



White, J. T. (2016) Pursuing design excellence: Urban design governance on Toronto's waterfront. *Progress in Planning*, 110, pp. 1-41.  
(doi:[10.1016/j.progress.2015.06.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.progress.2015.06.001))

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Deposited on: 9 November 2015

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## **Pursuing design excellence: Urban design governance on Toronto's waterfront**

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## **1. The governance of urban design**

### 1.1 Introduction

The Toronto waterfront covers an area of 800 hectares and is one of the largest redevelopment ventures of its kind in North America (Waterfront Toronto 2010). Efforts to transform the city's waterfront are currently led by a public agency that is the steward of Toronto's waterfront redevelopment programme and the lead master planner of the waterfront. Since 1999 it has pursued a complex urban design, planning and real estate agenda and committed to a policy of 'design excellence' (TWRC 2002). To realise its agenda, the corporation has employed a variety of instruments to govern urban design outcomes on Toronto's waterfront, including: design-led masterplanning, peer design review and public participation.

Systematic analyses of urban design processes across a broad sweep of time are rarely undertaken and, as Carmona (2014, 4) argues, "few urban design interventions are subjected to analysis that compares outcomes with processes of delivery". The purpose of this paper is to do just that: unpack the urban design process on Toronto's waterfront and assess the initial outcomes. The paper examines the political context underpinning Toronto's waterfront redevelopment and the evolution of the most recent planning and design agenda; it assesses the tools and mechanisms used to deliver new buildings and public spaces; and, it evaluates a series of case studies to understand how the urban design process has shaped the waterfront's changing built form and public realm.

### *1.2 Toronto: a booming city*

Toronto is the largest city in Canada. With a population of 2.8 million and a further 2.7 million people residing in its suburban hinterland, it is the commercial, financial and cultural hub of Canada and the gateway for around 30% of new immigrants to Canada (City of Toronto 2014). Toronto is famed for its diverse urban neighbourhoods and vibrant street life and, according to the widely quoted Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) liveability ranking, it is consistently recognised as one of the most liveable cities in the world (EIU 2013). Toronto's waterfront district sits immediately south of the city's urban core on the shore of Lake Ontario (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The Greater Toronto Area and the Toronto Waterfront Study Area**

(Map produced by the author using a base map from Google Maps)



The city's position in the EIU liveability ranking has helped precipitate a real estate boom which, despite a small decline in late 2008, has seen exponential growth ever since (Lehrer et al. 2010). In 2013, as many as 55,000 condominium units were under construction in the city (Austen 2013) – a number that well surpasses the rate of construction in other North American cities, including New York (Sturgeon 2014). Condominium construction has mainly occurred in the city's downtown and surrounding inner city districts and has dramatically changed the image of the city. Where low-rise commercial and industrial buildings and parking lots once stood, a dense ribbon of glass and steel residential towers ranging from 20 to as many as 70 stories has arisen. The waterfront is thus at the epicentre of Toronto's redevelopment boom.

## Figure 2: Condominium development in Toronto's inner city

(Photograph by the author, 2013)



This image looks west from the Railway Lands with the Gardiner Expressway in the foreground. It illustrates the considerable amount of high-rise, and high density, residential development that has occurred in the last fifteen years on the post-industrial lands in-between Toronto's downtown core and the waterfront district.

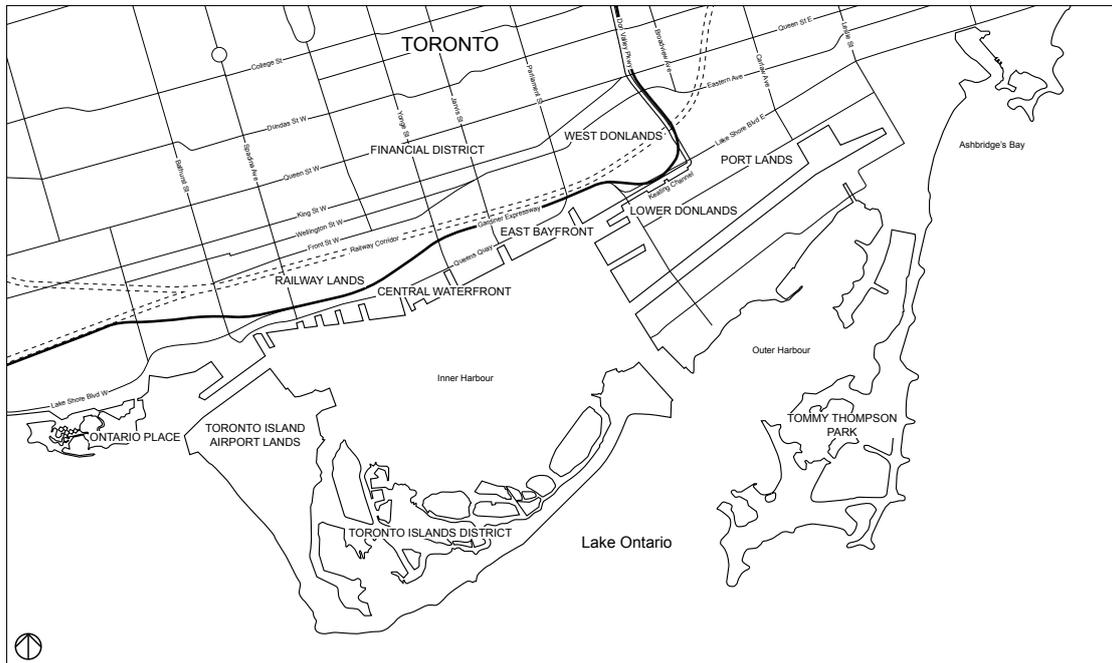
### *1.3 A 'terrain of availability' on the waterfront*

The story of redevelopment on Toronto's waterfront is not one of sustained 'design excellence', but rather a long saga fraught by "jurisdictional gridlock" (Eidelman 2011, 263). Cast as a "terrain of availability" by the urban designer Ken Greenberg (1996, 195), the waterfront has been characterised by unrealised and quixotic planning and design visions since the early 1960s that have often been tarnished by government agencies vying for control over development rights. The construction of various commercial, residential and cultural buildings as well as numerous public spaces in the central portion of the waterfront during the 1970s and 1980s, have broadly failed to improve the visual and morphological qualities of the waterfront (see Figure 4) and large areas of derelict land, especially in the eastern waterfront and the Port Lands (see Figure 3 and 4), remain undeveloped.

Compounded by its sheer size and the complications resulting from a patchwork of public and private landownership, the physical environment on the waterfront is fragmented. This problem is augmented both by the railway corridor that serves Toronto's Union Station, which cuts a wide east-west cleavage between the downtown and the waterfront, and by the elevated Gardiner Expressway, which runs parallel to the railway corridor along the entire length of the waterfront (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Toronto's waterfront**

(Diagram by the author)



Together, the railway corridor and the expressway create a mental widening of what, in reality, is a distance of less than one kilometre between the heart of Toronto's downtown core and the shoreline of Lake Ontario. Despite the fact that the wide north-south streets of Toronto's urban grid terminate on the waterfront, pedestrian and vehicles alike have to navigate a maze of tunnels, overpasses and complicated road junctions to reach the water's edge.

#### Figure 4: Toronto's waterfront

(Photographs by the author, 2013)



The Central Waterfront, Easy Bayfront and the Port Lands. This view eastwards captures the essence of Toronto's waterfront: a narrow strip of land between the city core and the Inner Harbour, intersected by the Gardiner Expressway and a railway corridor. The waterfront opens out to the east into the post-industrial East Bayfront and the vast Port Lands beyond.



The Gardiner Expressway and the Railway Corridor. This image looking north on Yonge Street illustrates how pedestrian movement between the Central Waterfront and the Financial District is inhibited both by the Expressway and by the lengthy underpass beneath the railway corridor.

#### 1.4. Research context and method

Now under the purview of the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC)<sup>1</sup>, an agency created and funded by the federal, provincial and municipal governments in the early 2000s, Toronto's waterfront does appear to be changing. The allocation of significant government resources to the task of redevelopment, combined with the corporation's commitment to a design-led redevelopment vision that champions design excellence suggests that a new phase of design-led redevelopment might have begun. A key objective of the research is to interrogate this proposition and, in so doing, understand the process of urban design governance and delivery on the waterfront.

Using a qualitative case study methodology, the research data was collected between 2009 and 2013 via archival research, semi-structured interviews and direct observations. .Approximately 300 textual and visual sources were assembled and 46 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The research participants included: City of Toronto planners and officials, representatives of the waterfront corporation, developers, design professionals, politicians, community activists and the press. Further informal conversations were also held with academics and commentators interested in Toronto's waterfront. Quotations from the interview participants are used in the paper to support the narrative and the coding system is described in the appendix.

#### 1.5 Why is urban design important?

Achieving higher standards of design can add value to both new and existing parts of a city or neighbourhood (Carmona et al. 2002). For real estate developers and their financiers, the *producers* of the built environment, urban design can help to stabilise local market conditions, reduce overall risk and better the marketing potential of new projects (Madanipour 2006). For those who live and work in cities, the *users* of the built environment, urban design has the potential to both improve how a place functions and enhance its symbolic value, while, for agencies of government, the *regulators* of the built environment, urban design can be harnessed for competitive advantage (ibid.) and employed as a "means of economic development" (Gospodini 2002, 60). High quality urban design is also recognised as a sophisticated instrument for managing environmental change, as well as an issue around which stakeholders

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2007 renamed Waterfront Toronto.

can participate in the process of developing and implementing a planning and design vision (Madanipour 2006; author 2015). Notably, as concepts of sustainable development have ascended urban policy agendas, interest in the social and environmental value of urban design has increased. This has generated a growing preference for compact and walkable neighbourhoods in which shops and services are mixed with residential and employment space and pedestrians and cyclists have priority over vehicles – the very principles that urban designers have long argued create higher quality built environments (e.g. Jacobs 1961; Gehl 1987). It is also increased interest in the ecology in the city and the ways in which sustainable infrastructure might be used to enhance the quality of the built environment and, at the same time, improve conditions for local wildlife (Beatley 2004; Hester 2008; Newman and Jennings 2008).

Yet the value of urban design can be a double-edged sword. The constant pressure upon the regulators of the built environment to generate new avenues of investment and create jobs has forced them to find ways to use urban design as a marketing tool to enhance global competitiveness (Gospodini 2002; Julier 2005) and “lend traction to capital accumulation” (Knox 2010, 5). Numerous governing authorities have been criticised for using large commercial endeavours and other ‘spectacle’ projects to generate income without properly addressing the social divisions, gentrification and proliferation of privately managed public space that often results (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998; Harvey 2000). In a case study of Melbourne’s waterfront, Kim Dovey (2005) demonstrated how public-spirited urban design practices were overshadowed by powerful public-private partnerships and fantastical architectural imagery. Reaching similar conclusions, but focused on an altogether different context, Moore-Milroy’s 2009 book, *Thinking Planning and Urbanism*, uses a case study to explore the complex story of Dundas Square in downtown Toronto where she unravels a planning and design process dominated by influential corporate interests in which the new public space that emerged at the heart of the city’s downtown was the first in Toronto that could be used to house commercial gated events.

In an analysis of urban design governance in Sydney, John Punter (2005) argues that the creation of better public spaces and achieving higher standards of urban design quality is undoubtedly at the core of that city’s economic competitiveness agenda. He notes that, like in many other Western cities, there has been a “preoccupation with iconic buildings, with the city image and skyline, with the city as spectacle in terms of architectural set pieces...” (144). Yet, he also counters that the

city's commitment to urban design goes beyond fetishism. A parallel City Spaces Program has successfully democratised space in the central city. More public open spaces have been made available, pedestrian-only movement space has been increased and the city provides a wide range of amenities for local residents, including swimming pools, leisure facilities and cultural venues. Reaching similar conclusions in a 2011 study of urban design and regeneration in Liverpool, Mike Biddulph notes that Liverpool's urban design agenda, which emerged as a key component of urban policymaking during the New Labour years, was "driven by a concern for prosperity" (2011, 100). Yet Biddulph cautions that it would be simplistic to assume that urban design was merely a tool in a wider global competitiveness agenda. He argues that while the objective of attracting investment often aligns with improvements in the design of the public realm, the two are not always dependent. Biddulph concludes that "the [p]eople working to secure urban design qualities..." in Liverpool "...have done so in the understanding that such work is in the general public interest" (2011, 101).

For many planners, the planning and design achievements of Vancouver, Canada is often cited as an example of how thoroughgoing design policymaking and judicious design negotiation on the part of city officials can result in a major city centre residential development boom while, at the same time, the retention and enhancement of public amenities, such as open spaces, schools and community centres (Punter 2003; MacDonald 2005). However, even in Vancouver, despite good intentions the success of the city's design revolution has led to negative 'knock on' effects, including unaffordable house prices and, as the opportunities for development creep further from the central city and to more disadvantages neighbourhoods, various challenges associated with gentrification and social polarisation (Smith 2003).

### *1.6 Research themes and guiding questions*

The research themes and guiding questions for this study are directly informed by the literature on Anglo-American urban design governance and process. This research tradition began during the 1970s following the publication of Jonathan Barnett's text, *Urban Design as Public Policy* (1974). Barnett used his experience as the head of urban design in the New York City planning department to demonstrate that private sector design could be controlled more effectively through a combination of comprehensive urban design policies and regulatory mechanisms. In exchange for

greater floor area allowances, and other 'bonuses', for example, Barnett's urban design team required developers to approach building projects within the context of a wider urban design plan. The approach adopted in New York highlighted how strong policy directives and supporting regulation might be used to powerful effect. Yet, at the same time, Barnett's work also demonstrated the importance of give and take between the public and private sectors. As Hack and Sagalyn (2011) reflect "urban design is often portrayed as shaping cities through bold visions of the future. In truth, it is largely devoted to the practical task of acquiring public or collective goods through the process of city building" (258).

Barnett's ground-breaking practice precipitated considerable interest among urban policymakers in North American and European cities about how to impact the design of the built environment through the planning process and embed a design ethos into decision-making. Ever since, a growing field of scholarly research has sought to evaluate the mechanisms used to integrate more design-aware decision-making into existing planning and development processes (e.g. Lai 1988; Scheer and Preiser 1994; Punter 1999; 2003; 2005; 2007; Punter and Carmona 1997; author 2015). This work has shown that, in Canadian and American cities, where zoning prevails, city governments have tended to enhance design quality by introducing discretionary tools such as peer design review and written design guidance into planning approval processes (Lai 1989; Scheer and Preiser 1994; Nasar and Grannis 1999; Kumar and George 2002; Punter 2003). In contrast, planners and urban designers in the UK, where planning decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, have experimented with control mechanisms, such as masterplanning and design codes, to govern the quality of the built environment (Hall 1996; Punter and Carmona 1997; Carmona 2009). The governance of urban design, both in North America and in the UK, has also been reshaped by increasingly sophisticated approaches to public consultation that encourage local people and other stakeholders to engage directly in the design process and make decisions collaboratively with expert designers (author 2015).

Punter (2007) notes that the growing focus on design quality in many planning jurisdictions has blurred the "distinction between...regulatory and discretionary systems" (168). He argues that a convergence of design control and management practice has taken place as governing authorities have adopted various measures to suit local political contexts, development cultures and bureaucratic procedures. Large-scale redevelopment sites, such as waterfronts, arguably provide an instructive lens to understand the evolution and implementation of design

governance and, in particular, the convergence and adaptation of design tools and mechanism such as design guidance, masterplanning, peer design review and public engagement. However, it is important to understand the effectiveness of these tools and mechanisms and, in particular, the impact they have on design outcomes. The effectiveness of an individual tool or mechanism is influenced by a range of factors, not only related to the quality of the governance instrument itself, but also by external factors such as local politics, financing and the wider regulatory regime. Moreover, these impacts might shift with time as the context for design governance changes (Carmona 2014). Masterplanning, for example, is often credited for providing a long-term design-led vision for an area that improves financial certainty for investors (Bell 2005; Tiesdell and MacFarlane 2007), yet at the same time, many masterplans lack regulatory clout and end up doing little to shape development outcomes. Similarly, peer design review processes have been credited for raising the quality of the debate about design outcomes and encouraging designers and developers to submit higher quality project for review (Punter 2003a), but have also faced criticism for limiting architectural freedom (Costonis 1989; Mandelker 1993; Scheer 1994).

The tools and mechanisms associated with the governance of urban design are inevitably interventionist because they are deployed by planners to steer real estate towards “*policy-shaped* rather than merely *market-led* outcomes” (Tiesdell and Adams 2011, 3). Urban design governance and policymaking is thus a ‘second-order’ design activity (George 1997) that “...shapes the design and development process by creating a frame for acts of first-order design,” (Tiesdell and Adams, 2011, 2). As a result, urban design is often a highly contentious component of the planning decision-making process and a site of “seemingly endless conflict” (Punter and Carmona 1997, 1) between the regulators, producers and users of the built environment. Urban design is not only a process of negotiation between the private sector developers who propose projects and the public sector planners who assess applications for development, it also causes professional conflicts between architects and urban planners and disagreements between professionals and the general public about the nature of what constitutes ‘good design’. Furthermore, because urban design is frequently a core concern on larger scale development projects, it often leads to emotive political debates that engage local elected officials, community groups and businesses (Punter and Carmona 1997).

Strengthening the urban design dimension of a city’s planning system, whether through a focused urban redevelopment effort, such as a waterfront, or via more

citywide changes to planning decision-making, is therefore challenging and complex. Invariably weak institutional arrangements and political and financial instability dominate; plans get delayed or derailed, causing significant urban design shortcuts to be taken (e.g. Sandercock and Dovey 2002; Punter 2007a; Bezmez 2008) and, even when urban design is given preference in the planning decision-making process, it does not necessarily lead to better quality design at the later stages of implementation. As Punter and Carmona (1997) argue, “overall design quality can be and often is sacrificed to achieve other objectives, particularly the desire for any development or job creation in less economically advantaged areas” (1). Ultimately, power in the urban design decision-making process tends to rest with those who assume the greatest financial risk (Carmona 2014).

The guiding concern of this research therefore rests in understanding *who* makes decisions about design, *how* are these decisions made, *what* policy mechanisms and regulatory tools are used and *to what extent* the urban design process actually shapes the physical built environment. Drawing directly from a series of best practice principles for design review and management developed by Punter (2007, 171), and latterly amended by this author (author 2015, 344), the following questions are posed: Is there a clear vision, developed collaboratively with the community, that underpins the pursuit of design excellence, and how is expressed? Is the widest possible range of actors and instruments harnessed to the goal of design excellence, are zoning and planning controls co-ordinated effectively, and are the exclusionary effects of design regulation addressed? Is design reviewed against broad substantive design principles that embrace issues of amenity, accessibility, community, vitality and ecology, and is scope left for individual creativity and innovation? And, are the processes of review transparent, constructively skilled, do the actors in the design control process have the capacity to react to changing market conditions and is administrative discretion management appropriately?

### *1.7 Paper structure*

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: *Section 2* briefly summaries the existing literature on Toronto’s waterfront and looks, in particular, at the period between 1970 and 1999 when the post-industrial future of the waterfront lands first entered the political and public consciousness. Sections 3 to 5 then explore the establishment of a governance regime and the formation of a planning and design vision for the waterfront in the period since 1999. *Section 3* details the two year

period between 1999 and 2000 when the federal, provincial and municipal governments placed responsibility for the waterfront's future in the hands of a private sector-led Task Force and charged it with developing a design-led vision and management strategy for the waterfront. *Section 4* describes the period between late 2000 and 2002 when a tri-government agreement was reached to fund the waterfront redevelopment project and the TWRC was formally established to govern the design and planning process. *Section 5* documents the financial and governance challenges that beset the waterfront corporation between 2002 and 2006 and explores how the involvement of the city's mayor and a comprehensive review of the corporation's management structure impacted the effectiveness of the new corporation to act as 'lead masterplanner' of the waterfront. *Section 6* then turns away from the chronological timeline and identifies the tools and mechanisms established alongside the statutory planning framework to govern for design excellence. The effectiveness of these tools and mechanisms and their impact on design outcomes is then evaluated in the remaining sections of the paper. *Section 7* explores the role of precinct masterplanning as a guiding mechanism for development. *Section 8* evaluates an urban design peer review panel that was established by the TWRC to assess design proposals. And, *Section 9* analysis the role of public participation and engagement in shaping design decisions on the waterfront. In each of these last three sections particular focus is placed on the delivery of new buildings and public spaces in the East Bayfront, one of the key development areas on the waterfront (see Figure 2). Finally, an assessment design governance on Toronto's waterfront and a series of reflections on the future of the waterfront redevelopment programme are presented in *Section 10*.

## **2. A brief history of Toronto's waterfront, 1912-1999**

### *2.1 Introduction*

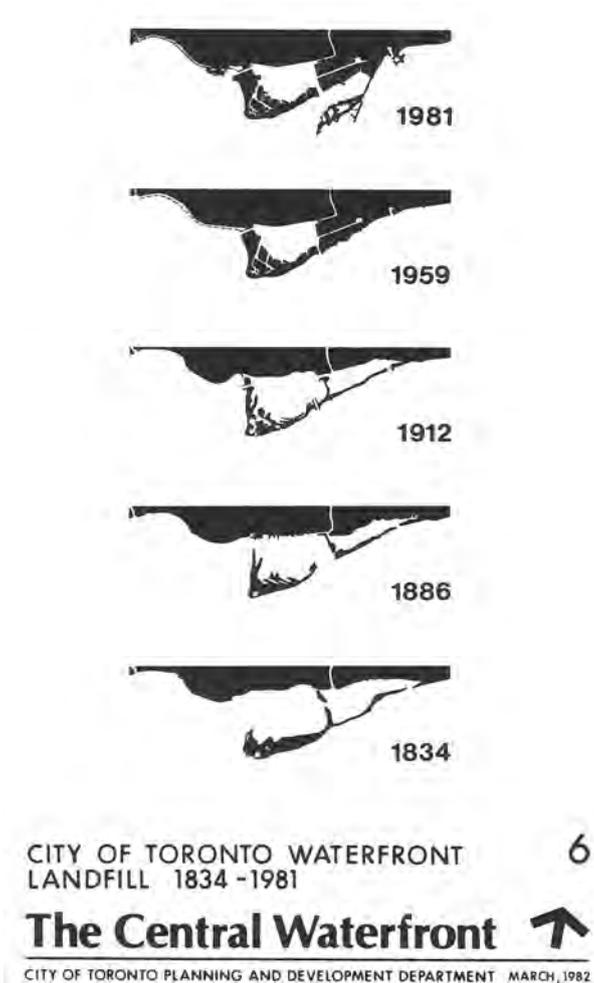
Toronto's waterfront redevelopment has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the years. One of the principal chroniclers of this history has been Gene Desfor, a York University (Canada) scholar who has focused on the impacts of large-scale environmental engineering projects and the contestations that have periodically arisen over land ownership (Desfor 1988; Desfor 1993; Desfor *et al.* 1988; Desfor *et al.* 1989). Desfor's most recent contribution to the literature was a 2011 edited book titled *Reshaping Toronto's Waterfront*, co-edited with Jennefer Laidley. It contains some thirteen chapters by various local authors and examines the legacy of unfulfilled plans, missed opportunities and environment controls that have defined the last 100 hundred years of growth, decline and rebirth on the waterfront. This section draws on these contributions, and others, to briefly chronicle and contextualises the history of planning and design governance on Toronto's waterfront from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 1990s.

