

January 25, 2022

To: Executive Committee

Regarding: Ontario Place Redevelopment

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Dear Executive Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario and the Future of Ontario Place Project with comments regarding the Staff Report on the redevelopment of Ontario Place to be considered by Council Executive on January 26th.

The report notes that Ontario Place is a Provincial Heritage Site of Provincial Significance. The City has placed Ontario Place on its Heritage Register. But it seems to us that this report makes little effort to protect the cultural heritage value of the site. It appears to largely acquiesce to Provincial plans and process that will do great harm to this globally important heritage site.

In 2020, the World Monuments Fund included Ontario Place in its Watch Program--along with only 25 other sites from around the world (including Notre Dame Cathedral and Easter Island). The Watch identifies sites of great cultural heritage value that are at risk. The Cultural Landscape Foundation has included Ontario Place in its Landslide program that identifies important and at risk cultural landscapes. Docomomo International has also listed the site. The world is watching how the Province and the City steward this place.

From this report it appears that the city is arranging to sell the portions of the site it owns, requiring only that the use and are remain consistent with current use. There is no mention of protection of the heritage value of this site as being a condition of sale. Part of the land to be sold is the entrance to the Cinesphere and Pod complex.

The report concludes that the "proposed uses and supportable in principle", noting that the Central Waterfront Plan identifies Ontario Place as "parks and open space". Among the proposed uses is the Therme Complex: the report states that this may be up to a 146 foot tall building (that is 14 stories) with 662 000 square feet of enclosed space (that is 14 football fields). How is such a use, which is proposed to cover most of the existing west island and destroy the forest of native species design by Michael Hough, consistent with maintaining a site as a park and open space. How does it respect the unique design characteristics of the Hough Zeidler design--one of the reports stated goals.

We urge the City to insist that the province follow internationally recognized best practices for stewarding heritage sites. Governments around the world steward these sites in ways that bear no resemblance to the rushed and chaotic process outlined in this report.

Consider how Sydney has managed its own iconic modern waterfront site, the Opera House. All changes at the site are guided by a Conservation Management Plan--its an encyclopedic and detailed document.

In contrast, the report acknowledges and accepts that a Strategic Conservation Plan will be produced in February of 2022 and that land leases to the tenants are to be signed in the first quarter of the same year. No draft of the SCP has been circulated as of January 25th. Under the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Heritage Properties, the SCP should have been in place before any decisions were made.

As you consider what kind of process and proposals are appropriate for Ontario Place we ask you to try to think of a site in Canada, designed by Canadians, that is a more important contribution by our country to 20<sup>th</sup> Century architecture and landscape design.

Also please image a giant spa on the Plaza next to the Sydney Opera House. What would the world think of a city that did that to its waterfront?

Sincerely,

Bill Greaves  
Board Member, Architectural Conservancy of Ontario  
Co-Director, Future of Ontario Place Project.