

THE LAKE ONTARIO WATERFRONT TRAIL & THE WATERFRONT REGENERATION TRUST

Presentation to the Trent Severn Waterway Panel, August 15, 2007 at Hastings, Ontario

The Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail was an idea that grew out of all of the work (public hearings, background reports, policy and program development) of the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront and its successor organization the Ontario Provincial agency - the Waterfront Regeneration Trust.

On June 1st, 1988 the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront began its work as a Federal Inquiry, with the Honourable David Crombie as the sole Commissioner. With this appointment David was retiring from federal politics and returning to the City of Toronto where he had been a very popular mayor. His return provided instant credibility to the work of the Commission.

The Commission's mandate was to 'make recommendations regarding the future of the Toronto waterfront, and to seek the concurrence of affected authorities in such recommendations, in order to ensure that, in the public interest, federal lands and jurisdiction serve to enhance the physical, environmental, legislative and administrative context governing the use, enjoyment, and development of the Toronto waterfront and related lands.'

The Commission was a response to the outrage of the citizens of Toronto who didn't like what was happening at their waterfront – the tall, ugly condominiums that were sprouting up all along the Toronto waterfront, on lands that they believed were for the public and for the enjoyment of all.

The Commission kept busy in the first 1 1/2 years holding a series of public hearings on the major issues it was considering – there were over 300 depositions to these Hearings. The first Interim Report provided recommendation on lakefilling, impact on the watershed, natural areas, heritage, public access, public involvement and environmental assessment; and advised that one cannot study the Toronto waterfront without looking and planning for the entire watershed. At the very first juncture of the Commission it was already recognized that you couldn't fix the waterfront without looking upstream at all of the tributaries that drain into the Lake.

The release of this first Interim Report prompted the Provincial government on October 12, 1989 to declare that 'it recognizes the importance of the Interim Report and Recommendations of the Commission'. What this meant was that the Province joined in on the Royal Commission and appointed David Crombie to carry on his duties on its behalf. The Provincial decision made the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront only the second federal/provincial Royal Commission in Canadian history. When the Province joined in the Commission, it also asked that the Commission's area of study be expanded to include the waterfront from Burlington on the west to Newcastle on the east and north to the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The Commission continued its investigations and report publishing and by April 1990, it had released a total of ten book length reports, five working papers and five technical reports. Although the contents of these Reports are getting dated some of the ideas and issues remain relevant, for example the debate on the dismantling of the Gardiner Expressway!

In August 1990, the Commission published its second interim report – Watershed. The contents of this Report, in my opinion, are very profound and have influenced the approach and problem solving for environmental issues in the communities along the Canadian shores of Lake Ontario. The ecosystem approach – 'everything is connected to everything else' and 'man is part of nature not separate from it' are common phrases today that were captured with the release of the Watershed Report. This Report also formally introduced the Greater Toronto Bioregion – Lake Ontario on the south, the Niagara Escarpment on the West, the Oak Ridges Moraine on the north, and the Trent River on the east.

The Watershed Report also articulated nine principles, which the Commission believed flowed directly from the ecosystem approach to managing the waterfront. They are clean, green, useable, diverse, open, accessible, connected, affordable and attractive. These principles still guide the regeneration of the Lake Ontario greenway and have been adopted in the planning documents of all of the waterfront municipalities – they have also been exported to other provinces and countries. An incredible legacy of ideas!

The final report of the Commission was Regeneration. It was submitted to the Governments in December 1991. This major document summarized the two Interim Reports and also provided a running commentary of the waterfront communities from Burlington to Cobourg, and provided recommendations for each of the five regions along the way.

The Provincial government established the Waterfront Regeneration Trust as a Provincial Agency, following the release of the Commission's Regeneration Report. The mandate of the Trust as a Provincial Agency was to 'coordinate the programs and policies of the Province and its agencies relating to the waterfront, and to facilitate the establishment of a waterfront trail and associated open spaces'.

