



April 20, 2023

Toronto Field Naturalists

Deputation to General Government Committee

GG3.20 - Ontario Place Redevelopment - Declaration of Surplus

Good morning, chair and councillors, and thanks for the chance to comment on this declaration of surplus land at Ontario Place, related to the development proposal of Infrastructure Ontario. My name is Ellen Schwartzel, and I'm speaking on behalf of the Toronto Field Naturalists – a group that has been connecting Torontonians with nature – and speaking up for nature - for 100 years now.

We urge your committee to please not rush into a land swap when so much public interest is at risk with the redevelopment proposals swirling around Ontario Place. It would be tragically short-sighted for the city to relinquish any leverage it has to safeguard the values that Ontario Place represents for our city. City of Toronto owns just a small portion of the lands, but they can represent significant leverage to achieve a greener, more nature-friendly and people-friendly future at Ontario Place.

I'm here on behalf of the Toronto Field Naturalists, and of course we absolutely care about nature. Our volunteer guides lead 5 or 6 nature walks at Ontario Place in a typical year, because the west island of Ontario Place offers a green refuge of hundreds of trees. It's a spot that countless migratory birds depend on during their migratory stop-overs. It also reliably offers excellent views of mink, foxes, beaver and other wildlife. But we care about people too. This proposal of a massive spa on West Island is a bad deal for nature and a bad deal for the public too.

It would wreck a spot that Torontonians treasure as a tranquil natural lake waterfront. Toronto has vanishingly few of those spots: we have essentially Tommy Thompson Park far in the east, Colonel Sam Smith Park and we still have Ontario Place – a beloved jewel on the water. An estimated million people visit Ontario Place annually. The proposal would also cut the public off from evening visits to West Island - it's one of the most popular spots for sunset viewing in the city.

Keep in mind that at least 40 per cent of Toronto residents live in tall buildings, according to the 2016 census. They don't have backyards, and they rely on parklands for fresh air and nature.

Keep in mind also that as our population grows, our parkland per person is steadily shrinking. That's an alarm bell that Toronto's General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation keeps

ringing, at every city budget discussion. That's what the city's own Parkland Strategy points to: "the declining provision of parkland per person over time."

Members of the General Government Committee, we urge you to focus on the needs of your residents for a green and tranquil place on the water. Remember that many thousands of condo dwellers are packed into the dozens of towers near the waterfront. They need a quiet spot they can visit before or after work, where they can just breathe deep. That's what Ontario Place represents, and what these public lands should be used for.

Let's be honest; there are no band-aids or mitigations that can salvage the spa proposal for the West Island, to make it compatible with nature or welcoming to the general public. The damage will not be undone by adding a few native trees, or by putting polka dots on the glass of the spa, or by paving a nice trail around the spa monstrosity.

We ask you, as representatives of the City, to please hold firm, and put the long-term needs of your residents first. This is not the time; these are not the circumstances where Toronto should cave in to demands for a quick deal on a land swap.

Thank you.

Ellen Schwartzel
Past-President, Toronto Field Naturalists

