

EXHIBITION PLACE

Creating a waterfront site to behold

Urban visionaries share their creative proposals with **Vidya Kauri, Oliver Moore, Tara Perkins and Brad Wheeler**

**Don Schmitt, architect,
Diamond Schmitt Architects**
Proposes an urban park

There's a huge amount of new residential use around Exhibition Place with almost no park space to speak of. The opportunity with the CNE is to create a great new urban park, maybe 25 per cent of the overall area of the grounds. A 50-acre, world-stature park that could extend right in the middle of the site from the Horse Palace all the way south to Lakeshore Blvd. Have the whole park bridge right over Lakeshore Blvd. and connect with Ontario Place creating a green link connecting to the water.

A gigantic percentage of the CNE is surface parking. It should be replaced by parking structures, ideally underground, and infrastructure for better transit connectivity. For example, the streetcar which comes in just at the Princes' Gates should connect to Dufferin Street and go north along Dufferin.

Then, move the midway to Ontario Place. It occupies a huge amount of space and that just remains surface parking most of the year. It really fits with the redevelopment of Ontario Place as a public green park.

Finally, redevelop it as a mixed-use neighbourhood with residential, retail and office space, while preserving the heritage buildings on site. All those big buildings used for fairs, conferences and trade shows can co-exist happily with a much more developed, mixed-use urban neighbourhood.

**Blake Hutcheson
CEO of Oxford Properties**
*Proposes a world-leading
healthcare "hub"*

So far, what we have heard from our citizens is what they don't want at the CNE grounds – a casino/hotel/retail complex. We also know that due to transportation limitations and simple market fundamentals, a conventional office building or retail complex would not be economically viable without marrying these uses to a huge economic driver like a casino. However, if one dreams a bit ...

In combination with Ontario Place, this whole area could become a recreational/health/wellness/preventive medicine "hub" – with parks, fields, rinks, baseball diamonds, fitness



Diamond Schmitt Architects suggests an urban park that extends south from Exhibition Place into Ontario Place. This image, from a speculative 2010 proposal by Diamond Schmitt for a private client, shows a redeveloped Ontario Place: this curvy glass building would house indoor swimming pools and a greenhouse. DIAMOND SCHMITT ARCHITECTS

centres, spas, medical office buildings and clinics, science labs, med school lecture halls, IMAX health documentary theatres, outbuildings for lectures, meetings, conferences and symposiums and appropriate hotel accommodations. In combination with that, and to help pay for it, this area could also offer some live/work housing stock (ideally rental, not condominium product, so the city could get an ongoing return) for proven contributors to these important areas, as well as to music and the arts (all tied into a "healthy" community) with significant studio and presentation space to showcase these talents.

**Jeff Cohen, concert promoter
with Collective Concerts**
Proposes a green space and permanent outdoor concert venue

Two years ago, I contacted Exhibition Place and proposed to take a parking lot there and turn it into a green space. Collective Concerts would put in the grass and develop a park and a summer concert site. It would be a deal similar to the one they made with the owners of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Exhibition Place would give me very inexpensive rent for the first couple of years, but after that, when we'd sign another lease, it would be at market value. They

said it was an intriguing idea, but I never heard back from them.

I was surprised. Here's someone looking to develop something free for them. It would create jobs. They would make money, as would I. I wasn't looking for any kind of favour. It's still feasible. I'm looking for something that could hold 7,500 to 10,000 people, which is a venue size the city still doesn't have in downtown Toronto in a green space. It's sadly missing, and we miss out on shows here because we don't have it

**Steve Diamond, developer
President of Diamond Corp.,
part of a group that has been
looking at the potential for redevelopment of the lands**
*Proposes a new neighbourhood
that can serve as tourist destination*

