibraltar Point.

Toronto Island Master Planning Process: This was already in the works before the floods, and is on-going. It's considering the future of the Island long-term. Extensive consultations are on-going.

New Toronto Island ferries: Designs were released last August. We may see the first of the new ferries in late 2024.

Other erosion mitigation measures: In 2021, TRCA reinforced the shore line of Ashbridges Bay park with new rip rap material on the slope down to the water and also created a nearshore underwater reef on the east side of the Park. The project scope has been expanded to include trail widening, which is on-going now. There will also be some new plantings.

Villiers Island: One of the biggest projects on the waterfront is of course Waterfront Toronto's Flood Remediation Plan, which has a \$1.25 billion price tag.

It involves digging a second river mouth for the Don River, thereby creating a new island, Villiers Island. Construction started in 2018 and is on schedule to be completed in 2024.

The Port Lands have been underutilized for a century or more because they are in the flood plain of the Don River. The project will make development of the Port Lands possible by preventing the river from flooding.

Three new bridges for Villiers Island arrived from Nova Scotia in 2021, by way of the St Lawrence Seaway. The red and white Commissioners Street Bridge arrived in two parts over the summer of 2021. By chance, I happened to be paddling in a kayak by the Spit in late August, as one of them came around the Leslie Street Spit and through the Outer Harbour, on a barge pulled by huge tugboats. It was a majestic sight.

The second Cherry Street Bridge, to go on the south side of Villiers Island, is white and yellow. It arrived at the beginning of December. In 2022, we'll be able to walk on the bridges in some areas and see the future river valley. There's one more bridge, the traffic bridge over the Keating Channel to the north of Villiers Island, still to come.

Building the new river valley is on-going; it involves vast amount of earth-moving. A membrane under the future river will prevent contamination from the soil getting in the water.

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Attention is now turning to what will be built on Villiers Island. The planning framework calls for mixed use residential and office space, plus lots of parkland. A Due Diligence Report for Villiers Island, outlining costs and strategy is underway, and will be completed in early 2023. Buildings on Villiers Island and the surrounding areas will be subject to Green Building Requirements released by Waterfront Toronto in 2021, requiring zero-emissions or close to it.

The Waterfront Toronto Rolling Five Year Strategic Plan, released December 2021, responds in part to an independent Waterfront Strategic Review which applauded the work being done, and suggested clarifying among other things whether Waterfront Toronto's existence should be extended beyond its current statutory wind-up in 2028.

An important report called "Next Phase of Waterfront Revitalization" by the City's Waterfront Secretariat dated October 13, 2021 was approved by City Council in mid-November. It calls for more detailed planning for Villiers Island, including affordable housing.

A big focus of these documents is philanthropy. Waterfront Toronto has been building capacity to pursue philanthropic fundraising, including the ability to issue tax receipts. It has identified "signature projects" that it thinks well-suited for philanthropic giving and donations.

Quayside: Google's Sidewalk Labs project was to be built on a 12 acre L-shaped site at the foot of Parliament, but as we all know it died in 2020. In March 2021, Waterfront Toronto launched a competitive process to find a development team to lead a reborn project at the site, still called Quayside. The former headquarters of Sidewalk Labs became a car rental place.

The competition got a lot of attention and many high-level entrants, perhaps because Sidewalk Labs had been covered around the world. A winner, Dream Unlimited and Great Gulf Group, was announced by Waterfront Toronto in February 2022.

Waterfront Toronto has an outline plan for Quayside which calls for waterside restaurants, lakeside swimming pools, floating docks, 800 affordable units, public space, timber buildings, a two-acre forested green space, canoe and kayak rental, and a multi-use arts venue.

Waterfront Toronto hopes to have a development agreement with the winning developers in place by the fall of 2022, and shovels in the ground by 2025. Completion is expected around 2030.

Chris Glaisek of Waterfront Toronto is our honoured guest and will tell us about it.

