



TORONTO BOARDSAILING CLUB

at Cherry Beach • Downtown Toronto

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MEMO to Toronto Harbour Commissioners, also Metro Toronto Councillors:

Betty Disero
Jack Layton
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RE: The Future of windsurfing and dinghy sailing in the Outer Harbour

Dear Commissioners:

Background

For almost a decade now, one or more windsurfing clubs or rental concessions have been the temporary tenants of the Toronto Harbour Commissioners (THC) on the North Shore of the Outer harbour, immediately west of the "Water Rat point" and the community clubs of the Outer Harbour Sailing Federation. And for a period of about 15 years, our vital new watersport has appeared at the City-run Cherry Beach Park as well.

Over this period, public participation in boardsailing has grown steadily, bringing countless hundreds of new young people (and not-so-young people!) into low-cost, high-performance active sailing. Citizens of Metro who have been members of windsurfing clubs and learned the sport at rental outlets on THC land have each bought thousands of dollars of equipment, which they continue to car-top and sail at their cottages on lakes throughout Ontario, where they in turn introduce this quiet, non-polluting sport to their friends and relatives. The popularity of windsurfing is not only due to the challenge of physical prowess but also the intellect -- a sailor is closely attuned to wind and waves (and is rewarded with a natural "high.")

An even greater contribution has been made by the sailing schools and community sailing clubs of the Outer Harbour Sailing Federation, where small boats are owned by the clubs, or individually-owned dinghies are stored.

Cherry Beach has made a major contribution to the fact that Toronto has the highest per capita windsurfing population in North America.

Symbiosis in Action

This unique sporting development was made possible by the unique locale which nurtured it: the Outer Harbour, formed by the creation of the Leslie Street Spit. This harbour has provided the ideal site for learning basic small-craft sailing skills, being sheltered by the Spit against squalls and off-shore winds, yet at the same time open from the West to the challenging conditions of the open waters of Lake Ontario. High-performance sailing skills are learned here as well in the safety of the lee shore provided by the Spit.

This public sailing experience, and particularly the organized skill-enhancing work of sailing clubs, has created a valuable sporting resource for the enjoyment of all citizens in Toronto, of all walks of life and incomes. Virtually penniless youth have scraped together board and sail and have become national and international sailing champions, learning their skills on the home waters of the Outer Harbour.

However, we sailors don't wish to labour the point of our achievements; it remains a fact that the majority of Torontonians are not even aware of the great potential for recreation at the foot of Cherry Street; and the existence of low-cost, accessible watersports open to all. Invariably, in introducing our sport and club to new members, we are obliged to draw a map, with arrows and shoreline contours, to reveal this little-known downtown spot to native citizens. Once arrived, however, they join our appreciation of this convenient and well-endowed recreation resource, with its grass and sandy beach, an ideal launching area.

So well-suited to recreation is the North Shore that it is hard to believe that it was developed by the THC as future dockfront. In fact, as soon as the North Shore took shape, and during the time the Spit was being formed, dinghy sailing arrived when Laser sailing blossomed forth at the Water Rat Club. As more of Toronto's spirited and adventurous citizens took to the water, more dinghy clubs established themselves on the North Shore. Over ten years ago, a new portable and inexpensive watersport took hold -- windsurfing. Today, 200 club members store their boards at our Club site, while a group of several hundred high-wind sailors use the public beach in early spring and late fall, and another group of a thousand or so launch from it's shores in the warmer, calmer winds of summer.

Genesis and denouement

We are told that the Leslie Street Spit was originally built as future marina dockage, it's embayments to house the hundreds of new mooring spaces that would be required over the next generation for large sailboats.

But above all, the Spit was the answer to Toronto's downtown development fill-disposal problem, providing a convenient location for the mushrooming bulk of excavation material. Most recently, the Spit has been designed to further serve industry's urgent need for a convenient depository for Don River dredgeate. Four large storage cells below the waterline on the south side of the Spit will hold this toxic dredge material (and each and every one of us, citizens of Toronto, swimmers and boaters on the waterfront, and drinkers of its water, have our collective fingers crossed on this score: may the Spit cells work and work well.)