### *2.2 Creating a waterfront port*

A federal agency called the Toronto Harbour Commissioners (THC) managed Toronto's waterfront for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Desfor *et al.* 2011). Desfor (1993) describes the THC as a 'hybrid corporation' with typical port agency functions, such as control over major infrastructure projects and landfilling, in conjunction with functions commonly undertaken by a private corporation, like the promotion, development and management of industrial uses on the waterfront. As a result, the THC acted more like a development agency than a port authority for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Merrens 1988) and, soon after it was established, began an aggressive landfill programme that ultimately resulted in the creation of approximately 1,300 acres of new waterfront land (Desfor 1993). The landfilling programme was guided by the corporation's 1912 *Waterfront Plan* (Toronto Harbour Commissioners 1913), which envisioned the transformation of the lakeshore marshes at Ashbridge's Bay (see Figure 1 for location) into a major industrial harbour (see Figure 6). Beginning in the 1880s, a huge swathe of land was created on the Eastern waterfront and, in the 1920s, the natural path of the Don River was replaced with the Keating Channel shipping canal and concrete slip heads were added at the termini of the city's north-south streets for docking purposes. In 1939, the Toronto Island Airport was also

opened by the THC on the Western edge of the waterfront (Desfor 1993; Desfor et al. 2011).

**Figure 5: Landfill activity on Toronto's waterfront**  
(City of Toronto 1982, 14)



This illustration demonstrates the landfilling activity that was conducted by the THC during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most notable is the creation of extensive new lands on the eastern waterfront, located to the south Keating Chanel – the engineered canal at the mouth of the Don River that was constructed during the 1950s. Much of the land south of Keating Channel was never fully developed and remained vacant or underutilised.

The THC focused on attracting industry to the new waterfront lands and creating a stable industrial property market. Yet, in spite of these efforts, the waterfront never really boomed as an industrial district. By 1929, the THC had leased only 29% of the 450 acres of new land it had created for heavy and medium industrial uses on the waterfront (Desfor 1993). Moreover, although its port function saw a modest increase in trade after the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, the amount of annual

tonnage began to decline after the 1970s due to the advent of point-to-point super container ships (Merrens 1988). As industry drifted away from the waterfront during the early 1960s, the waterfront became increasingly under-utilised. By the 1970s, the majority of the lands that had been filled by the THC had become derelict or used for low rent industrial purposes (Laidley 2007).

**Figure 6: Derelict Post-Industrial Land in the East Bayfront**

(Photograph by the author, 2011)



View looking west along Parliament Street towards Queens Quay East and the Corus Building demonstrating the scale and character of the post-industrial land on Toronto's waterfront and the proximity of this land to the city's downtown core (note the CN Tower in the background, approximately 2km away in the Central Waterfront).

*2.3 Post-industrialisation redevelopment visions*

Successive waterfront redevelopment plans were generated during the 1960s and early 1970s by various levels of government, including the THC, as well as private sector landowners (Filion and Sanderson 2011). One of the more ambitious ideas, produced by a consortium of Canadian railway companies, proposed a massive mixed-use office and residential development with a large pyramid acting as its centrepiece (Sewell 1993). Another, called Harbour City and proposed by the region's metropolitan planning commission, suggested that the Toronto Island Airport

be transformed into a 'futuristic' mixed-use neighbourhood (Filion and Sanderson 2011).

**Figure 7: Unrealised Visions for Toronto's Waterfront**

(Images from: Flack, 2010, p. 1)



Project Toronto, proposed by Buckminster Fuller (1964) on land owned by CN and CP railways between the city's downtown core and the waterfront, imagined a mega-structure and tower (now the approximate location of the CN Tower), a waterfront university centred around a pyramid and a series of man-made residential islands in the Inner Harbour.

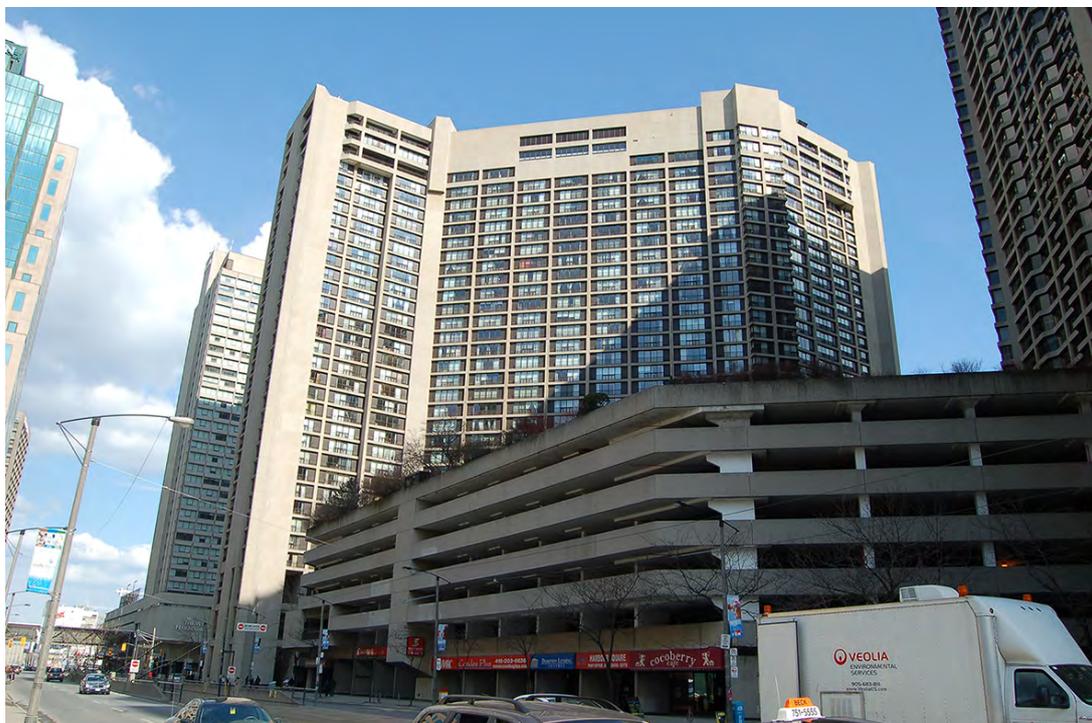


Harbour City was proposed in 1968 and imagined a series of interlinked residential islands on the land that is now occupied by the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport on the western edge of the Central Waterfront.

None of these visionary plans were ever realised, although one proposal made by the federal government did garner a lot of public support. During the 1972 federal election campaign the governing Liberal Party promised to transform 35 hectares of the waterfront into an urban park (Gordon 1994; Filion and Sanderson 2011). While some viewed the proposal as a cynical election ‘gift’ from the Liberals, the federal government argued that it was a much needed response to a large mixed-use office and residential development called Harbour Square that was under construction on the water’s edge (Desfor et al. 1989).

### **Figure 8: Harbour Square**

(Photograph by the author, 2011)



This photograph depicts the Harbour Square development located on Queens Quay Boulevard and overlooking Lake Ontario. Built during the 1970s, Harbour Square was strongly criticised for its size, bulk and relationship with the public realm.

The federal government described the Harbour Square development as the first part of a potential ‘ceramic curtain’ of high-rise buildings along the lakefront and characterised its efforts to construct a public park as saving the waterfront for the citizens of Toronto (Desfor et al. 1989). Despite this assertion, the federal government’s motives remained ambiguous because the Harbour Square development was proposed by a developer with close ties to the THC, itself a federal agency. The THC had given its support to the development because it saw a “golden

opportunity to launch a post-industrial redevelopment strategy and raise badly needed income to subsidise its port and airport operations” (Filion and Sanderson 2011, 83). In addition, pro-development councillors at the City of Toronto had approved the project even though it appeared to go against various emerging plans for the waterfront (ibid.).

#### *2.4 Indecision and inactivity on the waterfront*

The federal government achieved very little on the waterfront during the 1970s and Desfor et al. (1989) record that the period was marked by “indecision and an apparent lack of direction” (496). No progress was made with the park plan and following a drawn out cycle of discussions between politicians from different levels of government, as well as a poorly organised public participation effort, the federal government decided to create a Crown Corporation to directly oversee its waterfront redevelopment efforts (Gordon 1996). The federal government anticipated that the new semi-independent agency, called Harbourfront Corporation, would act like a private sector developer and carry out the government’s mandate more freely and efficiently (Desfor et al. 1989).

In 1978, Harbourfront Corporation released a *Development Framework* that proposed a mixed-use residential and retail scheme with various social housing options, acres of open space, programmed recreation areas and a supporting cultural arts programme to attract visitors to the waterfront (Filion and Sanderson 2011). Although the government provided the corporation with \$25 million in start up costs, it was expected to fund the remainder of its ambitious programme through private sector land sales and development. Industrial land remediation, infrastructure improvements and the cost of running its successful cultural programmes caused expenditures at Harbourfront Corporation to spiral during the early 1980s (Desfor et al. 1989; Gordon 1996). To compensate, the corporation increasingly relied on private sector development projects to cover its operating budget and allowed its development partners to stray from the original urban design framework for the area. Densities increased, the large waterfront park was never realised and the concept of a mixed-use community was replaced with luxury condominiums and high rent commercial office space (Desfor et al. 1989).

**Figure 9: Development on the waterfront during the 1980 and early 1990s**

(Photographs by the author, 2011)



View of Queens Quay Boulevard, the principle waterfront street on Toronto's waterfront, looking east towards Harbour Centre. The form of development approved in the 1980s created a barren and inhospitable public realm with little definition of the street.

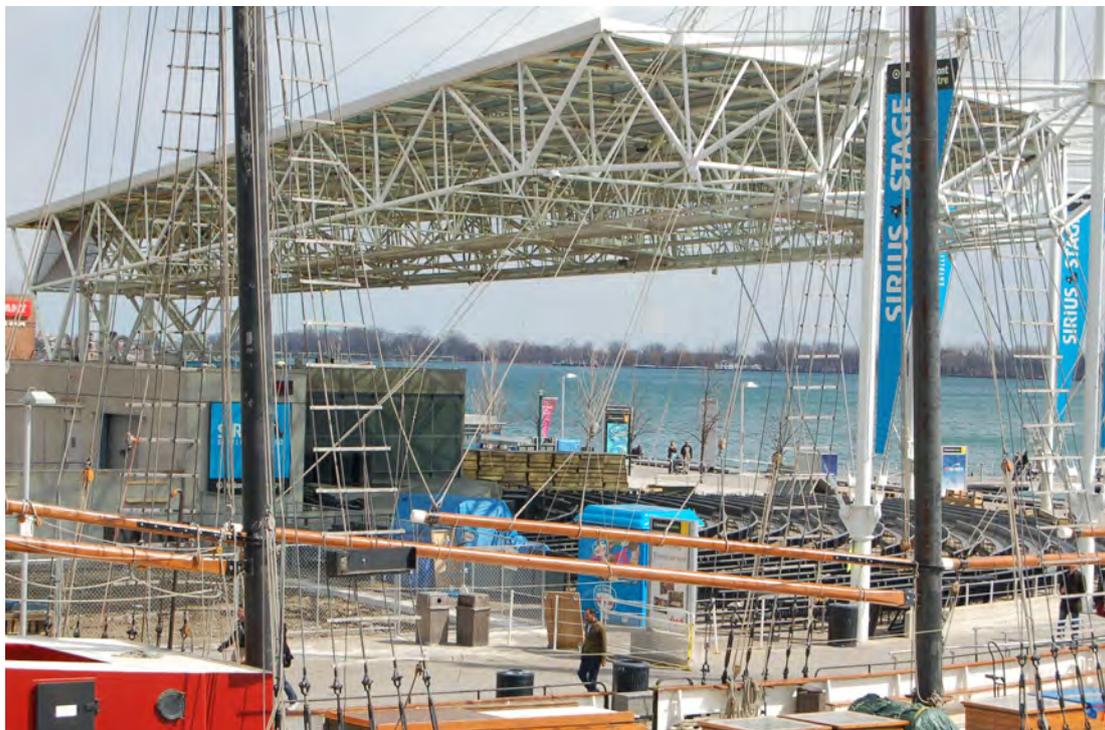


This image shows the Radisson Hotel. The building is accessed from Queens Quay and is typical of the form and style of architecture approved on the waterfront during the 1980s. The heavy concrete colonnade and reflective blue glass give the building an inward-facing appearance.

By the late 1980s the rapidly increasing number of private sector development projects on the waterfront was generating intense public dissatisfaction and, as more high-density towers were constructed, it became clear that the federal government's promise to break the 'ceramic curtain' of buildings on the waterfront would not be met. Recognising that any on-going redevelopment efforts were politically untenable, both the federal government and the City of Toronto placed a moratorium on development and, by 1990, unable to fully fund its cultural programs and carry out its responsibilities for land remediation and infrastructure, the Harbourfront Corporation was formally disbanded (Gordon 1996; Filion and Sanderson 2011). The one surviving element of Harbourfront Corporation is the arts and cultural programme, which operates from a multi-purpose venue on the waterfront. The federal government rebranded this component of the corporation 'Harbourfront Centre' and since 1991 it has operated as a not-for-profit arts venue (Harbourfront Centre 2012) and now incorporates an upgraded public realm that was funded by the federal government and constructed in 2005.

**Figure 10: Harbourfront Centre**

(Photographs by the author, 2013)



The Harbourfront Centre located between Queens Quay Blvd and the Inner Harbour at the foot of Simcoe Street on the Central Waterfront. This image depicts one of the open-air theatre spaces that forms part of the popular complex.



The new water's edge promenade and boardwalk, completed in 2005, uses a palette of simple materials to provide a coherent and elegant scheme that provides various organic spaces for people to use in their own personal way.

### *2.5 The Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront*

The Federal Government replaced the Harbourfront Corporation with a blue ribbon commission called the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront in the late 1980s. David Crombie, a popular former mayor of Toronto who had gained a reputation as an advocate of “reasonable development” (Laidley 2007, 263) during the 1970s, was appointed as commissioner. Following a wide ranging public participation process, the Royal Commission released a report in 1992 titled *Regeneration* (Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront 1992) that argued for an environmentally sensitive, yet economically driven, approach to planning and redevelopment.

With the Commission's work complete, a new Waterfront Trust was established in its place. Crombie stayed on to head the Trust and aimed to move the Royal Commission's vision forward by actively promoting a diversity of uses on the

waterfront (Laidley 2007). The Trust was given a seven-year mandate and hosted numerous public meetings and forums to discuss the future of the waterfront. During this period it successfully reinforced the environmental message that had emerged from the Royal Commission report, yet the Trust had limited power to implement the vision and plans it had developed, primarily because, in 1994, much of the land on the waterfront was transferred from the federal THC to the City of Toronto's Economic Development Corporation (TEDCO) (Filion and Sanderson 2011). Very little development occurred on Toronto's waterfront during the 1990s and progress appeared indefinitely stalled.

**Figure 11: *Regeneration* vision for the Port Lands**

(Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront 1992, 253)



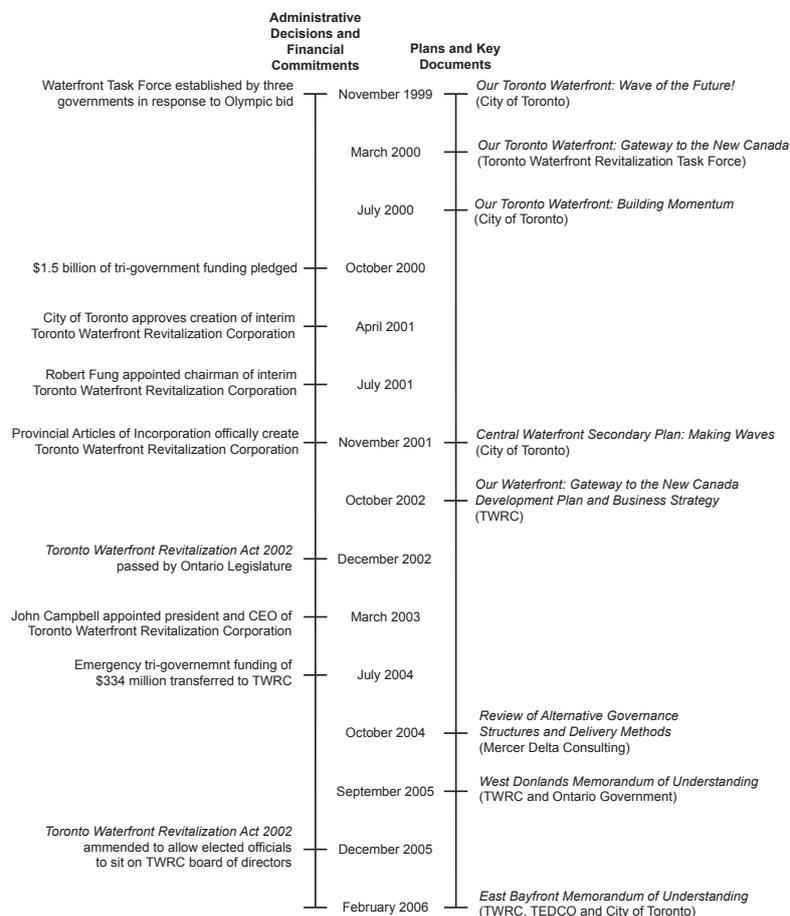
One of the most ambitious ideas contained in the Royal Commission's *Regeneration* report was the proposal to 'renaturalisation' the Don River Mouth. As this visualisation illustrates, the Commission imagined the creation of a wetlands environment with medium-rise development on the water's edge.

### 3. Coordinating a design and management vision for the waterfront, 1999-2000

#### 3.1 Introduction

The following three sections of the paper explore how a design-led waterfront redevelopment process evolved on Toronto's waterfront between 1999 and 2006. This chronology is summarised in Figure 13 (see below), which highlights the planning and design documents, administrative decisions and financial commitments that have shaped the current phase of waterfront development. The announcement and impact of a waterfront-focused bid for the 2008 Olympic Games is catalogued in this first section. The section further evaluates the urban design vision and development management plan produced by a newly-created waterfront Task Force and considers how urban design was conceptualised during the visioning process and how the Task Force's ambitious agenda for the waterfront was to be financed via the creation of a new redevelopment corporation.

**Figure 12: Timeline of decisions and plans for Toronto's waterfront (1999-2006)**  
(Diagram by the author)



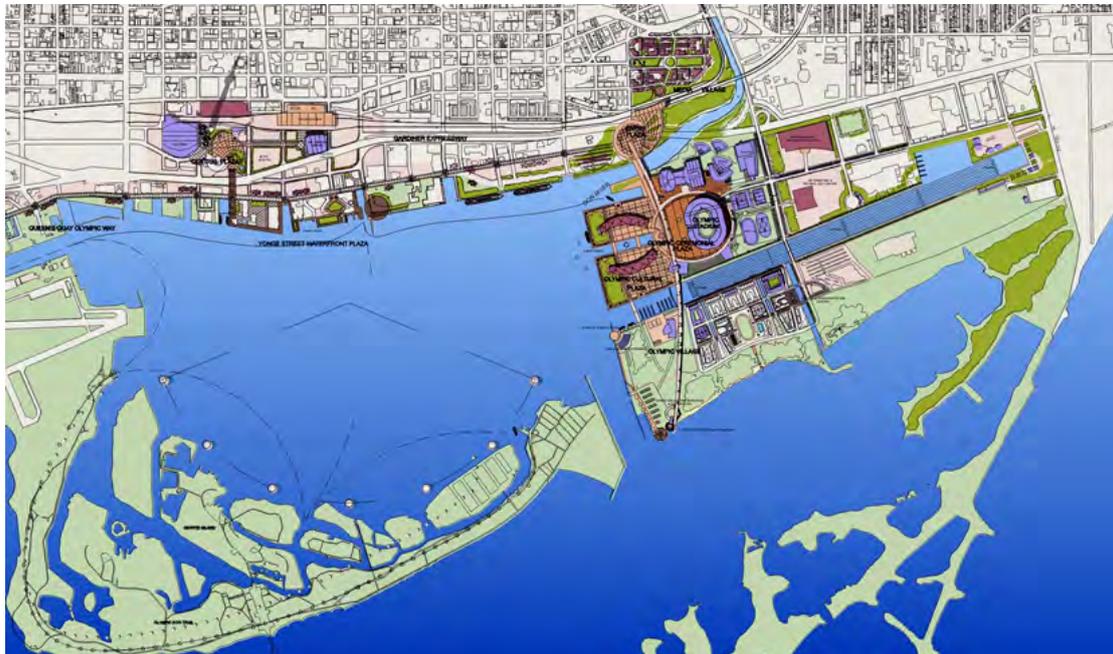
### 3.2 *The Olympic catalyst: creating a Task Force for the waterfront*

The current phase of redevelopment on Toronto's waterfront can be traced to an ultimately unsuccessful bid for the 2008 Olympic Games that was led by a private sector consortium co-chaired by David Crombie soon after he stepped down from his role at the Waterfront Trust. In his research on Toronto's aspirations to be an Olympic Games city, Oliver (2011, 774) notes that Crombie "had spent the better half of his adult life trying to establish a vision for Toronto's waterfront" and, after serving as chair of the Royal Commission and heading the Waterfront Trust, had come to the conclusion that the only way to kick-start redevelopment was to "pursue a mega-project like the Olympic Games" (ibid.) The 2008 bid for the Olympic Games has therefore focused firmly on the waterfront. Crombie stated in 1998 that the bid should principally be about "city building" (in Armstrong 1998, A8) and the connection that he drew between the Olympic bid and Toronto's waterfront proved irresistible to political leaders who saw it as an opportunity to boost the city's international exposure (Lehrer and Laidley 2008; Laidley 2011). The Olympic Master Plan included, not only Olympic infrastructure on the waterfront, but also a commitment to residential development in the eastern Port Lands and the West Don Lands, both of which were seen as crucial to the longer-term waterfront redevelopment initiative (Lorinc 2001; Oliver 2011).

The energy of the Olympic bid brought the federal, provincial and municipal governments together in November 1999 for the unveiling of a City of Toronto report titled *Our Toronto Waterfront: The Wave of the Future!* (City of Toronto 1999) and the announcement of a Waterfront Redevelopment Task Force (Rusk 1999) that was to be charged with refining the City's waterfront vision and reporting to City Council on how much it would cost and how it could be implemented through a public-private partnership (Lehrer and Laidley 2008). Robert Fung, a successful businessman and close friend of both the prime minister and the federal finance minister, Paul Martin, was appointed as chair of the Task Force (TWRC 5 2011).

### Figure 13: Toronto 2008 Olympic Bid Masterplan

(Toronto Olympic Committee, 2001, no page number)



This image shows the initial waterfront masterplan as contained in the 2001 bid document for the waterfront-focused Olympic Games. Central to the plan is the concentration of Olympic infrastructure in the Port Lands and the creation of two new residential districts, one south of the main Olympic stadia (the proposed Athlete's Village) and one to the north at the West Don Lands (the proposed Media Village). It is also interesting to note the continuation of the proposal to 'renaturalise' the Don River, as imagined in the Royal Commission's *Regeneration* report (1992). Plans for the Central Waterfront appear less developed but propose a linear greenway along much of the water's edge.

#### 3.3 Our Toronto Waterfront: *The Wave of the Future!*

*The Wave of the Future!* opened with a 'Disneyesque' tone, proclaiming the waterfront as "The Place Where Magic Begins" and declaring that "Great cities dream great dreams. Great waterfronts make dreams come true" (1999, 1). It emphasised the need for investment from the provincial government and the private sector to realise the City's ambitious vision and set out eight principles for renewal (summarised in Figure 14) that were predicated on an integrated urban design and planning vision for the waterfront – a lesson City planners had drawn from observations of cities in Europe and North America where vacant industrial waterfront land had been successfully transformed into vibrant neighbourhoods and destinations. Crucially, the city's *Wave of the Future* report supported a waterfront-

focused bid for the Olympic Games (Oliver 2011), but although it contained numerous glossy photographs it did not offer any further details on the master planning of the waterfront lands or prospective illustrations. As Oliver observes, the emphasis of the report was more towards "...the lengthy tradition of grandiose waterfront dreaming in the city" (2011, 779). Despite the lack of a masterplan, the document did list a series of environmental, transportation and urban design projects, including the restoration of the mouth of the Don River, removing/relocating the Gardiner expressway, improving Union Station, developing public spaces and major cultural buildings on the Central Waterfront, and transforming the underdeveloped Port Lands district into a mixed-use hub for leading film, 'imagination' and environmental industries.

