

# **R.C. Harris Public Advisory Committee**

**Meeting # 2/09**

R.C. Harris Water Treatment Plant, Construction Trailer  
2701 Queen Street East, Toronto

**Wednesday, March 4, 2009**

**7:00 p.m.**

---

## **SUMMARY NOTES**

---

### **ATTENDANCE**

#### ***Public Advisory Committee:***

Julie McNeill (co-chair)

Jim Tulk

Henry Spencer

Lorraine Mask

Julie Charles

Jim Glasspool (co-chair)

#### ***City of Toronto Staff:***

Ron Brilliant Toronto Water - R.C. Harris Water Filtration Plant (Manager)

#### ***Architects:***

Charles Hazel

John Mills

#### ***Facilitator:***

Cheryl Dow - Public Consultation Unit

#### ***Summary Notes:***

Jacie Kuker

#### ***Regrets:***

Alan Demb

David Lewis

Rob Sharples

## **PAC MEETING**

**Julie McNeill** called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

### **1. INTRODUCTIONS**

Introductions were made of the committee members.

### **2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

The agenda for this meeting was adopted as circulated.

### **3. APPROVAL OF JANUARY 6, 2009 SUMMARY NOTES**

The minutes from meeting #01/09 on January 6, 2009 were adopted without amendment.

### **4. PLANT UPDATES**

#### **4.1 BUILDING ENVELOPE REHAB (BER)**

**Ron Brilliant** said that the BER is still in its design phase with 90% completed, and they are hoping to have it ready for tender by the end of March. However, this is a tight timeline and there are still several processes to get through so there is a chance that the project may not go to Council until September, because Council does not meet during the summer.

##### **4.1.1 LIGHTING UPDATE**

**Ron Brilliant** discussed the results with respect to the lighting designs, which were unfortunately not successful. There were originally two proposals for the lights to shine onto the roadway and parking lot:

- 1) Lighting in the retaining wall along Nursewood Rd. to light the parking lot.
- 2) Lighting in the increased curb height along the roadway on the west side of plant.

**Ron Brilliant** was informed that these designs won't work; it is not possible to embed lights into the roadway curb or the retaining wall because it will not provide enough light for the parking lot or the roadway.

**Ron Brilliant** is now looking into different lighting system designs, and will bring more questions to the group for advice on what should be done. For the lighting of the roadway, there are two options:

- 1) Have taller (same height as street lights) and fewer lights.
- 2) Have shorter (about 12 feet high) and more lights.

**Ron Brilliant** said that there all kinds of lights that can be used to decrease the impact on the neighbourhood and the upper sky. The intention is not to light the road uniformly, just provide some lighting, because the building will be lit which will help to light the roadway. He is now looking at 16 foot lights, which is the standard height of lights on street.

**Julie McNeill** asked about the height of the street light that is currently on the north-south roadway. **Ron Brilliant** answered that it is 16 feet tall.

**Ron Brilliant** informed the group that both lighting options have pros and cons that need to be considered. Ron suggested that if 16 foot lights were used, then there may be 6 lights from the beginning of the section to the stairway. With taller lights, some people think there is less of a visual impact, whereas other people think tall poles might interfere with the sight-lines of the building. Shorter lights would require more lights, which for some people might present other problems.

**Lorraine Mask** asked **Ron Brilliant** if he thought the shorter lights could potentially be more susceptible to vandalism. **Ron Brilliant** said that he did not think that should be a problem.

**Julie Charles** suggested that the lights along the boardwalk are attractive and **Ron Brilliant** agreed that that was the look he had originally thought of as well.

**Charles Hazel** suggested waiting until different proposals are presented. He said that he had been looking at premium lights with interesting optics, mounted to one side and slightly down the hill; not immediately associated with the building but on the right hand side as you go in; where the lights have always been. Charles informed the group that it is also important to look at the “lumens per square foot”, to remain as modest as possible and maintain a balanced approach to lighting levels.

Ron Brilliant said that money has been allocated into the contract for new lights and Ron will continue to work on a lighting strategy over the next few months. He would bring options for the fixtures back to the group for their comments.