Because the Spit, as a construction site, was closed during the many years of its building, it became an "urban wild," a term coined by the staff of the Metropolitan Toronto Region Conservation Authority (MTRCA), under whom the land on the northwest side of the Spit is now to be developed as a conservation area, and small aquatic park.

In this way, the future of the Outer Harbour is very different from it's planned use in the past: in the process of its appearance, new users and uses have come on the scene. Most prominent of the changes is the future use of the Spit itself: no longer to become a marina, it has become a conservation area (backed by toxic cells). But just as prominent has been the transformation of the Outer Harbour from freighter park and dockwall, to become one of the primary small-craft sailing sites in Canada.

Now that it is certain that existing dockwall is sufficient for Toronto's portuary needs, there is no doubt in our minds, nor should there be in yours (we submit), that the invaluable growth of active, low-cost, publicly accessible sailing, on a site which has nurtured Olympic-class athletes and countless recreational sailors, was and is the best possible use of the Outer Harbour. This holds true in the period that this area lay fallow, and today, and even more so in the future, as City and Metro youth require more open space, space away from the shopping malls and carparks that they find so unsuitable for recreation. As the City turns toward the waterfront, for housing and for pleasure, for letting off steam and for excellence in sport, the full potential of Cherry Beach can be realized.

The greatest potential (we submit) is full public use for windsurfing, dinghy-sailing, canoeing and swimming, popular sports in harmony with each other and the conservation theme of the Leslie Street Spit as it becomes Tommy Thompson Park, the unique "urban wild."

Boardsailing and dinghy sailing not only gained justice in the right to share

space in Tommy Thompson Park; they also won the right to future use of the Outer Harbour. Implicit in this decision was the recognition that this harbour is public property, and that in the absence of industrial need, the public had, and has, a right to decide on its future use. We sailors have acted on this right through daily practising of our sport over the years.

Mandate and Non-mandate

It is in this context that the future use of the Outer Harbour should be decided, we submit, and that the impact of the THC marina assessed. Although the THC's mandate, as expressed in the 1911 Act of Parliament which created it, is very general as to its limits, and although the THC has wandered far from strictly port management matters in the past; nevertheless, the intent of the Act is clear: it's mandate is to run the Port of Toronto. The lands it was ceded were lands for port development; industrial lands for port-related industries and port facilities.

We submit that no one would challenge the fact that the mandate of the THC was fundamentally to serve area industry through rational development of the port of Toronto. As such, through Ports Canada and other federal agencies, it gathered a consensus of industry's needs.

But if the scope of development of the Toronto waterfront has diminished to the point where waterfront property has become available for recreation and park use, the THC's mandate has effectively ended. While it is in possession of lands no longer being developed as a port, the consensus it requires for development is that of the Municipality and its citizens, not the Federal government. Recreational, housing, and industrial development not required for port development is surely the responsibility and jurisdiction of Toronto and Metro Toronto governments. While the land remains in Federal hands, we submit, recreational development is subject to City assessment and approval. It can only be this way if consensus is to have any meaning.

The Royal Commission on the Toronto Waterfront will address this question this Spring. As a temporary arbiter on this question, it is our view that the only permanent solution to the question of future recreational use lies in recognizing Municipal control over parkland.

Public consultation on development for recreation purposes obviously entails recognition also of the fact that the citizens of Toronto have fundamentally changed their orientation to the lakefront. Whereas the lakefront in the past was regarded as an industrial zone, today it is highly prized as a place to live and play; yachting and above all dinghy sailing and boardsailing have appeared on the scene, as Toronto sailors realize the potential of Lake Ontario matches that of the ocean, the birthplace of high-performance sailing.

This new reality seems not to have registered in the consciousness of THC planners, who have conceived and are carrying out the construction of a massive marina in the Outer Harbour as though they were oblivious of what was going on in their own back yard. To the degree that THC planners are aware of the activities of small-craft clubs in the Outer Harbour, they tend to write it off as unimportant, and unworthy of future consideration. To paraphrase a statement in the description of the planned "Aquatic Park" on the North Shore, the THC states it "has no commitment to the preservation of the sailing clubs of the OHSF" (and presumably the windsurfing club) in it's future plans. Although they talk vaguely about "sailboat rentals," there is no provision for adequate public sailing access on the North Shore, beyond a rental facility. If there was adequate public access, there could easily be club space as well.

