

Public Meeting Report

December 12, 2011 Public Meeting, Toronto Reference Library, 6:30 – 9:00 pm

On December 12th, 2011 Waterfront Toronto, the City of Toronto and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority hosted the first public meeting of the Port Lands Acceleration Initiative at the Toronto Reference Library's Bram & Bluma Appel Salon. In addition to approximately 600 participants, several politicians were in attendance, including: MPP Peter Tabuns, Councillors Paula Fletcher, Pam McConnell, Peter Milczyn, Mary Margaret McMahon, Michelle Berardinetti, Mary Fragedakis and Raymond Cho. A live webcast of the meeting also enabled online participation and feedback.

Discussion at the meeting focused on goals and ideas for a development and implementation plan for the Port Lands. This report was written by the independent facilitation team for the project – SWERHUN Facilitation & Decision Support and Lura Consulting – and it is subject to the review of participants at the meeting. It compiles feedback from the meeting's plenary discussions, 40 Table Discussion Reports, 67 Individual Discussion Guides, and two letters received after the meeting by email and mail. It not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript. A draft of this meeting report was subject to review by meeting participants throughout January 2012.

KEY THEMES WE HEARD AT THE MEETING

There were several key themes that came through clearly at the meeting – based on both the feedback shared verbally and in the over 100 completed Discussion Guides received. The six key themes are listed here, with detailed feedback following in the remainder of the report (please see Attachment A for Questions of Clarification and Attachment B for a record of all written feedback).

1. People need much more clarity on the fundamentals of the Acceleration Initiative - what its purpose is (is it a wholly new plan, a phasing plan, a business plan or other?), why the Acceleration Initiative is needed, the potential benefits of the Acceleration Initiative, and the timeframe for accelerated development.

Participants would also like a greater clarification of the roles and responsibilities of all the actors involved in the Acceleration Initiative (including the various levels of government, their agencies, and private land owners). Some participants are concerned that politics may impact the planning process and they would like to ensure that plans for the Port Lands persist beyond four-year election cycles.

2. People need to understand the status of existing plans. Participants would like to know the status of existing plans (e.g. Lower Donlands Framework Plan, Don Mouth Naturalization and Flood Protection EA, Lake Ontario Park Master Plan) and how they will be incorporated into the Acceleration Initiative. Participants would like to know whether the Acceleration Initiative will largely stick to these plans, re-open them, or set them aside. The notion of “idea fatigue” arose in frustration – participants wanted to know why they are always being asked to “go back to the drawing board”.

In particular, participants felt that **more information could be provided on the relationship between the Don Mouth Naturalization and Flood Protection EA and the Acceleration Initiative**. Participants wanted to know if the Acceleration Initiative will determine phasing and funding options for the existing preferred alternative which has already been submitted to the Province for approval, or if the preferred alternative is in jeopardy.

3. Concern about trade-offs. Many participants expressed concern about potential trade-offs arising from accelerating development in the Port Lands. Examples include: that development quality in the Port Lands will be sacrificed for expediency; that short-term land value capture will be realized at the expense of a greater long-term land value capture; and that public consultation – both past and future – will be demeaned by accelerated development.

Participants also expressed concern that proceeds generated from development might be withdrawn from the Port Lands as a result of the Acceleration Initiative. **Many participants felt that all proceeds generated by development in the Port Lands should be reinvested back into the area to successively finance development.**

4. Support for a transparent process. Participants called for a transparent process that gives the community the opportunity to inform decision-making and ultimately support the outcome. Participants were particularly interested in having an in-depth and information rich public consultation on funding and financing tools and options to support development in the Port Lands.

5. Maintain established goals. Many participants expressed support for the planning and consultation that has happened over the past several years and would like to see the core goals established through this work maintained. These goals include: public access/public sector stewardship of the Port Lands; environmentally sustainable development; communities with a mixture of housing types, tenures and income levels; communities with a mix of uses; public transit that is implemented in coordination with development; and acknowledging the needs of existing users.

6. Ideas to explore – to maximize value and accelerate development of the Port Lands. Participants would like to see innovative funding models explored, **with a particular interest in funding models that provide the opportunity to maintain public stewardship.** Suggestions included: Waterfront Toronto bonds, community-based financing; user fees, road tolls/congestion charges, development charges, Tax-Increment Financing/Grants; leasing unused lands, Public-Private Partnerships, a city-building fundraising campaign; and World Bank/Clinton Foundation funds for environmental and sustainable city building.

Participants were open to phasing, as long as it is part of a strong overall plan. Participants expressed a range of opinions on how phasing could be approached, including: have the renaturalization of the Mouth of the Don or other public infrastructure built in the first phase as a means of encouraging private development; have development start in areas outside of the floodplain such as south of Unwin Avenue or moving west from Leslie Street; allow for easily-dismantled interim uses until a market/funding becomes available; and prioritizing adaptive re-use of the Hearn and/or other industrial structures.