**Julie Charles** asked about the style of lighting that was used on the The Gardener Expressway about 25 - 30 years ago, where there were lights set into the sides of the railings. She wondered why this would not be possible at the R.C. Harris plant. **Ron Brilliant** explained that the plant’s roadway is lower down, so we wouldn’t get enough light all the way across the roadway, or in the case of the parking lot, it would only light the beginning and not into the parking lot. Another problem would be that the lights in the parking lot would shine directly into the faces of people driving their vehicles.

#### **4.1.2 PROPOSED REHABILITATION TO FRONT ENTRANCE OF PLANT**

**Ron Brilliant** said that the work for designing the front entrance started in 1996-97. At that time, the PAC came up with some conceptual ideas. **Charles Hazel** was involved with the original front entrance design. The current plans are based on the initial design from 10 years ago.

At this stage, **Ron Brilliant** said that there hasn’t been any work done on plant signage but the group could begin developing a plan for signage over the next 6-8 months. **Charles Hazel** informed the committee that he has a presentation on signage from 4 or 5 years ago which describes ideas for signs and locations, which he would be able to show the group some other time.

**Charles Hazel** presented a slide show to recap front entrance issues, and also present new material. He informed the committee that at this point, they are moving ahead with technical issues, and completing the work that was started awhile ago.

#### **SLIDE PRESENTATION: “Entry Gates Design Development – Final Phase” (See Attached)**

Important points discussed during the presentation by **Charles Hazel**:

- Gates:
  - Design and development are in the final stages.
  - Form of gate: 2 concrete piers with caps on them with an aluminum gate.
  - Gates are made of aluminum castings which have a motif on them, framed by a stainless steel structure. Gates were removed during the RMF project and are now being stored.
  - Purpose of gates is to stop traffic, but they do allow for pedestrians to pass by.
  - The curve of the wall to left of the stairs is to accommodate for the closing radius/angle of the gate.
  - Cladding system is being developed for the gates with thick aluminum panels which will be attached to the concrete piers.

- CH2M Hill has developed a operating system for the gates, giving greater control of the gate for all seasons and situations.
- Stairway:
  - The top of the stairway is aligned with a sidewalk that extends to the midpoint of the filter building.
  - There have been concerns with how close the bottom of the stairway comes to the curb; some issues with traffic and turning radiuses of larger vehicles - vehicles often come up onto sidewalk when trying to make a turn.
  - By moving the stairway back by about 3 feet, an area is created at the base of the stairs where people could step back to read a plaque or a designation statement.
  - The top of the stairs will have a ground cover area, so as to improve the appearance.
  - The site slopes dramatically from the north to the south, with a foot and a half to two feet difference, creating a need for different walls on either side of the stairs.
  - There is a steeper grade on the right hand side of the stairway than the left.
  - On the right side of the stairs there is a raised edge (which is seen on other stairs across the site); on the left side there are two terraced walls, each about a foot and a half high, with ground cover landscape
  - Beside the stairs on either side is a retaining wall at street level – covered in ground cover – which slopes with the slope of the landscape.
  - Left hand side of stairway is a handrail.
- Front Entrance:
  - Visual reference for the front entrance is the terrace overlooking the lake. The front entrance won't be made of limestone, but the same effects can be achieved with architectural concrete.
  - Inspiration for the style of the front entrance comes from the restored fountain.
  - Goals for the front entrance are to represent the nobility of structure and purpose, and the transcendent qualities of the site.

### Questions and Discussions following the presentation:

#### GATES

**Julie McNeill** asked whether the curve of the retaining wall beyond the gates is decorative or functional.

**Charles Hazel** responded by explaining that the slope follows the gradient of the earth is necessary for operation of the gates. You have to clear room in the earth to get the gate open. Originally there was an in-ground operating device below where the hinge is, but now it is above ground.

**Julie McNeill** inquired as to whether the gate always opened over the curb, and **Charles Hazel** explained that the radius of the gate must open over the curb. There are only two changes that have happened with the new design; (1) the closing device has been upgraded, and for access reasons, the area is pushed back, and (2) there is now a curve following the shape to serve as a guide for snow plows so that they don't bump into the gate. The curve area has been moved out by about a foot.

**Jim Tulk** wondered if there might be a challenge in operating the gate if the area around the gate fills with snow or leaves. **Ron Brilliant** said that the reason the area is being moved back a bit is because of the experiences they have had over the past couple years with so much snow; they found that a bigger clearing area was important. He noted that vehicles are getting bigger; therefore more space is need for them to get around the corners. The entrance way itself is being made slightly wider for clearance and turning areas for vehicles.

