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LOOKING OVER THE LAKE



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LOOKING OVER THE LAKE

Toronto, Ontario's capital and Canada's largest city, looks across Lake Ontario but never made full use of its geographic advantage till Waterfront Toronto was created: the makeover will make the city more competitive as well as more beautiful

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A great city facing a broad stretch of water: as a description this could apply to thousands of places because mankind usually makes its first settlement where it first makes landfall. These settlements expand as trade makes use of the highways of the sea: hinterland cities are typically established later and take longer to grow.

Toronto developed that way. In the 19th century, with much of the city's major trade historically boat-borne, having manufacturing facilities adjacent to the waterfront made good business sense. Factories on the lakeshore allowed supplies to be easily received and finished products to be effectively transported. However, by the middle of that century, the lack of available land along the waterfront limited the growth of the shipping and industrial and railway infrastructure. So a massive campaign of lake filling was undertaken to expand the shore land. For the next hundred years, the shore was extended further and further south. The filling continued until the 1950s by which time the modern shoreline had been defined.

But the way it developed did not focus on the waterfront as an asset and it became cut off from the city centre and run down. In the 1970s people started to wake up to the fact that Lake Ontario could do for Toronto what Lake Michigan does for Chicago, or indeed the Laguna Veneta for Venice. But it was not until 1999 that Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, Premier Mike Harris and Mayor Mel Lastman announced the formation of a task force to develop a business plan and

Aerial view of the
Port Lands



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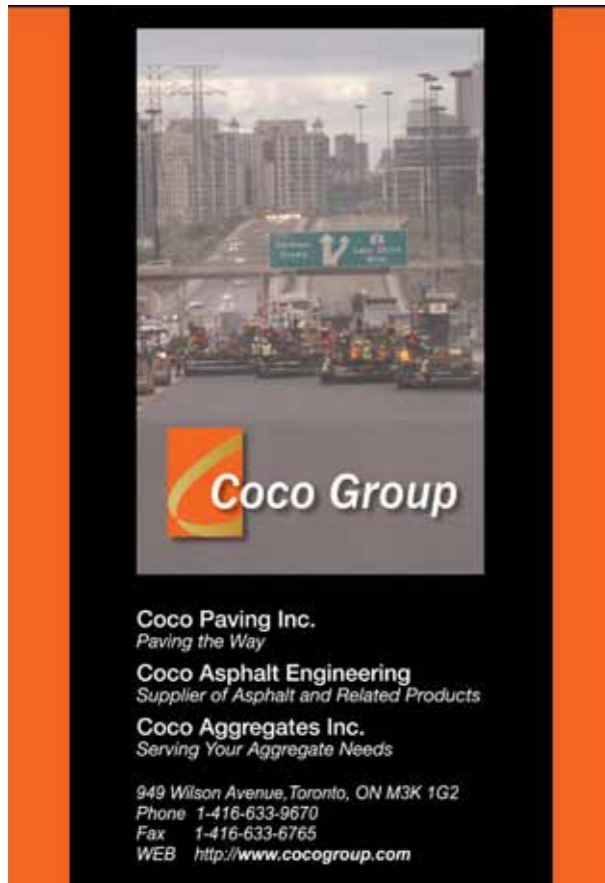
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make recommendations for developing the waterfront as part of Toronto's bid to host the 2008 Summer Olympics. Toronto lost out to Beijing in the event but the waterfront project progressed quickly after that.

In 2001 the Canadian government, the government of Ontario and the City of Toronto established Waterfront Toronto (then known as the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation) to oversee all

aspects of the planning and development of Toronto's central waterfront. The corporation's Board of Directors began meeting in February 2002. In March, a small group of core staff was hired and an office set up. In April, the corporation hired a program manager, the Toronto Waterfront Joint Venture, to oversee implementation of waterfront projects. John W Campbell joined the corporation as president and CEO in April 2003. In May of the same year, the provincial government enacted the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation Act, creating a permanent independent organization to oversee and lead





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Artist impression of Pan American Village

the renewal of Toronto's waterfront, with a 25-year mandate to deliver.

Now, half way through, Waterfront Toronto and other government agencies have invested over \$1.2 billion in capital projects. "These are revitalisation initiatives that the citizens of Toronto, Ontario and Canada will enjoy and benefit from for generations to come," says Campbell. The cost of revitalising Toronto's waterfront was originally estimated

(in 2001) at \$17 billion, of which \$4.3 billion would be funded from the public sector and the remaining \$12.7 billion from the private sector. Due to escalation in construction costs, the cost of revitalization is now estimated to be over \$34 billion. It really is one of the world's largest urban renewal projects.

But far from being a drain on the city, the nation and the Province of Ontario all this expenditure has delivered real value for

money, Campbell argues: "To date, our public investments have yielded more than twice their value in economic activity, generating \$3.2-billion in output for the Canadian economy." An economic study released recently also finds the \$1.26 billion public investment over the past 12 years has generated about \$620 million in government revenues, \$36 million going to the City of Toronto. And the project is far from complete (if urban renewal can ever be said to be complete): "There are 44 recent or planned development projects on privately-owned lands across the waterfront and adjacent neighbourhoods," he said. And that does not take into consideration the fact that the project has already created 9,700 full time years of employment.

John Campbell is keen to see that

Toronto becomes not only a more delightful place to live and work in as a result of the developments he is overseeing, but more effective and competitive as a city. To attract businesses into Toronto in this connected age it is essential to have the best access to communications technology, which is why he wants it to become known as an intelligent city. "The intelligent community concept is one of the things that can bring Canada back into a leadership position and drive our competitive stature around the world," he says. "At the Waterfront we are building in an open access ultra high speed broadband system that will compete with any place in the world."

With every home and business connected by fibre-optic technology the communities of

"THESE ARE REVITALISATION INITIATIVES THAT THE CITIZENS OF TORONTO, ONTARIO AND CANADA WILL ENJOY AND BENEFIT FROM FOR GENERATIONS TO COME"

the Waterfront are promised affordable and unlimited access to Internet speeds up to 500 times faster than typical North American residential networks. Built and operated by Toronto-based telecommunications firm Beanfield Metroconnect in partnership with Waterfront Toronto, the state-of-the-art network will deliver, at a competitive cost, internet connections starting at 100 megabits per second for residential customers and up to 10 gigabits per second for commercial customers. “We live in a time of acceleration,” says Campbell. “Cities that don’t adopt this kind of strategy are not standing still – they are dropping behind!”

While it isn’t possible to talk about all the innovative concepts the Waterfront will embrace, it is hard to resist either the name or the concept of a woonerf. A Dutch word meaning ‘living street’, a woonerf is a thoroughfare that gives priority to pedestrian, then bicycles, and finally vehicles that need to use it for access. Everywhere they have been tried since their introduction in the 1970s woonerfs have slashed accidents. Cars are limited to a speed that does not disrupt other uses of the streets (usually defined to be pedestrian speed). Toronto is going to have two woonerfs, the first of which is already under construction in West Don Lands, an 80 acre former industrial site that is being turned into a sustainable, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, riverside community. **BE**

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