

## First Parliament Master Plan – Where do we start?

### 1. Introduction

The First Parliament site played a vital role in the governance of Upper Canada and the development of Toronto as a focus of industry, commerce, culture and government.

The First Parliament Project is a two-phase assignment:

- **Phase One**, nearly complete, involved the preparation of a Heritage Interpretation Strategy. The Heritage Interpretation Strategy confirms the stories to be told, identifies the primary audiences, and sets out the general means of interpretation.
- **Phase Two** will produce a Master Plan for the site. The Master Plan builds on the heritage values laid out in the Heritage Interpretation Strategy, creates a vision and guiding principles, and finally develops a plan for the site's proposed uses. The Master Plan illustrates what the site might ultimately look like and provides guidance for future implementation.

**The purpose of this memorandum is to stimulate discussion that will lead to a firm basis for moving ahead into the master plan process.** There are several opportunities and issues surrounding the First Parliament site. To move ahead, we need to agree on what's "on the table" and what's "off the table" when considering planning and development options.



*The First Parliament Site from the Southeast*

## 2. Heritage Interpretation Strategy

Through research and consultation with experts and the general public, the Heritage Interpretation Strategy developed in Phase 1 identified four primary chapters in the history of the First Parliament site:

- The past and continued presence, stories, roles, and contributions of Indigenous people in the area and region, which constitute a fundamental chapter in the history of the First Parliament site.
- The parliamentary era, during which the first purpose-built parliament buildings were constructed on the site. From 1797 to 1824, the First Parliament site was the centre of governance for Upper Canada, where legislation was passed that would determine the future of Upper Canada and, later, the Province of Ontario. During this time, the site was also the focus of many cultural and religious activities associated with the rapid growth of the Town of York (Toronto).
- The First Parliament site was later developed to accommodate the Home District Gaol. In service for over 20 years, the Gaol was a large, imposing structure that housed a diverse population of people including criminals, debtors and the mentally disabled. Reflecting the harsh penal system of early Upper Canada, the Gaol's resident population included men and women of all ages, and even children.
- The Consumers' Gas Company occupied the site from about 1880 to the 1950s. Consumers' Gas built very large industrial structures on the site to convert coal to coal gas. It was this coal gas that literally fueled the development of the Town of York (Toronto) from a little hamlet to a major focus of commerce, finance and culture.

The Heritage Interpretation Strategy sets out an interpretive framework that celebrates the First Parliament site's role in "Building a Capital; Building a Province; Building a Nation". This concept is supported by five sub-themes: Site of Strategic Importance, Seat of Government, Planning and Infrastructure, Civil Society, and Industry and Commerce.

The Heritage Interpretation Strategy forms one of the key footings of the Master Plan.

## 3. Key Opportunities and Assets

The First Parliament site enjoys opportunities and assets that need to be recognized and capitalized on for the site to reach its full potential as an important heritage site and public place.

- **The site has significant heritage value** – First and foremost, the site has historical significance not only as the location of Upper Canada's first purpose-built parliament buildings, but also as the location of social, economic, and industrial activities that were key to the development of the City and Province. The history and the stories that surround it are paramount and should drive development of the site and should never be compromised by other site uses.
- **The site is a tremendous public resource** – The First Parliament properties were acquired and placed under public ownership in order to protect the heritage assets of the site and ensure appropriate interpretation. That said, the site also offers potential to accommodate other community uses and activities.
- **The site enjoys a central location in the City** – The First Parliament site is located in the heart of Downtown Toronto, within close proximity to the original 10 blocks

developed in the Town of York. The site's location is symbolically important, but also enjoys high visibility and ready access by any number of means of transport.

- **The neighbourhood is vibrant and supportive** – The previously derelict, post-industrial lands surrounding the First Parliament site are being redeveloped into vibrant, mixed-use neighbourhoods. Consequently, there is a growing population of residents, workers and tourists who will populate the First Parliament site on a regular basis and hopefully develop a strong sense of ownership and pride over the location. The First Parliament site is contiguous with David Crombie Park, which is soon to be restored, and across the street from the Distillery District, which is a major tourist destination.
- **A new public library is a tangible first step in revitalizing the site.** – The new TPL district branch library planned for the First Parliament site is a tremendous opportunity and asset. By its very nature, a public library can be highly compatible with and supportive of an important heritage site. Not only will the library draw large numbers of people to the site, it could directly assist in heritage interpretation through relevant programming and the provision of dedicated interior/exterior space and facilities.
- **The site enjoys considerable redevelopment flexibility** – In terms of future development opportunities, the site is relatively unencumbered by unrelated uses that might otherwise have been valuable and/or permanent. While the site is currently occupied by various automobile-related uses, these can quite reasonably be considered interim uses that can be removed to accommodate higher-order heritage and public priorities.

