

Government partners discuss opportunities for Toronto Waterfront revitalization

Michael Garrett, City Administrator from the City of Toronto, emphasized the long-standing urgency of Toronto's waterfront revitalization by recalling the sentiments of Lady Simcoe who, upon touring the mouth of the Don River in the late 1700's, remarked at how unspoiled it was. After 200 years of agricultural and industrial land use, he said that the area is finally being returned to a more natural state.

This project is one of many discussed by a panel that spoke to The Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships on March 28, 2001 about the tripartite government plan to revitalize Toronto's waterfront over the next 30 years with help from the private sector.

Together with Mr. Garrett, panel members included Margaret Bloodworth, Deputy Minister of Transport Canada and Mitch Patten, President of the Olympic Sports and Waterfront Development Agency of the Ontario Government.

Ms. Bloodworth began her remarks by noting that there are few cities of Toronto's size in the world with such potential development opportunities right in the city centre. She said that much of the current work has evolved from an intergovernmental task force chaired by Robert Fung, which made several recommendations in its report issued in the spring of 2000, including environmental remediation, transportation networks, public use and requirements for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. Ms. Bloodworth stated that the federal funding for the waterfront development would trigger a federal environmental assessment but that in order to keep the development cycle as short as possible, the federal government would make every effort to

streamline approvals with the Ontario Ministry of the Environment.

In October 2000, the three governments (municipal, provincial and federal) each made a \$500 million commitment for start-up funding of the waterfront revitalization. Ms. Bloodworth described the close partnership between the governments as "both a political and working" relationship. She appealed to the private sector to assist in raising the estimated \$12 billion in total capital as well as share in the rewards of an improved waterfront development.

Mitch Patten spoke about the provincial government's role and the anticipated governance structure for the Development Corporation. He emphasized that "The approach we take to the governance structure of the new agency will go a long way to determine the success of the revitalization itself." He attributed the previous failures concerning Toronto's waterfront plan to a lack of effective coordination and poor financial models.

Mr. Patten said that the proposed concept for the new Development Corporation would be arms-length would have all of the powers of a private corporation, including the ability to enter agreements, acquire land and lease or sell assets as it sees fit. It would be led by representatives from the private sector with oversight from the government partners. He did not anticipate that the corporation itself would be able to authorize initiatives that affect other agencies' jurisdiction (e.g. Exhibition Place, Ontario Place), but that the government partners would approve compliance through the development plan. He expects that the corporation would be at the least self-sufficient, and perhaps provide a repayment or return on investment to the three governments.

The first three major tasks of the corporation will be to formalize a development plan, create a business plan and articulate an infrastructure plan. He emphasized that these endeavours will be driven primarily by the Corporation itself without prescribed direction from the governments. In order to entrench involvement from the City in the Development Corporation, the Province is required to enact new legislation. In the meantime, an interim corporation will be given a limited mandate to manage the first phase revitalization projects, including:

1. Extension of Front Street (\$170 million)
2. Expansion of subway platforms and passenger corridors at Union Station (\$58 million)
3. Soil remediation and infrastructure in the Port Lands and West Don Lands (\$61 million)
4. Environmental assessment for naturalization and flood protection at the mouth of the Don River (\$2 million)

Mr. Patten asserted that this initiative is a departure from the “business as usual” approach and hoped that in one year he would be in the audience listening to the private sector discuss its successes in the Toronto waterfront revitalization.

Mr. Garrett’s view of the endeavour was one of “sprucing up the front porch of the city.” He sees the revitalization effort as “a great watershed with three governments willing to cut through their differences” and achieve a vision. He believes that the key to success is accelerating the zoning and planning approvals. A streamlined zoning process would consolidate the secondary and subdivision approval processes into one stage with greater latitude

given to projects that meet the overall Official Plan.

From April 24 to 27th, Toronto City Council will be considering the staff reports on waterfront governance and the first phase revitalization projects. The Central Waterfront Plan is being drafted and will be presented to Council within the year. Mr. Garrett said that options for the Gardiner Expressway are currently being evaluated and the Olympic Games will play a significant role in how and when the downtown highway is redeveloped.

Mr. Garrett affirmed his belief that private sector partnerships will be essential to achieving the project goals along with a productive partnership among the three governments.

When asked about whether or not the waterfront development is contingent on success of the 2008 Olympic bid, all three speakers reiterated their governments’ commitment to going ahead regardless. Ms. Bloodworth said that the timing of projects might change, but the substance would not. Mr. Garrett added that if the bid fails it might even accelerate the process since specific parcels of land would no longer need to be set aside for Olympic venues.

All three governments currently own land in the proposed development area, and Mr. Garrett said that upwards of two-thirds of the land area is owned by the City. The issue of how land will be transferred, sold or leased has yet to be determined.

Michael Wilson, Chair of The Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships, emphasized in his closing remarks that “It is now incumbent on the private sector to develop the ideas and proposals to match the vision and commitments from government.”

This panel was part of The Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships’ periodic breakfast series on current issues and initiatives concerning public-private partnerships. For more information on the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization and a summary of activities, visit the City of Toronto’s website section at: <http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/waterfront>. The full text of Margaret Bloodworth’s speech is available on The Council’s website at: <http://www.pppcouncil.ca/~partners>.