**Figure 14: Core themes identified in *The Wave of the Future!* principles**

(Summarised from City of Toronto 1999)

**1. Environment**

An environmentally sensitive approach to waterfront renewal that restores wildlife habitats, improves the health of Lake Ontario, supports the removal of an elevated highway and encourages improvements to public transportation on the waterfront.

**2. Urban Design and Planning**

An emphasis on high quality urban design that demands the skills of leading architects and designers and includes a commitment to a "ribbon of green" (11) on the waterfront, linkages across the city, the promotion of mixed-use developments, housing for all needs, and the preservation of historical buildings.

**3. Economy**

An economically viable renewal strategy that encourages job growth, especially in "internationally-competitive imagination industries" (17), and an "Aggressive Tourist Strategy" (21).

**4. Public Engagement**

A recognition that "the waterfront belongs to the people of Toronto" (7) and a subsequent commitment to public engagement and consultation that introduces a series of topic-based advisory groups.

The role envisaged for a new public-private partnership was more clearly defined. The City affirmed that the renewal of Toronto's waterfront would not solely be a government undertaking and recognised that the private sector would be one of the biggest benefactors of waterfront renewal. The report sketched out a partnership that would employ planning and urban design to harness economic development and increase Toronto's global competitive edge by creating "...a 'virtuous cycle' in which new business generates more property taxes, more property taxes lead to better public facilities, better public facilities attract more investment and more investment creates more jobs" (City of Toronto 1999, 7).

Curiously, the Olympic bid, although the catalyst that had brought the three governments together, received scant attention. Towards the beginning of the report, a potential waterfront-orientated Olympic Games was acknowledged but was quickly rendered insignificant in the face of the wider challenge of renewing the waterfront as a public space. Oliver (2011) notes that both the City's chief planner Paul Bedford and the co-chair of the Olympic bid, David Crombie, emphasised that the report was the result of a longer-term planning project. Yet, from a political perspective, the Olympic connection was unavoidable (ibid.). Ending with the proposal to form an intergovernmental task force as the crucial 'next step', the report also outlined the foundations for a future development management strategy. Noting the complexity of land ownership and regulation on the waterfront, it stated the need for the three governments to unify around a shared vision and avoid repeating the "jurisdictional gridlock" (City of Toronto 1999, 27) that had plagued previous waterfront endeavours, by creating a government-owned corporation with a transparent governance structure, a series of core responsibilities and the powers to manage the coordination of the public lands on the waterfront.

#### *3.4 Robert Fung and the Task Force players*

Initially, the choice of Robert Fung as chair of the Waterfront Redevelopment Task Force appears unusual. Fung was a corporate financier and investment expert and had no planning and urban design experience. The rationale for appointing Fung becomes clearer, however, when understood in the context of the political climate. Elected on conservative platforms, the Ontario premier, Mike Harris, and Toronto's mayor, Mel Lastman, were sympathetic to neoliberal policies and aggressively moulded Toronto as a pro-business competitive global city (Kipfer and Keil 2002). This ideological position impacted the tone of the City of Toronto's *Wave of the Future!* report, which, by promoting closer ties between the public and private sectors, had set the foundation for a corporate waterfront renewal. In addition, the bid for the Olympics was, as mentioned earlier, a private-sector endeavour that was supported, rather than led, by government (Laidley 2011).

Bringing Robert Fung on as chair of the waterfront Task Force fused the link between the public and private sector and, as one of his close advisors at the time admits, Fung "...had the ability to walk into each of their offices [prime minister, premier and mayor], which made a huge difference at Queen's Park [the seat of the Ontario

provincial government], a huge difference in Ottawa, and to some extent, the City” (TWRC 8 2011). Commenting on his suitability for the position, the advisor reflects:

He was not an urban designer. He just came clean. What he brought to the table was that he knew Canada well and he knew the world well because he travelled. He travels the world on a continual basis on global business. He had the confidence of the prime minister, he had the confidence of the premier and he had the confidence of the mayor (TWRC 8 2011).

Fung was given a few short months to construct his Task Force and produce a costed blueprint for the redevelopment scheme based on the City’s aspirational *Wave of the Future!* report (Rusk 1999). Acknowledging his own shortcomings in planning and urban design management, he sought the advice of developers he knew in the business community including Paul Reichmann of Olympia and York, the Toronto development company that planned and built Canary Wharf in London during the 1980s. Drawing on Reichmann’s advice, Fung assembled a formidable design team headed by Anthony Coombes, an experienced planner and urban designer who had served as chief planner for the Toronto Central Area during the mid-1970s before going to work for Paul Reichmann at Olympia and York as vice president of development. In this role, Coombes oversaw the design, planning and development of Canary Wharf and the World Financial Center in New York (Neptis Foundation 2009). Supporting Coombes were a group of like-minded urban designers with similar exposure to high-profile master planned projects, including: Joe Berridge of the Toronto-based firm Urban Strategies, Michael Kirkland of The Kirkland Partnership, also based in Toronto, and Fred Koetter of New York urban design firm Koetter Kim.

### *3.5 Our Toronto Waterfront: Gateway to the New Canada*

In March 2000 the Task Force released its report, titled *Our Toronto Waterfront: Gateway to the New Canada* (Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Task Force 2000). Known colloquially as ‘the Fung report’, it outlined an urban design vision and strategic management plan for the waterfront. Like the *Wave of the Future!*, the Fung report adopted a promotional tone and situated Toronto within a group of ‘elite world cities’ acting as economic gateways for their respective countries and competing for

economic dominance (Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Task Force 2000). It singled-out Toronto's waterfront as a spatial enabler: an untapped resource where the future economic viability of the city could be won or lost. "Toronto alone," the report intoned, "...has been virtually inert compared to its sister cities, who are inevitably its competitors" (14). The planning and design vision for the waterfront contained in the Fung report offered a more nuanced and urbane masterplan than the one presented in the Olympic bid document (see Figure 13) and also augmented the broad vision that had been sketched out in *The Wave of the Future!* via six development initiatives (summarised in Figure 15).

### **Figure 15: Six major development initiatives**

(Summarised from: Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Task Force 2000)

#### **1. Building a Waterfront for Public Enjoyment**

Producing a "...place to play, work and live" (29) by developing mixed-use communities that will accommodate 100,000 new residents and 25,000 new jobs, creating a 'green border' (29) along the water's edge that includes parks, boulevards, piers and promenades, reserving over 180 hectares of land as park space, especially in the Outer Harbour and coordinating development through master planning and other regulatory measures so that a coherent public realm is realized and an appropriate scale and character is achieved.

#### **2. Accommodating Business, Employment and New Economy**

Recognising that "...competition for the entrepreneurs and workers of the new economy is fierce and will only increase" (32), by extending *The Wave of the Future* report's call for a high-tech industrial cluster in the Port Lands and creating a new 'Convergence Centre' district, that would "...help Toronto more fully realize opportunities for interaction between the new media and the new high-technology and knowledge-based economy" (49).

#### **3. Development Comprehensive Transportation Networks**

Achieving an "...integrated and comprehensive system of streets and public transportation" (33) by reconfiguring the waterfront's street system to account for major highway removal (see Development Initiative 5), transforming existing waterfront streets into 'traversable urban boulevards' (34), supporting the potential expansion of Toronto's streetcar network into new waterfront projects, encouraging cycle usage through design and supporting the expansion of the city's rapid transportation infrastructure through improvements to Union Station.

#### **4. Providing a Clean Environment**

Encompassing strategies to address the environmental challenges of waterfront redevelopment into future plans by supporting existing initiatives to improve the water quality of the Don River and the Inner Harbour, remediating contaminated soils on former industrial lands to facilitate redevelopment, mitigating the potential for flooding through environmental engineering measures, including the construction of a berm and strongly supporting the Waterfront Regeneration Trust's and TO-Bid's efforts to re-naturalize the mouth of the Don River.

## **5. Reconfiguring and Integrating the Gardiner Expressway Corridor**

Defining the removal of the Gardiner Expressway as a primary objective for the future of the waterfront, both “practically and symbolically” (37) and supporting this objective by establishing that removal would be cost effective, demonstrating that it could be achieved without causing major disruption to existing transportation networks and offering a redistribution solution and ground-level redesign that “removes its sterilizing influence, eliminates the debilitating effect of the overhead structure, allows attractive new neighbourhoods, improves access to the core, provides important new waterfront streets and unifies, rather than divides, Toronto with its waterfront” (39).

## **6. Creating a Waterfront for the 2008 Olympic Games**

Amplifying the modicum of support offered by the City of Toronto for the 2008 Olympic Bid in the *Wave of the Future!* report by supporting the infrastructure needs of the Games on the waterfront, including a proposal for an Athlete’s Village and multiple stadia, arguing that the Olympics would “provide a powerful additional impetus for revitalization efforts and a definitive timeline” and addressing the role Olympic stadia, and other sports facilities, could play in the waterfront’s post-Olympic future.

For Robert Fung, the most important idea in the report was the role of the New Economy. He envisioned the waterfront as a catalyst for improving Canada’s standing in the global marketplace, defining it as *the* place for innovative business growth in Toronto. Fung concluded that Canada had an acute need to diversify its trade portfolio by increasing its global reach and reducing its reliance on cross-border commerce with the United States (TWRC 8 2011). The six development initiatives also supported the report’s more thoroughgoing masterplan. As shown in Figure 16, the masterplan envisaged an almost seamless integration of the waterfront with the existing urban form of Toronto. Despite the inclusion of Olympic infrastructure, the plan focused on the creation of a robust street grid and a publically-accessible linear edge (see Figure 17) – a stark contrast to other similar waterfront projects in North American and European cities that had tended towards celebratory flagship projects such as aquariums, art galleries and other cultural attractions (Harvey 1991; Smyth 1994) to undergird wider redevelopment and regeneration. The Task Force’s plan aimed, instead, to ‘stitch’ the city and the waterfront together using traditional urban blocks and pedestrian-scaled streets and spaces. As one of the authors explains, “It was essentially bringing the city to the water and recognising that urbanising the waterfront was the correct response to the Toronto situation” (TORONTO 8 2011). The design team had many discussions about whether the waterfront should be turned into a large Chicago-style lakefront public park, but instead proposed that the city’s streets be extended to a water’s edge promenade, a design objective that was well-supported by the plan to remove the Gardiner Expressway.

**Figure 16: The Central Waterfront Development Concept**

(Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Task Force 2000, 43-44)



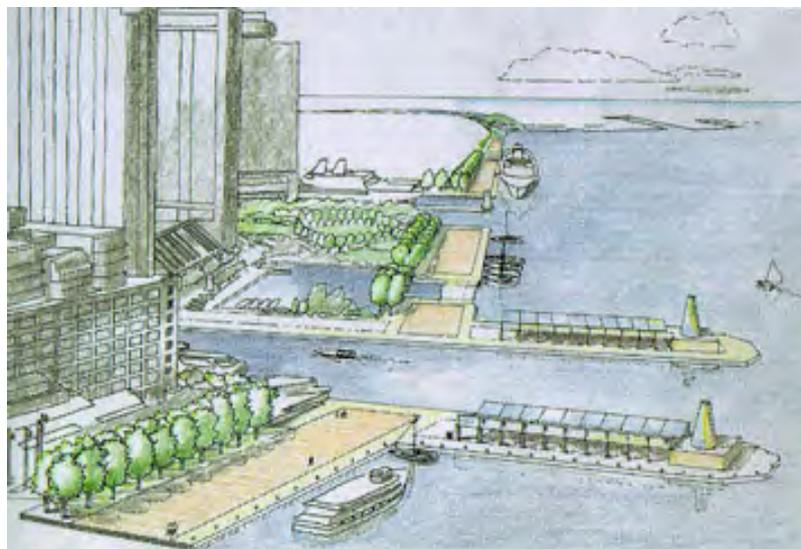
The development concept for the Central Waterfront proposed an integrated urban design response. The masterplan imagines a continuation of the Toronto urban grid to the waterfront and continues the commitment to a linear park space along much of the waterfront shoreline as proposed in the Olympic bid document. The proposal to re-naturalise the Don River at Keating Chanel also remains, but significant changes have been made to the area around the main Olympic sites in the Port Lands to reduce the impact of large-scale infrastructure and to highlight how the area might appear after the Games. Critical to the achievement of the overall design vision, yet not immediately obvious due to the soft colour tones used in the production of the masterplan, is the removal of the Gardiner Expressway along the Central Waterfront.

Using streets and blocks to reconnect the city with the waterfront was not a new idea, however. Since the late 1970s, this concept had been firmly established in planning statements both for the waterfront and the adjacent Railway Lands (e.g. City of Toronto 1978), which sit in-between the financial district and the Central Waterfront (see Figure 3). The City of Toronto's 1983 proposal document for the Central Waterfront, for example, stated "the Central Waterfront is a valuable resource which should be used and developed in ways that benefit the public and bring the City and its waterfront closer together" (City of Toronto 1982, 13). For implementation purposes, the Task Force's development concept also outlined how individual projects could be distributed and configured along the waterfront in manageable

chunks. Six major planning precincts with varying design characteristics were identified: The Central Harbour, The Port Lands, The Mouth of the Don River, The West Don Lands, Garrison Common and Exhibition District. The development precinct concept was also recycled, again from the 1982 City of Toronto proposal document for the Central Waterfront, which divided the waterfront into seven similar 'districts'. The design language of the six precincts is discussed in more depth in Section 8.

**Figure 17: Detailed visions for the waterfront**

(Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Task Force 2000, p. 45 (top), p. 47 (middle) and p. 49 (bottom))



In this conceptual sketch of the Central Waterfront, the concept of a linear waterfront public space is emphasised as a method to soften the negative impact of previous high-rise development, such as the Harbour Square towers, which are illustrated in the background of the image.





Conceptual Plan of the Port Lands Precinct  
(not to scale)

- Key:**
- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Waterfront parks       | 6. Cherry Beach District |
| 2. Landmark site          | 7. Outer Harbour         |
| 3. East Harbour District  | 8. New Lakeshore Bridge  |
| 4. Olympic Aquatic Centre | 9. Grand Channel         |
| 5. Olympic Stadium        | 10. Convergence Centre   |
|                           | 11. Lake Ontario Park    |

The imagined masterplan (below) streetscapes (above) for the Port Lands reinforce the broader urban design concept illustrated in the waterfront master plan. The images suggest that the precinct will be a walkable neighbourhood defined by an urban grid structure and perimeter building blocks. The substantial Olympic stadium sits within the grid structure and is defined, not by itself, but by a linear public plaza reminiscent of a classical amphitheatre. At street level, the public realm is reinforced by taller buildings located at strategic corners and by ground floor retail on the principal waterfront boulevard.

Turning to the management strategy, the Fung report called for a private sector-like corporation to be created that would be endowed with a series of government powers to enable private sector development. The Task Force's primary requests were that it should be given the powers to operate a streamlined and simplified planning system and have the capacity to raise finances independently. These requests were supported by a bold financial concept. The Fung report estimated that the infrastructure costs for the entire project, including the removal of the Gardiner Expressway, stood at \$5.2 billion, while the cost of associated private development projects would come in at \$7 billion. This generated a combined total of \$12.2 billion to implement the entire vision. Proposing that the public sector cover the infrastructure component, the report outlined a number of methods that the three governments could use to generate the required revenues, including: road tolling, a

downtown parking surcharge, a waterfront casino and land sales/leases. Proposals that, ultimately, never came to pass.

### *3.6 Making the case for a waterfront redevelopment corporation*

The Task Force's proposed governance model attracted the most scrutiny from politicians and the press. In the *Toronto Star* business columnist David Crane (2000) questioned the corporation's ability to be transparent and accountable to Torontonians when in control of so much public money. Jack Layton, a Toronto city councillor for the Don River ward, was reported to have stated: "I want this to be the people's corporation, not a corporation of three or four guys who've dealt with lots of money all their lives and know how to move pieces around on a Monopoly board" (quoted in DeMara 2000, no page number). At the same time, however, the design vision and management plan contained in the Fung report did garner powerful support, both in other quarters of the press and from City of Toronto planning officials. A former senior planning manager at the City of Toronto recalls that the report "spelled out some refreshing new ideas and approaches to rethinking the waterfront" (TORONTO 8 2011) and noted that the proposal for a 'Toronto Waterfront Redevelopment Corporation' should be welcomed because it aimed to bring all three level of government together. Writing in *The Globe and Mail*, David Gordon (2000) who, as a planning academic, had published research on waterfront redevelopment efforts in both New York and Toronto, supported Fung's assertion that the most important proposition in the Task Force report was the operational concept and its call for an independent corporation. He thought that "...the key financial strategy is not big cash grants, but granting the agency the power to borrow money, lease assets, and recover revenue from tolls and taxes" (A17). Gordon argued that the new waterfront corporation should have the power to hire the best employees possible and not be required to rely on government staff seconded from other government agencies or departments.

Fung and other Task Force executives also embarked on a promotional drive to sell their urban design vision and waterfront redevelopment strategy to the general public, politicians and the private sector. During the spring and summer of 2000, they conducted a number of press interviews, speeches and public open houses. Fung addressed multiple interest groups, including a joint forum of the Canadian Urban Institute and the Toronto Board of Trade (Lewington 2000a) and a high-profile public lecture at Toronto's Winter Garden Theatre (Barber 2000). The forums, notably

conducted after the report had been written, were used to highlight the role that urban design would play as a tool to attract new employers and professional employees to live and work on the waterfront. The six new precinct neighbourhoods were cast as exciting, vibrant enclaves replete with premium commercial services all within close proximity to the city's corporate downtown core.

### 3.7 Our Toronto Waterfront: Building Momentum

The Task Force's vision received its first official endorsement in July 2000, when Toronto City Council voted to approve an in-house staff analysis of the Task Force's vision (City of Toronto 2000). The City's report supported the Task Force's waterfront urban design vision and redevelopment strategy, but with some important reservations (City of Toronto 2000a). City planners were pleased that Fung's Task Force had been guided by the City's *Wave of the Future!* report and supported its commitment to make the waterfront a nexus for Toronto's global economy by endorsing the aim to use both the public realm and real estate development to attract innovative New Economy investors and jobs to the waterfront (City of Toronto 2000a).

The planners also stressed the many consistencies between the Task Force's urban design objectives and the City's latest *Official Plan* (City of Toronto 2002), which aimed to promote citywide urban design principles and encourage high quality development rather than list detailed policies and regulations as had characterised previous iterations of the plan. This change in approach was led by the City of Toronto's planning director, Paul Bedford, who was keen to see a performance-based, visionary policy plan that challenged existing approaches to development and proposed new ideas for the city. Although the controversial proposal to remove the Gardiner Expressway was characterised as a bold idea, it too was supported. The City suggested that the Task Force and the City conduct further comprehensive impact analyses of the highway and transportation reconfiguration proposals to develop the idea further. The report also proposed that the City planning department begin work on an expedited 'secondary plan'<sup>2</sup> process for the Central Waterfront that would align with the time constraints demanded by the Olympic Bid and build upon

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<sup>2</sup> Secondary plans, or Part II Plans as they are also known in Toronto, are statutory planning documents that accompany the citywide *Official Plan* and provide detailed policies and principles for specific districts or neighbourhoods in the city. Producing a secondary plan is the responsibility of the City of Toronto. However, they are often produced in consultation with the landowner(s), especially if large-scale development is planned.

community feedback that had been collected by the Task Force shortly after its report was published (City of Toronto 2000a).

The Task Force's supporting financial concept was also evaluated by City planners. The report concluded that it was generally sound and could be achieved through the various financial measures proposed, including road tolling and the possible development of a casino. However, concerned about risk and liability, City staff emphasised that a financial commitment from the provincial and federal governments was imperative if the overall project was to have long-term viability. The City could not go it alone. Finally, City staff turned their attention to the Task Force's proposal for an independent, 'business-like' corporation and outlined a number of reservations about the proposed devolution of powers, asking "What responsibility lies with the municipality and what responsibility lies with the new waterfront development governing body?" (80). Not finding a satisfactory answer in the Task Force's operational concept, City staff recommended that additional work commence between the three governments to establish whether a corporate-style management body was the correct choice for Toronto. The report stressed the need for a 'made in Toronto' model that would address the accountability of the waterfront governing body, its financial structure and its ability to make sound decisions quickly with necessary public input. Although the City of Toronto did not offer its complete support for the corporation Fung envisaged, the Council vote in July 2000 gave politicians and City staff the green light to commence detailed discussions with the province and the federal governments about the scope of a waterfront governance body. It also gave the City's planning department the blessing they needed to begin work on the new secondary plan for the Central Waterfront.

## **4. Establishing a planning framework and management structure for the waterfront, 2000 - 2002**

### *4.1 Introduction*

Section 4 focuses on the period between late 2000 and 2002 when various steps were taken by the federal, provincial and municipal governments to enact the vision and management proposals developed for the waterfront in 1999 and early 2000. The section outlines a funding commitment made by the three governments in 2000 and explores the subsequent decision to establish a corporation called the Toronto Waterfront Revitalisation Corporation (TWRC) to implement the design and planning vision for the waterfront. The section also documents the form, content and reception of the City of Toronto's official planning framework for the waterfront that was released to coincide with the creation of the waterfront corporation.

### *4.2 \$1.5 billion for waterfront revitalisation*

In October 2000, the federal, provincial and municipal governments made a shared \$1.5bn funding pledge for the waterfront (Byres and Greenwood 2000; City of Toronto 2001), with each level of government contributing \$500 million to the Task Force's redevelopment programme. The governments hoped that this promise would send a clear signal to the International Olympic Committee that Toronto was serious about being a host city for the 2008 games (Reguly 2000). However, the amount fell far short of that envisaged by Fung and the Task Force. They had estimated that a public sector commitment of at least \$5 billion was required (Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Task Force 2000) and were concerned that the money might be apportioned to projects associated with the Olympic bid rather than the broader redevelopment vision and management strategy.

The Task Force's concern about the nature of the funding pledge were confirmed early the following year when the three governments jointly announced that the first \$300 million of their shared contributions would be used to fund four Olympic bid priority projects: extending Front Street, expanding platforms and passenger corridors at the Union Subway Station, completing the first phase of environmental remediation on the Port Lands and carrying out an environmental assessment of the Don River mouth proposal (City of Toronto 2001).

### *4.3 Formation of the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation*

A month later, at the end of April 2001, Toronto City Council approved the formation of an interim 'Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation' (City of Toronto 2001a) and in July the three governments jointly nominated Robert Fung as the corporation's first chair (Rusk 2001). Remarkably, Fung's nomination occurred only two weeks after Toronto ultimately lost out to Beijing in its bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games (Lewington 2001). For supporters of the Task Force this proved a pivotal moment in the saga of Toronto's waterfront redevelopment because the three governments had kept to their promise and ultimately supported the ambitious project despite the disappointing Olympics result. Articles of Incorporation for the new TWRC were drawn up in 2001 and approved via an act of the provincial legislature in December 2002 (Eidelman 2011). However, while Fung had achieved his goal of establishing a dedicated organisation to implement his Task Force's ideas, it was not the *independent* corporation he had championed.