Some participants felt that catalytic uses could help encourage development though drawing attention to and attracting more people to the Port Lands. Catalytic uses could include things like an education campus, a landmark public building, a research park or innovation centre, entertainment venues, and/or a multi-use community sports complex.

MORE DETAIL ON THE KEY THEMES WE HEARD

1. **People need much more clarity on the fundamentals of the Acceleration Initiative - what its purpose is (is it a wholly new plan, a phasing plan, a business plan or other?),** why the Acceleration Initiative is needed, the potential benefits of the Acceleration Initiative, and the timeframe for accelerated development.

Participants would also like a greater clarification of the roles and responsibilities of all the actors involved in the Acceleration Initiative (including the various levels of government, their agencies, and private land owners). Some participants are concerned that politics may impact the planning process and they would like to ensure that plans for the Port Lands persist beyond four-year election cycles.

ADDITIONAL DETAIL

- There is a need for greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of all the actors involved in the Acceleration Initiative. Participants wanted clarity on:
 - Who is in charge of the Acceleration Initiative;
 - The role of different private landowners in the Port Lands;
 - How much land is owned by each order of government in the Port Lands;
 - How the Provincial and Federal governments are going to be engaged to support and move the Initiative forward; and
 - The role of the Toronto Port Authority.
- Several participants expressed support for Waterfront Toronto playing a leadership role in the Acceleration Initiative.
- Several participants also were concerned that the plans may be threatened by political influence – they felt that four year election cycles may induce short-term thinking. Some participants would like to see measures taken so that plans are protected from being re-opened, re-discussed and altered.

2. **People need to understand the status of existing plans. Participants would like to know the status of existing plans** (e.g. Lower Donlands Framework Plan, Don Mouth Naturalization and Flood Protection EA, Lake Ontario Park Master Plan) and how they will be incorporated into the Acceleration Initiative. Participants would like to know whether the Acceleration Initiative will largely stick to these plans, re-open them, or set them aside. The notion of “idea fatigue” arose in frustration – participants wanted to know why they are always being asked to “go back to the drawing board”.

In particular, participants felt that **more information could be provided on the relationship between the Don Mouth Naturalization and Flood Protection EA and the Acceleration Initiative**. Participants wanted to know if the Acceleration Initiative will determine phasing and funding options for the existing preferred alternative which has already been submitted to the Province for approval, or if the preferred alternative is in jeopardy.

ADDITIONAL DETAIL

- Participants were interested to know if the original plans approved by Council would be maintained through this Initiative, if they would be incorporated into the Initiative, and/or built on by the Initiative.
- Some participants were specifically concerned about the status of the Don Mouth Naturalization and Flood Protection EA, particularly the Michael Van Valkenburgh vision. Others expressed specific concern that the Lake Ontario Park vision might be changed by this process.
- Several participants wanted more clarification on how the Acceleration Initiative would affect the Don Mouth Naturalization and Flood Protection EA. They wanted to know:
 - What process would be used to examine further options for naturalization and flood protection;
 - If the Acceleration Initiative was merely an exercise in due diligence; and
 - Why other options need to be considered.

3. Concern about trade-offs. Many participants expressed concern about potential trade-offs arising from accelerating development in the Port Lands. Examples include: that development quality in the Port Lands will be sacrificed for expediency; that short-term land value capture will be realized at the expense of a greater long-term land value capture; and that public consultation – both past and future – will be demeaned by accelerated development.

Participants also expressed concern that proceeds generated from development might be withdrawn from the Port Lands as a result of the Acceleration Initiative. **Many participants felt that all proceeds generated by development in the Port Lands should be reinvested back into the area to successively finance development.**

ADDITIONAL DETAIL

- Many participants were concerned that the Acceleration Initiative would lead to a compromising of the visions and objectives for waterfront development established through prior Waterfront Toronto planning processes. The West Don Lands and East Bayfront were specifically mentioned as areas where positive results have been delivered.
- Further, some participants were concerned that accelerating development in the Port Lands may impact some of the projects underway in the West Don Lands and East Bayfront through flooding the market with units.
- Some participants were concerned that the Acceleration Initiative would create an impetus to “go the easy way” and realize short-term gain through quick land sales and others were concerned that the Acceleration Initiative may impact the mix of public and private uses in the Port Lands.

4. Support for a transparent process. Participants called for a transparent process that gives the community the opportunity to inform decision-making and ultimately support the outcome. Participants were particularly interested in having an in-depth and information rich public consultation on funding and financing tools and options to support development in the Port Lands.

ADDITIONAL DETAIL

- Participants wanted assurances that the public’s contributions through previous consultations would be honoured by this process. Participants also wanted to ensure that this public consultation process will allow their voice to have an effect on the final outcome.
- Some participants tied the need for clarification on what would be explored through the Acceleration Initiative to the public consultation process. It was felt by these participants that a better understanding of what would be being decided through this process would result in greater clarity on what would be open to public influence.