Our point is that, instead of announcing a plan for a recreation park, especially an "aquatic" park on the North Shore, it should have been conceived in consultation with the present users: the sailing clubs and the public.

We believe that as elected members of Toronto and Metro councils, you are

duty bound to ensure that the THC, of which you are directors, abandon their present plans which seem to have been concocted in the rarified atmospheres of boardrooms, with no reference to the reality of present use and established recreation needs.

We sailors would like to remind you, as City and Metro Councillors, that you are Commissioners of a public body with control of public lands which have been created as a public trust. The final use of these lands should be in harmony with traditional and present public use, expanded to realize the potential for all citizens, not a minority who are able to afford substantial investments in luxury recreation craft.

The excess industrial and port land in question has long been "discovered" by a vigorous and vital recreational use during the past twenty years. For small-craft sailing, no further development of the Outer Harbour has been necessary; in fact, further landfill has severely restricted it's water area and usefulness for recreational and competitive sailing. Already, with the present development of the THC marina, our sailing space in the Outer Harbour has been effectively halved.

In reality, very little development is required for the sailing clubs: small, serviced clubhouses and a section of private beachfront (because of equipment security). As for us windsurfers, even should our numbers double or triple, all we require is clubhouse facilities with instruction and secure storage facilities, preferably on a public beach with no swimming, exposed to maximum clean wind, with enough rigging grass area and a sand beach. In any case, our facilities would leave the bulk of park lands free for land uses and/or picnic grounds. Hopefully, the lands south of Unwin Avenue would find a use for active sports with an emphasis on youth participation.

A Public Park - Where Less is More

The solution to the problem of assuring future recreational use of this area which would preserve the unique development of low-cost, high-performance sailing, is simple: expand Cherry Beach Park (Clark Park) as a city-run facility, along the entire North Shore to the O'Hearn Generating Station. This would provide the citizens of Toronto with a point of contact with one of the last remaining beachfront areas, and certainly the last and only one available to dinghy sailing (windsurfers have access to Kew Beach and potentially at Humber Bay Park as well.)

This solution -- a City-run public park with full access -- contrasts with the THC's concept of a "theme-park" waterfront development, geared primarily to non-sailors, with a small boat rental facility. Not only do we boaters reject this concept because it ignores the past, present and future potential of the Outer Harbour as a primary sailing venue, but it denies general public access for these watersports, providing only passive public participation. It seems to say "it's okay if John Q. Public comes to stroll along the waterfront and look at the boats out on the water, as long as he doesn't get the idea that he and his family can actually go sailing as well."

The trouble with this concept says it all about the THC's idea of waterfront development in the 80s, the same problem that the Crombie Royal Commission seems willing to tackle: the lack of recognition that the waterfront as perceived by the public has changed fundamentally in the last 15 years. Living by the water's edge and using the water for recreation is a recent discovery by Torontonians. Slowly but surely small-craft sailing has taken off, as Canadians shift from the great North American obsession with motorized recreation, to the directly physical and intellectual pleasures of sail power and muscle power -- human finesse vs. nature.

Speaking of motorized recreation, a recent trend toward more power cruisers and away from sail powered yachts, poses a particularly acute problem for the future of the Outer Harbour. It may raise the question of water quality for small-craft sailing and swimming as well, to say nothing of environmentalists' concern over the proximity of fuel-powered boating to Tommy Thompson Park. More serious, however, is the safety concern with a powerboat-sailpower mix in the Outer Harbour. Because, despite the fact that sailboats are also motor-powered, and that powerboats are able to cruise as slowly as sailboats, the danger lies in powerboat skippers' fundamental

ignorance of the dynamics of sail power: the importance of wind direction and speed, why a boat tacks upwind instead of heading directly upwind, and why and how fast various boats and boards jibe, or are susceptible to wind gusts or wind shadows. All these factors have led to near collisions and much colourful language by enraged sailors in the past, trying to conduct a race around a buoy as a party launch blunders through.