First of all, Ontario Place should be developed together with the CNE. I think you will have a better development if the city and the province would come up with guidelines for development for both. We think that there's the potential to develop a new neighbourhood for the city. I think it would be partly a tourist destination, but I think it would be more of a new neighbourhood that would add vitality to the city, somewhat similar to the Distillery District. It's got retail,

it's got housing, it's got some office space. It would be partly a tourist attraction, but would create a lot of nighttime activity and another destination for people in the region. And with the city's growth, we think that potential exists, and can likely be accomplished without hurting the existing CNE and maintaining large amounts of open public space. Any new neighbourhood should have a mix of all types of density. You would have some low-rise housing and some mid-rise housing and some high-rise housing. There are two major issues. One is the cost of infrastructure, bringing sewers to the land. The infrastructure kind of stops at the gates. Also, in order to make it work, there needs to be improvements to the transportation system. In the Metro-linx plan, one of the options does show the downtown relief line ending with a stop at the CNE, and if that plan was ever put into place, then that would be a huge boost to facilitating development in that area.

**Heather Dubbeldam, Principal
at Dubbeldam Architecture +
Design, and co-chair of Toronto
Society of Architects**
Proposes a redevelopment with sustainable design and landscaping

That site could be a benchmark for sustainable design and landscaping for Toronto and cities around the world. The problem with that is the incredible cost.

There's a parking lot with a huge problem with water runoff when it rains very heavily. The entire site should be landscaped with permeable materials, planters, green roofs, and trees.

It should be done in such a way that it allows flexibility for festivals. You also need some shade.

If you look at all the world-class cities, their waterfronts are developed in a way that's harmonious both indoors and outdoors with a connection to the waterfront, not inward-looking buildings with no windows. It has to be something that complements the urban park they're designing to the south at Ontario Place.

Every urban park needs facilities. So, Exhibition Place could be envisioned as a connection to the site in a way that's pedestrian-friendly. It becomes a destination in connection with Ontario Place.

Exhibition Place was planned to be what it is now as an entertainment venue for trade and consumer shows. So, from that perspective, it's very successful.

But there's no real integration to the city. It needs to have some life outside those events – they are usually quite short.

If you look at the Evergreen Brick Works, that's a great example of how they repurposed all the buildings and created nature trails and a farmer's market. You could have parking structures instead of surface parking, do some landscaping and create hills and views out to the lake.

**Chris Rudge, executive chair
and CEO of Toronto Argonauts
Football Club, chair of the Canadian Sport Institute Ontario**
Proposes development of public-access sporting facilities

There is room for development of public-access sporting facilities like public gyms. It is a spectacular environment, there are a lot of buildings down there, and a lot of shows go on, but it's got to be integrated with a vision for the city.

You would have to look at what percentage of land would be appropriate to set aside for public access for sport and what kinds of sports. Should we use Exhibition Place as an environment that is able to attract the various cultural communities that come downtown and share their cultural recreation activities with the rest of the city?

Rather than thinking in the context for traditional soccer or baseball, do it from the perspective of embracing the growing cultural and ethnic communities here. Cricket is growing in leaps and bounds here. There could be bocce ball courts for the Italian community. We work on this principle of embracing the cultural diversity we have in the city. That is something potentially that could be done.

**Mike Layton, City Councillor
for Ward 19, Trinity-Spadina**
*Proposes an innovation centre
and better transit links*

We need to maintain Ontario Place as a public space, where everyone is welcome, regardless of age, culture or income. It is prime waterfront land close to Toronto's downtown that must be made relevant and more accessible.

For Ontario Place to succeed, it must function as a place of learning, discovery and entertainment, as it was intended. Ontario Place could be a place that sparks both our imaginations and our economy. Perhaps part of the site could serve as an interactive centre for innovation, where Ontario universities, colleges and businesses could showcase innovation in an entertaining way.

There is also potential if we imagine Ontario Place and the grounds of Exhibition Place together, so that we can leverage the assets of each. A centre for innovation could leverage the new hotel and the conference facility at Exhibition Place.

To make this possible, we need to build better transit connections between Ontario Place and the rest of the city.

We can do this by extending a streetcar loop, finally building the western waterfront LRT, and maximizing GO train service. There are endless options, but first we need to get Torontonians to the table to help develop a long-term vision that can build the supporting infrastructure needed and the province must be prepared to invest in the site.

Most important, it must be maintained as a public space accessible to all.

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