



ontarioplaceforall.com

April 11, 2023

Toronto & East York Community Council

Dear Chair Perks and members of the Community Council,

RE: TE4.36 - Ontario Place - Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-law Amendment - Status Report

Ontario Place is currently a free, open and accessible waterfront park that is used by more than a million people every year. It is also an internationally recognized architectural treasure. And yet this amazing asset is at risk RIGHT NOW with a private spa threatening to dominate Ontario Place.

As the excellent staff report before you today details, the proposed development of Therme's Mega spa at Ontario Place is dramatically at odds with both Toronto's Official Plan and the Central Waterfront Secondary Plan which has governed the successful transformation of Toronto's waterfront over the past 20 years.

Since the development application was filed with the city, a growing chorus of voices from the public, urbanists, heritage experts, media and even the Waterfront Toronto/City Design Review Panel have raised concerns that are now laid out at a high level in the update report from City staff.

It is obvious that the 85,000 square metre mega spa facility and entrance is planned at a scale (throughput of 14,000 visitors/day) that is entirely unsuitable to the Ontario Place site. The result of that mismatch is the need to:

- clearcut and level the entire landscape of the Michael Hough designed 14.8-acre West Island (with a loss of over 800 trees)
- carry out massive lake filling to expand the footprint of the West Island provide public access to the water's edge
- replace the existing west entrance to Ontario Place with a 37m Therme branded guest entrance pavilion.
- replace the bridge to the West Island with a private multi-storey guest and administrative services structure.
- Increase parking from 1200 to 2800 spaces, mostly accommodated in below lake facility that is to be paid for out the public purse at an estimated cost of \$450 million.

The effect of the mismatch is to entirely obliterate the iconic prominence of the Cinesphere and Pods and destroy the fabric of the Hough-Zeidler design.

Another impact is the distance an Austrian spa franchise takes us from the original intent behind the creation of Ontario Place. In 1970, then Premier John Robarts described the project in this way:

“We felt there was a need in Ontario for something akin to a spiritual home/a touchstone of stability, a place where people could come, see and reflect upon the society that has been created in Ontario. We felt there was a need for a place where we could examine our history, look at our cultural and economic growth and contemplate the challenges of the future. In short, we wanted a place to re-affirm our identity as Ontarians and Canadians.”

Replacing a public park that has a long history of access and participation with a commercial European spa complex that most Torontonians cannot afford to visit says nothing positive about Ontarians.

In 2020, Ontario Place for All commissioned a report from HR&A Advisors on the Value of Public Space. The report found that Ontario Place has more sustainable long-term value as a high-quality, public space that creates diverse benefits for the regional community. It also found that public space tends to last longer (50-100 year investment lifespan vs. 20-30 year investment lifespan for commercial use) and isn't subject to the risk of commercial failure. Good public space has real estate, tourism, sociocultural and talent benefits; this can all be confirmed by looking at the spaces around Waterfront Toronto designed sites such as Sugar Beach. A final observation the report made is that forward thinking cities across North America are actively investing in public space and reclaiming their waterfront assets for public use.

We are asking City Council to have that same forward-thinking vision and stand up for an Ontario Place for All.

Best,

Ontario Place for All



Norm Di Pasquale, Co-Chair
info@ontarioplaceforall.com



Cynthia Wilkey, Co-Chair
wilkeycj@gmail.com



Ontario Place for All is a grassroots organization who want to ensure Ontario Place redevelopment follows core principles of waterfront revitalization.

Our Core Principles

- Ontario Place must be for ALL and kept publicly accessible.
- There must be a thoughtful, comprehensive public review before any changes, with a full and robust public consultation that:
 - conforms to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report's call for informed, respectful and meaningful consultation with Indigenous peoples over economic development
 - recognizes the diverse communities that use and contribute to Ontario Place
- Public interest, not commercial interest must drive the new vision.
- Future plans must
 - acknowledge the waterfront's Indigenous heritage and incorporate meaningful Indigenous consultation
 - maintain Ontario Place as part of Toronto's waterfront park system.
 - be integrated with the revitalization of Exhibition Place.
 - celebrate Ontario.
 - be guided by a collaboratively developed Conservation Management Plan that sustains Ontario Place as a recognized cultural heritage landscape.