Not only should the number of berths in the new THC marina be restricted to reasonable levels to ensure safety in the Outer Harbour, but serious consideration given to making the marina an all-sail powered facility. This could easily be done by increasing powerboat space at other marinas and shifting sailing yachts to the Outer Harbour. This move would give us small-craft sailors a fighting chance, at least. Now, we'd be shaking our fists and cursing other sailors, keeping squabbles in the family, as it were.

No doubt the traffic and use problem of the Outer Harbour will have to be monitored over the next few years, and other options such as an eastern egress point through the neck of the Spit for THC marina access, explored. The THC has reassured us sailors that marina traffic will not be the problem we fear it might be, as the number of craft travelling in and out of the marina even at peak periods is restrained, and in heavy weather (high wind and waves), the type and conditions we small-craft sailors prefer, the larger yachts tend to stay tucked up in their berths.

Hopefully, this is true, and the multitude can find their way, sailing as they do at cross-purposes and wildly varying speeds. But certainly, the advent of powerboats or public launching for motorized boats on the marina, or traffic to the marina for a boat repair facility, would tip the scales into the anarchy of an over-used harbour stretched beyond its capacity.

Talk to Us

We sailors hope and trust that we can successfully inform you and sensitize you as to some important recreational realities, of which you were perhaps unaware. While we as a group are traditionally unorganized and therefore ineffective as a "lobby group," and unlikely to undertake "political" action except when confronted with an emergency, we however realize that our sport is also a useful, and necessary adjunct to the daily routine of labour and raising families; for the good health of our mind as well as our body. A vigorous activity like sailing is a gift of nature that, provided by the waterfront on our doorstep, deserves to be preserved.

Toronto is an economically superheated city: seemingly endless opportunities for profitable development unfold everywhere, the shine and glitz of high-priced accommodation and retail abound. But somewhere among this frenetic construction, a place for ordinary citizens to go about their ordinary, personal and low-cost play, must be preserved. Out of this ordinary play comes not mediocrity, on the contrary: low-keyed sport for fun which develops into the kind of expertise which Canada needs so urgently in amateur sport.

Such a milieu does not exist in Disney-like theme-parks, or artificial wave ponds, where real waves appear at the mouth of the Outer Harbour in a good stiff West wind blow. The milieu already exists. The development that is required is the training of instructors, and coaches, for watersports as for other sports, for a milieu in which amateur competition exists alongside pure recreation.

Perhaps you were unaware of the milieu which exists in the Outer Harbour, sans dockwall. As members of a federal Commission you no doubt gave it little thought, or importance. But it deserves serious thought, and it has much importance.

We enthusiastically invite you to familiarize yourself with our sailing

activities, particularly on a windy day (rain or shine) at Cherry Beach. The sailors of the Outer Harbour Sailing Federation would undoubtedly be eager to introduce you to the mysteries of dinghy sailing as well.

Our sport has unlimited membership and a democratically-run, non-profit Club organization, which either alone or in conjunction with a rental and instruction facility, is ideally suited to the activities of a public beach.

We believe that if the Commissioners ceded the vacant lands south of Unwin Avenue to the City Parks Department, that this action would create the greatest harmony between the North Shore and the conservation theme of Tommy Thompson Park. When all is said and done, it would create the greatest harmony also with the fundamentally industrial and portuary nature of the Port Industrial District surrounding it, becoming not a superheated "theme park" encircled by hostile industry, but an ordinary public park surrounded as ordinary parks often are, by the inevitable grime and grit of a great, productive city.

Our Committee plans to participate in the Royal Commission on the Toronto Waterfront hearings, and do so in the vein presented here. We invite your response and comments.

For the Committee

John Darling

Note #1: A Strong Voice for Windsurfing

We would like to draw your attention to an "Open Letter" addressed to the Hon. David Crombie, head of the Royal Commission on the Toronto Waterfront, entitled "Hands Off Cherry Beach!"

It was submitted by the Committee for a Boardsailing Centre in the Outer Harbour, which was set up to ensure the future development of the sport of windsurfing by securing a permanent site, for the organization of competition and instruction, from entry-level to expert level sailing. A good cross-section of the sport's most expert boardsailors, and representatives of the industry, including the Ontario Sailing Association, makes up it's Board of Governors, Patrons and Officers. The general boardsailing public would easily recognize it's "staff" as prime representatives of the sport. Copies of the "Open Letter" are available.

