



April 12, 2023

Toronto Field Naturalists
Deputation to the Toronto and East York Community Council:

Item - 2023.TE4.36

Ontario Place Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-law Amendment - Status Report

Good morning, councillors, and thanks for the chance to comment on the redevelopment of Ontario Place, as proposed by the province. My name is Ellen Schwartzel, and I'm speaking on behalf of the Toronto Field Naturalists.

Here's a quick quiz: What's the best spot for Torontonians to:

- spot loons on a pit-stop during their migration to northern Ontario
- enjoy the spectacle of thousands of cliff swallows nesting in the summer
- count on seeing a dozen or more species of ducks during winter months
- enjoy great views of waterfowl without disturbing their feeding

If you guessed Ontario Place, well done.

And if you specifically said the West Island of Ontario Place, you deserve a bonus prize.

Sadly, West Island is exactly where the province proposes a massive private spa on public land. The spa would destroy vital shoreline habitat – rare in our city, where most of our shoreline is built-up; it would mean the loss of hundreds of mature trees; it would add vast glass surfaces, rising 13 stories (45 metres), to a spot that countless birds depend on for their migratory stop-overs.

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 Ontario Place reliably offers excellent views of rare birds, 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.

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Keep in mind 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 Toronto and East York Community Council, 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, 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 needs of your residents first. Please send the proponents of this wholly inappropriate scheme back to the drawing board. Please reject the proposal outright.

Thank you.

Ellen Schwartzel
Past-President, Toronto Field Naturalists

