



WATERFRONTToronto

Waterfront Design Review Panel Minutes of Meeting #19 Wednesday, September 12, 2007

Present:

Bruce Kuwabara, Chair
George Baird
Paul Bedford
Tania Bortolotto
Peter Clewes
Anne McIlroy
Janet Rosenberg
Greg Smallenberg
Charles Waldheim

Designees and Guests:

John Campbell
Robert Freedman
Christopher Glaisek

Regrets:

Siamak Hariri
Don Schmitt
Renee Daoust
Peter Halsall

Recording Secretary:

Margaret Goodfellow

WELCOME

The Chair welcomed the Panel and reviewed the agenda, noting that there would be an *In-Camera* session prior to the review in order to discuss the Waterfront Design Review Panel By-Laws, Protocols and Procedures.

The Chair then invited John Campbell to provide his report.

REPORT FROM THE CEO

Mr. Campbell, Waterfront Toronto's President and CEO, began by welcoming the Panel Members back after the August break.

Mr. Campbell announced that over the summer, the new CN Bridge opened along with the Bala Underpass and Head of the Don Trail, noting that the new bridge will now be able to accommodate the increased volume of water that could result once the Flood Protection Landform is complete.

Mr. Campbell then announced that 18 submissions were received for the West Don Lands Developer Request for Qualifications that went out in June. The Request for Proposals will be sent out after the short-listed teams have been selected.

Mr. Campbell stated that the Toronto Community Housing Corporation has selected Daniels as the builder for their units that are being designed for the McCord site at King and River Streets.

Mr. Campbell announced that the Spadina Head of Slip construction tender was issued and construction is scheduled to begin in October.

Mr. Campbell stated that Waterfront Toronto is currently working with an institutional tenant for the blocks east of the Corus Site in East Bayfront, with a formal announcement anticipated at the beginning of November.

Mr. Campbell concluded by announcing that Paul Goldberger, the Architecture Critic from *The New Yorker* magazine will be a keynote speaker at Waterfront Toronto's Annual General Meeting on October 2nd, and welcomed the Panel members to attend.

REPORT FROM THE VP PLANNING AND DESIGN

Christopher Glaisek, Waterfront Toronto's Vice President for Planning and Design, provided a summary of project progress over the past month.

Don River Park

- The 90% Construction Documents set is complete. The construction of the park will commence in spring 2008, once the Flood Protection Landform is functionally complete.

Jarvis Slip

- An invited competition will be held for the public space at the foot of Jarvis Street, adjacent to Project Symphony. Letters of invitation will be sent out to the selected candidates shortly.

Canada Square

- A Feasibility Study is currently underway with Harbourfront Centre to determine the best mix of uses for the land now occupied by the above grade parking lot.

Lower Yonge

- Waterfront Toronto is working towards creating a comprehensive set of development guidelines for this area. Though not a full precinct plan, these guidelines will help the City and Waterfront Toronto review and respond to development proposals that may come forward in the future, while protecting for the possible reconstruction of the Gardiner Expressway.

Lower Don Lands

- Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA) is currently working with the Environmental Assessment team to select the preferred alternative for the mouth of the Don. This work will ultimately inform the design of the entire Lower Don Lands precinct.

Mr. Glaisek concluded by reinforcing Mr. Campbell's remarks about the start of construction on Spadina Head of Slip and thanking the Panel for their contributions in reviewing the design.

GENERAL BUSINESS

The Chair began by thanking Mr. Bedford for chairing July's meeting.

The Chair noted that there is a need for a Waterfront Design Review Panel “Re-visioning Session” to review where the panel has been effective, where it needs improvement, and how it can evolve. The Chair then suggested that the proposed By-laws, Procedures and Protocols should be discussed at that session. Mr. Glaisek agreed that this could be valuable and to try to schedule this prior to the next Design Review meeting on October 10th.

The Chair then asked the Panel if there were any questions or comments on last month’s meeting minutes, noting that many of the issues covered in June’s meeting still seemed to be repeated in July’s meeting. One Panel member suggested a slight change to the *Summary of the Panel’s Key Issues* section for the Spadina Head of Slip, noting that the recommendation “The bench should not invite people to walk along the edge of the deck”, should be revised to say that the Panel thought the dimension between the edge of the bench and the edge of the deck should be studied further to determine a safe dimension. Pending this minor change, the minutes were approved.

The Chair then convened the *in camera* portion of the meeting and asked the members of the public to leave.

The Chair re-opened the public portion of the meeting at the conclusion of the *in-camera* session.

PROJECT REVIEWS

2.0 West Don Lands Public Realm

ID#: 1018

Project Type: Park/Public Realm Design

Location: Area bounded by Parliament Street, Eastern Avenue, the Don River and the CN Rail corridor.

Proponent: Waterfront Toronto

Architect/Designer: The Planning Partnership with Phillips Farvaag Smallemberg and &Co.

