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Revamping Toronto's Waterfront Projects move forward

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The East Bayfront area of the waterfront will include the new headquarters for Corus Entertainment.

Long in the planning stages, projects aimed at revitalizing Toronto's waterfront are moving ahead

REVAMPING TORONTO'S WATERFRONT

BY NESTOR GULA



THERE HAS BEEN DISCUSSION OF REVITALIZING THE Toronto waterfront for as long as most living Torontonians can remember. Today, discussion is turning into action as progress is finally being made. Several calls to tender have been issued by Waterfront Toronto, the organization in charge of redeveloping parts of Toronto's waterfront, and construction on some projects has begun.

Established in 2001, Waterfront Toronto's mission is "to put Toronto at the forefront of global cities in the 21st century by transforming the waterfront into beautiful, sustainable new communities, parks and public spaces, fostering economic growth in knowledge-based, creative industries and ultimately redefining how the city, province and country are perceived by the world."

Governed by a 13-member board of directors appointed by the federal and provincial governments and the City of Toronto, Waterfront Toronto works with the community and public and private sectors to create waterfront parks, public spaces, cultural institutions and diverse and sustainable commercial and residential communities.

John Campbell, Waterfront Toronto's president and CEO, acknowledges that the process has been longwinded. But he points out that three core projects — Central Waterfront, East Bayfront and West Don Lands — are currently underway. Requests for proposals for redevelopment have been issued for some parcels and new ones will be issued for other parcels very soon. "West Don Lands is moving forwards as well as the Central Waterfront," says Campbell. "And we are starting up in the East Bayfront very soon."

CORUS ON THE EAST BAYFRONT

On the East Bayfront, construction of the new headquarters for media giant Corus Entertainment is currently underway. With a budget of over \$100 million, the project is being developed by the Toronto Economic Development Corporation (TEDCO), with input from the City of Toronto, Corus Entertainment and Waterfront Toronto. Aecon Group Inc. won the construction contract.

The building will include approximately 500,000 square feet for an office and broadcast centre, as well as retail space and a public promenade along the edge of Toronto's harbour. It will also be gold-certified under LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) standards, in keeping with TEDCO's goal of supporting

sustainable development initiatives and environmental best practices.

The new Corus headquarters is meant to start the revitalization of the area south of Queens Quay Boulevard near the Jarvis Street slip. "The Corus building is a single site," explains Campbell. "The rest of the area will be following soon. We are designing the municipal services and infrastructure."

What is challenging, adds Campbell, is "creating an environment for employment. Corus will have well over 1,100 employees in the area to bring jobs into the city."

Additional projects on the East Bayfront are also moving forward, including the Jarvis Street slip. The design was announced in early February and the project will go to tender over the winter of next year with construction to start in 2009. Construction on Sherbourne Park will start that same year, with some infrastructure work already taking place, including road and pipe work. Other blocks of development will also be up for tender soon. "A first proposal call is going out in March for a mixed-use piece and another call going out for a residential piece for about 600,000 square feet," says Campbell.

In the Central Waterfront area, Waterfront Toronto is undertaking the construction of Spadina Head of Slip, consisting of a 700-square-meter wooden pedestrian deck over water, adjacent to the foot of Spadina Avenue south of Queens Quay Boulevard.

Somerville Construction will oversee construction work, which will consist of pile driving, dock wall repairs, in-water fisheries habitat construction, deck installation and landscape improvements. Work on the project began in October 2007 and is scheduled to be completed by June 2008.

WEST DON LANDS GETTING READY TO GO

Over on the West Don Lands work is also progressing. "West Don Lands is under major construction right now. Our partner Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC) has got people working on the replacement of the lower level interceptor sewer and we are preparing the area for the flood protection landform and the subsequent parks — that's all under way," says Campbell.

The West Don Lands area will be the first new waterfront neighbourhood developed as part of the revitalization of Toronto's waterfront. The majority of the West Don Lands is owned by the Government of Ontario and managed

on its behalf by the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC). ORC is responsible for commercial tenant management, site remediation and risk assessment, demolition and site clearance and flood protection, which is required for its redevelopment. The first phase of West Don Lands development involves collaboration between ORC, the community and Waterfront Toronto to transform a vacant, undeveloped brownfield site into a vibrant, mixed-use, sustainable community.