Love Park: Construction is on-going on the new park, designed by Montreal's Claude Cormier, the landscape designer famous for the dog and cat statues at the fountain at Berczy Park on Front Street. The park will replace the now-dismantled northbound circular exit ramp at Queens Quay West and York Street. It will open this year. Another park is planned further west along Queens Quay at Rees Street.

PortsToronto: Geoff Wilson, CEO of PortsToronto for around the past 12 years, recently announced he will retire on June 30, 2022. He is with us tonight to share his thoughts. We're delighted to have him. He will talk in particular about the various sustainability efforts he's initiated at PortsToronto.

PortsToronto is required by statute to be self-sufficient financially. It has three business units, the Island Airport, the Port of Toronto, and the Outer Harbour Marina. It also has responsibility as a trustee for the harbour, and has legacy ownership of certain surrounding lands.

(a) Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport (BBTCA)

Commercial Flights resumed at Billy Bishop in September 2021. Before that PortsToronto had to survive with essentially no airport revenues for around 18 months due to Covid shutdowns.

In its recently-released 2021 annual report, PortsToronto said it suffered net losses in both 2020 and 2021. It had to lay-off a lot of staff, although some are now coming back.

One issue for Geoff's successor will new federal regulations that require Canada's busiest airports including BBTCA to install a "runway end safety area" (RESA), a run-off area so an aircraft can stop safely in case of emergency. As I understand it, compliance is required by around 2027. It could involve extensive landfill at both ends of the Billy Bishop runway.

On March 30, 2021 Ports Toronto issued a Request for Interest seeking a potential a partner/investor, essentially proposing to sell the airport. The proposal was later withdrawn. In the course of the RFI process, Ports Toronto estimated the cost of compliance with the RESA regulations at between \$50 million and \$130 million.

(b) Port of Toronto

199 ships visited the Port of Toronto in 2021 bringing sugar, salt, cement and steel.

The Viking Octantis, the first cruise ship to dock in Toronto in a long time due to Covid, arrived at the end of April 2022. It docked at the former Rochester ferry terminal in the eastern gap. It looked mighty big from a kayak! It's a newly built ship intended to tour the Great Lakes and also Antarctica. Thirty cruise ships are scheduled to dock at the Eastern Gap terminal this year.

In 2021, PortsToronto embarked on a four year project together with the City to rehabilitate the ageing Ship Channel Lift Bridge.

It also embarked on an interesting water-cleaning project involving what are called Floatables and Seabins, in conjunction with TRCA. These are essentially floating automatic trash collectors, which pick up random junk and litter. This is an exciting new idea and may be widely adopted, if successful.

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On May 4, 2022, PortsToronto unveiled a waterside statue on the south side of the Western Gap near the ferry dock called Maanjidowin, The Gathering. Conceived and installed in conjunction with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, it was created by sculptor David M General, Mohawk Nation, Wolf Clan of the First Nations. It is sixteen feet long, and portrays mythical figures, a bear, otter and eagle, fishing from a canoe. It's impressive to paddle by.

Dock Wall Safety Ladders: I applaud Ports Toronto for fixing up the south dock wall of the Western Gap, and installing sturdy yellow safety ladders down to the water.

We need more safety ladders all around the harbour! Safety hooks and lifebuoys are not enough; if someone is in the water, a safety hook is no use if stolen, or no one else is around to help. PortsToronto has set a great example by installing some ladders, but it only controls a small portion of the dock walls around Toronto Harbour.

The dock walls are often six feet high, and impossible to climb in the absence of a ladder. For about half the year the water is cold enough to kill you in a few minutes. If someone falls in for any reason, or is thrown in, and I have seen both happen, it could be a death sentence. As more people are around Toronto Harbour, more safety ladders are essential. Yet there are none in many places. Where safety ladders do exist, they are often too far apart or in such poor repair as to be useless.

I was on City News talking about this problem last October, and sent a follow-up letter to the City on October 12, 2021, posted on the website of Waterfront for All. But nothing seems to have changed since.