Review Round: Four

Presenter(s): David Leinster, The Planning Partnership, and Greg Smallemberg, Phillips Farvaag Smallemberg, and Mark Stirling, &co.

Delegation: Mike Tocher, The Planning Partnership

2.1 Introduction to the Issues

Christopher Glaisek, Waterfront Toronto’s Vice President Planning for and Design, introduced the project, noting that this was the fourth time the team has been before the panel and that, unlike typical reviews, we were in this case going to ask the Panel to help Waterfront Toronto decide between two design options for Front Street.

The main issues on which the advice of the Panel was sought included:

- Preference for the Central Median or Asymmetrical Park option for the design of Front Street
- Thoughts on the long-term operations and maintenance implications of each option

2.2 Project Presentation

David Leinster, Partner with the Planning Partnership, began by introducing the team. Mr. Leinster continued by describing the goals and objectives for the design of District 2, including

parks space, open space connections, transportation issues, ownership issues, and street patterns based on both the Central Median and Asymmetrical Park options for Front Street. Mark Stirling, Partner with &co, then described the implications to “Street G” and the adjacent development blocks. Greg Smallenberg, Partner with Phillips Farvaag Smallenberg, then described the pros and cons and possible impacts that both the Central Median and Asymmetrical Park options could have on park land dedication, the intersections, programming, safety, retail and the overall adherence to the approved precinct plan. Mr. Smallenberg concluded by adding that their high expectations for the size of the trees is attainable in both scenarios.

2.3 Panel Questions and Comments

The Chair then asked the Panel for questions of clarification only.

One Panel member enquired as to the impact the Asymmetrical option would have on the dimension of block 14a. Mr. Stirling replied that it would be about 35 metres deep, which although tight, could allow for a use like townhouses.

One Panel member asked which option the design team preferred. Mr. Smallenberg answered that they favoured the Asymmetrical option, and that the role of the designer should be to take risks.

Another Panel member asked for clarification on how the “pedestrian scramble” at the Bayview Avenue intersection would work. Mr. Smallenberg stated that the entire hatched area would be designated as the crossing zone. The Panel member then asked if the design team has consulted with MVVA, the designers of the adjacent Don River Park, and if they had an opinion on which one they preferred. Mr. Smallenberg stated that MVVA has been consulted and are comfortable with both schemes. One panel member noted that the Asymmetrical option flows seamlessly into the park and coagulates it as one continuous space, more so than the Central Median option.

The Chair then opened the meeting to Panel comments.

One Panel member felt that in both options, there are too many variables, and not enough constraints in the design.

Another Panel member stated their fear that the Asymmetrical option commercialized the park space, and noted a lack of programmatic clarity. One Panel member noted that if the public objective for this space were for it to be a park, then the Central Median option would produce that, but that there is already an amazing park space at the terminus of Front Street with Don River Park. The Panel member then added that Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, the precedent often cited as a good example of a central median, is rarely occupied as people prefer to walk down the sidewalks. Another Panel member agreed, citing University Avenue as a local example of a nice, but underused central median park space.

One Panel Member stated that the Central Median option is safe and has been done before, and that this is an opportunity to really explore new models for public space in the city. Another panel member agreed that we need take risks. Another Panel Member stated that they were strongly in favour of the Asymmetrical option because it could be a really unique public space in the City. Another Panel member added that they saw a greater long-term potential of the unique space that the Asymmetrical option would create. One Panel member added that the possible need for permits for the pavilions should not be a reason not to select the Asymmetrical option. Another Panel Member felt that the Asymmetrical option would calm traffic more than the

Central Median option would. Another Panel member stated their preference for the Asymmetrical option, but noted that the pinching of the trees at the corners detracts from the clean grid, and that the grid should be kept as pure as possible and the ends of the blocks should be strengthened with the trees and not have gaps right at the corner. One Panel member cited Lincoln Road in South Beach, Florida as a great example of the Asymmetrical option, noting both successful retail and public space.

Several Panel Members felt that control of the pavilions should be with Waterfront Toronto to ensure their long-term success. They stated that the design of the pavilions could be a great opportunity for young, up-and-coming designers in the city, but cautioned that in the wrong hands, the management of these areas could be a failure. Another Panel member stated that a simple and beautiful landscape is all that is needed in the beginning and that more specific uses will make space for themselves there as the WDL develops and grows. Another Panel member agreed, feeling that the pavilions were a “red herring”, in the sense that the success or failure of the pavilions would affect both schemes equally.

One Panel member stated their preference for the Central Median option, expressing concern that the open space in the Asymmetrical scheme would require a high degree of intervention and negotiation to keep it successful. They also felt that the symmetry could be a very powerful element, and could see the median being a very beautifully landscaped place. Another Panel member agreed that they favoured the Central Median, and was not comfortable with the ultimate success or non success of Front Street hinging on Waterfront Toronto long-term and complicated management commitment.