The first proposal call has already been issued for 850 residential units in the West Don Lands. Campbell expects the units to be pre-sold this summer and construction to begin this fall. Developers have already been short listed for the project, including Monarch Corporation and Fram Building Group with Graziani & Corazza Architects and Cobalt Engineering, Onni Development Capital Corp. with Gomberoff Bell Lyon Architects.

The majority of the work being done in The West Don Lands to date concerns the berm, built to protect the area from flooding. "That's the key issue there — flood protection landform," says Campbell.

The berm is necessary to control erosion and other effects of the Don River and is comprised of about

300,000 cubic metres of soil formed to protect against the Don River flooding. "It is a very shallow slope that can't be washed away. That is to protect the eastern side of Toronto from a Hurricane Hazel type of storm," explains Campbell, in reference to the 1954 hurricane that washed away many parts of the city and killed 81 of its inhabitants.

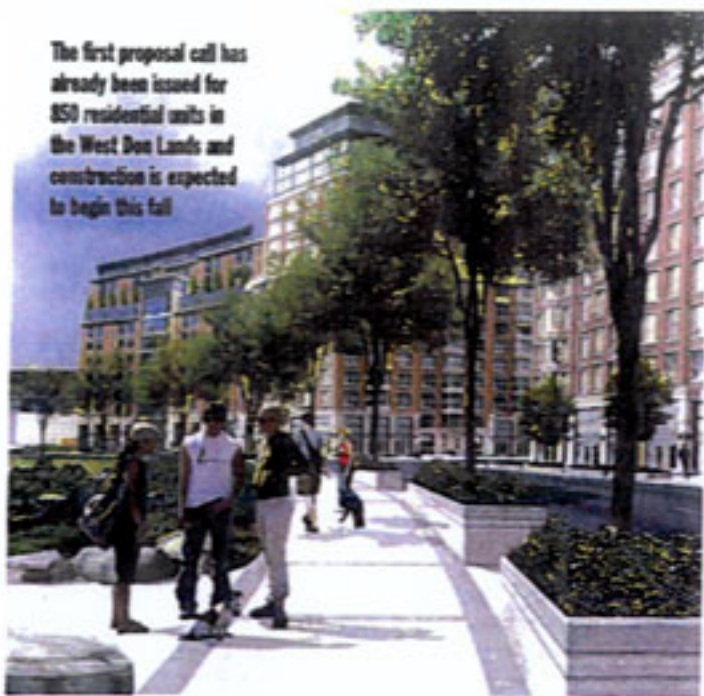
"Before completing any development we have to do this. And before we did the berm, we had to open up the CN bridge," says Campbell. "If you did have the flood, the berm would contain the water and you would blow the bridge out. Another problem with the berm is that it is being built on top of the old river bed which has pockets of compressible soil that is sometimes as much as 40 feet deep. We have had to wick out all the water. The wicking has been done with 28,000 wicks and then we will be bringing the soil in and compressing it."

As well, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) has a project to build some affordable housing on the corner of Kerr and King. The affordable rental and market ownership homes in this area will create 130 affordable family units in a mix of rent-geared-to-income and affordable rental, as well as 40 units of market ownership housing. The buildings are to be built



The Spadina Head of Slip consists of a 700-square-metre wooden pedestrian deck over water

The first proposal call has already been issued for 850 residential units in the West Don Lands and construction is expected to begin this fall



to LEED gold certification. "The proposal calls are with the developers, the Trideb, Monarchs, etc. They will be bidding on it and then hiring the various construction firms," says Campbell.

A LONG TIME COMING

Some people might complain that the whole waterfront revitalization in Toronto is taking a long time, and Campbell would agree. However, he says there are valid reasons for this. "There is a lot of work to be done. We have had to rezone and get approvals from government. Toronto is a very democratic city. We have to engage the public and make sure that as you do the designs and planning that in fact you get the best vision and the best results. The local population is a very important element."

Campbell adds that while it does take longer, the decisions that result are better and they stick. "It is a very intensive process. The environmental assessments take a long time. There are EAs for everything. For the berm itself they had to create a whole flood methodology and this was subject to an environmental assessment — this took a year-and-a-half. These are things that are part of the whole complicated problem." | ■

