

**Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation  
Lower Don Lands Innovative Design Competition  
Jury Report  
May 2007**

## **Overview**

The Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC) sponsored the Innovative Design Competition for the Lower Don Lands to bring a fresh, new perspective to the 40-hectare site which represents one of the greatest opportunities to rebuild a river mouth in an urban centre and to provide critical connections between emerging new waterfront communities in the East Bayfront, West Don Lands and the Port Lands.

## **Four Outstanding Design Teams**

Four outstanding international teams representing a range of urban, architectural, landscape and ecological design philosophies were selected to take part in the eight-week competition.

Atelier Girot/Arup/Applied Ecological Services/Baird Sampson Neuert Architects/J. Mayer H. Architects/Office of Landscape Morphology/Philip Ursprung/ReK Productions

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA)/Greenberg Consultants, Inc. /Phillips Farevaag Smallenberg/Behnisch Architects/Limno-Tech, Inc. /Applied Ecological Services/Great Eastern Ecology/Transsolar/RFR Engineering/Arup/TSH

StossLandscapeUrbanism/Brown + Storey Architects/ZAS Architects/Nina-Marie Lister/Brookner Studio/Kidd Consulting/Applied Ecological Services/Moffat + Nichol/Arup/Pine + Swallow Associates/Nitsch Engineering/Consult Econ Inc.

Weiss/Manfredi/du Toit Allsopp Hillier/McCormick Ranking Corporation/ECoplans Limited/Golder Associates Ltd./Weidlinger Associates/David Dennis Design/Evergreen

## **Design Competition Jury**

TWRC appointed a jury to evaluate and select the winning design and team.

Bruce Kuwabara, Architect, Chair, Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg Architects  
Edward Burtynsky, Photographer, Photographic Works  
Renee Daoust, Architect, Daoust Lestage Architecture Urban Design  
Charles Waldheim, Landscape Architect, University of Toronto, Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design  
Morden Yolles, Structural Engineer, Halcrow Yolles

## **Goals of the Competition**

The design should create:

An iconic identity for the Don River that accommodates crucial flood protection and habitat restoration requirements, and

A bold and comprehensive concept design that integrates development, transportation infrastructure, and the river mouth into a harmonious whole.

## **Required design elements:**

1. Naturalize the mouth of the Don River
2. Create a continuous riverfront park system
3. Provide for harmonious new development
4. Extend Queen's Quay eastward to enhance the road network
5. Prioritize public transit
6. Develop a gateway into the Port Lands
7. Humanize existing infrastructure
8. Enhance the Martin Goodman Trail
9. Expand opportunities for interaction with the water
10. Promote sustainable development

## **Process**

The jury deliberations included attending the public exhibition and presentations by the four competitors held at BCE Place on April 16. A walking and bus tour of the Lower Don Lands site was conducted on April 24.

The jury met for two days, April 26 and 27, to formally review the designs and to select the winning scheme and team. The staff of the TWRC provided a broad overview of the competition requirements, site context, flood control and ecological issues, as well as patterns of land ownership and soil conditions.

As part of their deliberations, the jury received presentations from three stakeholder groups.

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) coordinated an Environmental Assessment Technical Group to provide an overview of the ecological and hydrological feasibility analysis and a high level costing for each design concept.

A City of Toronto Technical Team provided a staff overview of comments received from each of the relevant City departments including urban planning and design, parks, heritage and culture, water, and municipal servicing. The City team provided the jury with their identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the designs and provided thoughts on the teams' innovative approaches.

John Wilson, Chair of the Lower Don Lands Stakeholder Committee, provided a summary of the group's response to each of the designs. The group prepared a report for the jury with detailed critiques of each design.

Kristin Jenkins of the TWRC provided the jury with a summary of the public comments collected during the BCE Place public exhibition, April 16 – 24.

In addition to reviewing the design reports submitted by each competing team, the models of the competition schemes were set up for viewing at the offices of the TWRC specifically for the jury deliberations.

## **Commissioners' Park**

The jury acknowledged the exemplary work of Claude Cormier in the design of Commissioners' Park which was completed before the idea of launching an international design competition for the mouth of the Lower Don was approved.

Although Commissioner's Park is superseded by the naturalization of the mouth of the Don River, the park's recreational program was incorporated in different ways within each of the four submissions.

## **TWRC Leadership and Stakeholder Collaboration**

The jury recognized the leadership role of the TWRC in promoting design excellence and innovation through international design competitions. And, the jury commended TWRC for its deep and consistent commitment to citizen participation and on-going stakeholder consultation.