Mr. Glaisek then enquired if it was even possible to design the Asymmetrical space for restaurants and cafes without knowing who the future tenants would be, and noted that Waterfront Toronto has the money to build now, not in successive phases as new tenants emerge. One Panel member stated that Waterfront Toronto should be laying the infrastructure for the street and saw the street life and retail components developing naturally, noting that it would only take corner anchor tenants to maintain itself.

2.4 Summary of Panel’s Key Issues

The Chair then summarized the recommendations of the Panel:

- i. The majority of the Panel supports the Asymmetrical option for Front Street.
- ii. The tree pattern should be studied further and strengthened at the ends.

2.5 Proponent’s Response

Mr. Smallenberg and Mr. Leinster thanked the Panel for their feedback.

3.0 Don River Park: Public Art

ID#: 1006-A

Project Type: Park/Public Realm Design

Location: Don River Park; west of the Don River, north of the rail way.

Proponent: Waterfront Toronto

Architect/Designer: Meg Webster

Review Round: three

Presenter(s): Laura Solano, MVVA, and Meg Webster, Artist

Delegation: Rob Gilmore, MVVA

3.1 Introduction to the Issues

James Roche, Planning and Design Project Manager for Waterfront Toronto, introduced the project, noting that since the last presentation, the design team has done extensive research on the viability of the rammed earth material. The main issues on which the advice of the Panel was sought included:

- The form of the public art piece
- The siting, context and integration of the piece with the surrounding landscape design proposal
- The viability of the rammed-earth structure.

3.2 Project Presentation

Laura Solano, Principal with MVVA, began the presentation by commending the Panel for their excellent and constructive feedback at the last presentation. Ms. Solano then described the evolution of the piece in which the spiral form had tightened, eliminating the open centre, enhancing the safety and visibility, as well as the beauty of the form. Meg Webster, the artist of the piece, outlined how the location and siting were chosen, and explained that the new form was intended as both ramp and seating. Ms. Solano continued by describing the piece's increase in scale and sectional qualities, and materiality including local precedents which showed the durability and constructability of rammed earth. Ms. Webster further elaborated on the potential for interesting texture that the material allows. Ms. Solano concluded by stating their intention to complete a "mock-up" of the piece to further study the material's potential.

3.3 Panel Questions and Comments

The Chair then asked the Panel for questions of clarification only.

One panel member enquired as to the height difference between the top of the ramp and the adjacent ground. Ms. Solano stated that it was approximately 8ft.

The Chair then opened the meeting to Panel comments.

One Panel member expressed concern about the possibility of railings being required due to the difference in height between the top of the ramp and the ground, and noted that anything over .6m typically requires handrails by code. Another Panel member suggested that the topography surrounding the piece could be sculpted to negate the difference in height and prolong the experience without railings.

Another Panel member observed that a choice should be made whether it is a piece of art, or whether it is inhabitable "architecture" and should therefore conform to the building code. They also cautioned against using the term "ramp" as the word has certain connotations and regulations on how long and how steep ramps are allowed to be. One Panel member stated that another decision should be made on whether this piece would be accessible or not. Another Panel member noted that the rock in the Village of Yorkville Park did not require railings, and so neither should this piece. One panel member stated that it may be prudent to discuss this issue with the City before constructing it and find out if railings would be required. Another panel member agreed that it would be a shame to put railings on the piece and lose a certain element of tension and suspense that the piece could have.

Another Panel member stated their desire for more of a reward at the top, noting their disappointment at waiting in line to traverse the "Serpentine Pavilion" in London only to reach the top and find nothing there. They went on to state the difficulty with the spiral form in general, feeling that it could be a one-dimensional experience, unlike Richard Serra's work where the

experience can change depending on which way you traverse the piece. Ms. Webster agreed that she did not want this piece to be just a “one-liner”. Another Panel member counted by stating their discomfort with making too much of the experiential nature of the piece rather than just enjoying the beauty of the form.

One Panel member observed that if you plant the rammed-earth surface you could have a different dialogue over the nature of the piece. Ms. Webster stated that although an interesting idea, it could prove difficult to find plantings that could be walked on regularly. Ms. Webster stated that they had also considered rocks or boulders. Ms. Solano noted that there were indeed a group of plants called “steppables” that they could investigate utilizing. Another panel member cautioned that it could give the piece an unintended “ruin” effect if it was too overgrown with plantings.

3.4 Summary of Panel’s Key Issues

The Chair then summarized the recommendations of the Panel:

- iii. Resolve the issue of whether this piece is sculpture or an occupiable ramp that may require building codes to be complied with.
- iv. The closed spiral form and increase in scale are improvements, but may not eliminate all safety concerns.
- v. The piece’s relationship to the path and the surrounding topography needs to be studied further.

3.5 Proponent’s Response

Ms. Solano and Ms. Webster thanked the Panel for their comments.

CLOSING

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

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