5. Maintain established goals. Many participants expressed support for the planning and consultation that has happened over the past several years and would like to see the core goals established through this work maintained. These goals include: public access/public sector stewardship of the Port Lands; environmentally sustainable development; communities with a mixture of housing types, tenures and income levels; communities with a mix of uses; public transit that is implemented in coordination with development; and acknowledging the needs of existing users.

ADDITIONAL DETAIL

- Some participants emphasized that they would like to see a continuation of design excellence in waterfront development, and that beauty does not take a backseat to the push for development. Similarly, other participants would like to see the Port Lands developed as a place that is integrated into the fabric of Toronto through design considerations such as pedestrian scale and discouraging “big box” retail.
- Some participants wanted to ensure that the allocation of public space in the Port Lands remains high in quantity and quality and that the public realm is protected and not privatized. Access to the water’s edge and an ample provision of park land were two often mentioned examples of public space.
- Some participants wanted the Port Lands to be a best-in-world showcase of sustainability, including energy and environmental design performance standards. A specific example of sustainability is making the Port Lands an “off grid” neighbourhood – one that supplies its own renewable energy, and deals with all wastewater and garbage on site.
- Many participants emphasized that that a mixed-income and affordable housing component should be maintained so that many different people can afford to live downtown, thereby increasing diversity. Some participants wanted greater clarification on the target proportions of affordable housing versus market rate housing in the Port Lands.

- Some participants wanted to see the construction of effective public transit made a top priority. While some participants wanted to see transit construction prior to development, others thought it would suffice to have a comprehensive transit plan with gradual implementation as development occurs. Several participants specifically mentioned Light Rail Transit as their preferred option for public transit within the Port Lands.
- A number of participants felt that any plan for the Port Lands development should realistically and concretely acknowledge and accommodate current users, including industrial and port users, and community sailing, rowing, paddling and yacht clubs. In particular, some participants would like clarification on how compatibility between industrial and residential uses will be considered in any plan for the Port Lands.

6. Ideas to explore – to maximize value and accelerate development of the Port Lands. Participants would like to see innovative funding models explored, **with a particular interest in funding models that provide the opportunity to maintain public stewardship.** Suggestions included: Waterfront Toronto bonds, community-based financing; user fees, road tolls/congestion charges, development charges, Tax-Increment Financing/Grants; leasing unused lands, Public-Private Partnerships, a city-building fundraising campaign; and World Bank/Clinton Foundation funds for environmental and sustainable city building.

Participants were open to phasing, as long as it is part of a strong overall plan. Participants expressed a range of opinions on how phasing could be approached, including: have the renaturalization of the Mouth of the Don or other public infrastructure built in the first phase as a means of encouraging private development; have development start in areas outside of the floodplain such as south of Unwin Avenue or moving west from Leslie Street; allow for easily-dismantled interim uses until a market/funding becomes available; and prioritizing adaptive re-use of the Hearn and/or other industrial structures.

Some participants felt that catalytic uses could help encourage development though drawing attention to and attracting more people to the Port Lands. Catalytic uses could include things like an education campus, a landmark public building, a research park or innovation centre, entertainment venues, and/or a multi-use community sports complex.

ADDITIONAL DETAIL

- In addition to suggesting several innovative funding models to be explored, some participants would like more clarification on the following:
 - If there are any immediate sources of funds – public or private – available for constructing required infrastructure;
 - What are the precise financial requirements for renaturalization and other infrastructure needs; and
 - What financial models are already under consideration.
- Participants who supported phasing did so for the following reasons:
 - As a means of achieving the greatest overall return on land value;
 - As a means of demonstrating the overall feasibility of the plan through realizing success on a smaller-scale first; and
 - As a means of controlling the pace and facilitating a more organic type of development.

- Several participants emphasized that adaptive re-use of the Hearn should be a priority project. Specific ideas for the Hearn included sports, retail, academic, cultural and/or residential uses.

NEXT STEPS

In wrapping up the meeting, Lead Facilitator David Dilks (Lura Consulting) highlighted the following:

- This is just the start of the public consultation proces, and there will be two more rounds of public consultation, with the next round anticipated in February 2012 (see process overview below);
- Participants representing organizations are encouraged to apply for membership on the Stakeholder Advisory Committee for the project (note: feedback from individuals will be sought during public consultation meetings); and
- The project consultation website address is www.portlandsconsultation.ca. It is anticipated that the website will be activated in January 2012.

John Campbell (Waterfront Toronto) and John Livey (City of Toronto) thanked participants for coming and highlighted the following:

- We can't emphasize enough how important public consultation is to us and this process; it is critical that we involve you in the discussions as to how we go forward, including on things like the financing alternatives we have to look at – we need some creative solutions; and
- We look forward to working with you on developing some great solutions for the Port Lands.

As noted in the Discussion Guide, the the Independent Facilitator's draft report from the meeting will be available for participant review in early January.

Overview of the Process