The federal and provincial governments shared the City's concerns about the power of a fully independent corporation (see Section 3) and decided not to relinquish total control of the waterfront planning process to such a body (Oliver 2011). Therefore, the provincial act of incorporation did not actually award the TWRC with the power to implement the mandate handed to it by the three governments (Eidelman 2011). Under the legislation, the waterfront corporation was unable to make decisions about land and financing, including mortgaging, buying land, or borrowing money, without the separate permission of all three levels of governments. Specifically, the Act required the TWRC to seek its funding via contribution agreements one project at a time, which has left it "financially vulnerable to bureaucratic delays (Eidelman 2011, 278). Senior corporation officials share Eidelman's conclusions and, as one recalls, "We got the money, but we never got any authority....So, the land was never controlled by us, but in our enabling legislation we are identified as the master developer, so one would think we should have been the master developer (TWRC 3 2011). The powers requested by the Task Force were not dissimilar to those awarded to the Toronto Harbour Commissioners by the federal government in the early twentieth century (see Section 2) and the three levels of government agreed that it would be political untenable to create such a powerful organisation again (Oliver 2011). The City of Toronto, in particular, was eager to avoid losing control of the waterfront planning process to an agency of the provincial and federal government.

#### 4.4 Making Waves: A planning framework for Toronto's waterfront

To coincide with the formation of the TWRC, the City of Toronto released a secondary plan for the waterfront in October 2001. Titled "Making Waves: Principles for Building Toronto's Waterfront" the plan was written in partnership with the Task Force and thus tied together the planning work conducted in the *Wave of the Future!*, the Fung report, the *Building Momentum* document and the Olympic bid. As a core component of Toronto's plan hierarchy and a 'Part II' component of the City of Toronto *Official Plan (2002)*, *Making Waves* provided the new corporation with a legal basis for waterfront redevelopment. Albeit very similar to the Task Force's vision for the waterfront, *Making Waves* did mark a radical departed from the format of previous secondary plans produced by the City of Toronto. To fulfil the objectives of the citywide *Official Plan*, secondary plans had traditionally prescribed very detailed land use regulations and invariably listed planning and urban design stipulations for each land parcel in the secondary plan area together with simple interpretive maps.

To compliment the wider changes to the *Official Plan*, described in Section 3, the City was determined to move away from this format and produce a more visionary performance-based plan that would facilitate the TWRC's redevelopment process rather than directly control it (TORONTO 8 2011). *Making Waves* was thus a glossy and colourful publication complete with photography, visionary plans and three-dimensional visualisations (see Figures 18 and 20). In much the same way as the *Wave of the Future!* and the Fung report, *Making Waves* had the feel of a marketing brochure for the waterfront rather than a municipal regulatory document; the familiar language of urban competition had been transported into the plan's opening statements and there was little to no alteration to the urban design vision and strategy tendered by the Task Force.

## Figure 18: *Making Waves* Public Realm Plan

(City of Toronto 2001, 38-39)



The public realm plan was broadly similar to the development concept outlined in the Fung report (see Figure 16). The commitments to a linear waterfront public space, the renaturalisation of the Don River and the removal of the Gardiner Expressway were all retained. The Olympic infrastructure proposed for the Port Lands were removed (following the failed bid) and detailed neighbourhood block configurations were no longer provided for the East Bayfront, West Don Lands and the Port Lands. This suggests that further detailed design work was to be reserved for the subsequent precinct planning processes.

### *4.5 Principles for Building Toronto's Waterfront*

The secondary plan outlined the planning and urban design implementation strategy that was to be carried out by the City of Toronto in partnership with the newly created TWRC. Four 'Core Principles' sat at the heart of the plan and condensed the six development initiatives identified in the Fung report (see Figure 15). These principles were outlined in conjunction with a series of 'Big Moves' that were identified as the key ways to realise the vision for the waterfront (City of Toronto 2001). The 'Big Moves' made reference to specific streets and sites along the waterfront and used visualisation tools to demonstrate how different proposals might be achieved. The goal was to show the depth of the public sector's commitment to the waterfront and to assure the private sector that the waterfront was a safe, and even formidable, investment opportunity (see Figure 19).

## **Figure 19: Central Waterfront Core Principles and Big Moves**

(Summarised from: City of Toronto 2001, 23-45)

### **1. Removing Barriers/Making Connections**

Bringing Toronto to the waterfront by removing barriers and reconnecting “the city with Lake Ontario and the lake with the city” (24). Six ‘Big Moves’ proposed:

- (A1) Redesigning the Gardiner corridor and removing elevated expressway when improvements to other networks completed;
- (A2) Extending and improving the existing public transportation network;
- (A3) Reimagining Lake Shore Boulevard as a generously landscaped boulevard;
- (A4) Creating a scenic Waterfront Drive along Queen’s Quay;
- (A5) Completing the Waterfront Trail that along Lake Ontario; and
- (A6) Enforcing the unique identity of historic corridors on the waterfront.

### **2. Building a Network of Spectacular Waterfront Parks and Public Spaces**

Recognising the importance of public spaces on the waterfront and promoting it as a destination for local people, tourists and businesses alike. Ten ‘Big Moves’ proposed, including:

- (B7) Reserving the Water’s Edge for public use;
- (B10) Crating a new waterfront park at East Bayfront;
- (B11) Creating a scenic greenway through the Port Lands to link existing parks; and,
- (B13) Transforming the existing Port Lands Ship Canal into a powerful focus point;

### **3. Promoting a Clean and Green Environments**

Aiming to achieve a “high level of environmental health in the Central Waterfront” (40) and creating sustainable waterfront communities. Three ‘Big Moves’ proposed:

- (C17) Promoting sustainable modes of transportation;
- (C18) Constructing a flood protection berm to protect the West Don Lands; and,
- (C19) Renaturalising the Mouth of the Don River.

### **4. Creating Dynamic and Diverse New Communities**

Creating communities that will one day be “acclaimed for their high degree of social, economic, natural and environmental health and cultural vibrancy” (44). Four ‘Big Moves’ proposed:

- (D20) Opening up the Port Lands for redevelopment to support the New Economy;
- (D21) Redevelop the West Don Lands into a mix-used community;
- (D22) Transform the East Bayfront into a prominent waterfront community;
- (D23) Expand Exhibition Place into a dynamic destination that includes housing and employment space.

Adopting the Task Force’s term ‘precincts’ to identify areas of opportunity on the waterfront, *Making Waves* also detailed a series of strategic ‘precinct plans’ that would sit below the secondary plan. Discussed in more detail in Section 7, the

precinct plans were a new tool in the City of Toronto planning hierarchy, and were described in the following terms:

The precinct development strategies will deal with street and block patterns and building heights, urban design, community services and facilities including schools and local parks, and a strategy for achieving affordable housing targets in the Central Waterfront. The precinct development strategies will also address business relocation requirements and financing options (City of Toronto 2001, 21).

Reflecting the sentiment of the tri-government agreement and clearly marking the boundaries between the City and the corporation, the *secondary plan* stated that the City remained the approving planning authority on the waterfront, while the new corporation would be responsible for producing a business plan that reflected the planning and design vision in the plan.

**Figure 20: *Making Waves* detailed design proposals**

(City of Toronto 2001, extracted from pages 23-46)



Three-dimensional computer visualisations were used in the *Making Waves* secondary plan to illustrate the Core Principles and 'Big Moves'. The image above illustrates the potential boulevard street environment that would be created on Lakeshore Boulevard should the Gardiner Expressway be removed from above it.



This view of the Port Lands Ship Canal proposes a mid-rise neighbourhood in the Port Lands with a central 'scenic greenway'. The mid-rise block forms are similar to those proposed in the Fung report (see Figure 17).



This view of the East Bayfront illustrates one of the 'Big Moves' and proposes that much of the site at the water's edge be reserved for public space (both exterior and interior), with medium rise buildings facing an upgraded Queens Quay.

#### 4.6 *The release of Making Waves and its reception*

Like the Task Force report before it, *Making Waves* was well received by the press. The *Toronto Star* remarked that "City planners did get it right. Their report...lays a solid foundation for the creation of a waterfront that will be open, accessible and inviting to all residents" and went on to conclude that the plan reaffirmed "the important principle that Toronto Council have authority over planning decisions" (2001, A26). Planning and urban design professions also applauded the secondary plan. In May 2002, the Canadian Institute of Planners presented the City of Toronto with its 'Award of Excellence' citing the plan's innovation, potential and presentation (Canadian Institute of Planners 2011) and, later that same year, the international Waterfront Center bestowed their prestigious '2002 Excellence on the Waterfront Award' upon the City (The Waterfront Center 2011).

#### 4.7 *Opportunities for public consultation and review*

After a period of public consultation and review, the secondary plan was adopted by Toronto's City Council in April 2003 (City of Toronto 2003). Lehrer and Laidley (2008) highlight that the City of Toronto undertook only a limited amount of public consultation during the secondary plan process and, much like the public forums convened after the publication of the Fung report, the opportunities for genuine public input were minimal. A community leader with a long history of involvement in

waterfront consultation on Toronto's waterfront recalls that "we were presented with a draft plan. It was written. It was done. You could comment on it, but really: how much was going to be changed?" (CIVIL 2 2011). Using Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Citizen Participation' (1969), Lehrer and Laidley characterise the consultation efforts that took place as 'tokenistic' and argue that the City chose to sell the Task Force's ambitious scheme to the community via the secondary plan process rather than directly involve members of the public in its creation (2008). In a separate paper, Laidley (2011) goes further and argues that the publication of *Making Waves* caused the lines between the private sector Task Force and the public planning process for the waterfront to blur because many of the same authors worked on the Fung report and the secondary plan, meaning that the content was, in effect, translated from document to document. Laidley's assessment is confirmed by the recollections of senior Task Force designers and a senior planning manager at the City of Toronto, all three of whom worked on the report. The planning manager openly admits that, "I saw an opportunity to take those ideas and translate them into principles" (TORONTO 8 2011), while one of the Task Force urban designers dogmatically asserts that the City of Toronto "...produced a secondary plan that accorded with the book [the Fung report]" (TWRC 5 2011). "It was a communal effort to put that thing together" (DESIGN 10 2011), remembers the other Task Force urban designer.

## **5. A faltering start for waterfront design and redevelopment, 2002 - 2006**

### *5.1 Introduction*

With the planning framework and management structure for the waterfront in place, work began on implementing the vision for the waterfront. Yet, as Section 5 now documents, a series of financial and political struggles faced the newly created TWRC between 2002 and 2006. The section therefore pays particular attention to the limitations of the TWRC's governance model and the supporting funding mechanisms that were established by the three governments to support its endeavours. It examines how the corporation narrowly avoided bankruptcy and sought a comprehensive review of its governance structure to avert further such crises. The section also notes the close attention that the City of Toronto's new mayor paid to the operations of the TWRC, and examines how his mayoralty became a central part of the city's waterfront redevelopment story.

### *5.2 Beginning the process of waterfront planning and management*

The TWRC produced a comprehensive *Development Plan and Business Strategy* in 2002 that laid out a five-year implementation plan. This reiterated the familiar themes of global competition and the New Economy, as well as stating a clear objective to pursue design excellence on the waterfront by realising the ambitious proposals contained in the secondary plan and the Fung report. It also outlined the projects that would be tackled in the first five years, including: producing precinct plans for all areas of the waterfront, beginning the first phase of construction on the East Bayfront precinct, developing a centre for the New Economy in the Port Lands and undertaking the four short term infrastructure projects that had been singled out by the three governments in their initial \$300 million funding allowance – despite the fact these projects had originally been tied to the now-defunct Olympic bid. The noticeable omission from the list of priority projects was the Gardiner Expressway, which was reserved for further study due to on-going political concerns about its potential removal.

In March 2003, the day-to-day task of running the TWRC and delivering on its ambitious redevelopment agenda was placed in the hands of a real estate executive called John Campbell. Campbell was recommended for the post of president and CEO by TWRC board chair Robert Fung and, like Fung, he had a private sector

background (TWRC 8 2011). Although trained as a civil engineer, Campbell had spent most of his career in real estate and, immediately before his appointment at the TWRC, had managed a number of large-scale commercial real estate projects in downtown Toronto as president of Brookfield Ventures Ltd.

### *5.3 Limitations of the TWRC governance model*

Leading the TWRC from a planning vision into the early stages of implementation was going to be a formidable challenge, even for a seasoned real estate operative like John Campbell. As discussed in Section 4, the three governments had pledged contributions of \$500 million each towards the waterfront's redevelopment in October 2000. But, at the time of Campbell's appointment in March 2003, very little of that money had actually been transferred. The contribution agreement funding model meant that the TWRC had to apply each year for specific sources of money to fund individual development projects (Mercer Delta Consulting 2004) and, while this method allowed the governments to stay attuned to the spending priorities of the waterfront corporation, it created cash flow problems in its early years of operation.

A changing political environment was somewhat to blame for this. In 2002 the leadership of the City of Toronto government shifted. Mayor Mel Lastman, a right-leaning politician who had helped set up the TWRC, was replaced by the more left-wing administration of Mayor David Miller. Miller won the mayoralty, in part, because of his opposition to a widely unpopular proposal for a bridge connecting the waterfront with Toronto Island Airport (the airport was served by a ferry) (Lewington 2003). Waterfront residents were concerned that a 'fixed link' would improve the viability of the airport, thus increasing aviation traffic and noise (Theobald 2002). Miller was successful in getting the fixed link to the airport cancelled (City of Toronto 2003a). However, angered by the TWRC's decision to support the airport expansion (James 2002), he began to direct his attention towards the operation of the new corporation. As a centre-left politician Miller was wary of the corporation's detachment from the City of Toronto, despite the limited powers it had been awarded. One senior City Hall insider reflects how the mayor's office perceived that the arm's length corporation was set up by a centre-right administration – with whom Robert Fung had been close – that mistrusted municipal governance (POLITICAL 2 2011). Indeed, Miller took particular aim at the TWRC's board of directors, criticising what he perceived as the stalled implementation of the secondary plan and, at the same time, questioned the composition of the corporation's board of directors, stating:

Several of the corporation's directors have inherent conflicts because they represent interests with their own waterfront agendas – power plants, theme parks, construction opportunities. These people should be replaced by visionary urban thinkers – people such as architect Jack Diamond, planner Ken Greenberg, thought-provoking Jane Jacobs or former mayor David Crombie (Miller 2002, A21).

Political leadership also shifted at the provincial level. A centre-left Liberal government led by Dalton McGuinty replaced the right-leaning Progressive Conservative government of Premier Mike Harris, also one of the original partners of the earlier tri-government agreement. Not long after he arrived at the corporation, Campbell had approached the previous Progressive Conservative government and requested that the scope of the new corporation's enabling legislation be renegotiated so that the TWRC could be more financially independent and less reliant on staggered contributions from the various levels of government. But, according to a corporation executive, a promise made by Mike Harris' provincial government in early 2003 to increase the corporation's control over financial matters at the end of its first year of operation was not honoured by the incoming Liberal administration (TWRC 7 2011).

The unpredictable nature of election cycles at the three levels of governments meant that the TWRC faced the challenge of trying to fund the implementation of their long-term vision for the waterfront while justifying their funding requests on the basis of short-term implementation successes (TWRC 7 2011). By early 2004 the cash flow problems facing the TWRC reached a point of no return. Only \$35 million of the pledged \$1.5 billion had actually been transferred to the corporation (Filion and Sanderson 2011) and a number of the governments' future funding commitments were directed towards the projects highlighted in the secondary plan which related to the failed waterfront Olympic Bid, but were not under the purview of the corporation, such as a heavy rail connection from downtown Toronto to the city's Pearson International Airport and upgrades to subway platforms at the nearby Union Station. This lack of stable government funding forced the TWRC to reveal in March 2004 that it was nearly bankrupt. To avert a crisis, the federal government provided a small bridging payment in March 2004 that allowed the corporation to continue paying its staff (Lewington 2004) and then, after considerable lobbying and further negative

press reports, the three governments eventually committed a further \$334 million in late July 2004. This injection provided the corporation with the medium-term stability it required.

The corporation's renewed financial stability did not end the growing criticisms of its governance structure. Mayor Miller continued to offer assessments of the TWRC's ability to operate effectively and, as the funding crisis intensified during the summer of 2004, he reiterated his earlier concerns about the composition of the board of directors. Miller's solution was that politicians should be allowed to serve as board members (Gillespie 2004), a condition expressly prohibited in the corporation's enabling legislation because of concerns about overt politicisation (Ontario 2002). More specifically, he argued that the waterfront's redevelopment should be more clearly identified as a municipal project, a position motivated by the heavy handling of the fixed link debate by the federally controlled Toronto Port Authority. In November 2004, Miller went a step further and proposed that he would like to sit on the corporation's board of directors as the City of Toronto's representative (James 2004).

#### *5.4 Governance and financing review*

The combination of Mayor Miller's public calls for changes at the TWRC and the fragility of the corporation's funding model highlighted just how vulnerable the corporation was to the short-term political priorities of the three governments. Realising that a longer-term solution was needed, the board of directors commissioned an independent review of its governance structure and financing model (TWRC 2005). Produced by management consulting firm Mercer Delta and published in October 2004, the review identified a disconnect between the original vision for the TWRC as an 'empowered development corporation' and the actual reality of its day-to-day operations. Recasting the corporation as a 'coordinating agency', Mercer Delta concluded that the TWRC did not have "sufficient power to compel alignment among stakeholder efforts and/or advance the development of the waterfront" (Mercer Delta Consulting 2004, 3). The review attributed this to a lack of political will on the part of the three governments, a lack of collaboration between stakeholders – especially other government agencies – and an inadequate supply of capital. Yet the review also accepted that the TWRC, as a special purpose corporation, walked a thin-line between independence and public accountability. Mercer Delta suggested that, while the concept of a fully 'empowered corporation' was theoretically sound, the conditions for such a model appeared to be untenable.

The report deduced that one of the biggest roadblocks to change was the unwillingness of the three governments to cede control of land they already held on the waterfront. Although in some parts of the waterfront over 80% of the land was owned by the public sector, it was controlled by different government agencies, including: the provincial Ontario Realty Corporation, the municipal Toronto Economic Development Corporation (TEDCO) and the federal Toronto Port Authority (TPA). As separate organisations with widely differing mandates, there was little appetite on the part of the three governments to consolidate their individual holdings through the tripartite corporation. Furthermore, the City of Toronto was not prepared to grant planning powers to an independent entity in fears that this would undermine its citywide planning decision-making powers (City of Toronto 2000a).

**Figure 21: Waterfront landownership in 2000**

(Diagram produced by the author using data from Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Task Force, 2000)



The review argued for some version of an ‘empowered corporation’ model tailored to the Toronto waterfront context, and proposed that the waterfront corporation be given the power to “direct the use of lands on the waterfront in accordance with the comprehensive plan and timelines whether or not ownership of the land is actually transferred to the corporation” (Mercer Delta Consulting 2004, 5). To guarantee the smooth implementation of specific development projects under this model, the report suggested that a series of separate ‘memorandums of understanding’ be drawn up

between government agencies to “ensure alignment and commitment to the comprehensive plan for waterfront revitalization” (5). One of the key recommendations was that the corporation be permitted to mortgage lands owned by the three governments and have the right to establish subsidiary companies, thus spreading the corporation’s financial risk – the very powers the Task Force had sought four years before (Eidelman 2011). Mercer Delta argued that such a move would minimise further government contributions because the profits from early development project could then be reinvested in TWRC operations. In the management consultant’s estimation the success of an empowered development corporation ultimately hinged on an improved working relationship between the three governments and the TWRC. Using evidence from other waterfront cities, the review argued that the three governments had to stop acting independently and agree to work together. One possible way of doing this, it suggested, was to allow elected officials to sit on the corporation’s board of directors, as proposed by Mayor Miller. But Mercer Delta only gave lukewarm support for the idea, noting “there is concern about the potential politicization of the Board through the appointment of elected officials to the Board, as suggested by the City, even though it is recognized that the City’s support is critical to success” (2004, 20).

When the Mercer Delta review was released by the waterfront corporation in late October 2004 it received a mixed response. At City Hall, Mayor Miller greeted it with enthusiasm. He talked animatedly about giving the corporation more power to implement the shared planning and design vision for the waterfront, while at the same time, improving the conditions for public oversight through the appointment of politicians to the board of directors. The reception of the review by the provincial and federal governments was less steadfast. Reporting for *The Globe and Mail*, municipal affairs correspondent Jennifer Lewington (2004a) noted that both governments remained wary of appointing politicians to the TWRC board and the federal government, in particular, did not look favourably upon ceding additional financial powers to the corporation.

### *5.5 Partial implementation of the governance and financing review*

The only permanent change that was made to the corporation’s primary legislation as a result of the review was an amendment to allow the mayor of Toronto to sit on the board of directors (Eidelman 2011), a surprising decision considering both the cautious language Mercer Delta had used to describe the proposal and the lack of

support it received from the provincial and federal governments. Reflecting on Miller's appointment to the board, a senior TWRC executive notes that the mayor's high profile was always going to be a double-edge sword for the corporation. While his passion and advocacy for the waterfront had its benefits, the challenge presented by his undue level of influence – in comparison to other board members – meant the corporation was always sensitive to the charge that he might become a 'super director' (TWRC 7 2011).

Although the waterfront corporation was not awarded any of the enhanced financial powers it sought, Mercer Delta's suggestion that a series of memoranda of understanding be drawn up to clarify the corporation's role as the lead developer of the waterfront was heeded. While negotiations were protracted, the first memorandum was signed with the TWRC by the Ontario Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal and the Ontario Realty Corporation in September 2005 and transferred responsibility for the West Don Lands to the corporation (Ontario 2005). A second memorandum followed in February 2006 as an agreement between the City of Toronto, its economic development agency, TEDCO, and the TWRC with respect to landownership at East Bayfront and the Port Lands. This transferred most, but not all, of the land held by TEDCO to the TWRC (City of Toronto 2006). In what was widely seen as a step forward, the memoranda "confirmed the TWRC's role as the lead planning and coordinating body responsible for waterfront lands" (Eidelman 2011, 278) and vastly improved the TWRC's ability to operate on the waterfront, facilitating, in the words of the corporation's *Annual Report 2006/07*, "a more streamlined and focused approach as...lands are prepared for development" (Waterfront Toronto 2007, 2).

#### *5.6 Shifting leadership at the TWRC*

Mayor Miller's election to the TWRC board of directors in late 2005 began a transition for Robert Fung, who had been chair of both the original Task Force, and then the corporation, since 1999. From the time of the Toronto Island Airport debate in 2002, when then-Councillor Miller had first become interested in the waterfront's redevelopment, Miller and Fung had tended to view the political and jurisdictional issues impacting the TWRC differently. Miller had vehemently opposed the fixed link bridge to the airport, an issue that helped propel him to the mayoralty, while Fung had supported it. Moreover, before he joined the board, Miller often criticised the corporation and argued that the City of Toronto should play a far greater role in the

waterfront redevelopment process. In contrast, since the earliest days of the Task Force, Fung had been convinced that the corporation should be completely independent from government and have its own planning decision-making powers. Ultimately, as a senior TWRC executive with close ties to Robert Fung reports, “Miller and Fung never saw eye-to-eye...Miller wanted to come on the board and Fung did not want Miller on the board” (TWRC 8 2011). Fung’s term as chair expired in May 2006 and was not renewed. The decision was both personal and political. While the political realities of the day made it impossible for him to continue as chair, Fung had played a significant, and at times singlehanded, role in shaping the revitalisation program. While he had initially been viewed as a surprising choice – a successful businessman with ties to the prime minister but with no planning or design experience – he left behind a lasting legacy, in the form of functioning developing corporation, a clear planning and design vision and, as Section 9 will discuss, an emergent commitment to public consultation.

## **6: Establishing the conditions for a design-sensitive practice?**

### *6.1 Introduction*

This section turns away from the chronological timeline that saw the TWRC placed in charge of Toronto's waterfront redevelopment programme and considers in more detail how the corporation has endeavoured to govern planning and design on Toronto's waterfront within the context of a limited governance mandate and the City of Toronto's statutory planning and zoning framework. The section establishes the foundation for a more detailed focus on the governance of design via specific tools and mechanisms: the precinct planning process (Section 7), peer design review (Section 8), and public participation and engagement (Section 9).

