



HO Park (Central Waterfront)
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AlvinofDiaspar

2006-Nov-16, 14:09

HO Park (Central Waterfront)

From the Star:

A vision beyond the urban beach
Nov. 16, 2006, 01:00 AM
CHRISTOPHER NUNNE

Janet Rosenberg may be in a hurry, but unfortunately Toronto isn't.

One of the city's leading landscape architects, Rosenberg desperately wants Toronto to get off its collective butt and get going. She's getting tired of waiting.

Take HO, for example, the "urban beach" at the foot of John St. at Queens Quay W. her firm designed three years ago. The project is underway and slated to open next spring, finally, only two years behind schedule.

Much of that time has been spent jumping through bureaucratic hoops. Dealing with the various agencies alone was enough to slow construction to a crawl. Now, however, the results can be seen; the large concrete terraces that reach down to the very waters of Lake Ontario have been poured and the hole that will contain a huge sandpit has been dug and lined.

Even a few of the bright yellow umbrellas have been installed. Eventually there will be 39, the bulk still to come. Willow trees have also been planted on mounds and benches installed.

Of course, changes were made along the way. After West 8 of Rotterdam won the central waterfront redesign competition last summer, the beach was moved closer to Queens Quay in anticipation of reducing the street from four lanes to two.

Though HO remains a construction site, its final form and even some details are visible. It will be a spectacular, and desperately needed, addition to the water's edge. Despite widespread cynicism, the reclamation and transformation of the waterfront has started. No, it's not moving fast enough and the process will take years, even decades, but it has begun.

From the start, Rosenberg has fought against the safety tyrants who rule Toronto: The sandbox almost had to go; some years ago a razorblade was found at Cherry Beach. The terraces almost had to go; someone could fall into the water and drown. The umbrellas almost had to go; someone might climb up and hurt themselves. The slope of the terraces almost had to go; if they were too steep someone could trip and scrape a knee.

"The reality in the city now is that you're always designing for the worst possible scenario," Rosenberg says. "Really good design anticipates that and incorporates it. But it's a very hard battle to fight; you want to design spaces that are beautiful, but you're always dealing with a bureaucracy that's preoccupied with the lowest common denominator and liability."

According to Rosenberg, if HO hadn't started as a design competition, it would never have happened. Because competitions involve juries, they are somewhat immune to the city's usual way of doing business.

"I take my hat off to (councillor) Joe Pantalone, who knew there would be problems and helped us steer the scheme through many hurdles," she says. "What really upsets me is that there's no hierarchy that establishes the public realm as a priority. No one ever comes to your city because you've got great sewers. I get really frustrated that public works projects never take into account the fact that things have to be beautiful and usable spaces, not just well engineered."

Rosenberg points to the streetcar right-of-way on St. Clair as an example of how poorly the city looks after itself. "I'm angry that through all the discussions we never talked about how people feel walking on the street," she argues. "We never thought about the sidewalks and the implications for people, for how businesses can flow out onto the sidewalk and how many trees have to be removed because of the right-of-way."

"So when you make a decision to put in a streetcar that saves people seven minutes, you also have to give equal balance to the price in terms of the public realm, the streets. We really don't look at things from edge to edge. We never really look at the major trade-off that happens on the streets because of it. Our streets are really important; they're the life of the city. They give us an identity."

"Making wider sidewalks is just as important as creating a right-of-way," she insists. "So we can have places for trees, room for restaurants and stores to move out onto streets. We're so shortsighted in our focus. The TTC is a great example, but it's not alone. The Gardiner is the next disaster waiting to happen; what does it mean to take down the Gardiner without creating parks and wonderful public spaces? You can't look at taking down the Gardiner without looking at what will happen afterwards. It's an opportunity to create wonderful green people places, to create a nice strong link to the city."

"It's the thought process that's wrong," she says. "Who has a vision for the city?"

Rosenberg does. She will lecture on the New Landscape tomorrow at 8 p.m. at Convocation Hall, University of Toronto.

