

## **Deputation to Executive Committee of Toronto City Council**

### **Item EX18.3 – Port Lands Flood Protection: Due Diligence Review and Next Steps**

**John P Wilson, Co-Chair, West Don Lands Committee**

**October 26, 2016**

Thank you Mayor Tory and members of the Executive Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on a matter that is close to my heart – flood protecting the Mouth of the Don River by naturalizing it. I'm speaking for the West Don Lands Committee in support of the staff recommendations of this matter.

Port Lands Flood Protection is a city building project without parallel. Doing this will finally unlock the Port Lands to become the centrepiece of Toronto's waterfront that we know it should be. This project will remove hundreds of homes and businesses from the risk of catastrophic flooding, not unlike the Calgary floods of 2013. It will permit the development of East Harbour – the former Unilever site – that is slated to become a major new employment centre, and a driver for Smart Track and other transit improvements. It will help spur the continued growth of the Film District. It will help to clean the water in Toronto Bay. It will allow us to build resilient new communities near the centre of our city. And it will help to will restore the environmental health of the Mouth of the Don River and make it a source of pride and hope for our future.

Doing the flood protection project is crucial to city building, environmental health and economic growth that will ripple across the city, the region and the country. Not doing this, on the other hand, will probably bring Waterfront Revitalization in Toronto to a grinding halt, such that twenty years from now the new West Don Lands will look like a curious experiment on the edge of a brownfield wasteland – not unlike how it looks now.

I believe that this Council is ready to issue a loud, clear Call To Action. Leading by example and committing Toronto funds to Flood Protecting the Port Lands, you – mayor and councillors – will have the community at your backs when you call out to provincial and federal partners to contribute their share to completing this cornerstone project.

I am John Wilson, co-chair of the West Don Lands Committee, and, as some of you know, I've been at this for a while. In 2003 I was asked, along with our co-chair Cindy Wilkey, to serve on the Technical Advisory Committee for the Environmental Assessment of the Lower Don River. The first technical advice I was asked to give was to help recruit community, first nations and business leaders who would review the Environmental Assessment process as stakeholders. It's been a long time since that assignment. And I've seen this project capture the imagination of thousands of people from across the city. In 2007 I chaired a stakeholder advisory group during the Innovative Design Competition, when Michael Van Valkenburgh's spectacular "Port Lands Estuary" design captured our imaginations as it was displayed in the Galleria. I was active with my community when the Port Lands Acceleration Initiative attracted thousands to participate in public meetings and workshops to refine the preferred design we now see confirmed through the Due Diligence review. Let me assure you, mayor and councillors, that the public has your back when you go forward with this Call to Action. The only question many people have is, "Why has it taken so long?"

The Due Diligence Report you have before you answers that question partially – the project is multi-faceted and technically complex. But also it has taken a long time to get to the point when the political stars align and three orders of government are ready to invest in the infrastructure to continue building for a twenty-first century future. Cindy Wilkey and I have spoken on behalf of the West Don Lands Committee to Ministers Chiarelli and Sohi; we've met with Minister Morneau's office; we're ready to do more with you on behalf of the neighbourhoods, the business groups and the civil society organizations in our West Don Lands coalition.

I think Council is ready to do the right thing and commit – or re-commit – to the Don Mouth project. We need to seize the moment and put the ball in the court of our provincial and federal partners. The time to commit to the job of flood protecting the Port Lands and naturalizing the Don River mouth is now. The second quarter of 2017 as recommended by staff is none too early. Let's get the Port Lands project moving so it's completed and this hidden gem of the waterfront is unlocked!

Thank you.