**Jim Tulk** noted that the piers were getting pretty badly chewed up, likely due to construction equipment rather than regular vehicles. **Ron Brilliant** said that normally there are about 20 to 30 trucks through the gates each month, but during construction it could have been up to 100 trucks per day. The piers were hit a couple

of times, but rather than repairing them they chose to wait for a better and more durable design. Ultimately, they would like the piers to fit the look of the building and be able to withstand snow, graffiti, vehicles, etc.

**Ron Brilliant** went on to explain that the mechanisms use to operate the gate have been upgraded to the same operator that is used inside the plant. **Jim Tulk** asked whether the plan was to have a control room with a camera, so that someone could see a vehicle approaching. **Ron Brilliant** explained that there is already a camera on that corner. When the system is completed there will be a card reader, or a code, or a microphone to talk to someone in the control room, for drivers coming in. The plan is to have the gates remain open during daytime hours and closed in the evening; but that might change in the future.

#### STAIRS:

**Jim Glasspool** inquired about the reasons for the two different retaining walls beside stairs. **Charles Hazel** responded by saying that there are two reasons for this: (1) the stairs are being pushed back, and (2) the grades on the north side and the southwest side are different. The new design makes the stairs more “freed-up” on the left side, but they must be contained on the right side because of the two foot difference between where you are walking up and the slope on the right. The two terraces on the left hand side are necessary to control that slope. On the right side of the terraces, you will be able to see about 16 inches of them and then they will feather out within about 4 or 5 feet to just groundcover; they are fairly subtle.

**Ron Brilliant** said that the area in front of the stairs will not be grass, but will have some sort of groundcover that fits the historic nature of the facility, and will be something that doesn’t have to be cut. This will force people to use the stairs instead of climbing up the hills. When the time comes to decide on what type of groundcover to use, he will eventually bring in someone from Toronto Botanical Gardens to have a look at the site and make some recommendations.

#### HANDRAILS:

**Julie McNeill** asked about the style of handrails to be used on the stairs. **Charles Hazel** said that the handrail will be the same as what is on site now, but on the left hand side. The reason for the handrail on the left side is because the retaining wall on the right side precludes the need to have another handrail. **Julie McNeill** brought up the fact that the stairs descending into the parking lot have a handrail only on the side that is along the building; this design is subtle and doesn’t disrupt any sightlines.

**Charles Hazel** said that he would look into having the handrail on the right hand side instead of the left. This would eliminate the big loop at the top of the stairs that is typical of free-standing handrails. Instead, there could be a rail elevated about a foot above the right side retaining wall (which is already about 2 feet high). It could come up from the side rather than top.

#### SIGNAGE:

**Julie McNeill** suggested that the retaining wall that connects the gates have signage mounted-flush into the hill. The sign would be encasing the corner, embedded into the hill, and perhaps help with any problems associated with erosion. With the new plans, **Julie McNeill** expressed concern about moving forward with the wall before addressing signage. **Charles Hazel** said that having the sign lying on the hill would probably not prevent erosion problems, unless it was really large, like a billboard. **Charles Hazel** also said that using the inclination of the hill for the sign, like a lectern would be an interesting idea worth exploring.

In a brief discussion about the content of the sign, **Julie McNeill** suggested that the sign not be there to give directions, but that it should provide an explanation of the building or something historical about the facility. **Charles Hazel** suggested making the sign some sort of statement or something where kids could do a

rubbing. **Jim Tulk** mentioned that it had been suggested that there be extensive interpretive resources on the site. **Ron Brilliant** said that the sign is something to be discussed in the future. He suggested having something inside the retaining section which could be sloped down (it doesn't have to be straight up), and to the left of stairs.

**Ron Brilliant** mentioned the possibility of having "RC Harris Water Treatment Plant" engraved into the stone of the retaining wall, and **Charles Hazel** said that that could be done nicely, like at Union Station.

**Ron Brilliant** explained that there used to be a lot of signs on the site, but over the years we have eliminated them. However, he does not necessarily want to go back to having a lot of signs; he would rather have the sign at the front entrance serving as the only sign for the public. There is no reason to have directional signs because the plant is not usually open to the public. **Julie McNeill** added that the signage should help the public understand what is what on the site.