#### 4. Key Issues and Plan Drivers

Developing a master development plan for the First Parliament site will require that several issues be addressed. However, these challenges also suggest opportunities that can lead to form-making. The final master plan direction for First Parliament will be founded on a balanced approach to the resolution of these issues.

Of the issues to be addressed, three stand out as being the most significant.

##### 1. Heritage interpretation

In describing the First Parliament site's archaeological record, the word "ephemeral" is often used. From the investigations undertaken in recent years, we know that there are actual traces of the first and second parliament buildings, and somewhat more substantial remains of the Home District Gaol and the Consumers' Gas works. However, the first and second parliament traces, in particular, are fragile and limited in extent. They are also embedded in contaminated soil. Revealing these artifacts for public display is not considered feasible. Therefore, heritage interpretation may have to rely on strategies other than displaying historical artifacts. As set out in the Heritage Interpretation Strategy, these strategies may include plaques and displays, electronic digital media, staged events and other tools. Interpretation may also be conveyed through innovative, evocative site design and/or architectural design.

From a master plan perspective, we know where on the site the most important archaeological remains are located. If those remains are to be preserved and protected, that alone is a strong determinant in how the site should be developed.

## 2. Site Programming

In addition to the library (which will occupy about ¼ of the site), the First Parliament site can accommodate a range of other uses. Typical suggestions for the balance of the site include plazas, parks and other open spaces. However, can we consider other uses as well, assuming they are consistent with the heritage priorities? Should we consider more intensive program elements such as community facilities, supportive housing or commercial/entertainment uses?

The range of possibilities suggests that there might be a number of ways that the site could be developed. While the final master plan direction might have built-in flexibility, it should firmly identify the most appropriate uses for the site.

## 3. Environmental Condition

Like much of downtown Toronto, the First Parliament site was contaminated by historic industrial activities. Contamination management will be a challenge for the First Parliament Master Plan. Full removal of contaminated soil would be prohibitively expensive and would impact the archaeological record. Placing a “soft cap” (up to 1.5 metres of clean soil) over the entire site would likely present design challenges related to the visual and physical connections between various parts of the site and between the site and surrounding streets. Placing a paved “hard cap” (concrete or asphalt) over the contaminated soil may limit opportunities to create an appropriate mix of hard and soft open spaces.

Site investigations have determined what the contamination consists of, where it is most severe and how it behaves under different conditions. This is valuable information that will influence what kinds of uses are most appropriate for the site and where they are best located.

### Other Issues

There are a series of other issues that will be addressed during the master plan process. These are important in and of themselves but they are generally sub-sets of the three central challenges discussed above. They include:

- **Interim site programming** – If the redevelopment of the site is phased over time, as is most likely, are there interim uses that would animate the site and identify it clearly as a vital public resource? Possibilities include pop-up markets, performances, or hard-surface sports events.
- **Revenue generation** – The Ontario Heritage Trust’s Planning Framework stipulates that the First Parliament site should be financially self-supporting. This directive implies uses on the site that are in addition to and more intensive than a library with parks and open spaces. Again, possibilities include residential, commercial or entertainment uses.
- **Jurisdiction** – The Ontario Heritage Trust’s Planning Framework is quite clear that the First Parliament site revitalization should be undertaken as a single integrated project. However, the site has two owners that, while having very similar goals for the site, may have somewhat different priorities, timelines and decision-making protocols. These particularities could affect site programming, capital funding, development phasing, site management/programming and site maintenance.
- **Indigenous representation and interpretation** – We can assume that the First Parliament site was long known to Indigenous peoples who likely camped, foraged or

hunted on the site. During the engagement process, individuals we spoke with expressed considerable interest in issues such as the Toronto Purchase and other treaties, which were tied to the site's historic parliamentary activities. There is an exciting opportunity to represent and interpret the site's Indigenous history.

- **Phasing** – A new public library is the only use already approved for the site. It may well be that the library will occupy a part of the site long before other uses are approved and implemented. A key task of the master plan will be to develop an approach that maintains the viability and coherence of the site as a whole during the initial stages of redevelopment.
- **Zoning** – Does the site have the zoning necessary to realize the heritage and community ambitions that will be established through the master plan process? The First Parliament properties are currently zoned for a variety of uses including residential and mixed use. The King Parliament Secondary Plan, which includes First Parliament, is underway. As part of this on-going work, the zoning will be reviewed. Further information will become available as the secondary plan evolves.

## 5. A Vision for First Parliament

A clear vision with guiding principles helps direct the master plan process and serves as a means of evaluating success. The vision and guiding principles evolve from a thorough understanding of the site coupled with clear goals and objectives. They are developed and confirmed through consultation with stakeholders and the general public.

The City's proposed vision with guiding principles is largely based on the Ontario Heritage Trust's Planning Framework. Approved by Trust's Board of Directors in June of 2014, the Planning Framework (appended to this memorandum) offers a solid foundation for moving forward.