Note. #2: A Couple of Wild Cards and a Joker or Two in the Pack:

In the waterfront poker game, there is the wild card in the Ontario-sponsored "Bold Concept II" devised by Jack Jones which, among other things, proposes to move the Island Airport to the Leslie Street Spit. Needless to say, this idea totally ignores present ownership of the environmentally sensitive northwest half of the Spit by the MTRCA, their long process of planning a conservation area which is to include an aquatic park for some of the dinghy sailing clubs and a windsurfing club, and the long-standing and politically powerful attachment of naturalists and conservationists to the "wilderness" Spit concept. Nor does it allow for the key future use of the south-east sector of the Spit, as a dredgeate disposal area. It appears this card is a Joker.

Likewise, the hand held by the "Toronto Ontario Olympic Council" may contain

a trump card or two. We know this group of blue-chip diplomat-entrepreneurs thinks big, and may actually succeed in wresting the 1996 Summer Olympic Games from the favourite host city, Athens. According to a Feb. 18, 1989 Globe & Mail article entitled "Dramatic changes to lakeshore proposed in new Olympic plans," the Council promises to "give the City more assisted housing, waterfront parks, sporting and community facilities, while providing solutions to existing environmental and other problems," in return for totally re-arranging the face of the Toronto waterfront.

Their plans for an athlete's village west of Cherry Street on the docks would mean relocating the port itself "in the remaining port lands" (could they possibly mean the Outer Harbour?); or alternately, shifting the entire Port of Toronto... to Oshawa! They deserve straight "A"s for originality!

We sailors do not imagine that we could or should stand in the way of Toronto's bid for the Olympic games. But we would state categorically that we expect to be part of the "waterfront parks, sporting and community facilities" promises being thrown into the pot.

Alas, the ante has been upped again.

A whole new hand is being dealt us with the announcement by the Toronto Sun on Feb. 28, 1989 that "Toronto (is) on Expo short list" for hosting Expo 2000. It reports that "a consortium of 32 companies --including the Sun-- is working with municipal politicians on Expo 2000, which (Metro Chairman Alan) Tonks says will generate \$2 billion from tourism."

Forgive us for feeling a little paranoid about deals going on behind our backs, but "Sun publisher Paul Godfrey said Metro's got an outstanding chance to score a 'grand slam' with the Olympics in 1996 and Expo 2000 four years later."

While Exhibition Place and Ontario Place are to be the centre of Expo 2000, we're talking major development affecting all the waterfront: "...a 130,000 sq.m. exhibition facility, 2,000 units of affordable housing, marinas, hotels and the construction of a new Olympic Stadium..."

The quiet little old water hole known as Cherry Beach seems not likely to be overlooked by either the Olympics or Expo 2000. It rather appears to be slated to become galvanized into a platinum-plated super-marina bordered by high-rises. How 'affordable' this 'housing' will be, remains an interesting question.

But after the hoopla is over and everyone's gone home, and it's quiet once more in the Outer Harbour, circa 2001, will the ordinary folk of Metro Toronto be totally disenfranchised when it comes to low-cost, high-performance sailing? Will there be an opportunity for us to enjoy the fruits of the billions of dollars we spend to create these facilities (\$60 millions from Metro and Ontario to build the SkyDome), and which will earn billions of dollars of tourist money for local industry and commerce?

We are determined that we will be there when its over.

Our determination will have the support of the citizens of Toronto. Already, people like Colin Vaughan questions the purpose of Crombie's Royal Commission. In the March issue of Toronto magazine, he writes: "'Development' is a word better suited to the fringes of Metro, not the lakeshore. Already Harbourfront and the central waterfront are overdeveloped, but even now, when the question of the THC-owned land to the east of Toronto Harbour comes up, all involved immediately begin to think of ways those sites can be 'developed' for housing or industry or whatever... rather than the 'D' word, 'R' words should prevail on the waterfront. 'Recovery,' 'Restoration,' 'Rehabilitation' and 'Renovation' of the natural and pedestrian and park environments from the Humber to the eastern limit of the Beaches should now be the top priority..."

Amen.