#### FINAL QUESTIONS:

In response to **Julie McNeill's** question about the piers, **Charles Hazel** said that they will be clad in aluminum plates, which are quite heavy. The architectural concrete that is currently there has been dinged a few times, so the cladding system would help to protect them, and be easier to clean in instances of vandalism. It will also have some of the same qualities as the metal panels on the building. There will be a texture to the concrete, similar to the base of the filter building: a pebbled or weathered look.

**Jim Tulk** asked whether the colour would be a chalky gray, and **Charles Hazel** said that yes, it would be in the dark colour range, with an epoxy finish on it. He added that if a plate were to get dinged, that piece could be removed and repairs made to it.

**Ron Brilliant** inquired about the concrete between the two piers (the front wrap-around). **Charles Hazel** said that it will look like the concrete at Roy Thompson Hall. It will be similar to the concrete in the security area, but it will not be exactly the same because it is not part of the historic building. The new concrete will have its own simple, elegant presentation.

**Julie McNeill** asked whether the sides of the stairs will mirror the width of the other stairs around the plant, and **Charles Hazel** said that yes, they would.

**Jim Glasspool** asked whether the stairs could be flared a bit at the bottom. **Charles Hazel** mentioned that that idea was considered and is something that could be looked at again. However, the stairs are only a one person stairway, so it might not be necessary.

In response to **Julie McNeill's** question, **Charles Hazel** said that radius of the curb at the corner is the same but the entrance itself is a little bit wider. **Ron Brilliant** said that normally, there are very few trucks coming from the south of plant going up and around the north side of the plant, but if there is a truck, then we run into problems. Most of the drivers know where to go because they've been coming here for years.

**Ron Brilliant** concluded the discussion by informing the committee that over the next few months, they will be looking more closely at lighting and signage issues.

## **4.2 NORTH RETAINING WALL**

**Ron Brilliant** said that the north retaining wall is virtually completed. It should be wrapped up by the end of April. Some fencing on the east side of the plant should have been removed in January but because of the frozen ground, contractors were not able to remove it, however it has not had to be paid for since January 1<sup>st</sup>. Now that things are thawing, it should be removed within the next few weeks.

**Jim Tulk** wondered whether they were waiting for handrails before opening up that area of the site. **Ron Brilliant** said that they are now waiting for topsoil but no one is delivering top soil yet. Handrails cannot be put in until the weather warms up. The railing will be put on the north of the retaining wall and the armour stone will be on the final corner at the north east end.

In response to a question from **Jim Tulk**, **Ron Brilliant** said that the long term intention is to have a roadway with perforated brick that will look like grass, but will allow access to the back area without destroying the grass. This will not be done for another 3 or 4 years; for now, a temporary road will be there.

**Ron Brilliant** explained that the Building Envelope Rehabilitation project is a large project; anticipated to take 5 or 6 years. The impact on the community will be minimal, but a lot of work is needed on the facility. The construction trailers will be moved to the east side of the pump-house so as not to bother residents West of the Plant.

## **5. HERITAGE INVENTORY**

A few copies of the Heritage Inventory were passed out by **Cheryl Dow** to committee members to look at.

The book was produced in 1997 and it is a record of the facility. **Ron Brilliant** explained that the book is intended to be a reference for the future, so that people 50 years from now can see what has been done to the site and when. **Ron Brilliant** asked if anybody would be interested in updating the book, covering the past 10 years. Anybody who is interested should send Ron an email, or bring it up at the next meeting.

## **6. NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business at this time.

## **7. NEXT MEETING AND AGENDA ITEMS**

Next meeting is set for **Wednesday, May 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 at 7 pm.**

Location of meeting: construction trailer or meeting room in the building, if completed.

**Follow-Up Note: May 6<sup>th</sup> meeting has been cancelled and rescheduled as follows:**

**Date: Thursday, June 4, 2009**

**Time: 7:00 p.m.**

**Location: R. C. Harris Water Treatment Plant, 2701 Queen Street East, Construction Trailer**

## **8. ADJOURNMENT**

**Julie McNeill** adjourned the meeting at 8:46 pm.