Scarborough Bluffs Project: TRCA plans an 11-kilometre shoreline multi-use trail between Bluffer's Park and East Point Park. That has been planned and talked about for a long time. It's now in the design phase. There was an open house in December 2021. Nancy Gaffney of TRCA is our guest and may tell us more about it. We always enjoy hearing from Nancy whenever she comes to see us.

TRCA monitors erosion of the Bluffs and is always working to mitigate its effects. This is a constant, never-ending battle. The breeding of bank swallows, the distinctive birds that live in holes high in the Bluffs, appear to be undisturbed by the erosion control measures TRCA builds from time to time below their colonies.

A paved trail will soon be built up the east side of Brimley Road South, the steep road that goes down to Bluffer's Park. It is in the 60% Design Phase. Various other erosion control measures are underway.

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Ashbridges Bay Landform Project: Work is on-going on the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant Landform Project, a \$96 million undertaking by TRCA, to reduce erosion, prevent silting up of the boating facilities there, and providing enhancement to aquatic habitat. It is located just south of the current Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant. The fill is shale taken from various Toronto tunnelling projects. The perimeter of the landform project was completed in mid-2021. When completed it will create 27 hectares, around 67 acres, of landfill. A new high-tech waste water treatment plan will be built on it.

This project has been on-going for years. The landfill is divided into three large enclosures called cells. Cells 1 and 2 are complete. Cell 3 is expected to be completed by the end of 2022. 2021 also saw the construction of two T-shaped “headlands” and the placing of armour stone and cobble beaches. Two more headlands will be built this year. The project also involves building two breakwaters: one a groyne sticking south from Ashbridges Bay, now complete, and a longer curved breakwater protecting the Coatsworth Cut. Construction on that larger breakwater will continue through to 2024.

This breakwater will create a sheltered area for flat water paddlers and home for lots of fish.

Nancy Gaffney will talk about it and show us some maps and pictures.

Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant Outfall Project. This huge underwater tunnel under the lake bed is being built now. You may have noticed something resembling an oil rig, visible from the Leslie Street Spit or Ashbridges Bay, with nearby ventilation shafts coming out of the water called risers. You’re not supposed to paddle near it, but of course I have. I can verify it’s big.

The tunnel is a new outflow for treated water from the new waste water treatment plant. It is seven meters in diameter and extends 3.5 kilometers out into Lake Ontario.

Don River and Central Waterfront Combined Sewer Overflow Project. The outfall is only part of a much larger waste water-management project that will clean up Lake Ontario.

We had a wonderful talk from Lou Di Geronimo from City Works about all this, part of our Waterfront for All Speaker Series last fall. He described the massive efforts underway to clean up the pollution that spews into the Lake. His slide deck and talk are on our website.

Our sewage infrastructure is too old. After a heavy rainfall, the storm sewers and the really nasty sewers (containing you-know-what) combine and overflow into rivers such as the Don, the Humber and directly into the Lake, through what are called Combined Sewer Outfalls or CSOs. Toronto has almost 90 CSOs. Many of the slips along the central waterfront have CSOs that spew untreated sewage into Toronto Harbour after a storm.

The huge Don River and Central Waterfront Combined Sewer Overflow Project will eliminate the CSOs and the pollution they release. Once built, this wet weather flow management system

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will capture, store, transport and treat all that wastewater. The requires building an underground tunnel almost the size of a subway tunnel, called the Don River/Coxwell Bypass, down the Don Valley. This is now underway. When finished, the tunnel will conduct all the wastewater to the new Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant and Outfall that I just described, and then harmlessly into the lake. This project will cost over \$3 Billion, and is scheduled at present to be completed by 2038.

Part of the plan is a Central Waterfront Tunnel that will go under the waterfront slips and the Queens Quay area of the Inner Harbour, bringing sewage to the new Treatment Plant instead of dumping it in the Lake whenever a heavy rainfall happens. But unfortunately the Central Waterfront Tunnel is not scheduled to be built for many years.

Yet it is designed and ready to go! Lou Di Geronimo told us that his greatest wish would be to start construction on the Central Waterfront Tunnel in 2024 instead of around six or more years later. This can be done, he said. The budget of the overall project, already over \$3 Billion, would have to be increased by around a third, as I understand it.

