

CITY_{of} PARKS

The closer we live together, the more spaces we need to stretch out. As Toronto's densification dilemma grows, a park renaissance is in full bloom



**The People's
Parks**

P.6

**How Toronto
Stacks Up**

P.10

**Parks of the
Future**

P.15

**Serious
Recreationists**

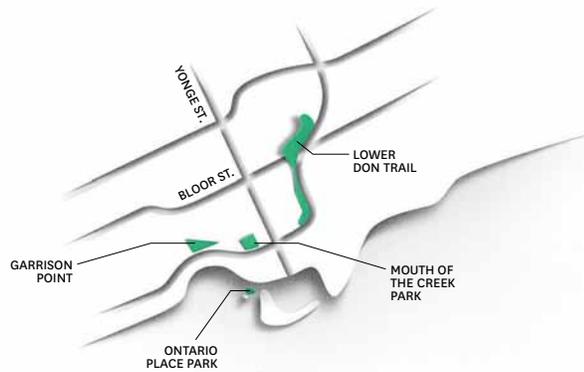
P.20

DESIGN

PROSPECT PARKS

Sure, New York's got the High Line. But in Toronto, ambitious planners are designing green spaces to rival the best. Take a peek at four of the most promising places to escape the concrete jungle

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THERE ARE A LOT OF REASONS why Toronto is one of the world's best cities. We have a booming housing market, a zillion top-tier restaurants (Momofuku now delivers!) and World Pride is coming this summer (the nudity on Yonge Street will be more diverse than ever). But until recently, our parks were like our sports teams—mostly popular, but never quite performing up to their potential. Sure, we had lots of them—over 1,600 gardens, playgrounds and trails cover close to 13 per cent of the city's total surface—but none were particularly outstanding. Nothing comparable, anyway, to New York City's High Line or Chicago's Millennium Park. Then, a few years ago, we got some funky urban beaches along the waterfront. We got wavedecks by the lake. We even got Underpass Park, which managed to turn the underside of Eastern Avenue into a whimsical skate park and play space for kids. And the future only looks better. New high-rise proposals, a surging population and the 2015 Pan Am Games have spurred the city, developers and a clutch of talented landscape architects to reimagine our green spaces for the years to come. There will be new ways to connect to our water, our history and the city at large. Here, four of our most promising future parks.



GARRISON PARK

WHAT

A 1.6-hectare, wedge-shaped park at the tip of Garrison Point, the new, master-planned community just east of Liberty Village.

WHEN

It should be completed by 2017.

WHO

Development firms Diamond Corp and Cityzen/Fernbrook are co-constructing a series of five high-rise condos (which, in total, will have almost 1,700 units) on the site. To give residents access to green space, they've hired Montreal-based landscape architect Claude Cormier (the quirky mind behind Sugar Beach and HTO Park).

BEST FEATURE

The view. The grassy, tree-lined prow of the park is nestled

between the GO train's Georgetown and Lakeshore rail lines as they merge heading toward Union. Although that makes the park somewhat of a post-industrial peninsula, it also creates a clear, uninterrupted vista along the rail corridor, framing the heart of the city.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FIT

Because the park is part of a condo development, the residents of the new towers only have to walk out of their lobbies to enjoy the rolling lawns. Easy access to the park is particularly important for the community because Garrison Point will have a higher than normal proportion of two- and three-bedroom units—the area is largely geared toward families with young kids who have outgrown their smaller units elsewhere. The proposal

also connects well to the surrounding urban amenities. A serpentine walkway will squiggle through the space, connecting to two pedestrian bridges that span the rail lines—one in the north that links to Stanley Park and one in the south that links to Fort York.

BIGGEST OBSTACLE

Although it's a private development, a lot of the key features depend on (uncertain) public funding. The Fort York and Stanley Park bridges are being built by Metrolinx. They were supposed to be finished by 2012, but were put on hold for years due to budget concerns. Garrison Park was also originally proposed with a public pool, but the plan is up in the air while the city decides whether to commit to the operating costs.

ONTARIO PLACE PARK

WHAT

Approximately three hectares of parkland on the edge of Ontario Place's east island, with a trail almost a kilometre in length.

WHEN

Construction is scheduled to start in summer 2014 and be completed in time for the Pan Am Games in 2015.