The Trust, as a Provincial Agency, was in place for seven years. During that time substantial work has been done to ensure that the concepts, ideas and principles coming out of the work of the Royal Commission were being recognized in decision making along the waterfront. A whole new approach to planning and development can only be accomplished through the belief in the change by those recommending and making the decisions. The Trust was very fortunate to have the complete support of all of the local communities to the vision, goals and objectives. However even with the unanimous support, we were starting to work at the level were 'the rubber hits the road' as they say – trying to turn the good ideas and principles into action.

In the early years of the Trust that was the major part of our work – helping to facilitate the change in attitude and approach – always keeping in mind the ecosystem approach to decision-making and the nine reference principles.

In addition to the emphasis on implementation, the Trust also prepared a strategy for the Ontario section of the Lake Ontario shoreline. The *Lake Ontario Greenway Strategy* was a major Report that was developed with the input of all of the municipalities, conservation authorities and community groups along the Greenway. The Strategy was released in May of 1995.

The topics covered in this Strategy are similar to the themes that the TSW Panel has been asked to explore. Strategy can be viewed at www.waterfronttrail.org/library-publications.html#greenway.

In the late 1990's the Trust, as a Provincial Agency, got caught up in the Provincial rationalization of agencies, boards and commissions (the ABC exercise) and in 1999 the Province decided to wind down the Trust as a Provincial Agency – not because it did not recognize the important work of the Trust but because it felt that the funding responsibility should be placed on the local governments.

This decision created an opportunity for the Waterfront Regeneration Trust to create a not for profit charity, which is our business status today.

Our focus is on the Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail and Greenway. The first Interim Report of the Royal Commission recommended the creation of a 'greenbelt' across the Toronto waterfront and in each of the subsequent documents this idea and recommendation got refined and soon it became the Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail and Greenway.

The Trail grew from being Greater Toronto centered to encompass the Canadian shores of Lake Ontario to the Canadian shores of Lake Ontario AND the Ontario shores of the St Lawrence River east to the Quebec border – 650 kms tip to tip.

The extension of the Trail occurred through 3 major expansions to the east - each of the expansions was at the request of the local communities, who saw the value in being part of something larger (i.e. the Waterfront Trail). To become a partner each community was required to adopt the nine waterfront principles (as set out by the Royal Commission), they were required to plan for a Waterfront Trail, and in addition to participate actively (funding and human resources and information) in joint Trail promotions and communications. Today the partnership includes 48 municipal partners, 9 conservation authorities and a host of community organizations.

Significant partnership achievements include:

- Marketing & Promotion (guided by committee of marketing professionals from the partnership)
 - Signed route from end to end
 - 83 Trailhead signs (3' x 5') at major staging areas
 - world class web site with over 5.3M hits and 212,000 unique visits in 2006
 - mini itineraries (trips less than 2 hours – maps, directions, attractions)
 - 2 monthly newsletters (one partner focused, one user focused)
- Trail extension from 350 kms in Greater Toronto Region to 650 kms (tip to tip) from Niagara on the Lake to Quebec border, with connections to La Route verte in Quebec and Seaway Trail in New York state
- \$9.2 M federal/provincial infrastructure investment for over 50 projects by 27 partners (managed by the Trust)

- Upcoming Waterfront Conference (September 19 & 20) to reflect on past and plan for future – important touch stone for the partnership

Key reflections:

- Success today is largely as a result of the Government mandated Commission and provincial agency and the public participation, partnership development, and financial resources that were provided to support these initiatives
- The total, being more than the sum of the parts – the 650 km trail from Niagara on the Lake to the Quebec border, is key in terms of attracting funding and gaining public interest & support
- The care and feeding of the partnership is not cheap or easy as contacts within the partnership change, issues vary between geographic areas

Connecting Lake Huron (Georgian Bay) and Lake Ontario by trails can be a reality. Using the established Waterfront Trail and the Trent Severn network of lock stations and other public green space, there is a unique opportunity to provide recreation, tourism and green transportation infrastructure. An example is our neighbouring province Quebec – their La Route verte Provincial bicycle network covers 3,000 kms and is a partnership with all levels of government. Key parts of this network are Parks Canada sites; including Lachine Canal and Canal de Chambly.

Staff of the Waterfront Trust would be pleased to meet with the Panel to provide any information that would be of benefit to the Panel.