That would stop nasty CSO pollution from spewing into the Toronto Harbour by around 2030 instead of letting it continue until 2038.

Let's get the Central Waterfront Tunnel started, and complete this vital water treatment project as soon as possible! This is important!

Ontario Place: On July 30, 2021 the Province announced plans to develop Ontario Place. It said Two-thirds of Ontario Place will be “free and open to the public.” Public ownership of the site will be maintained. The pods and Cinesphere will not be removed but will be renovated. They will be “integrated into the development”. The Ontario government will do a detailed examination of what it will cost to restore the site and the structures, now over 50 years old. Shovels may be in the ground by 2028, with completion perhaps in 2030. Extensive consultation is promised.

The Province also at the same time announced the winners of a selection process to choose private companies that will develop major attractions on the site, collectively spending more than \$500 million. The winners are Therme Group, Live Nation and Ecorecreo.

Therme Group, an Austrian company, will build an all-season recreation and wellness attraction (a spa). Images show glass-sided building with palm trees, pools, waterslides and botanical gardens. Its area will include approximately 8 acres of free, publically accessible gathering spaces, trails, parkland and beaches.

Live Nation will redevelop the existing Budweiser stage into a year-round attraction, with a capacity of around 20,000 in summer (up from the present 16,000) and 9,000 in winter.

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Ecorecreo Group, based in Montreal, will build an all-season adventure park for all ages, including an aerial obstacle course, zip lines, and climbing walls. There will be Segway, quadracycle, canoe and kayak rentals.

The Province is working with Ontario Science Centre to explore opportunities to have science-related tourism in the iconic Pods.

It's nice to see something happening at Ontario Place after years of limbo! However we are concerned that there was no public consultation on the choice of these partners, nor on the overall plan for Ontario Place. The partners and the plan were just suddenly announced after what appeared to be secretive process. An opportunity to get the benefit of extensive consultation, namely, widespread political support, was lost. On the positive side, *something* is happening!

Waterfront for All has urged that Waterfront Toronto become more involved with Ontario Place, so that planning can be more integrated with existing planning for the waterfront as a whole. Waterfront Toronto of course represents all three levels of government, has deep awareness of what is happening elsewhere on the waterfront, and has a history of extensive public consultation.

We also suggested that a planning process with lots of public consultation take place *before* tenants/private contractors are chosen. If commitments have been made, as they appear to have been, we suggested that the formal contractual terms ensure that cancellation or a substantial change in plan will not cause the Province to be on the hook for extensive damages.

Our letter about Ontario Place is on our website.

An updated Western Waterfront Master Plan: The existing Western Waterfront Master Plan completed in 2009 dealt with Humber Bay, from Ontario Place to the mouth of the Humber. It's now time to revisit the Plan, according to a report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee of City Council submitted by City Staff in May 2022. It points out there has been an increase in paddling activity along that area, among many other changes.

Walter Kehm, who was involved in setting up and designing Tommy Thompson Park, spoke in our Speaker Series about Humber Bay last year. He proposed many enhancements, including an archipelago of artificial islands. This was our most well-attended talk. His deck and a recording are on our website.

City staff will prepare an updated master plan and report back to City Council around the end of 2023. There will be public consultations, presumably this year or next year.

Humber Bay has lots of potential. Now is the time to start dreaming and talking about what it could be!

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Rebel, Cabana Pool Bar Nightclub liquor licence: Some years ago, the owners of the existing Rebel nightclub and associated outdoor patio Cabana Pool Bar, at Unwin Street on the eastern end of Toronto Harbour, sought a new liquor license. It would have allowed more people, longer hours and fewer restrictions on amplified music on the outdoor patio.

A key governing principle on our Waterfront is that potentially conflicting uses have to be kept in balance. This application, because of the potential for loud music at all hours, seemed to upset the proper balance our waterfront needs, and to put in jeopardy years of planning and vast amounts of public money spent to upgrade the waterfront.