Finally, the jury appreciated the input of the stakeholder groups themselves---TRCA, City of Toronto, and the Lower Don Lands Stakeholder Committee. The jury was impressed by the quality of the information that was presented and the enthusiasm and passion the stakeholders have for the Lower Don Lands.

## **Jury Comments**

The jury commended the outstanding and innovative work that each of the teams produced in a short period of time for such a complex undertaking. The jury was impressed by the quality and diversity of the multi-disciplinary teams which included significant participation from Toronto architects, urban designers and engineers.

The jury selected the design by the team led by Michael van Valkenburgh and Associates as the winning design. This design was selected because the jury felt it best met the two major objectives of the competition which were to create a naturalized mouth and iconic identity for the Don River, and to deliver a comprehensive plan for addressing the area's ecological, urban design and transportation issues. The implementability of the MVVA team design was also an important consideration for the jury.

## **Wandering Ecologies**

Weiss/Manfredi/du Toit Allsopp Hillier

The jury felt that the Weiss Manfredi scheme was very clear and architecturally elegant, noting the dramatic outlook back to the city. In terms of built form, the jury appreciated the creation of a relatively low urban neighbourhood without towers in the Port Lands, but had questions as to whether the design meets the competition requirement for 10,000 residential units. The design was also seen as effectively reconciling the tension between contemporary approaches to landscape with a naturalized river mouth. The connections to the neighbouring communities and the city were viewed as very strong particularly the extension of Parliament Street into the Port Lands. However, the jury felt that the introduction of more elevated roadway construction to

achieve this was not appropriate given the goals of the competition and the desire to create a more naturalized mouth of the Don.

The jury felt that the integration with the West 8/DTAH central waterfront promenade was effective, although some jurors questioned the appropriateness of the sheer amount and scale of the wood decking proposed for the Lower Don Lands. The jury appreciated the acknowledgement of the industrial past through the use of heritage pieces within naturalized areas.

The ecological function of the river was considered less developed compared with the other teams' submissions. The design itself did not fully explore the ecological layers of the project to play a more significant role in the formation of the project. The jury also had concerns about the feasibility of transforming 480 Lake Shore, a heavily contaminated site, into a major ecological wetlands area. The scheme also provided less park space than the other schemes. In terms of the river, the jury did not feel that the connections were strong enough between the river and the community to the south. The jury was also concerned that the open river would interrupt the continuity of the urban inner harbour with development in the Port Lands.

Given these strengths and weaknesses, and the fact that the primary objectives of the Lower Don Lands competition were focused on the treatment of the river including naturalization, flood protection and habitat restoration, the jury did not select the Weiss Manfredi design as the winner but considered it a strong second place runner up in the competition.

## **Don Mouth Park**

### **Atelier Girot**

The jury recognized the innovation and clarity of the Girot design particularly the interlocking of natural and urban systems and the series of L-shaped channels. The Girot design was viewed as an ambitious model for its integration of the morphology of the river into an urban context. The jury also noted the economic potential of such significant amounts of water's edge development.

The jury questioned whether the density and building typologies were appropriate for the Lower Don Lands given the high importance placed on naturalization, landscape and ecology in the area. While the parallel piers of housing were convincing in plan, the number, heights and placement of the residential towers, while generating a layered mini-Manhattan image from certain vantage points, was not considered appropriate for the area.

The jury also felt that the channels may not flush adequately and could result in large pools of stagnant water. Several members of the jury criticized the lack of an idea of transition between the hard surface of urban development and the constructed natural systems. From a transportation point of view, it was felt that the one route down Cherry Street was insufficient and would have to be very wide to accommodate projected demand. At the same time, there was not an adequate network for movement within the urban neighbourhoods.

## **River + City + Life**

Stoss LandscapeUrbanism/Brown + Storey Architects/ZAS Architects

The jury felt that the Stoss design contained many innovative ideas noting that many of these strategies contributed to the creation of both highly sustainable natural and urban environments. The jury was particularly impressed with the number of building typologies, their relationship to the water and the level of detail included in the submission. It was pointed out that the two tallest buildings were also the “greenest.” The jury felt that the team effectively used landscape to define the new communities in the design.

While the jury was impressed with individual components of the scheme, it did not feel that it provided an effective overall approach for the Lower Don Lands. The jury felt that the design lacked clarity and order, and did not create a coherent system to address the area’s ecological, transportation and urban design issues. The treatment of the river was viewed as overly complex and did not sufficiently address issues of flood protection. The higher order of magnitude costs associated with the extensive engineering of the proposed complex systems was viewed as a drawback to the design’s feasibility.