AdD

Bogtrotter

2006-Nov-16, 15:55

To sum up - Toronto is an aesthetically challenged city. Change doesn't come quickly and 'Good Enough' seems to be the motto of Toronto Public works.

RJR123

2006-Nov-16, 16:39

"Good Enough" or "Keeping Adults and Children Scrape-Free"?

EnviroTO

2006-Nov-16, 17:10

I think the issue is the fear of getting sued due to injury is out of control. All the playgrounds we used when we were young have been torn up because there is a chance of injury. It won't be long until the "do not use hair dryer under water" labels turn into railings; along every square inch of the grand canyon and fences around every tree accompanied with "climbing trees can cause injury" signs.

spmarshall

2006-Nov-16, 17:23

I'm still young (and old) enough to remember when playgrounds were fun - the tall slides, the old truck tire that was attached to chains and hung from overhead to create a multi-person swing that would allow multi uses - "bumpies", where the tire would hit the wooden poles holding it up, spins, and high up/down.

Then there was the chain spider web, bridges that would swing back and forth and ran upon, and in some playgrounds, spinning platforms.

All that was removed, and now we get rubberized playgrounds that are no fun. The de-funization of playgrounds and the overall liability craze is one factor, in my mind, for rising childhood obesity rates.

building babel

2006-Nov-16, 17:33

So, where do you go then?

mark simpson

2006-Nov-16, 17:56

I can agree with Rosenberg although her viewpoints are a little on the extreme - landscape, though, is her business

I remember a city funded sand lot somewhere along Queens Quay were kids could build things or hammer away on some of the erected wooden structures. I vividly remember hammering nails into the roof of a 15 foot tall cone-shaped building without worry of slipping and falling; something professionals wouldn't do without harnesses. Those were the days

Archivistower

2006-Nov-16, 17:41

One of my favourite "eyesores of the month" at www.kurstier.com is here:

<http://333.photobucket.com/albums/d7...over/Play1.jpg>

<http://333.photobucket.com/albums/d7...over/Play2.jpg>

Fear of lawyers is a terrible thing. I think it's also a fact that its basic human nature for people to thrill to risk-taking. Adults go skydiving and skiing, kids, too, will always want to do crazies for excitement. And some of them will die doing it, whether or not we pad the ground on playgrounds.

Mike in TO

2006-Nov-16, 17:47

I've heard one of the reasons why trees in the street right-or-way don't have the metal grates with little holes for rain water is due to liability issues (e.g. fear of a woman in high heels falling through and breaking an ankle)... so now most of our trees don't get enough water and die with the crappy concrete coverings.

building babel

2006-Nov-16, 17:49

... and it hasn't done a darned thing to increase the number of babes in stiletto's stalking the boulevards.

mark simpson

2006-Nov-16, 18:22

yeah ... where have the hookers gone

cdl42

2006-Nov-16, 18:42

"bridges that would swing back and forth and ran upon"

Back in Grade 6 while in hot pursuit during a game of tag on the school's playground set, I dashed across one of these bridges only to have it give way beneath me. One moment I was running, the next I was flat on my back in the gravel below. It was pretty painful and I had some nasty spasms for hours after, but in usual form I was back in class the next day. An odd regret to have, but I wish my family had sued the school. Not sure what we could have expected to gain from it, though.

mpolo2

2006-Nov-16, 19:20

To sum up - Toronto pays a lot of bureaucrats too much to waste our money and make our city move slower.

Mike in TO

2006-Nov-16, 19:33

The engineering dept of many municipalities really runs the show. There have been significant battles out in the burbs between developers and various municipalities over rear laneways as well as thinner 'new urbanist' types of streets to maximize land use for residential purposes rather than municipal services and increase densities - the issue is often that the roads need to remain rather wide for emergency services (yet the fire trucks still seem to be able to navigate many Toronto streets or thinner streets in the downtowns of older Ontario towns).

unimaginative2

2006-Nov-16, 19:54

Exactly, Mike in TO. I think the biggest problem is that these engineers are labouring under the misapprehension that we are in the United States. We just don't have the same kind of courts handing out outrageous damages for proscric injuries, but Canadian cities seem to be preparing for it anyway.

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