The liquor licence application was opposed by the City, the Islanders and one of our member associations York Quay Neighbourhood Association (YQNA), which I represented at the hearing and subsequent appeals, which took around five years.

After a 17 day hearing, the License Appeal Board (LAT), in August 2018 permitted a new liquor license, but with conditions much worse for the nightclub than the liquor license already in place: amplified music on the outdoor patio was prohibited. The nightclub appealed. The appeal went slowly because of Covid among other reasons. The appeal was finally heard and dismissed with lengthy reasons by the Ontario Divisional Court on June 14, 2021. The unanimous Divisional Court's decision is [here](#). That was a big win for the waterfront.

The nightclub sought leave to appeal to the Ontario Court of Appeal, but leave was denied on November 16, 2021. That means the litigation is over. However the legal situation in the Port Lands is convoluted, and the nightclub owners or others may find ways to make a lot of loud noise this summer, despite the outcome of this lengthy litigation.

Jack Layton Ferry Terminal: Many of you will recall that a beautiful design for a revitalized Jack Layton ferry terminal was selected some years ago, after a design contest conducted by Waterfront Toronto. You can see the plans in the shelter at the terminal while waiting for the ferry.

A small landscaping project known as Phase 1 at the entrance area from Queens Quay was completed last year. There is no funding at present for the rest. But it has been identified a "signature project" by Waterfront Toronto, meaning that it may attract philanthropic support.

Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood Plan: This involves beautifying the area around the malting towers at the Western Gap. Phase 1 was unveiled on December 22, 2020, without ribbon-cutting or dignitaries due to Covid. Almost the only person there was me!

Phase 2 is now in progress; it will involve animating and upgrading the public space west of the malting towers, and renovating the malting towers themselves. You may have seen the scaffolding that recently appeared all around the south end of the malting towers.

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In a year or two, there will be amazing light effects projected on the malting towers, and other cultural and music events in the beautiful new public realm space nearby.

New waterfront facilities for kayaks and canoes? For a long time, Waterfront for All has raised concerns about the lack of facilities for paddling on the Toronto Waterfront. In response, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation department of the City issued an RFP dated April 9, 2021 seeking proposals to operate stand-up paddle board and kayak rental operations at six specified locations.

Five operators were chosen. They opened almost immediately afterwards, in the early summer of 2021. They included Toronto Island SUP beside the Algonquin Bridge on Toronto Island, Toronto SUP and Kayak at the east end of Cherry Beach, two SUP rental operations at the Beaches and one along Humber Bay. They will be opening again this year in a few days.

This is great news, but it didn't address the growing demand for canoe and kayak storage, which continues to grow. A Toronto Star front page story about this issue on April 5, 2021 featured a my picture of a paddler in front of the CN Tower, with quotes from me, Paula Fletcher and many other people about the need for storage.

Kayaks are a good thing for the City! Non-motorized watercraft, as the City bureaucrats call them, are a low cost way to animate the waterfront and people out on the water for recreation and exercise. But they require training for safety and other reasons, not unlike sailing.

People need a place to keep them near the water. You can't keep a canoe or kayak in a condominium. Some people can keep a canoe or kayak in their garage or backyard and bring it down to the Waterfront by car top. But many people don't have a car or a backyard.

Hundreds of storage places are required. Luckily, kayaks are small; and can be stacked up on racks, so not much space is needed. Waterfront for All has proposed a Toronto Paddle Centre at the Outer Harbour (or somewhere else) where people could keep kayaks and canoes. It would also have instruction, kid's camps, programs, races and so on. That idea was rejected (for now) in a report dated September 17, 2021 by the General Manager Parks, Forestry and Recreation to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee, adopted on October 26, 2021.

However the idea of a paddle centre (the paddling equivalent of a yacht club) is still out there, and I believe it will happen one day. Councillor Paula Fletcher is still behind the idea, and it has supporters among City staff.

A few weeks ago I created an Annotated Paddling map of the City of Toronto. You can find it on Waterfront for All's website. We'll be expanding and developing that idea.