### *6.2 A delivery vehicle for design-led waterfront revitalisation?*

The failure of the three governments to commit to all of the governance reforms outlined in the Mercer Delta review discussed in Section 5 signalled that the TWRC needed to find innovative ways to ensure that its planning and design goals could be realised. As a senior TWRC executive drily notes, "What we have done...we have done in spite of the governance model" (TWRC 7 2011). Although the 2002 enabling legislation did not furnish the corporation with the planning decision-making power many private sector decision-makers had hoped for, the two memoranda of understanding that followed did define the corporation as the 'lead master planner' of the waterfront lands. This designation was also supported by a 2004 endorsement by the City of Toronto Council that stated: "The TWRC is the delivery vehicle for waterfront revitalization. All revitalization initiatives will be conducted under its auspices and entities charged with implementing specific waterfront projects will do so under service or delivery agreements with TWRC" (City of Toronto 2004, 3). Yet, even the memoranda of understanding left some room for ambiguity with respect to landownership. The agreement reached in the East Bayfront memorandum, in particular, was severely tested in the years that followed. It allowed TEDCO to retain ownership over a small land parcel within the East Bayfront precinct (City of Toronto 2006) and, in what would become a major frustration for the TWRC, TEDCO developed a design proposal for the site that was directly at odds with the corporation's wider vision for the East Bayfront precinct (see Section 8).

### 6.3 Controlling for 'design excellence'

'Design excellence' had been embedded in the vision for Toronto's waterfront since the formation of the Task Force in 1999. However, as the earlier sections of this paper discussed, urban design tended to be narrowly defined through an economic development lens. A broader definition of what urban design could mean on the waterfront emerged as the corporation began to refine its aims and objectives in the mid-2000s. A key turning point appears to be a trip that Robert Fung and John Campbell made to Sweden in August 2004 as part of a delegation organised by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Sponsored by the federal government, the weeklong 'Community Energy Planning Mission' incorporated a series of policy seminars by the Swedish government and fieldtrips to sustainable housing developments, 'ecovillages' and renewable energy projects (Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2004). The mission had a major impact on the way Fung and Campbell conceptualised the future of Toronto's waterfront and, as a senior TWRC executive explains, they both returned with a desire to intertwine sustainability and design excellence into the corporation's mission and make it the guiding force behind the implementation efforts:

As you learn about what it is you are doing, these kinds of things crept into the core mandate. So, how do you build communities? How do you build a city where people can live and work throughout their whole life span whether they are rich or poor? Part of it is about the vision of the future and how do you prepare today to get there. Sustainability and design excellence – quality of life, quality of place – all these things have come together over the years" (TWRC 7 2011).

To progress the waterfront redevelopment programme 'despite the governance model' and achieve sustainable design excellence, the waterfront corporation needed to establish various tools and mechanisms to control for design quality. Three, in particular, have helped to emphasise the corporation's role as 'lead masterplanner' of the waterfront. First, are the *waterfront precinct plans*, which were formalised in the waterfront secondary plan, *Making Waves*, and have allowed the corporation to guide and control the design principles for the new waterfront districts via a series of focused masterplans. Second, has been the establishment of a

discretionary *urban design peer review panel* to assess all planning and design proposals on the waterfront. And, third has been an unusually strong commitment to *public participation* that has extended well beyond the basic consultation processes employed during the formulation of the waterfront planning and design vision mentioned in Sections 3 and 4.

The TWRC has used this suite of tools and mechanisms since 2003. Yet, despite the influence they have had upon the design, planning and management of the waterfront redevelopment programme, none of the measures have official statutory status in Ontario's planning system. This includes the precinct plans, which, although initially imagined as a tertiary component of the City of Toronto *Official Plan* (2002) are not, like a secondary or 'Part II' plan, recognised in the provincial *Planning Act* and thus remain unenforceable. The waterfront corporation, in some instances working directly with the City of Toronto planning department, has taken steps to manoeuvre around these statutory limitations and weave its proprietary design control mechanisms into the official decision-making procedures operated under the planning act. To give status to the precinct plans, for example, the City of Toronto has designated various land parcels on the waterfront as special districts within the City of Toronto *Zoning By-Law* (City of Toronto 2010) and has then used the TWRC precinct plans as the basis for the site specific zoning by-law amendments required for each of the special districts. This process, which is described more thoroughly in the following section, has created a regulatory 'bridge' between the urban design components proposed in the precinct plans and the legally binding rules required for the creation of a zoning by-law amendment.

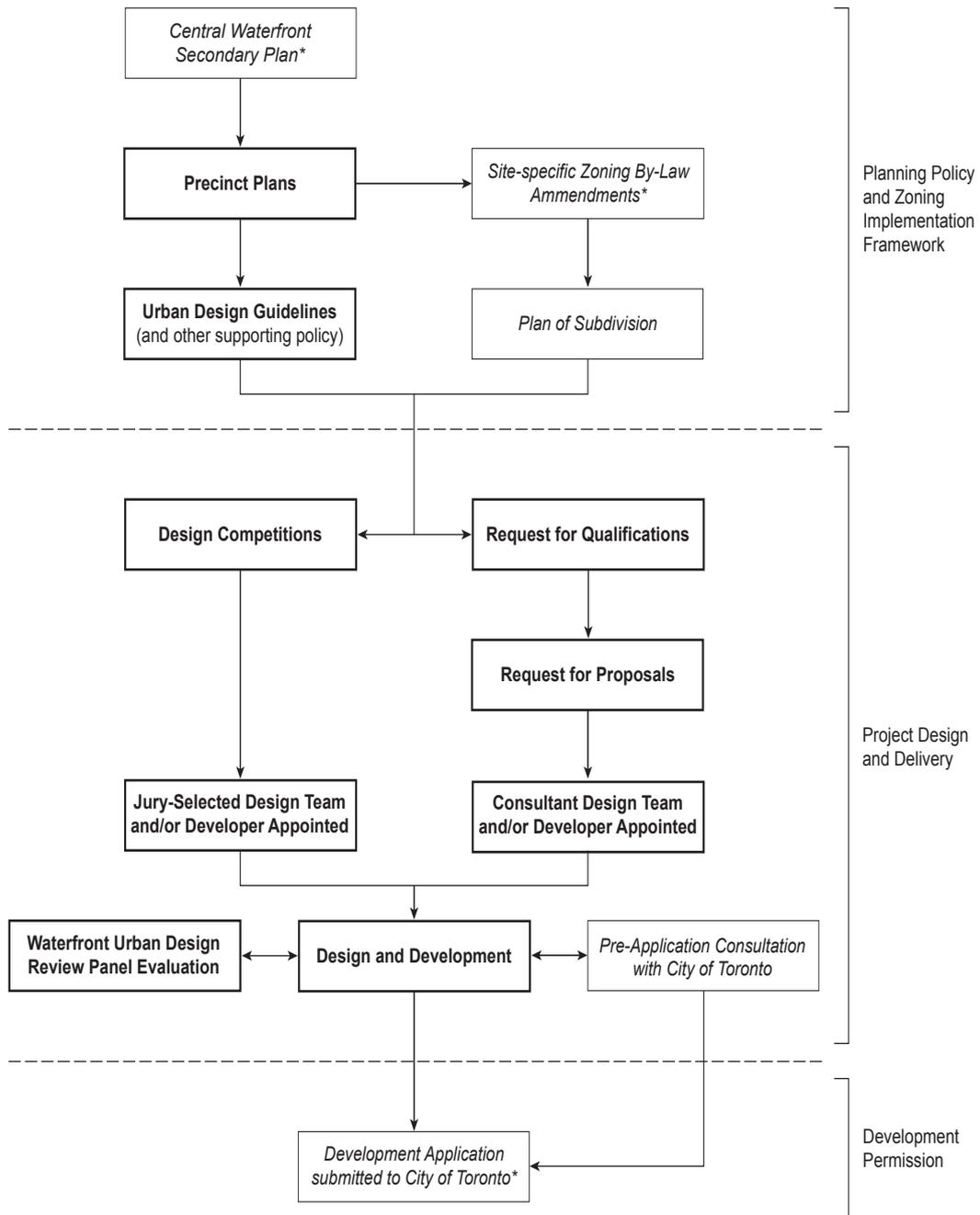
The design implementation tools that support the precinct plans, such as the urban design peer review process and the corporation's public participation strategy are empowered through the TWRC's contractor and development partner selection process. Under its founding legislation, the TWRC has the authority to choose and contract its own design consultants and select its real estate development partners because the vast majority of land on Toronto's waterfront remains in government hands and is thus under the direct purview of the waterfront corporation (Ontario 2005; City of Toronto 2006). Each private developer or external design consultant selected to participate in the TWRC's precinct planning efforts must apply through a rigorous 'Request for Qualification (RFQ)' and 'Request for Proposal (RFP)' process. If successful, the TWRC specifically requires the developer and/or consultant to participate in its public participation processes before applying for planning

permission from the City of Toronto. On certain projects, typically parks and open spaces, the TWRC also convenes a design competition to select the design team. All of the corporation's design competitions are guided by detailed briefing documents that spell out the corporation's planning vision and urban design principles and also involve a mandatory public engagement component. Moreover, the development proposal documents and design competition briefs state that every waterfront project must, in addition to passing through the standard City of Toronto planning application process, be subject to an evaluation by the corporation's Waterfront Design Review Panel (e.g. Waterfront Toronto 2008). This stipulation is also contained in the zoning by-law amendments issued by the City of Toronto for the waterfront (City of Toronto 2006a).

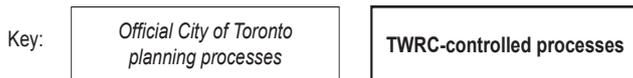
In short, the TWRC relies on the precinct zoning by-law amendments and the individual legal agreements it reaches with developers and consultant design teams to enforce a waterfront-wide system of design control. Internal design review takes place *before* the TWRC and its development partners submit applications for development approval to the City of Toronto. Design peer review and public feedback opportunities also continue after approvals have been granted by the City of Toronto to ensure that the completed projects reflect the TWRC's earlier plans and proposals. The diagram in Figure 22 illustrates how this complex interweaving of policies and procedures works in practice, beginning with the secondary plan and precinct planning framework and then moving to the planning, design and delivery of individual development projects.

**Figure 22: Layered control of planning and design on Toronto's waterfront**

(Diagram by the author)



\*Subject to appeal at the Ontario Municipal Board  
(TWRC projects excluded from appeal at application stage)



## **7. The waterfront precinct plans**

### *7.1 Introduction*

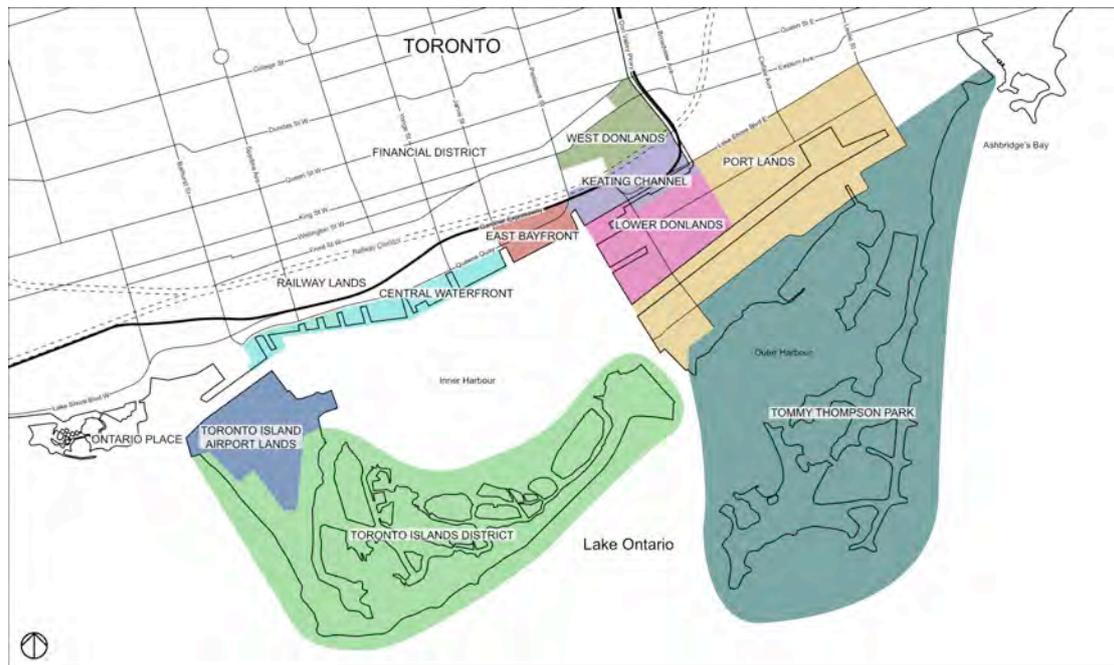
This section looks in detail at the precinct plans produced on Toronto's waterfront by the TWRC to guide and support the implementation of new development. The waterfront precinct plans broadly resemble the tool known as a 'design-led masterplan,' which is typically used to guide large-scale development and translate urban design policies into more site-specific or neighbourhood-level objectives (Bell 2005; Tiesdell and MacFarlane 2007). Masterplans are often used in conjunction with or as a substitute to zoning and can help to provide a more design-sensitive vision and programme for future development (Punter 2007). At the same time, however, design-led masterplans have also been identified as formidable marketing tools that capitalise on 'flashy' graphics and three-dimensional graphics to generate private sector investment rather than focusing on social and community planning goals (Giddings and Hopwood 2006). In this chapter the role and form of the waterfront precinct plans is discussed with a particular focus on the precinct planning process for the East Bayfront, before the paper turns the two mechanism used to support their implementation: peer design review (Section 8) and community participation (Section 9).

### *7.2 The waterfront precinct plans*

The precinct plans divide the large waterfront district into a series of focused redevelopment areas and translate the broad policies and principles contained in the waterfront secondary plan into actionable masterplans. The boundaries of the various precinct have changed subtly over time and since 2010 emphasis has been placed on the eastern waterfront because it contains by far the greatest amount of underdeveloped and government-controlled land. More recently, further sub-precincts have been designated in the Lower Don Lands and Port Lands due to the vast size and complexity of the site and the long-term ambition to re-naturalise the Don River. The Central Waterfront precinct, which sits directly south of the city's downtown core, has been the subject of a comprehensive public realm upgrade, rather than a precinct planning process, because it was mostly developed during the 1970s and 1980s and did not contained large areas of vacant space.

**Figure 23: The waterfront precincts in 2010**

(Diagram produced by the author using data from Waterfront Toronto 2010, 15)



Since 2001, the TWRC has overseen the production of three precinct plans by external design consultants as well as a public realm master plan for the Central Waterfront (see: author 2015). Toronto City Council approved the first precinct plans, for the West Don Lands and the East Bayfront, in 2005 (City of Toronto 2005; 2005a). The most recent precinct plan covers the northern quadrant of the Lower Don Lands, now called Keating Channel, and was endorsed by the City of Toronto Council in July 2010 (City of Toronto 2010a). A further precinct planning process for Villiers Island (formerly Cousins Quay), also located in the Lower Don Lands began in 2013 (Port Lands Acceleration Initiative 2013).

Although the three completed precinct plans were produced by different design consultants, they share a common urban design language and incorporate many of the principles imagined in both Fung's Task Force report and the waterfront secondary plan and, as will be discussed in Section 9, each of the precinct plans were informed by a public participation process. The precinct plans focus on defined areas of the waterfront and offer detailed guidance on the arrangement of the streets, blocks, building heights, public spaces and other components of the built environment. They all emphasise how mixed-use development might encourage diversity and variety and highlight how strong relationships between buildings and public spaces, especially at ground level, can generate a sense of place and



The precinct masterplan for East Bayfront (above) and associated artist's renderings of the streetscape and public spaces. Displaying a similar design language to the West Don Lands, but with slightly taller buildings, the masterplan employs a series of urban blocks that step down to the waterfront from the Gardiner Expressway (rear). Queens Quay Boulevard, which runs through the centre of the site, is transformed into a urban greenway, and a series of triangular open spaces, including Sherbourne Park in the centre, are proposed to act as view cones to the lake. A strong urban edge is imagined along the waterfront and incorporates a multi-level promenade.

### *7.3 Translating the precinct plan principles into zoning*

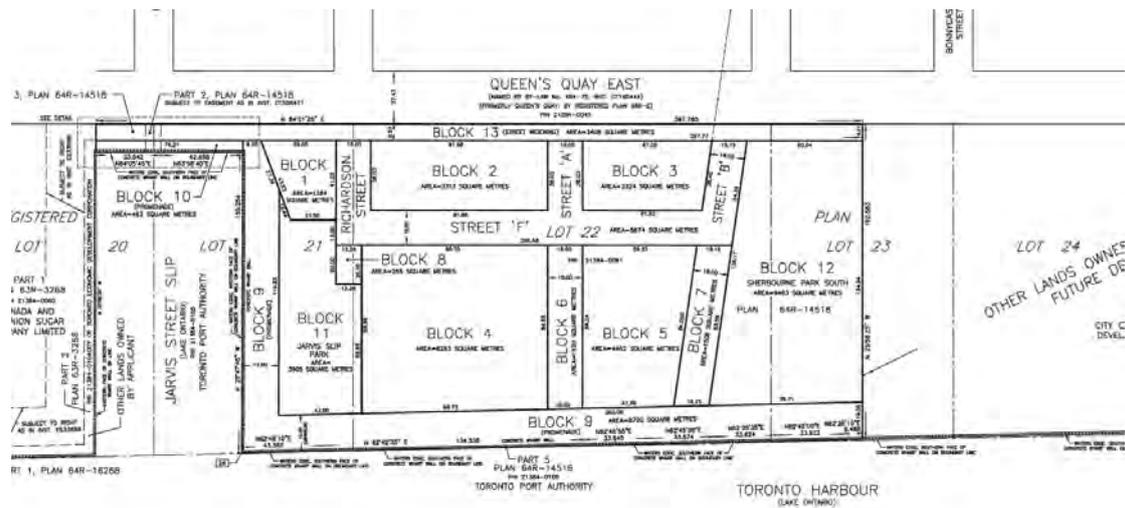
As outlined in Section 6, the City of Toronto always intended that the precinct plans would act as a design-sensitive 'bridge' between the official, but broadly stated, planning policy for the waterfront contained in the secondary plan and the strict legal standards required as part of the zoning by-law amendment process. To achieve this, the City of Toronto translates the planning proposals and design principles contained in each precinct plan into a zoning by-law amendment. This means that the arrangement of blocks, the height of buildings and the provision of open space for each precinct is formally codified into a skeletal legal framework with full statutory provision. Each zoning by-law amendment also includes a series of financial obligations to ensure that the amenities and public infrastructure imagined in the precinct plans can be secured during the development process. The generous residential density allowances and building height limits in each precinct are therefore offered *in exchange* for a public infrastructure improvement fee; this is set at \$69.86 per square metre in the East Bayfront precinct, for example (City of Toronto 2006a). Further obligations for affordable and social housing are also mandated in the zoning by-law amendments. In response to clear community support for long-term affordable housing provision in the East Bayfront precinct, the target of 20% affordable rental housing and 5% social housing contained in the precinct plan (TWRC 2005b) was translated into a statutory requirement in the zoning by-law amendment (City of Toronto 2006a).

The precinct plans and zoning by-law amendments are further supported by official 'plan of subdivision' documents that codify the configuration of each land parcel contained within the zoning-by laws. However, to ensure that the more visionary ideas for the waterfront precincts are not lost under the weight of zoning by-law and subdivision legalese, the corporation also produces detailed urban design guidelines

for each precinct. The design guidelines suggest how developers might interpret the zoning by-law and propose various block configurations for each land parcel (TWRC 2007). In addition, the guidelines demonstrate the success of various alternative solutions through an extensive bank of precedent images. The precinct urban design guidelines are also intended as a guide for the Waterfront Design Review Panel when it deliberates on individual development proposals (see Section 8).

**Figure 25: East Bayfront Zoning and Subdivision**

(Waterfront Toronto 2007a, 18).



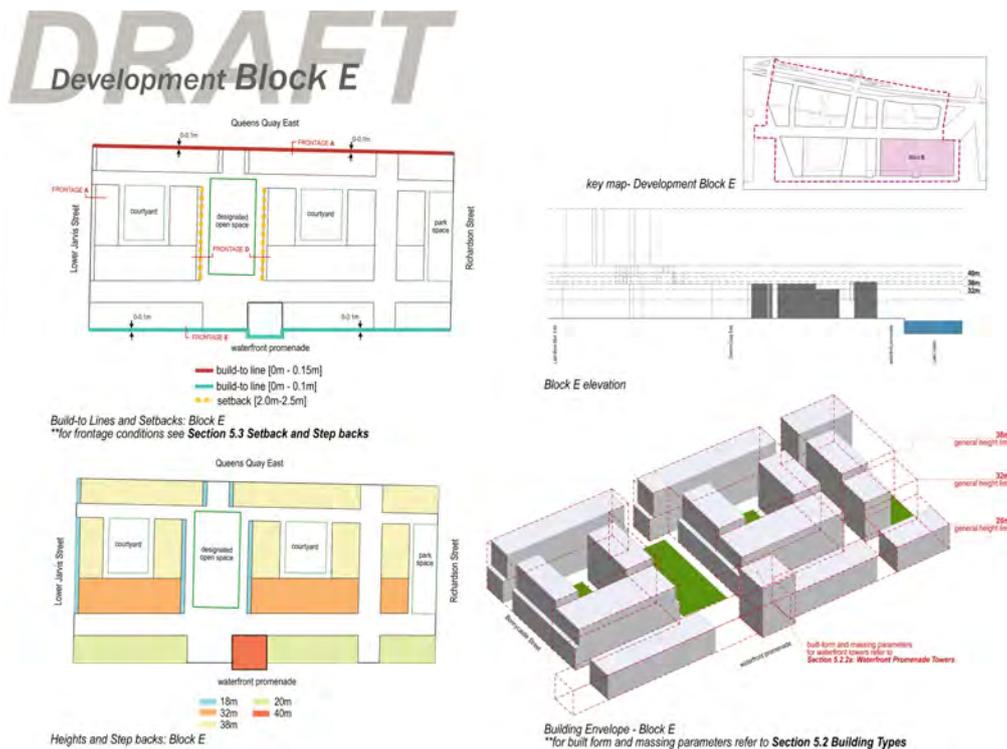
Plan of Subdivision Block Plan for the first phase of the East Bayfront, incorporating the public space overlooking Jarvis Street Slip (right) and the proposed new park (Sherbourne Park South). The triangular shape of the proposed new park is carried over from the initial precinct plan. However, this design element, which was a central part of the precinct plan, is largely lost on the edge of Jarvis Street Slip. This was due to the development of Block 4 for a media company headquarters. The design process for this particular building is described more in Section 8.

The complicated process of translating the precinct planning and design principles and financial targets into zoning by-law amendments requires an active partnership between the corporation and city planners. The City of Toronto has therefore established a dedicated Waterfront Secretariat to oversee its participation in the waterfront redevelopment programme. The planning department also plays an active role in the TWRC's precinct planning process by attending regular meetings with the corporation's planning and design team and its consultants and has been very supportive of its public engagement efforts (described in Section 9). The waterfront

corporation also works with the City of Toronto to co-produce Municipal Class Environmental Assessments for all of the various precincts, which are required under the Ontario *Environmental Assessment Act* (1990) for major development proposals that include alterations to the existing public infrastructure, including roads, sewers and water courses (e.g. TWRC 2006).

**Figure 26: Urban Design Guidelines for the East Bayfront**

(Image from: TWRC 2007, 51 (Images 1-3) 66 (Image 4, overleaf))



An extract from the *East Bayfront West-Precinct Design Guidelines* demonstrating how the requirements of the amended zoning by-law for the East Bayfront might perform. Although this diagram is shown for illustrative purposes only, it should be noted that the guidelines are no longer in draft format as denoted on the above illustration. At the time this project was completed the document had not been updated on the TWRC/Waterfront Toronto website.

