



November 8, 2021

Re: Executive Committee Report, First Parliament Site (Ex. 27.8)

Dear Mayor Tory and Councillors:

**Recommendation:**

That City Council request Infrastructure Ontario to include, in the public realm section of its plan for the First Parliament site, these features proposed in the Master Plan report's Demonstration Plan<sup>1</sup>:

- Lakeshore Park — a park on land at 44 Parliament Street, such land to remain permanently in public ownership;
- Interpretive Centre — a heritage-focused amenity on land once occupied by the north First Parliament building, such land to remain permanently in public ownership;
- Parliament Square — a publicly owned commemorative space extending southward from the Interpretive Centre to include land once occupied by the south First Parliament building, such land to remain permanently in public ownership.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-172182.pdf> The Demonstration Plan is outlined on pages 50-57 of the Master Plan report. The report has been prepared by a team of consultants retained by the City, with a mandate to advise on optimal use of the First Parliament site. When the team started work, the City and Province each owned portions of the site. However, as work on the plan neared completion the Province decided to expropriate the City portion. Metrolinx will use the consolidated site as a staging area for building an Ontario Line station across Front Street. Infrastructure Ontario is working on a final version of its own development plan for the site, even though development can't begin until station construction is finished about eight years from now. Negotiations between the City and Infrastructure Ontario revolve around this final plan, and also around financial compensation to the City for loss of its land.

A letter from the City to Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario has already requested provision of a park, interpretive centre and Parliament Square.<sup>2</sup> However, the letter did not focus on opportunities laid out in the Demonstration Plan. So far as the park is concerned, the Demonstration Plan proposes a number of potential attractions, including a Blockhouse lookout, but value added by the Plan is most evident in its configuration of Parliament Square and the Interpretive Centre. That configuration is the focus of this communication.

Setting the stage for the Demonstration Plan, the Master Plan report refers indirectly to the Interpretive Centre while highlighting Lakeshore Park and Parliament Square:

*“...the First Parliament public realm framework will...facilitate the full interpretation of the site’s illustrious history. The portions of the site that contain the archaeological resources associated with the parliament buildings, Home District Gaol and the original shoreline should always remain in public ownership and should be developed as Parliament Square and Lakeshore Park”(p. 47).*

The Demonstration Plan describes the Interpretive Centre as follows:

*“The creation of an Interpretive Centre has been a long-standing ambition for the First Parliament site. The interpretative centre will complement the site-based heritage expressions and contribute to the cultural life of the City. The Interpretive Centre will play a City-wide role by partnering with related cultural, place-making and historical organizations to collaborate on heritage interpretation activities and events.*

*“The Interpretive Centre occupies the site of the original north first parliament building, and is designed to recall that building’s former scale and form. This site is available for this use as any remains of the north first parliament building would have been destroyed by the Consumers’ Gas building that replaced it.*

*“This location provides the Interpretive Centre with high visibility on Front Street and a direct connection to the Library and Parliament Square with the outdoor heritage experiences provided there.” (p. 54).*

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<sup>2</sup> June 21 letter from the Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, copied on the November 9 Council agenda as an appendix to a staff report:

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-171988.pdf>

The Library reference is to a district library plan that pre-dates the expropriation. As the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association rightly points out, a ten or twelve year wait for the library is too long. Consequently the Association — again rightly — is requesting the City to secure an alternative site for the library, a site without the First Parliament site's time constraint.<sup>3</sup> With the library located elsewhere, the Interpretive Centre's connections will be to Front Street on the north and Parliament Square on the south.

The Demonstration Plan describes Parliament Square as follows:

*"Parliament Square is the central interpretive and open space focus of the site. The Demonstration Plan illustrates a physical extent that reflects exactly the area identified by Archaeologists as having the greatest potential for archaeological remains from the First Parliament and Home District Gaol eras."* (p. 52)

Archeological remains of the south First Parliament building — the key archeological feature of Parliament Square — were discovered in 2000 and remain *in situ*. The appointed Legislative Council met in the south building, while the elected Legislative Assembly met in the north building. The Assembly was the forerunner of today's elected Provincial Parliament. This heritage connection reinforces the case for public ownership of the north building's footprint.

An 1818 map in the Master Plan report (page 2) shows that the First Parliament buildings were about 20 meters apart and aligned on an axis parallel to Berkeley Street. By 1818 the buildings had been partially reconstructed after invading US forces set them ablaze during the War of 1812. By 1820 reconstruction was complete and the buildings became wings of a new central building. That central building, together with its wings, is known as the Second Parliament. The Master Plan report observes that:

*"Of the many histories of the site, it is the First and Second Parliament eras that generate the most interest and are of the greatest historical significance. These eras are the primary reason for the site's historical designation and protection"* (p.12).

Anchored by the Interpretive Centre and the south building's footprint, Parliament Square would also include the footprint of the Second Parliament's centre block.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ex/comm/communicationfile-137795.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The District Gaol's footprint would also be included, at least in part. The Gaol replaced the Second Parliament buildings after they accidentally caught fire in 1824.

Infrastructure Ontario's planning rationale report<sup>5</sup> features a large office building on the Berkeley Street side of the site, and a large residential building on the Parliament Street side. However, neither building encroaches on the south First Parliament building's footprint since it's included within open space (see diagram on p. 78). The report also appears open to public ownership of public realm elements:

*"Pending discussions with municipal stakeholders, there is potential for the landscaped open space on the (First Parliament) Site to be provided as parkland dedication to the City." (p.100)*

Regrettably, however, the diagram on page 78 shows the office building encroaching on the north parliament building's footprint. This encroachment can be avoided with relatively minor adjustments to Infrastructure Ontario's plan — adjustments that should have no bearing on the likelihood of securing Lakeshore Park.

The First Parliament buildings played a key role in the War of 1812, and thus in the history of North America. Because the buildings were burned in 1813 by American invaders, the Royal Navy attacked the White House and US Capitol in 1814. As numerous media reports have pointed out, the Capitol wasn't attacked again until almost 207 years later — on January 6, 2021.

An opportunity to properly celebrate the First Parliament buildings' legacy is at hand. No office building or condominium should encroach on the land they once occupied.

Yours sincerely,



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<sup>5</sup> [https://engageio.ca/sites/default/files/2.\\_corktown\\_toc\\_planning\\_rationale.pdf](https://engageio.ca/sites/default/files/2._corktown_toc_planning_rationale.pdf)

Note: The First Parliament buildings occupied land seen in the appended photo. Looking north, with the carwash on the right, the south building's footprint is to the left of the large tree growing beside the carwash where archeological excavation discovered remains of the building in 2000. A diagram in The Master Plan report (p. 51) places that footprint at the tip of an arrow labeled "Parliament Square":

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-172182.pdf>

The diagram aligns the north and south buildings along an axis parallel to Berkeley and Parliament Streets, separated by about 20 meters; the north building's footprint is at the tip of an arrow labeled "Interpretive Centre". Thus in the photo the north building's footprint would likely be on land under the building with the open door, occupied until recently by Budget Car Rental.