The City's proposed vision for the First Parliament site:

***The First Parliament site is first and foremost an important historic site. It was the location of important events and activities that were fundamental to the development of the City as a centre of government, commerce and culture, and of the Province as a dynamic region and founding member of Canada's confederation. The First Parliament site will be protected and preserved in perpetuity and will be developed jointly by the City and Province to make that history evident and accessible to the broader public.***

***At the same time, the First Parliament site will become an important public/community resource serving a rapidly revitalizing part of downtown Toronto. As such, the site will provide a range of community-based opportunities to meet the needs of a growing resident, working and visiting population. These opportunities, which include the planned district library branch, will be selected and planned to complement and support the primary purposes of heritage interpretation. Like any other public place or facility, the First Parliament site will be designed to support a range of formal and informal activities and to ensure the safety, comfort and enjoyment of all users.***

## **6. Draft Guiding Principles**

The draft guiding principles for the First Parliament site reflect the heritage and community aspirations set out in the vision statement above. The Heritage Interpretation Strategy from Phase 1 outlines a series of principles that will help guide the development of the First Parliament site as an important interpretive destination. As an urban public place, the First Parliament site will also share many of the requirements and features that characterize all public places in the City. The key guiding principles are presented below for review and discussion.

### ***Prioritize heritage preservation and interpretation***

- Protect known and potential archaeological remains
- Interpret all historical layers
- Employ a full range of interpretation tools
- Reveal heritage through design
- Appeal to all audiences

### ***Respond to the site and its context***

- Capitalize on the size and scale of the site
- Respond to the built and future built fabric surrounding the site
- Recognize current movement and approach patterns
- Embrace the site's current topography and solar orientation
- Address the soil contamination in a positive way

### ***Recognize the site as a valuable public asset***

- Celebrate the public status of the site
- Serve the local community and the whole City
- Complement other existing opportunities in the area

### ***Celebrate the library as the first key piece***

- Showcase the site
- Protect for other future opportunities
- Incorporate historical interpretation as an integral dimension of the library
- Provide associated outdoor spaces for library and public use

### ***Develop a vision that can be implemented over time***

- Maintain existing uses until they can be replaced by higher order uses
- Consider revenue-generating uses
- Ensure sustainability
- Animate the site with interim public uses

## **7. Potential Planning Themes**

There are numerous ways in which the First Parliament site could be developed to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the vision statement. The purpose of the master planning process is to uncover the planning direction that best meets the goals and objectives of the vision statement, resolves the key issues noted above *and* stimulates the excitement and enthusiasm that will trigger the will to finance and schedule full implementation.

For the purposes of discussion, we propose four possible themes that could form the basis of a planning direction. Each of these themes assumes the primacy of heritage protection and interpretation as well as the imminent construction of a new district library branch.

- **A centre for interpretation** – Using this approach, the entire site is focused on interpretation. Other community and library uses are secondary to that purpose, and are selected, located and designed only with a view to supporting heritage interpretation. (precedent – Upper Fort Garry, Winnipeg)
- **A public park** – This approach accommodates heritage interpretation and the library, but much of the site could be developed as a stunning new public park, providing recreational opportunities that would complement those already existing in the area. The site’s environmental condition presents design challenges that can met with imagination and ingenuity. (precedent – HTO Park, Toronto)
- **An urban entertainment venue** – In this approach, the First Parliament site is developed to host large, revenue-generating entertainment and cultural events. Heritage interpretation and the library are accommodated, but the site is developed and serviced for large events. Site development would likely include significant amounts of paving, which would deal with the contamination issue and protect the archaeology. (precedent – Dundas Square, Toronto)
- **A community development site** – This approach accommodates heritage interpretation and the library, but much of the site could be developed to accommodate more intense and revenue-generating uses such as community services, supportive housing or commercial activities. In all likelihood, the library would be incorporated into a larger structure. (precedent – Regent Park, Toronto)

## 8. Key Stakeholders

Largely due to the historical importance of the site, a wide range of stakeholders have a keen interest in the project and are playing important roles in promoting and reviewing ongoing work. They include:

- Real Estate Services (City of Toronto) – sponsoring the First Parliament Project; responsible for the execution and coordination of real estate transactions for the City’s 5,600 properties;
- Ontario Heritage Trust (Province of Ontario) – administers the Province-owned portion of the First Parliament site;
- Toronto Public Library (City of Toronto) – directs the design, construction and management of TPL facilities;
- City Planning Division (City of Toronto) – responsible for guiding and managing the growth and physical form of the city;
- Parks, Forestry & Recreation (City of Toronto) – ensures equitable access to recreation programs, facilities and open spaces;
- Transportation Services (City of Toronto) – plans, constructs and manages the transportation infrastructure within the public right-of-way, including the public realm, sidewalks and roads;
- Various individuals and community groups.