#### *7.4 Implementing a precinct plan: the case for the East Bayfront*

The East Bayfront precinct provides an instructive lens to assess the implementation, albeit partial, of one of the precinct plans. So far, the waterfront corporation has overseen the completion of the major parks and open spaces in the East Bayfront, and the beginning of real estate development. The corporation assigned resources to the design and construction of open space on the waterfront via an initiative it has called 'leading with landscape', the objective of which has been to demonstrate a concrete commitment to the wider redevelopment programme and thereby encourage private sector investment (Waterfront Toronto 2007b). In pursuit of this initiative, the TWRC has used design competitions to attract international interest to the waterfront.

Sugar Beach, a new public space located adjacent to the Jarvis Slip (see Figure 27), opened in 2010 following a design competition won by Montreal-based landscape architect Claude Cormier. The waterfront promenade in the East Bayfront was also the result of a design competition convened in 2007 for the entire spine of the Central Waterfront promenade and Queens Quay; it was won by a team led by Dutch landscape architecture firm West 8 (see: author 2014) and construction was completed in 2010. The large central public space, Sherbourne Common, was designed by the Vancouver-based landscape architects Philips Farevaag Smallenberg and was also completed in 2010 (see Figure 27). Unlike the other public spaces in the precinct, however, Sherbourne Common was not the subject of a competition because the design team was selected during the precinct planning process (TWRC 2005b).

**Figure 27: Canada's Sugar Beach and Sherbourne Common, East Bayfront**

(Photograph by Daniel Pearce, 2011)



Identifiable because of its collection of bright pink umbrellas, Sugar Beach has been generally well received. Although the public space has garnered some criticism for its 'kitschy' design elements, such as the large rocks that aim to recreate the Canadian shield landscape of Northern Ontario, it has also been praised for its simplicity and the tactile sense of colour and texture. This image, taken in 2012, shows the park being well used despite the lack of any residential development in the precinct at the time.

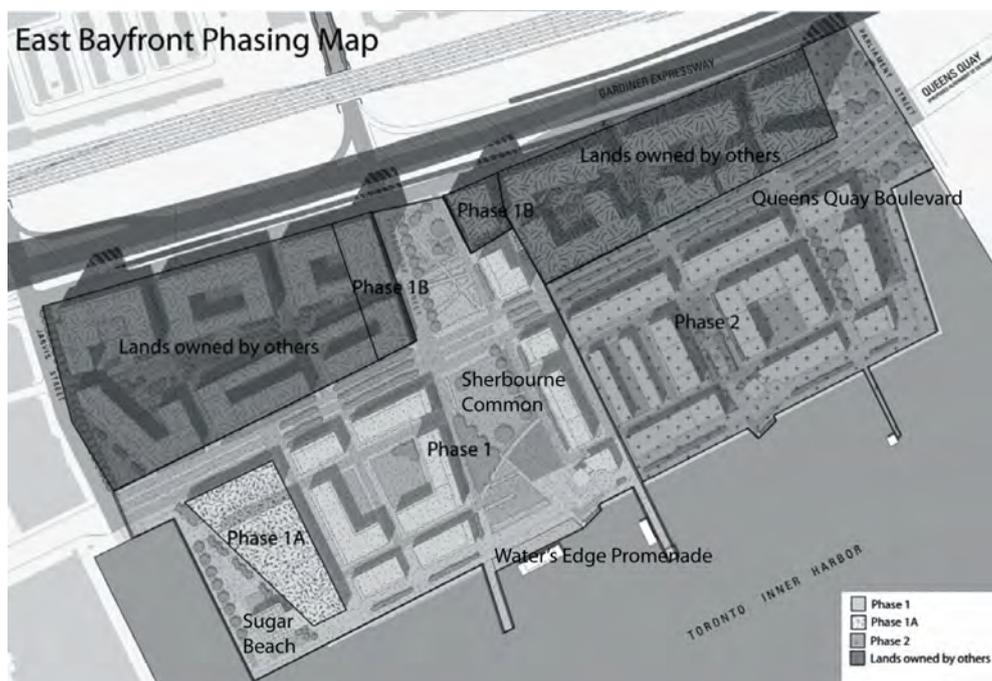


This image shows the central portion of Sherbourne Common in 2011 with the George Brown College building under construction in the background. In the foreground is a water feature that re-establishes the line of an ancient stream and meanders through a larger green space behind the central pavilion. The pavilion acts as a transitional element between the water fountain-play zone and the green space behind, and also houses facilities for the play space, which, in winter, becomes a neighbourhood ice rink.

A phasing strategy has been used to guide the implementation of the *East Bayfront Precinct Plan* since 2006 (see Figure 28) and, subject to local market conditions, the corporation (by now called Waterfront Toronto) anticipates that Phases 1 and 2 will be completed during the early 2020s (TWRC 6 2011). The two initial Phase 1 projects – a large-floor plan office building for Corus Entertainment (Phase 1A) and a higher education building for George Brown College (the portion of Phase 1 adjacent to the water’s edge promenade) – were undertaken by public sector agencies between 2010 and 2012. Both represented an immediate departure from the precinct plan and, for reasons more fully explored in Section 8, the commercial office building, funded and constructed by TEDCO, proved particularly controversial because the design ignored one of the core urban design components of the master plan: the proposed diagonal building line adjacent to the Jarvis Slip that sought to open up views to the lake and emphasise the termination of the north-south streets on the waterfront (see Image 2 in Figure 24).

**Figure 28: East Bayfront Phasing Strategy.**

(TWRC 2006a, 28)



The decision to locate a higher education campus in the precinct was announced in July 2008 and, despite not being a residential block (as proposed in the precinct plan), the corporation was confident that it would be a formidable ‘anchor’ on the waterfront (Waterfront Toronto 2008a). Although deviating from the precinct plan, the building responds positively to a number of the plan’s general principles. The building

steps down to the water's edge from eight to five storeys and respects the requirement set out in the precinct plan that all ground floor areas should be animated with commercial uses. In contrast, the creation of an active ground floor was resolved less successfully on the adjacent Corus Building. TEDCO and their tenant, Corus Entertainment, wished to reserve the majority of the ground floor for those who worked in the building. Although some effort was made to activate the edge between the building and the waterfront – the design team incorporated sliding glass doors on the western elevation to facilitate open-air media events and leased space for a waterfront coffee shop in 2011 – the building remains relatively private.

**Figure 29: The Corus Building and George Brown College**

(Artist's impression: TWRC 2005a, p. 26; photographs by the author, 2013)



This image is extracted from the *East Bayfront Precinct Plan*. Looking east, it imagines the feel and scale of the tiered waterfront promenade at the approximate location of the Corus Building and George Brown College.



This photograph shows the waterfront promenade as constructed outside the Corus Building (looking west). The scale of the space is broadly similar to that imagined in the precinct plan and high quality street furniture, paving and landscape elements have been used. However, the bulk and singular architectural form of the Corus Building does detract from the quality of the space and the proposal to create a tiered promenade with three distinct movement corridors has been lost – a decision that means the promenade is arguably wider than necessary.



This image shows the front and east elevation of George Brown College. With multiple elements, the building appears less bulky than its neighbour (the edge of the Corus Building can be seen in the background). The use of clear glass panels and public interior spaces overlooking the park and the waterfront serve to enliven the relationship with the public realm. But, together George Brown College and the Corus Building do mark a significant departure from the more delicate massing of the new buildings imagined in the precinct plan.

In 2008, Waterfront Toronto released the first RFQs for residential and mixed-use development at East Bayfront: one for the eastern portion of Phase 1B and another for the entire Phase 2 site (Waterfront Toronto 2008; 2008b). The American developer Hines was selected for Phase 2 (since name Bayside) and the local developer Great Gulf Homes was selected for Phase 1B (since named Parkside) (Waterfront Toronto 2012). Bayside and Parkside are currently under construction. Before the developers sought planning approval, confidential development agreements were signed with the TWRC, formalising commitments to the agreed planning and design vision outlined during the RFQ/RFP process. The rationale for this approach is explained by a senior TWRC executive (see, also, Figure 22 in Section 6):

We have a development agreement with every developer and it says what they can and can't do and one of the things they can't do is 'blow up', without our permission, some of the principles that are in place. It also requires them...to go through our design review panel process, it requires them to build to LEED Gold...There's a legal relationship created between Waterfront Toronto, the City of Toronto as landowner and the developer and so there are financial securities. It is like any transaction and that's how you protect for the vision in the long run. Hopefully we picked the right partners (TWRC 6 2011).

### *7.5 Precinct planning: an initial assessment*

Without question the construction of two non-residential buildings on the water's edge during Phase 1 certainly altered the urban design character imagined in the precinct plan and the subsequent relationships that have been created between the new public spaces and buildings constructed in the precinct. It is, however, premature to judge the overall success of the East Bayfront precinct. Such an assessment must wait until the large residential components of the plan are built over the next decade. Nevertheless, it is possible to examine why the form and arrangement of the development projects completed so far have diverted from the precinct plan vision and principles and, in so doing, offer some initial thoughts on the role of the waterfront precinct plans as coordinating urban design plans.

The East Bayfront precinct plan were intended to facilitate a seamless translation from 'plan' to 'zoning' and establish a clear set of rules for development. Yet, the reality has been quite different. While the zoning by-law amendment and accompanying urban design guidelines faithfully reproduced the vision and principles that emerged from the precinct planning process, many of the core ideas have been subtly reshaped and, in some instances, substantially changed. The precinct plan thus did what many urban design theorists think a masterplan should do: it provided a sense of security for the waterfront corporation while, at the same time, allowing market flexibility and new creative ideas to evolve around the basic tenets of the plan. The plan was never replaced by a wholly new concept and the early completion of the public spaces, allowed for the implementation of some of the most important design principles.

One of the urban designers involved in writing the original plans notes that is translated into "...a very simple by-law....everything that needed to be said...., leaving the rest to the skills of the building architect" (TWRC 5 2011). Nevertheless, the same urban designer also laments that this approach was undermined when the architectural team selected by TEDCO to deliver the Corus Building chose to all but ignore the vision and principles of the plan. He states that the corporation should have said: "Here's the plot, here's the rules" (TWRC 5 2011), but by choosing not to do so the plan was compromised. The experience of the Corus Building showed the corporation that master plans are fragile instruments, regardless of the additional safeguards that are put in place to protect them. Masterplanning is temporal and predicting the future is hard. The evidence from this case demonstrates that, however well a master planning process is conceived, politics, market forces and previously unknown opportunities or threats will cause priorities to shift and conditions to change.

Design and development also continues on the other waterfront precincts, especially those located in the eastern waterfront. The design competition and implementation process associated with the public realm upgrades to the Central Waterfront, including the waterfront promenade, are described by this author in (author 2014) and the story of the West Don Lands precinct planning process can be found in Bunce (2011). Construction of the West Don Lands precinct is underway, with part of the site being used as the Athlete's Village for the 2015 PanAm Games and planning and participation efforts for the precincts located in the Port Lands are continuing. Although not carrying any statutory weight, the precinct plans have emerged as

relatively powerful planning and design instruments. The City of Toronto, in conjunction with the waterfront corporation, has generated a successful model of “integrating zoning into planning and addressing the limitations of zoning” (Punter 2007, 171) by translating the design and planning principles contained in the precinct plans into a legally binding zoning by-law amendment upon completion.

## **8. Discretionary design review**

### *8.1 Introduction*

This section turns to the Waterfront Design Review Panel and looks in detail at the role of peer-led assessment on Toronto's waterfront used to generate better outcomes (Lai 1988; Punter 2003a; Dawson and Higgins 2009) and design review panels are usually composed of professional experts or local officials. In many instances, review panels have proven to be an effective method for meeting the agreed objectives for an area, such as those contained in a masterplan or guidelines, or for raising the general standard of design quality (Kumar and George 2002; Punter 2003a). But, as Punter (2003a) summarises in his study of the Urban Design Panel in Vancouver, Canada, the peer review method has also been criticised for failing to adhere to guiding principles and for allowing arbitrary debates. Moreover, architects and other design professionals often complain that peer-led design review can inhibit their creative freedom (Costonis 1989; Mandelker 1993; Scheer 1994).

### *8.2 The Waterfront Design Review Panel*

Over the past thirty years design review panels have become an increasingly popular tool for monitoring urban and building design (Punter 2003a). However, when the waterfront corporation proposed a Waterfront Design Review Panel in 2005 it was an entirely new concept for Toronto. At the time there were only three design review panels operating in Canada: one in the City of Niagara Falls, another in Ottawa, under the purview of the National Capital Commission and a third in Vancouver. The Vancouver panel is perhaps the most renowned review operation in Canada and is credited for "refining design quality, setting high standards, and creating a culture of 'peer review'" (Punter 2003a, 133) within that city's planning system. The City of Toronto does now operate a review panel. It was temporarily established in 2006 to review a limited number of high priority projects and became a permanent advisory body in 2009 (City of Toronto 2012). Many of the procedures put in place by the Waterfront Design Review Panel were subsequently adopted by the City of Toronto.

The waterfront corporation announced that its new Waterfront Design Review Panel would be charged with upholding the corporation's commitment to design excellence by providing professional and objective advice on all waterfront projects under its purview. Its remit would include not only buildings, but also site plans, parks, streets

and public art. The corporation appointed a Toronto-based architect called Bruce Kuwabara as the inaugural panel chair and, following the model used by the Vancouver Urban Design Panel, sought a diverse group of general members, who could bring a balance of architectural expertise and supporting professional skills. To ensure that the planning authority is witness to the proceedings of the panel, the terms of reference state that the City of Toronto's director of urban design should be present at panel meetings, but as a non-voting and silent member; the panel's proceedings are also observed by the TWRC's vice-president of planning and design, who acts as the corporation's official representative. The unpaid members of the panel are appointed for three years and the corporation sought to put together a team of professional experts that not only demonstrated individual creativity and had an international reputation, but could also work well in a group setting and respect the ethos of the TWRC's planning and design mandate (TWRC 3 2011). The terms of reference for the panel also stated that all meetings would be open to the public (TWRC 2005c).

### *8.3 Power to influence design outcomes*

Legally, the waterfront panel is only an advisory board. But, as explained in Section 6.3, the City of Toronto expects that any applicant applying for development permission on the waterfront to attend the panel and includes this stipulation in the zoning by-law amendments for the waterfront precincts (City of Toronto 2006a). On the other hand, the by-law amendments do not require developers to adhere to the panel's advice. As a result, The Waterfront Design Review Panel is officially independent of the City of Toronto's official site plan approval and development application process. Subsequently, all of the panel's recommendations are made directly to the corporation and, to quote the panel terms of reference, "in no way replace the City of Toronto's regulatory approvals process" (TWRC 2005c, 1). Considering these limited parameters, the TWRC's vice president of planning and design notes that the panel tends to "influence decisions more through moral suasion than legal authority" (TWRC 2005d, 4). However, the corporation has also taken steps to reaffirm the review requirements set out in the zoning by-law amendments. All of the corporation's land development partners must enter into a legal agreement that, in addition to other conditions, obligates them to attend a staggered review by the Waterfront Design Review Panel before they submit an application to the City of Toronto for site plan approval. This means the panel operates like a 'fail-safe mechanism'. Consequently, the panel's power goes much further than its advisory

mandate suggests.

#### *8.4. A shaky start for design review: the Corus Building*

While the panel has been broadly successful as a 'fail safe' mechanism its credibility was severely tested in 2007 when it reviewed a proposal for a new waterfront media centre. Section 6 described a crucial 2006 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by TEDCO, the City of Toronto's economic development agency, and the TWRC that saw much of the land controlled by TEDCO in the East Bayfront and the Port Lands transferred to the new corporation (City of Toronto 2006). However, as Section 6 also explained, TEDCO negotiated to retain a small parcel of land in the East Bayfront precinct (Parcel 1A shown in Figure 28) where it planned to construct a media complex. As described in Section 7, this would ultimately become the headquarters of Corus Entertainment. The journey of the Corus Building (initially called Project Symphony) through the waterfront design review process highlights the fragility of the TWRC's design excellence mandate and led to a number of important changes to the corporation's review process. The story of the review process also identifies some of the challenges associated with peer review and the critical role that clear and broadly understood administrative procedures can play in guarantying more effective design governance.

Before the review process for the media complex began in 2007 a number of potential problems had been flagged. First, it was evident that the complexity of the new building would demand significant alterations to the height, setback and massing of the land parcel. Second, despite the departure from the precinct plan, the project had received the backing of the city's mayor, David Miller, who was swayed by the potential for creative jobs on the waterfront. Third, although the TWRC had agreed to make a \$12.5 million contribution to the project in exchange for compliance with the Waterfront Design Review Panel's recommendations (TWRC 3 2011), the media complex was ultimately located on land that was not controlled by the TWRC and thus the corporation's power to shape the design process remained weak.

The proposal came before the review panel on five occasions between February and November 2007 and again for two follow up sessions during 2008, following a change of design team. From the time of the initial review onwards the review process was characterised by hostility, heated exchanges and increasing politicisation. In the initial review, held in February, the panel members were

immediately troubled by the building's relationship to the East Bayfront precinct plan and the integration of the ground floor to the surrounding public realm (TWRC 2007a). In the second review a few weeks later, the design team, led by Diamond Schmidt Architects, presented a revised proposal that reduced the bulk of the building and created a stronger relationship with the public realm through the introduction of ground floor retail and more generous public open space. The panel, however, remained unconvinced: concerns were raised about the 'fortress-like' massing of the building and the lack of animation achieved on the building edges that did not directly face the lake. The panel also continued to highlight the detrimental impact that they felt the proposed building would have upon the precinct plan. Objecting to the panel's advice, and noting the changes he had made, the lead architect argued that he was receiving confusing advice from the TWRC and stated that the review panel did not appear to trust him to deliver a high quality building (TWRC 2007b).

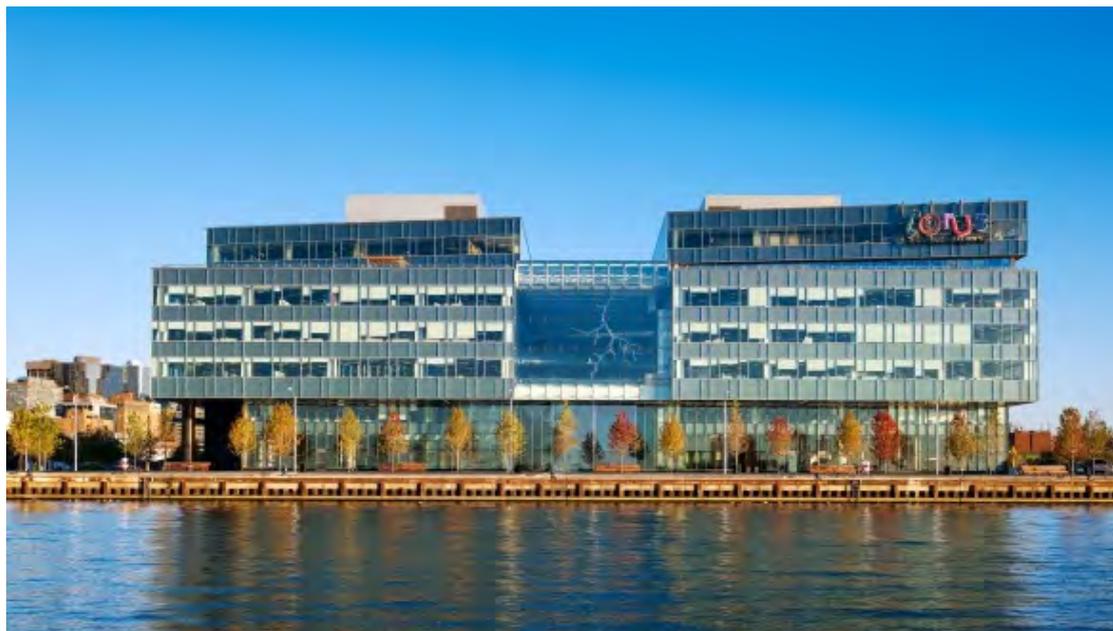
As the review panel meetings were open to the public, the outcome of the second meeting made its way to the press where the panel chair voiced his concerns about the evolving design of the building (Hume 2007). The city's mayor, David Miller, chose to respond, noting that then panel should be more careful about how it raised issues in public (Hume 2007a). Thus, by the time of the third review, held in April 2007, tensions were high. The lead architect presented the latest iteration of the proposal and noted that he had sought to address the panel's concerns with respect to the bulk of the building. For example, the building had been reconfigured in an asymmetrical arrangement to break up the massing of the waterfront elevation. Many of the changes were well received. However, concerns remained about the accessibility of the building and the architectural treatment. This second point, in particular, led to a bitter disagreement between one panel member and the presenting architect about the design language of the media complex (TWRC 2007c). Despite the heated review process, the panel did offer in-principle support for the proposal, but emphasised that the design team needed to "push a bit further to create a building which reflects its context on the waterfront" (ibid., 5).

The design team returned to the review panel on two further occasions, in June and November 2007. At the November meeting, the panel were concerned that the quality of the design, rather than improve, had been compromised since the last panel meeting (Waterfront Toronto 2007c). The panel reemphasised their concerns about the building's relationship to the surrounding public realm and further argued that many of the building's best features had been 'value engineered out'.(ibid.). As a

direct consequence of the review, the chair of the review panel sent a memorandum to the corporation's board of directors and stated that it could no longer support its decision to grant conditional approval of the project. The board of directors agreed to withhold a portion of the corporation's funding for the project until the design team had satisfied the panel (Waterfront Toronto 2007d, 2). With pressure mounting, including from the mayor's office, the review panel eventually granted conditional approval for the media complex in January 2008 (Waterfront Toronto 2008c). The architectural treatment of the building remained little changed, although the panel did accept that some improvements had been made. It was evident that the panel was never going to be satisfied with the overall design strategy, nor the design team with the panel's advice.

**Figure 30: The Corus Building**

(Photograph 1 courtesy of Waterfront Toronto; remaining photographs by the author, 2011)





These three images show the completed Corus Building and demonstrate how it responds to the public realm. The waterfront elevation is shown in the top image, which, at the request of the panel, was split into two wings on either side of a central atrium to reduce the bulk of the building. The second image is taken looking east at the building across the new Sugar Beach public space. The review panel was not successful in requiring the design team to observe the diagonal building line proposed for the west elevation of the building in the precinct plan. The third image shows the loading bays for the building and vividly confirms the fear expressed by the panel that their placement would detract from the streetscape of the East Bayfront.