## **Port Lands Estuary**

Michael Van Valkenburgh and Associates

The jury selected the MVVA team’s design as the winning submission. The jury felt that this design’s big, bold moves impressively integrated the natural and wild elements of the river’s and the Lower Don Lands with urban placemaking, creating a spectacular and compelling vision for the area.

In taking this approach, the jury felt the MVVA team best addressed the competition’s two key objectives of providing a naturalized mouth and iconic identity for the Don River and creating a comprehensive plan for addressing urban design, transportation, naturalization, sustainability and other ecological issues.

In the MVVA scheme, the mouth of the river has been relocated further south and a community has been developed around the mouth of the river. The Keating Channel is left intact and will be filled with lake water rather than river water. The river becomes the main outlet of a riverine system and a wetland-like quality is create in the tertiary spillway which conveys an image of the area that is highly ecological while at the same time, solidly connected to its urban context. The jury felt that the MVVA team’s approach to balancing and integrating urban and naturalized environments best developed an innovative vision for the Lower Don Lands.

The MVVA team’s solid understanding of the soil conditions including the engineering, economics and the value in shaping the new river mouth combined with its understanding of existing land ownership in the area were both highly innovative and very strategic. The jury recognized the depth of thinking in this submission in terms of implementation and phasing which greatly distinguished this team’s strategic approach from the other competitors.

The MVVA design also provided the most effective series of connections across the Keating Channel into the Port Lands, although the jury felt that another major route into the Port Lands in addition to Cherry Street will likely be needed.

The jury also liked the strategy to integrate the area's industrial heritage structures into the scheme, in particular the Keating Channel, which could become a significant destination for residents and visitors.

The flexibility of the urban plan was recognized as workable and appropriate. The location of taller buildings in the north part of the precinct and the stepping down of building heights to the south was appreciated. The introduction of the courtyard and atrium typologies was recognized.

### **Jury Recommendations for Implementation**

1. The clarity of the urban form and street pattern needs to be worked out, respecting the geometry, scale and character of the industrial heritage elements of the Port Lands. The placement and heights of new buildings and development in relationship to the industrial heritage structures needs more study.
2. The pastoral landscape of the river mouth has to have a more contemporary feel. Jurors are looking for a design expression that is fresh recognizing that nature is being engineered as a construct.
3. The Keating Channel should not become the primary outfall for the Don River, but rather the relocated river would be the primary ecological/hydrological move. The Keating Channel should have cleaner lake water in order to enhance its potential as an urban place.
4. The regional recreational sports fields should be located closer to the dunes in the evolving master plan for Lake Ontario Park, where bus access and parking is available without impacting the local community. One sports field might be kept in the plan for use by the community.
5. Explore making the connection from the Don Roadway up to Broadview.
6. Explore the inclusion of community gardens in the program.
7. Increase naturalization along the Don Greenway which can be seen as a spillway with more wetlands.
8. Explore a Parliament Street connection for pedestrians and bicyclists.
9. The design of the bridges should be considered further in terms of specific language and character relative to the existing bridges in the Port Lands and the timber bridges proposed by the West 8 team for the Central waterfront.
10. The heritage elements and the industrial history of the area need to be considered further through imaginative transformations, adaptive reuse, and possibly through commemorative and educational narratives.

11. The introduction of a cultural/public structure on the edge of the river looking back to the city should be explored as a destination.
12. Develop a contingency plan if the Gardiner Expressway were to come down.
13. Consider greater intensification in the 480 Lake Shore precinct in relationship to the high costs of soils remediation, and the fact that the shadows of tall building in this location would fall on the rail lands.
14. Ensure that an Integrated Design Team including the lead consultants, Behnisch Architects, Phillips Farevaag Smallerberg, and Transsolar are involved with the design and detailed development of the first phase of community building including prototypical housing courtyard development and the first phase of the public streets and public realm of the precinct. It is absolutely critical to develop an approach to ensure design excellence, sustainability, and material quality for the first new building, streetscapes and landscapes in the precinct around the mouth of the new Lower Don.
15. The southwest corner of the Keating Channel has been proposed to be demolished and replaced the new “naturalized” river mouth. Can the design team explore maintaining this corner as an element that is important to the character and history of the industrial Port Lands while still creating a new image and configuration of the river mouth? It is a question of image, performance and balance.
16. Can Commissioners Street be maintained on its present alignment while still achieving the objectives of the plan?