WHO

The project is a collaboration between the Ontario government, Waterfront Toronto and Infrastructure Ontario. The acclaimed Rotterdam-based landscape architecture firm West 8 (which is responsible for the wave decks at the foot of Spadina, Simcoe, Rees and Parliament streets), along with Toronto's LandInc, is overseeing the design.

BEST FEATURE

Romance. Toronto doesn't have many public spaces to put someone in the mood. The CN Tower might be suggestive, but it isn't exactly heart-melting. The eastern edge of Ontario Place will have an area specifically dedicated to swooning (aptly called the Romantic Garden). Smooth hunks of granite will protrude from rounded mounds of grass, giving couples semi-secluded dunes to nestle behind, with views south over Lake Ontario that will make for amazing sunset picnics.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FIT

Right now, the park feels like an orphan. Although it will connect to the Martin Goodman Trail, few people live within easy walking distance. And it's surrounded by the postmodern



wasteland that is Ontario Place, most of which has been shuttered since 2012 (the Molson Amphitheatre, Echo Beach and a sea of pay parking lots excepted). It's a good start at revitalization (the design is lovely, including an epic entryway with giant granite walls), but more needs to be done to make the overall area a destination again.

BIGGEST OBSTACLE

Considering that the Pan Am Games are about a year away, and the park still doesn't have a finished design (the third in a series of public consultations just wrapped up this past March), the possibility of construction actually being complete by July 2015 seems as likely as Rob Ford entering rehab.

LOWER DON TRAIL

WHAT

A 4.6-kilometre path, running south from Pottery Road down to Corktown Common, which will be revitalized with new entry points, pathways, art features and bridges.

WHEN

Construction is scheduled to start in summer 2014, with parts completed in time for the Pan Am Games in 2015 (the new access points are a priority) and the rest phased in by 2020.

WHO

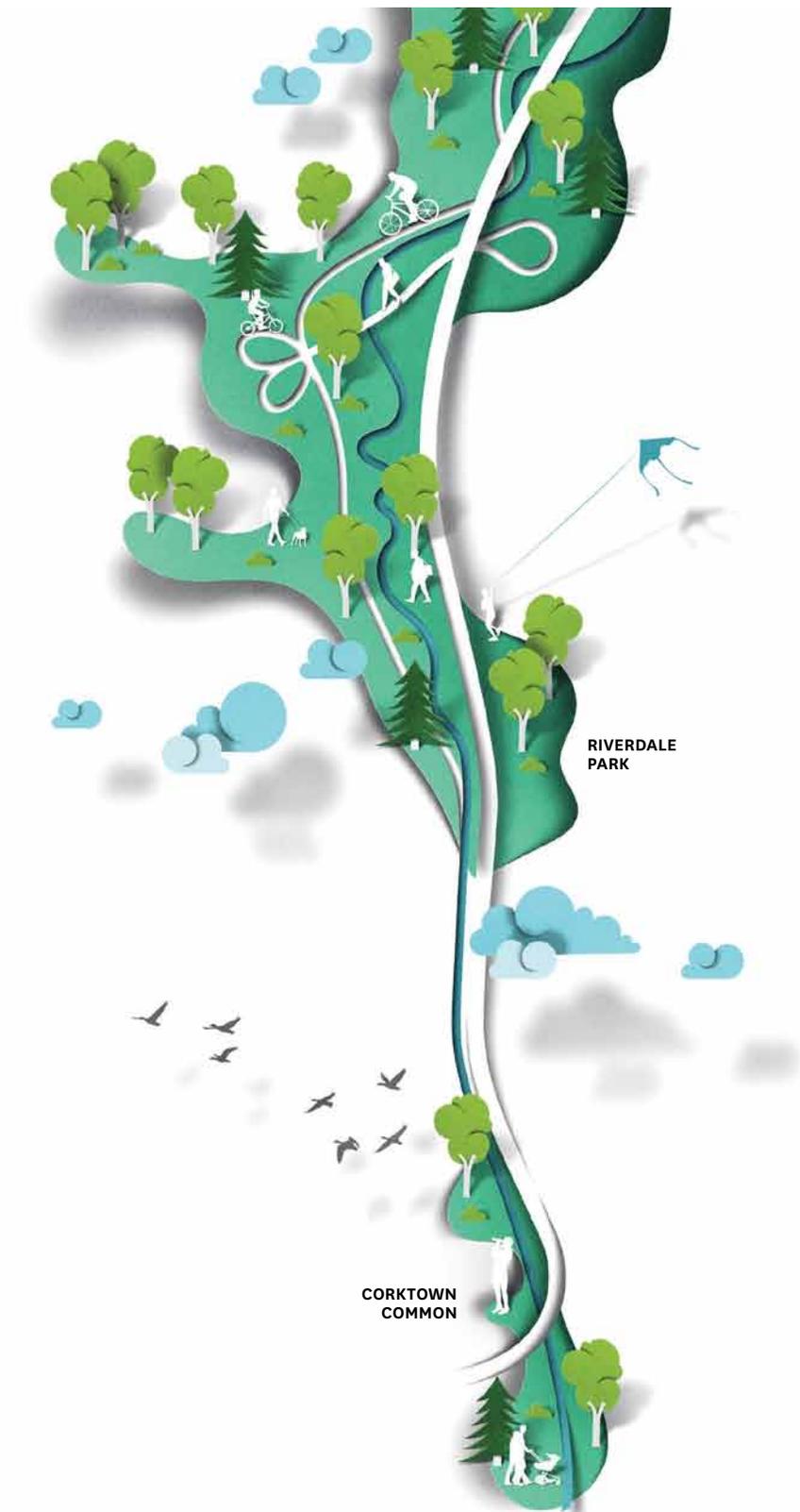
The City of Toronto along with local architecture firm DTAH (their other projects include the Artscape Wychwood Barns and the Evergreen Brick Works).