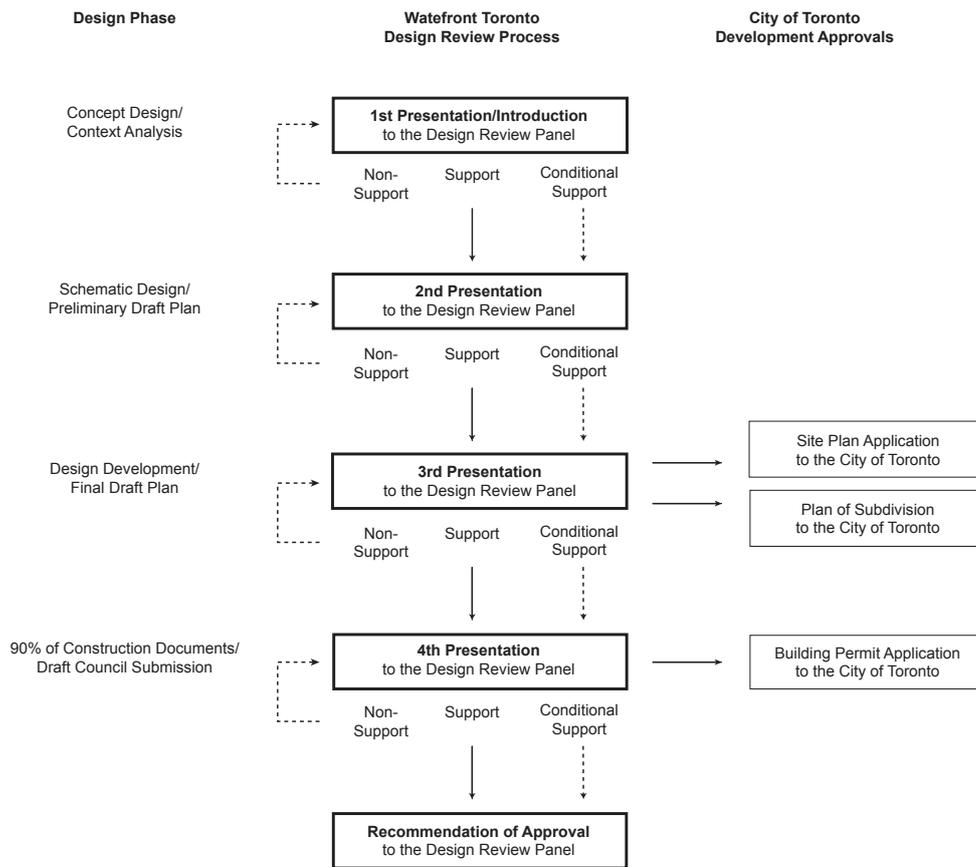
### *8.5. Achieving greater clarity*

The design review process for the Corus Building ended with mixed results. The panel was able to encourage some minor changes to the design (TORONTO 6 2011), but was never able to get on board with the architectural philosophy or fully reconcile its opposition to the changes being forced upon the precinct plan. In the end, the panel's capacity to engineer a change of direction was limited by the corporation's lack of legal authority over the land parcel and the politicisation of the review process. Not only did the corporation's board of directors ultimately have to get involved, but during the middle of 2007, in the midst of the review process, the mayor and City Council approved a loan to help TEDCO complete the project and offered Corus Entertainment a significant twenty-year tax relief benefit if they moved to the waterfront site (City of Toronto 2007). In addition to these external factors, it was also evident that the panel failed to operate effectively under pressure. One panel member remembers that the process was "kind of [like] theatre" (DESIGN 7 2011), while another reflects that many panel members made the mistake of turning the review into a pure architectural critique (DESIGN 1 2011). One of the presenting architects adds that the panel acted like the 'aesthetic police' and often gave contradictory advice or endeavoured to redesign the building during the panel meetings (DESIGN 6 2011).

Recognising that the Waterfront Design Review Panel could be much more effective, the corporation's senior design team worked with the panel to develop a new set of procedural guidelines. These were adopted in the form of a new by-law at the beginning of the panel's January 2008 meeting (Waterfront Toronto 2008c) and offered precise details on how the panel should deliberate. The by-law included a clear statement on how many times a project could be reviewed by the panel: something that the previous terms of reference had failed to do. To improve clarity and avoid some of the inconsistencies experienced during the media complex review, the new by-law incorporated a phased review structure requiring all projects to receive a minimum of four reviews. The four phases were staggered and purposefully included an early conceptual review to allow the panel an opportunity to "focus on the quality and appropriateness of the main design intent, or 'the big idea' of the project" (Waterfront Toronto 2008d, 6), before the production of more detailed designs (see Figure 31).

**Figure 31: Phased Review Process for the Waterfront Design Review Panel**

(Diagram by the author; adapted from Waterfront Toronto 2008d, 8)



The most important and, indeed, controversial component of the phased review process was the introduction of voting. When it was set up, the panel had decided not to vote at the end of each review, but following the confusion surrounding the media complex review, the corporation insisted that the panel reconsider. The waterfront corporation argued that voting on whether to support a project or not was essential if the panel wished to avoid the accusation of proffering contradictory advice. Voting has since helped the panel to make clearer decisions and improved the clarity of the panel's advice. A qualitative reading of the meeting minutes released before and after the introduction of the new by-law indicates that the quality of the panel's discussions improved as a result of the various operational changes. The decision to consider a specific set of issues at each phase of the review process helped the panel to focus their discussions and avoid offering 'design solutions' during the course of their evaluations. Moreover, the knowledge that each review would conclude with a vote appeared to help the panel to be more consistent. The result was that the chair's final summaries were much more direct and less

ambiguous than before.

Demonstrating the need for what Punter (2007, 171) refers to as 'clear *a priori* rules and guidelines for urban design intervention', the review of the Corus Building laid bare many administrative failings and directly precipitated the more rigorous guidelines adopted in early 2008. Yet, more broadly, it also demonstrated the fragility of design review and the unpredictability of politics, personality and ego. Creative design has an intensely personal dimension, especially when designers have their projects publically scrutinised by their professional equals. Nevertheless, the Waterfront Design Review Panel has emerged as an important voice on waterfront design offering an added layer of sophistication to the planning decision-making process. To some extent this is due to the panel's soft power, or 'moral suasion', which is bolstered by the calibre and reputation of both the chair and the other panel members. Its panel members are well respected and the panel proceedings generate sustained interest from the press, especially when high profile projects come before it. As the panel has become more established, designers who are called up for review often feel obligated to present their best work, not wanting to be embarrassed in front of their colleagues and competitors. This, a former panel member states, has transformed the review process into a genuine "peer review" (DESIGN 1 2011).

## **9. Public participation and engagement**

### *9.1 Introduction*

Earlier sections of this paper have noted that commitments to public participation and engagement during the waterfront visioning process were tokenistic. Public consultation during the Task Force years often occurred after strategic decisions had been made and, as a result, had a negligible impact on the waterfront planning and design agenda. As the corporation took control of the waterfront redevelopment process, concerns remained about its ability to act in the public interest (Eidelman 2011; Laidley 2011). In this section, the paper looks at the TWRC's commitment to public participation. Eidelman (2011) notes that the corporation's public participation philosophy and practice is now "a far cry from the closed-door elite only approaches" (280) that were the hallmark of the Task Force era, while a former City of Toronto planning manager claims that the corporation is widely considered to be a "master at public consultation" (TORONTO 8 2011), and far exceeds its legislative mandate to engage local people in the waterfront revitalisation programme. "Right from the initial phases, before anything is done," he states, "...there are pens put to paper right through the whole process. They are very, very good at that and people really appreciate it. All the residents and the business community feel very positive about it" (TORONTO 8 2011).

### *9.2 Why a change in practice?*

There appear to be a number of reasons why the corporation transformed its practice. One political operative at the City of Toronto argues that the TWRC has simply been able to reserve a much larger proportion of its budget for public consultation than the City of Toronto ever could during the secondary plan process (POLITICAL 2 2011). It has also been argued that the corporation has consciously used public meetings and other participatory processes to build a broad constituency of support for its waterfront planning and design vision, in part, for reasons of political expediency. "[W]ithout backing from the local community, and the political will that comes with such support," contends Eidelman (2001), "the TWRC may not be able to convince government partners to extend its funding" (280) in the future. It is not easy to pinpoint whether the availability of resources or a more calculated political objective was the primary driver of the waterfront corporation's improved commitment to public consultation. Both certainly influenced the changes that occurred; however, there

does also appear to have been a genuine desire on the part of the leadership team to improve their practice and engage more directly with people who lived and worked on the waterfront.

The origins of the transformation can be traced to a key relationship that developed in the early 2000s between Robert Fung and the West Don Lands Committee, which was formed in 1997 as an agglomeration of local neighbourhood associations and stakeholder groups to protest against the construction of a horseracing track on the long-derelict West Don Lands site (West Don Lands Committee 1999). In 1999, the committee successfully applied for a federal grant to conduct a community-led planning workshop with the aim of demonstrating that a more thoughtful development strategy might satisfy the needs of all stakeholders, including the provincial government (*ibid.*). The workshop also coincided – like the Task Force’s parallel visioning process for the wider waterfront – with the emerging bid process for the 2008 Olympic Games, which, as noted in Section 3, had proposed that a media village be located on a portion of the West Don Lands site (see Figure 13).

The West Don Lands Committee held their three-day planning workshop in November 1999. Among the principles and strategies for future development agreed by the planning workshop participants was a desire to weave the West Don Lands site into existing communities and create a 24-hr mixed use and a pedestrian-scaled community with significant amounts of public open space (West Don Lands Committee 1999). Three ten-person multi-disciplinary design teams attempted to transform the community’s ideas into sample development concepts. All of the teams produced variations on a dense mixed-use residential neighbourhood with ample public space provision. The West Don Lands Committee published an illustrated summary booklet of its efforts that was later presented to the City of Toronto’s Planning and Transportation Committee, where it was endorsed as a model for similar future planning exercises in the city (City of Toronto 2000b).

Among the attendees at the three-day workshop was Robert Fung, who had been appointed chair of the Toronto Waterfront Redevelopment Task Force only a few weeks before (Rusk 1999). As discussed in Section 3, Fung’s appointment had initially come as quite a surprise because he lacked planning and design experience and, as a result, many West Don Lands Committee members were sceptical of his appointment. However, they were also encouraged by his decision to attend and actively participate in their workshop (CIVIL 5 2011). For Fung, the experience of

taking part in the workshop became an important milestone during his leadership of the waterfront redevelopment project. Meeting local people and learning about their aspirations for the waterfront altered his ideas about how to lead the revitalisation programme (TWRC 8 2011). Aware of the powerful role that the evolving corporation might one day have on the waterfront, the leaders of the West Don Lands Committee also realised that they had to demonstrate their credibility as potential partners in the revitalisation process early on. One member of the West Don Lands Committee admits that the timing of the three-day planning workshop a few weeks after Fung was appointed “couldn’t have been better” (CIVIL 5 2011), noting:

...we [the West Don Lands Committee] demonstrated that, as members of the public who had informed themselves and committed themselves to this work, we had something to add. We were valuable allies and valuable sources of information about our communities, and it was important for them [the corporation] to actually develop a relationship with us” (CIVIL 5 2011).

### *9.3 Developing a Public Consultation and Participation Strategy*

The first evidence of a shift towards more positive consultation about the waterfront’s future can be traced to the new corporation’s 2002 inaugural business plan, which included a participation strategy that stated the corporation’s desire to use public consultation to “[b]uild constituency, trust and support for the Corporation” (TWRC 2002a, 4) and generate a positive dialogue between those who might disagree about the future of the waterfront. The corporation aimed to create a productive environment for participation that straddled the divide between experts and lay people, while also generating a forum for resolving conflicts and encouraging community leaders to emerge. What was envisaged, and what has since evolved as one of the corporation’s central philosophies, was an iterative relationship between open forum public meetings and a stakeholder roundtable.

The West Don Lands Committee and other community organisations, including the neighbourhood associations representing other areas of the waterfront, were amenable to the general concept proposed in the TWRC’s business plan, but questioned how public forums and a stakeholder roundtable group would work in practice. In their view, the strategy document failed to adequately explain which

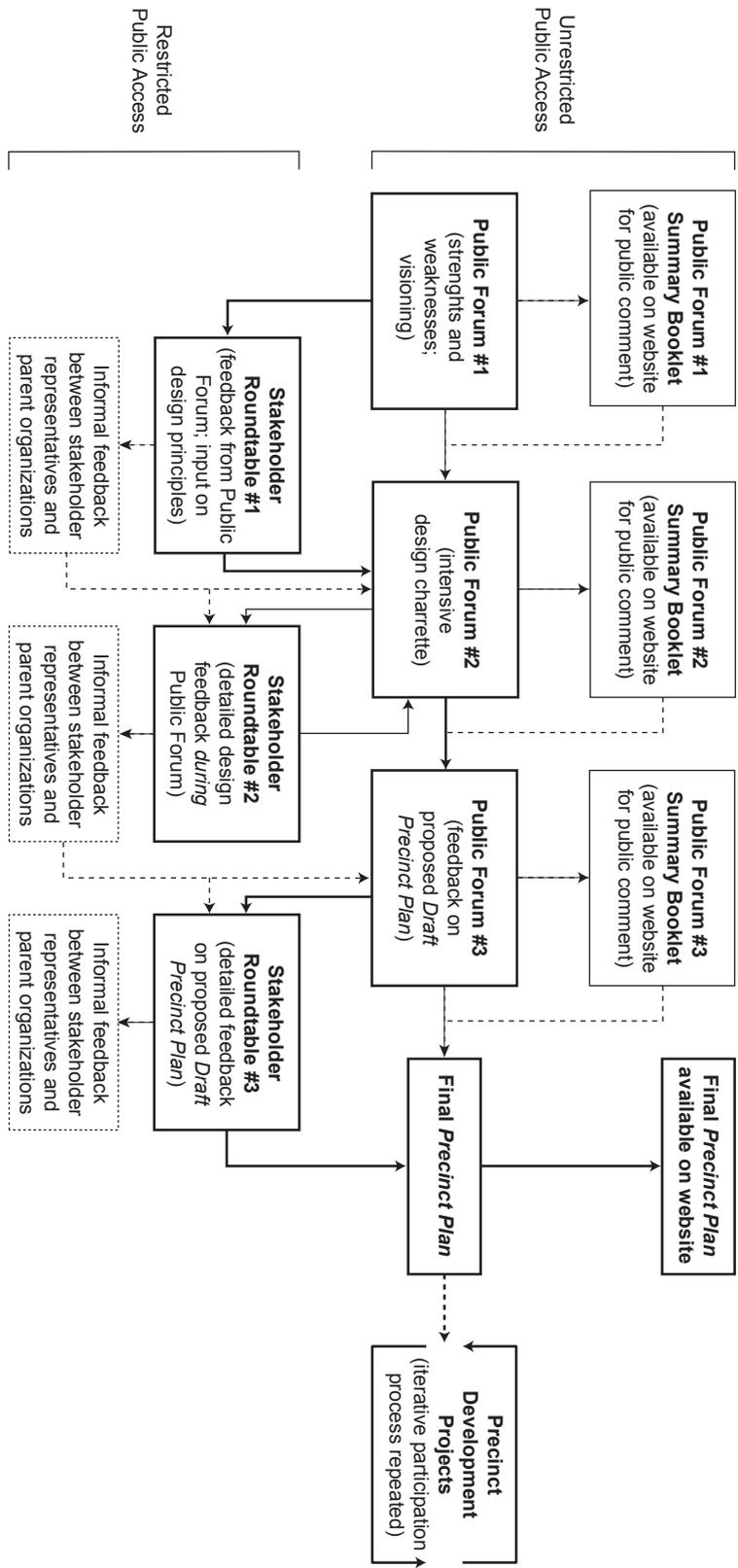
organisations were waterfront ‘stakeholders’ and what planning and development projects would be subject to the type of consultation proposed. In a formal written response to the proposal, the West Don Lands Committee – by far the most organised of local neighbourhood associations at the time – noted that a successful participation process had to find ways to avoid ‘tokenistic’ public meetings and, in an effort to more clearly define the role of the stakeholder roundtable group, suggested that stakeholder advisory committees could be convened for each of the waterfront precincts (Wilkey 2003). The Committee further proposed that each stakeholder advisory committee might “...include representatives with demonstrated expertise, commitment, and where possible, accountability to an existing community stakeholder” (ibid., 1) and be convened at the earliest stages of the planning and design process to allow the community’s local knowledge to be integrated into the decision making process.

#### *9.4 Implementing ‘iterative’ public participation*

The Committee’s response to the proposed strategy had a direct impact on the approach to public participation that was adopted by the waterfront corporation. The corporation has combined public meetings with stakeholder advisory committees (SACs) – that are unique to each precinct – on all of its projects. In addition, it has also made a concerted effort to consult the public about individual buildings and public spaces, as well as (on-going) phases of construction. Furthermore, and in an effort to increase accessibility, the corporation’s public meetings are held on weekday evenings. Central to this approach is the iterative nature of the format used (see Figure 32). The first public meeting during a precinct planning process typically begins with a broader discussion of the participants’ ideas, desires and concerns about the site in question. Design principles and master planning options are not presented until later meetings, by which time the design teams have had an opportunity to respond to the local knowledge of the participants.

**Figure 32: Waterfront consultation and participation process**

(Diagram by the author)



Further feedback is collected at the interim SAC meetings, which are held *in camera* with community representatives, as well as local businesses and institutions located in or in close proximity to the precinct. These include active neighbourhood associations such as the Gooderham and Worts Neighbourhood Association (which represents the residents of a new mixed-use development just north of the East Bayfront precinct), the Central Waterfront Neighbourhood Association, the York Quay Neighbourhood Association and the Waterfront Business Improvement Association. Large commercial concerns located on the waterfront, such as the Redpath sugar company and Loblaws supermarkets, are also directly involved in the SAC process. The primary aim of the SAC meetings is to have focused and detailed discussions about specific design and planning proposals in preparation for the next public meeting. Although no minutes are released from the SACs, a thorough summary booklet of each public meeting is produced and hard copies are made available and the summary documents for most of the public meetings conducted by the TWRC Toronto since 2003 are readily available on the corporation's website.

Written summaries of the precinct planning meetings demonstrate the strength of the iterative engagement processes adopted by the TWRC and, in particular, the level of collaboration that occurs between design experts and lay people. In contrast to previous research on design collaboration events, which has found expert opinion to dominate and obfuscate the decision-making process (Grant 2006; Bond and Thompson-Fawcett 2007), the format adopted by the TWRC appears to emphasise reciprocity. At the start of each meeting, the corporation's design consultants outline how the evolving design has changed since the last public meeting and then, as a starting point for the next round of discussion, seek feedback on the new material they have produced. The same process is repeated at each meeting until a final precinct plan is produced. Further SAC and annual public meetings are then held to solicit feedback on the scope of supporting planning documentation, such as zoning by-law amendments, and the various building projects that are underway. For the corporation, the SACs act as a critical sounding board for new and, at times, controversial ideas and provide an important two-way link between the community and the corporation (Waterfront Toronto 2012a).

The general public do appear to show up, in large numbers, to the forums convened by the waterfront corporation. The summary report from the West Don Lands public consultation documents that between 100 and 200 people attended each of the four public forums (TWRC 2004), while the East Bayfront precinct planning processes

was attended by between 200 and 250 people. In 2008, the public forums that were convened to discuss the master planning proposals for Queens Quay Boulevard on the Central Waterfront were equally well attended and attracted between 230 and 200 local residents (Waterfront Toronto 2008e; 2008f). Moreover, a three-day series of public forums on the revitalisation of the Port Lands precinct, held in March 2012, was attended by over 500 people (Lura Consulting and SWERHUN 2012).

#### *9.5 Widening opportunities for participation?*

The public participation process on Toronto's waterfront has not been without criticism. Lehrer and Laidley (2008) identify the wider case as a new form of 'mega-project' that uses the neoliberal language of interurban competition to focus on benefits for particular groups in society, rather than benefits for all. The authors support this assertion with the example of the corporation's public forums and stakeholder meetings, arguing that while the meetings are well attended by members of the public, they fail, in the authors' estimation, to engage a diversity of local residents, especially those living in poorer districts of Toronto. This criticism is shared by Eidelman who also argues that residents from nearby low-income neighbourhoods have been generally "underrepresented" (2011, 280). It might be further argued that one of the biggest gaps in the corporation's strategy has been the lack of engagement with people who have recently moved to the waterfront. The membership of many of the waterfront SACs has not changed significantly since the start of the precinct planning processes for the East Bayfront and the West Don Lands. Therefore, while the relationship building that has occurred should be applauded, the narrowly defined composition of the SACs remains problematic. Almost all of the community representation on the SACs is drawn from adjacent neighbourhoods and the representatives tend to be retired white professionals. In this respect, the corporation must also recognise that the design and planning priorities of people living on the waterfront, as opposed to those living near it, might well be shaped by different considerations, especially if they have invested in waterfront real estate.

A further concern relates to the structure of the SACs. While the iterative feedback loop that exists between open public meetings and smaller invitation-only stakeholder meetings is an effective model for gathering a combination of general and focused feedback, the transparency of the SAC process is troubling. As stated earlier, no minutes are taken at these *in-camera* meetings and, therefore, little can be

known about the nature of the discussions that take place. The corporation claims that sensitive financial data relating to land deals and real estate markets is often discussed and, therefore, it would place the corporation at a competitive disadvantage if minutes were published. Yet the lack of an official record severely limits the openness of the SAC process and, unnecessarily obfuscates an otherwise formidable instrument in the public consultation and participation process employed on Toronto's waterfront.

Despite these challenges, the waterfront corporation has, in large part, transformed its approach to consultation and does engage many hundreds of local people and stakeholders in the planning and design of the waterfront each year. In contrast to the lacklustre public dialogue achieved by the earlier Task Force, the corporation now meets many of the basic conditions for collaborative decision-making (Bond and Thompson-Fawcett 2007). By establishing an iterative dialogue with local people and stakeholders the corporation has, to a large extent, provided "the conditions for all members of the community to be involved in the process of developing and committing to a coordinated vision of urban design" (Punter 2007, 171). Moreover, it has managed to establish a collaborative process for the periodic review of urban design plans (author 2015) by continuing to consult local community groups and stakeholders on the master plans and building projects as they change and evolve. It has also created a forum for expert and experiential ideas to come together and for bridges to be built between various opinions on the future of the waterfront's revitalization: a process that might be cast as 'mutual learning' (Friedmann 1973).

Yet, the relationship that has formed between the local community associations and the waterfront corporation remains dynamic and delicate. When the precinct planning process for the West Don Lands and the East Bayfront were conducted in the mid-2000s there were very few residents or business that were located in the two precincts. But, as implementation has got started and the first residential buildings are occupied this situation will change. No longer will all the people attending public forums and SACs be mere observers, instead they will be members of the community, living and working on waterfront with a vested interest in its future. Making sure these actors have a voice remains one of the corporation's biggest challenges.

## **10. Conclusion**

### *10.1 Introduction*

The post-industrial story of Toronto's waterfront began in the 1960s. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the waterfront was plagued by a lack of strategic vision, transparency and inter-governmental cooperation, and a public, accessible and well-designed waterfront – while always the aspiration of successive political leaders – failed to materialise. Cut off from the downtown by the Gardiner Expressway and the parallel railway corridor, the waterfront remained a largely forgotten part of the city and many of the sporadic development projects that emerged were poorly conceived. Since 1999, however, coordinated public expenditure and private investment has shifted the narrative on Toronto's waterfront and, under the direction of a development corporation, the city has witnessed the start of a waterfront renaissance. The construction of new open spaces, a waterfront promenade and various residential and commercial buildings has been achieved via a complex array of financial arrangements, political agreements and planning policy, supported by a suite of new design tools and mechanisms.

This final section of the paper presents a series of reflections on the urban design process that has shaped the city's waterfront since 1999, evaluating the extent to which some of the design objectives for the waterfront have been met and assessing the tools and mechanisms employed by the waterfront corporation to further its goal of 'design excellence' (TWRC 2002). The section ends with some final thoughts on the future of the design-led planning agenda and the wider lessons that might be drawn from the case.

### *10.2 Key design governance themes since 1999*

The biggest surprise from the recent history of Toronto's waterfront is the speed with which a coordinated and design-led vision of the waterfront was put into motion in the early 2000s after so many decades of inaction. The key urban design governance themes that have shaped this process are summarised as follows:

- The bid for the 2008 Olympic Games convinced the federal, provincial and municipal levels of governments to commit to an urban design vision for the waterfront (2000) and provide political and financial support to a dedicated

redevelopment corporation (2000-2001), albeit with limited financial and planning powers.

- The early strategic definition of urban design used by politicians and the waterfront Task Force (2000-2002) was narrowly defined and wedding the future of the waterfront to notions of urban competitiveness, privileging the economic value of urban design and promoting sites for New Economy jobs.
- The language found in the early visioning documents produced by the private sector Task Force (2000) was often identical to that used in official City of Toronto planning documents (1999) suggesting a close working relationship, but also a lack of openness and engagement with the public (Lehrer and Laidley 2008).
- The waterfront secondary plan (2002) represented a positive shift in the planning philosophy for the waterfront by focusing on the quality of place and imagining a neighbourhood-scaled environment that would provide enhanced accessibility to the lake
- Despite funding commitments made by the three governments, the financial stability of the new waterfront corporation (formally created in 2002) was weak and it nearly went bankrupt (2004).
- A last minute funding commitment (2004) staved off bankruptcy but laid bare the financial vulnerability of the waterfront corporation, which continues to be reliant on short-term funding contributions and lacks the power to raise funds independently.
- This deficit of financial power led the waterfront corporation to find new ways to assert its strategic role on the waterfront and two memoranda of understanding for the West Don Lands (2005) and the East Bayfront (2006) confirmed the corporation's role as the 'lead master planner' of the waterfront lands and consolidated its control over large areas of the waterfront.
- A new 'layer' of urban design tools and mechanisms, including the precinct plans, a design review panel (established in 2005) and urban design guidelines have emerged as the core components of the waterfront corporation's approach to design governance.
- The waterfront corporation relies on development agreements with its private sector partners to ensure compliance with its design excellence agenda.
- The waterfront corporation's approach to precinct planning precipitated a fundamental shift towards public consultation and engagement on all elements of the waterfront planning process (since 2002).

- Design competitions have been used to generate both public and commercial interest in the waterfront planning and design vision, and led to the creation of popular public spaces that have won numerous awards for the quality and creativity (since 2005).

The waterfront corporation has achieved a great deal more in the past eleven years than previous efforts to plan and redevelop Toronto's waterfront, but it has yet to achieve all of objectives that were set in the waterfront secondary plan, *Making Waves*, which established the need to: remove barriers/make connections, build a network of spectacular waterfront parks and open spaces, promote a clean and green environment and create dynamic and diverse new communities (see Figure 19). The limited accessibility of the waterfront from the downtown core, in particular, greatly detracts from other successes in the individual waterfront precincts. Yet at this relatively early stage in the process, it is premature to offer a comprehensive design assessment of the overall implementation. The corporation has, however, been particularly successful with respect to parks and open space and its commitment to master planning, but as it transitions from being a primarily plan-making organisation into one intently focused on implementation, the corporation faces an uphill battle to maintain continued political support and generate the necessary funds to implement the various components of its ambitious waterfront vision.

The corporation's funding model remains its greatest limitation. Although the three governments made a shared pledge of \$1.5 billion towards the waterfront redevelopment effort in 1999, a large amount of public money has been directed towards projects favoured by politicians at the time rather than the corporation's planning and design programme. Furthermore, as a public entity, the corporation is specifically barred from raising funds independently. Such an institutional design limitation means the corporation has to rely on transfers from any or all of the three levels of government. This greatly limits its ability to act efficiently in the waterfront real estate market because the relative commitment of the federal, provincial and municipal governments to the long-term waterfront redevelopment programme rest precariously on the outcome of three separate election cycles and thereby the actions of politicians who hold public office at the time.

### Figure 33: Public Realm Improvements on the Central Waterfront

(Photographs by Daniel Pearce, 2011)



This photograph depicts the Rees Wave Deck in the Central Waterfront. The 'wave deck' is one of series of new sculptural wooden structures along the water's edge that emerged from a design competition for the Central Waterfront as part of the corporation's leading with landscape programme.

#### *10.3 An assessment of urban design governance on Toronto's waterfront*

In the opening section of this paper, a series of questions were posed about the effectiveness of the regime used to govern urban design on Toronto's waterfront. These were drawn from internationally derived best practice principles for design review and development management. The principles are grouped into four themes: community collaboration and visioning, the integration of planning and zoning and other instruments, broad and substantive ecological design principles and due process and skills. Employing a similar format to Punter, who used the original principles to evaluate the design control system in Vancouver (2003) and Sydney (2005), the paper now offers an assessment of the urban design process on Toronto's waterfront using a adapted version of the principles developed by Punter (2007) and this author (author 2015).

Turning first to *community collaboration and visioning*, the scope and quality of community consultation conducted by the waterfront corporation is one of its most significant achievements. Beginning with the first public meetings for the West Don Lands and East Bayfront precinct plans in 2003, the corporation has conducted detailed consultation on all of its masterplans, building projects and public space. By interweaving public meetings with smaller stakeholder advisory committees (SACs), the corporation has created the conditions for an iterative dialogue to evolve with local communities. This marked a shift from the lacklustre consultation conducted under the Task Force and a return to the more inclusive approach adopted by the Royal Commission in the early 1990s.

For certain groups and community interests, the corporation's participation process has generated a 'sense of ownership' over the waterfront redevelopment programme. However, it is not without its flaws. Earlier research has pointed to the corporation's failure to engage a true cross-section of people and, in particular, those residents who live in underprivileged neighbourhoods close to the waterfront (Lehrer and Laidley 2008), as well as those who are new to the waterfront. A further concern, discussed in Section 9, pertains to the structure of the SACs, which, undertaken in private session to not offer the same level of openness and dialogue.

### **Figure 34: Community collaboration and visioning**

1. Providing the conditions for all members of the community to be involved in the process of developing and committing to a coordinated vision of environmental beauty and design (revised from Brennan's Law).

#### **Achievements:**

- Corporate commitment to public consultation and participation through a rigorous public consultation strategy.
- Implementation of innovative public participation process on all plan-making and construction projects.
- Accessible and well-attended public meetings.

#### **Future Challenges:**

- Delivery of design vision agreed between public and corporation.
- Encouraging a wider cross section of people to take part in public participation process, especially new waterfront residents.
- Recognising that priorities of new waterfront residents might shift and change.

2. Developing and monitoring urban design plans (at the citywide and site level) that are supported by the community.

**Achievements:**

- Local communities have assumed ownership of precinct plans and wider vision for the waterfront.

**Future Challenges:**

- Maintain trust achieved between local communities and corporation.

3. Employing innovative participation tools that encourage the broadest cross-section of local people to participate in the design process.

**Achievements:**

- Iterative public meetings and SACs have created a strong feedback loop between communities and the corporation.
- Report back meetings and on-going SACs meetings allow the general public to be engaged throughout all phases of planning and implementation.

**Future Challenges:**

- Lack of clarity in the SAC process needs to be addressed.
- Maintaining 'high bar' set on initial plans and projects.

With respect to *the integration of planning and zoning and other instruments*, the most important design-led planning documents on the waterfront are the precinct plans and the supporting zoning by-laws. In addition to establishing the core planning and design principles for the various sectors of the waterfront, the zoning by-laws also detail the specific contributions required from developers for housing and public realm costs in exchange for particular residential density and height allowances. These costs are typically subject to negotiation. Therefore, the legal agreements between the waterfront corporation and their development partners, discussed in Section 7, are therefore crucial. These reaffirm the targets that have been set in the precinct plans and the zoning by-law amendments and require developers to respond in kind. However, they are still to be fully tested and pertain only to the land controlled by the corporation (albeit the vast majority of land on the waterfront). The design excellence agenda on the waterfront is also underpinned by the appropriation of public money to the redevelopment programme and, in particular, the investment in 'leading with landscape', which support the early construction of public parks and open spaces.

### Figure 35: Integration of planning and zoning and other instruments

4. Harnessing the broadest range of actors and instruments (tax, subsidy, land acquisition, etc.) to promote better design and encourage the development of ecologically sensitive infrastructure.

**Achievements:**

- Channelling tri-government financial contributions towards public realm improvements.
- Employing design competitions to encourage high design standard and committing to the renaturalisation of the Don River.

**Future Challenges:**

- Ensuring that tri-government commitment (\$1.5bn), and future monies, to the corporation.
- Achieving the long-term ambition of renaturalising the Don River.

5. Mitigating the exclusionary effects of control strategies and urban design regulation.

**Achievements:**

- Investment in parks and open space.
- Commitments to affordable/social housing.
- Mandated contributions towards waterfront infrastructure, affordable housing in zoning by-law amendments and reaffirmed in developer agreements.

**Future Challenges:**

- Ensuring that private developers meet affordable and social housing targets for the waterfront.

6. Integrating zoning into planning and addressing the limitations of zoning.

**Achievements:**

- Precinct plans translated into zoning by-law amendments.
- Zoning by-law amendments supported by urban design guidelines.

**Future Challenges:**

- Ensuring that the various mechanisms employed to protect spirit of precinct plans.

As regards *broad and substantive ecological urban design principles*, the vision for the waterfront district, contained in the waterfront secondary plan (City of Toronto 2002), provides a thorough, but not overly prescriptive, design-led framework which promotes normative urban design principles that focus on the creation of an accessible, human-scaled waterfront as well as supporting context-specific principles to guide development initiatives, such of the division of the waterfront into neighbourhood-scale precincts. The precinct plans and supplementary urban design guidelines offer further site-specific principles and objectives, which emphasise the relationships between built form and do not unduly focus on building aesthetics.

There is considerable scope for design innovation and spontaneity to occur during the planning and design process and for individual building architects and landscape

architects to make their mark and, despite the early teething problems described in Section 8, the waterfront design review panel exists to ensure that a balance is sought between architectural creativity and the design principles contained in the precinct plans. Design creativity is further encouraged through the design competition process.

**Figure 36: Broad and substantive ecological design principles**

7. *Basing urban design guidelines on generic (ecological) urban design principles that are developed in conjunction with the community and supported by contextual analysis.*

**Achievements:**

- Corporate commitment to ‘design excellence’.
- Established urban design principles underpin programme.
- Local communities have played a role in production of plans and policies for the waterfront since 2003.

**Future Challenges:**

- Scope for ecology to be more fully integrated into waterfront programme.

8. *Using a collaborative process to explore how ecological urban design principles, such as amenity, accessibility, community, vitality, energy efficiency and resilient form, might be mutually beneficial to all local stakeholders.*

**Achievements**

- Sustainable revitalisation program defined during the precinct planning processes.

**Future Challenges:**

- Engagement with local communities about ecological urban design.
- Realising long-standing transformative ecological commitment (the Don River).

9. *Articulating desired and mandatory urban design outcomes in the design process, while allowing spontaneity, vitality, innovation and pluralism to flourish.*

**Achievements:**

- Emphasis on controlling baseline urban design outcomes rather than mandating particular architectural treatments.
- Design excellence and innovation undergirded by design competitions.

**Future Challenges:**

- Ensure design review feedback is clear and constructive.

Urban design theory has tended to focus on the qualities and aesthetics of urban space for human usage and, broadly speaking, this approach has guided the ‘design excellence’ agenda on Toronto’s waterfront since 1999. Recent urban design theory, however, increasingly conceptualises urban design through an ecological lens (e.g. Hester 2008) and it is important to recount that sustainability was identified as a core concern on the waterfront in the 1992 report by the Royal Commission, which

characterised the waterfront revitalisation in ecological terms. While this approach did not necessarily come to dominate subsequent planning and design efforts, the legacy of the Royal Commission's work is clearly evident in the precinct planning work for the Port Lands, where the vision to improve the ecological condition of the Don River through the renaturalisation of the river estuary remains a key principle.

**Figure 37: Winning Submission for the Port Lands Estuary**

(Waterfront Toronto 2007e, 3)



A visualisation showing how the re-naturalised Don River might appear in the future following a 2007 design competition for the Lower Don Lands precinct in the Port Lands that was won by a team led by landscape architect Michael Van Valkenberg.

Looking finally at *due process and skills*, the link that has been forged between the secondary plan, the waterfront precinct plans and specific open space and building projects is critical. The measures that have been taken, such as the use of urban design guidelines and the deployment of a peer review design panel, heighten the role that urban design plays in the planning decision-making process but, at the same time, serves to circumvent the regulatory failings of the extant planning system. As a result, design control on the waterfront rests on the relationship that exists between the City of Toronto, as the planning approval authority, and the waterfront corporation as master planner. At present, the two organisations work well together

and the planning and design vision for the waterfront is a shared one. All of the waterfront precinct plans have also been fully endorsed by the City of Toronto Council and all applications for site plan approval receive an enormous amount of scrutiny through the design review process and the corporation's SACs before they are finally assessed by the City of Toronto. Nevertheless, this collaboration is only good as long as it lasts. The personalities of key decision-makers, a problematic development project or the impact of a new political agenda could all weaken the fragile relationships that have been used to work around the corporation's governance model – as Section 8 vividly demonstrated through the example of the Corus Building.

Lastly, the integration of urban design skills and real estate expertise into the planning and design process on Toronto's waterfront is both impressive and far-reaching. This achievement can be traced to the years of the Task Force, when Robert Fung, a successful businessman but design novice, sought the skills of private sector design experts to produce his vision and management plan in 2000. Fung selected a team of urban designers with a combination of local and international master planning experience. Yet, this group was also chosen because they understood large-scale redevelopment and the role that urban design plays in the wider planning and real estate process. They were not just planners and designers, but 'market actors'. It was during this period that the concept of precinct planning emerged, as well as the emphasis on 'design excellence' that eventually became a core policy objective that is now directly supported, in practice, by the waterfront design review panel.

## Figure 38: Due process and skills

10. Identify clear a priori rules and guidelines for urban design intervention to avoid arbitrary discretionary decision-making.

### **Achievements:**

- Level of urban design control exceeds that traditionally found in Toronto.
- Proceedings of the review panel are underpinned by the urban design objectives contained in the hierarchy of waterfront plans and guidance.

### **Future Challenges:**

- Ensuring review panel conducts discussions within the bounds of the waterfront planning and urban design policy framework.

11. Establishing proper administrative procedures with written opinions to manage discretion and implementing an efficient, constructive and effective permitting process that is supported by an appropriate appeal mechanism.

### **Achievements:**

- The review panel must assess all waterfront development applications before planning approvals can be sought.
- Success of waterfront review panel has led to a (non mandatory) review panel being formed by the City of Toronto.

### **Future Challenges:**

- Mitigating political intervention in the planning and design process.

12. Providing appropriate design skills and expertise to support the urban design policymaking and review process.

### **Achievements:**

- Dedicated urban design staff at the corporation.
- Review panel established to evaluate all design and planning proposals on the waterfront.

### **Future Challenges:**

- Ensuring that conflicts of interest do not emerge during the design review process.

13. Equipping planning and urban design staff with knowledge of the local property market and advancing their skills in collaborative negotiation to build capacity with public and private sector actors.

### **Achievements:**

Stakeholder forums allow private and public actors to discuss planning, design and development in a collaborative forum, reducing the conditions for conflict.

### **Future Challenges:**

- Ensuring that a positive dialogue between public and private sector actors continues throughout all the various phases of implementation and construction.

### *10.4 A positive public private partnership?*

In spite of the glossy focus on global competition espoused by the Task Force in the early 2000s, the design language of Toronto's waterfront and the urban design goals and objectives of the corporation have aired on the side of pragmatism. The current chapter of the waterfront redevelopment story was initiated by a bid for the Olympic Games and began like many other large-scale waterfront projects with a focus on a 'spectacle' events to draw capital to the city. However, the failure of the bid changed this narrative and, ever since, the aim has not been to furnish the waterfront with arts, cultural or sports projects, but instead to create a series of mixed-use neighbourhoods linked together by high quality public accessible space.

This long-term vision remains the goal of the waterfront corporation and marks it out from other waterfront cities that have undertaken much more aggressive processes led by short-term capital investment and flagship development or architectural set pieces (e.g. Harvey 1991; Dovey 2005; Punter 2007a). In reflecting on the use of urban design on Toronto's waterfront, it is therefore pertinent to remember Biddulph's assessment of Liverpool (2011) and to note that, while urban design can easily get caught up in an agenda of global competition, it can still be governed in the public interest and used to create accessible public spaces and sustainable urban design qualities. This is undoubtedly the case in Toronto where the early planning and design documents used the language of global competition and the New Economy to shape the waterfront vision, but the reality of the subsequent implementation appears to be more nuanced combining economic goals with a clear desire to reconnect the city with the waterfront and create new public space to encourage its repopulation.

Research in the field of planning and urban design, which has long shown that short-term political agendas, financial instability and weak institutions impact the pursuit of a long-term design vision (Sandercock and Dovey 2002; Dovey 2005; Punter 2007; Bezmez 2008). These themes are germane to the case of Toronto's waterfront, especially in the early years of the new waterfront corporation, when its efforts to foster a design-led planning process were marred by periods of institutional uncertainty and a general unwillingness to radically transform the regulatory planning framework for the waterfront. The impediments of the waterfront corporation's governance model loom large over its ambitious redevelopment programme and, as a result, the case of the Toronto waterfront cannot be cast as an exemplar of urban design governance in the way cities like Vancouver (Punter 2003) or Barcelona (Marshall 2004) might. The achievement of a truly integrated commitment to design-

led planning in Toronto remains a goal yet reached and the story of urban design governance on the city's waterfront is one characterised by fighting against the odds and working around regulatory impediments and financial roadblocks to deliver a quality built environment. At the very least, then, the story of the Toronto's waterfront corporation stands as an example of resourcefulness when the powers to act effectively are limited. More than that, however, the corporation has successfully trodden a fine line between being the public steward of the waterfront on the one hand and a real estate developer on the other and the case demonstrates how urban design can emerge as a central part of a more sophisticated conversation about the future of space and place.

The design story on Toronto's waterfront has been characterised by moments of political courage and leadership, far reaching aspirations and policies and a sense of shared commitment between the producers, uses and regulators of the built environment. When taken at face value, the corporation has the appearance of a 'corporate' organisation. Its founding chair was a billionaire businessman and its current CEO a real estate developer. Yet, the corporation has not lost sight of its public mission. It has broken down some of the barriers that typically exist between the public and private sectors and has allowed urban design to be driven as much by policy imperatives as by market conditions. This outcome has been determined by the iterative relationships that have been built with local people and other waterfront stakeholders through the corporation's approach to public consultation and engagement. Together, the corporation's thorough and methodological engagement processes have generated a 'sense of ownership' by the local community over the waterfront precinct plans and, indeed, the corporation's broader urban design vision for the waterfront. The mutual trust that has emerged between institutional actors and the general public mirrors theoretical aspirations for a 'soft infrastructure' of relationship-building in planning practice, that allows diverse participants to discuss planning concerns at a level beyond the elementary (Healey 2006) and to share in the decision-making process with dominant agents (Bond and Thompson-Fawcett 2007), in this case urban design and real estate development experts. Toronto's waterfront, this author would argue, represents a positive public-private partnership.

### *10.5 What does the future hold?*

The story of Toronto's waterfront redevelopment is far from over and, while this paper might have paused to reflect on the progress so far, the waterfront corporation continues its work. Despite continuing to face funding delays and political setbacks, the corporation has won numerous awards for its planning and design efforts (Waterfront Toronto 2013) and is now fully engaged in the job of implementation.

The closest the corporation has come to crisis in the current decade occurred – perhaps inevitability – during the second year of the tumultuous mayoralty of Rob Ford, who assumed office in 2010 when he replaced David Miller on a no-nonsense budget-cutting agenda. Not long after his election, Mayor Ford focused his attention on the waterfront corporation, describing it as a perfect example of government waste and excess in Toronto and “the biggest boondoggle the feds, the province and the city has ever done.” (quoted in Doolittle, 2011, 1). In the summer of 2011 the Mayor's brother, Doug Ford, himself a member of the City of Toronto council and a champion of the mayor's agenda, announced a proposal to take control of redevelopment in the Port Lands away from the waterfront corporation and work with a local developer to build a shopping mall, Ferris wheel and monorail (Doolittle 2011; James 2011). Doug Ford's vision for the waterfront was no joke and the mayor's powerful executive committee unanimously approved the proposal in early September 2011 (James 2011). However, in a high profile meeting of the City of Toronto Council a few weeks later, his plan was ultimately dismissed by a full vote of council. Such an outcome was by no means guaranteed and one of the key reasons that Council voted to dismiss Ford's plan rested on the unprecedented support for the corporation and its waterfront vision from local people, community groups and the Toronto planning and design community. Council also recognised the many years of consultation and community participation that had been conducted by the corporation. Cindy Wilkey, chair of the West Don Lands Committee, and one of the community architects of the corporation's public participation strategy, called the council vote a “stunning reversal” and admitted that she did not realise that Torontonians were “so passionate about the waterfront” (quoted in James 2011, 1).

In 2013 the waterfront corporation passed the half way mark of its 20-year mandate and, in 2017, it is expected to reach the limit of its \$1.5 billion tri-government funding. The corporation has so far invested \$1.3 billion of public money in the waterfront redevelopment programme and, in its 2013-2014 strategic business plan, states that this has resulted in “revenues of \$348 million to the federal government, \$237 million

to the provincial government and \$36 million to the City of Toronto” (Waterfront Toronto, 2013, 6). The report further states that the corporation’s waterfront redevelopment programme has generated \$3.2 billion of economic output for the Canadian economy. The corporation anticipates that a further \$1.65 billion will be required for it to fulfil its 20-year mandate (Church 2014) and, in its 2013-14 business plan, states that a short term line of credit and longer term loans are critical for its future financial planning. However, the business plan also reiterates what the corporation has long stated, that in order to realise its vision for the waterfront it requires “the power to borrow and encumber assets” (Waterfront Toronto 2013, 19) rather than rely on short-term contribution agreements from the three levels of government. Most recently, in June 2015, the issue of the Gardiner Expressway returned to the political agenda after a long hiatus when plans to demolish the elevated road were voted down by a small margin by Toronto City Council. The Council instead voted in favour of reducing the impact of the expressway on the eastern edge of the waterfront through a series of changes to the existing road network. Notably, councillors representing downtown residents voted in favour of removing the elevated highway, whereas those from suburban wards voted to retain it and undertake the much less dramatic improvement works (Rider 2015).

It is here that this particular account of Toronto’s waterfront redevelopment programme concludes. The avenues for further research on Toronto’s waterfront are multiple and wide-ranging, and will undoubtedly evolve as the next phase of the redevelopment programme takes shape. Looking through the lens of design governance and, based upon the evidence, this author’s own prediction for the future of Toronto’s waterfront is broadly positive. Undoubtedly many more challenges will arise, but the drive and ambition of the waterfront corporation is palpable and the true renaissance of Toronto’s lost edge appears to finally be within grasp. Nevertheless, many questions remain: Will the Gardiner Expressway ever be torn down and the connection between downtown Toronto and the waterfront restored? Will the ambitious master plan for the Port Lands and the re-naturalisation of the Don River ever be achieved? Will Toronto’s waterfront become a public room for all Torontonians? How will the downtown ‘condo boom’ impact the waterfront redevelopment vision? And, will future mayors of Toronto champion or challenge the corporation’s vision for the waterfront? Researchers must continue to ask questions such as these and seek to understand whether the urban design processes established by the corporation in the first decade of the 2000s have resulted in a

sustainable, open and accessible public realm that new residents are proud to call home.

## **8. Acknowledgements**

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## **Appendix: Description of codes**

The numbers assigned to the participants below denotes their categorisation in the full list of research participants for the wider project that led to this paper.

TORONTO 8

Former planning director at City of Toronto

TWRC 3

Senior executive and urban designer

TWRC 5

Former senior executive and urban designer

TWRC 7

Senior executive with managerial responsibilities

TWRC 8

Former senior executive with managerial responsibilities

DESIGN 1

Toronto-based urban designer and former urban designer at the City of Toronto

DESIGN 10

Partner at a Toronto-based urban design and planning firm

POLITICAL 2

Former City of Toronto senior political advisor with waterfront responsibilities

CIVIL 2:

Leader in neighbourhood association adjacent to Toronto's waterfront

CIVIL 5

Leader in neighbourhood association adjacent to Toronto's waterfront