BEST FEATURE

Access. The Don Valley is, in isolation, one of the city's most interesting, if underutilized, green spaces. It's like a scene from *Bambi* with a highway running through it. But until now, access to the area has been limited, with few points of connection from the major streets that bridge over the valley. As part of this proposal, a new series of stairs (including one set each at Gerrard and Dundas streets to complement the existing one at Queen) and pedestrian bridges (such as one adjacent to Pottery Road, which will mean visitors won't have to walk along the busy thoroughfare) will allow people to get into the valley easily.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FIT

Because of a spate of condo developments both east and west of the valley—including the athletes' village of the Pan Am



Games and all the new low-rise buildings in Corktown—the population around the trail is expected to swell by 80,000 over the next decade. Even the simplest interventions in the park, like resurfacing the crumbling asphalt trails, will go a long way toward providing all

those new residents with an escape from their compact condos.

BIGGEST OBSTACLE

The new art features, access points and bridges will all require increased maintenance—something the cash-strapped city will have to budget carefully for.



MOUTH OF THE CREEK PARK

WHAT

A half-hectare park east of the Bathurst Street bridge and west of CityPlace.

WHEN

Construction is scheduled to start in 2016 and end in 2017.

WHO

The City of Toronto has retained the design from the new Toronto-based landscape architecture firm Public Work (the studio is also doing the redevelopment of One Spadina Crescent).

BEST FEATURE

History. Right now, the site looks terrible. It's basically a flat patch of dust in the shadow of the Gardiner. Two centuries ago, it was lush. It sat along the city's original shoreline and was where Garrison Creek (now

buried underground) emptied into Lake Ontario. The proposal is to return the site to its original, pre-urban ecology, with seven-metre-tall promontories (like a mini-Scarborough Bluffs) surrounding sunken grasslands. Some of the seating and play elements will be made of found archaeological artifacts, objects excavated when the nearby towers were going up. The foundations of an old stone house will edge a sandbox, for example, and the moorings of an old wharf will function as a jungle gym for young kids.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FIT

Although on its own the park is relatively small—a half hectare is about the size of an American football field—it's a desperately needed oasis for neighbouring CityPlace, which, when

completed, will be Canada's most densely populated neighbourhood. (It already has over 5,000 residential units.) And Mouth of the Creek will include an important, pedestrian-friendly walkway under the Bathurst Street bridge. The link will grant CityPlace residents easy access to a much bigger patch of grass—the expansive lawns of historic Fort York—and help connect the area to the city's broader walking, running and cycling infrastructure.

BIGGEST OBSTACLE

The part of the park that slopes down under the Bathurst Street bridge will act like an upside-down umbrella. When it rains, it will fill up, so the designers hope to use marsh grasses to absorb the excess moisture.