



# INTRODUCTION: THE WORK OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF THE TORONTO WATERFRONT

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WE SHALL NOT CEASE FROM EXPLORATION  
AND THE END OF ALL OUR EXPLORING  
WILL BE TO ARRIVE WHERE WE STARTED  
AND TO KNOW THE PLACE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

—T.S. ELIOT. FOUR QUARTETS. LITTLE GIDDING, V

## THE FIRST PHASE

On 30 March 1988, the Governor-in-Council, on the recommendation of the prime minister, approved the appointment of the Honourable David Crombie as Commissioner to:

inquire into and 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.

More specifically, the Commission was directed to examine:

the role and mandate of the Board of Toronto Harbour Commissioners;

- the future of the Toronto Island Airport and related transportation services;
- the issues affecting the protection and the renewal of the natural environment insofar as they relate to federal responsibilities and jurisdiction;
- the issues regarding the effective management of federal lands within the Toronto waterfront area; and
- the possible use of federal lands, facilities, and jurisdiction to support emerging issues such as the proposed Olympic Games and World's Fair.

The Commission was initially given a three-year mandate, from June 1988 to June 1991; that was later extended to 31 December 1991, in order to give the Commission time to complete added work requested by the Province of Ontario.

The Government of Canada's decision to establish the Commission was based on

its recognition that the Toronto waterfront was an area offering many opportunities but had, to quote an Intergovernmental Waterfront Committee (IWC) that looked at the situation, “a number of urgent matters that must be studied and dealt with”.

The IWC had been organized informally 18 months before the Commission was established, after the prime minister asked Mr. Crombie, then a cabinet minister from Toronto with a particular interest in urban issues, to make recommendations on the appropriateness of having the Government of Canada, through the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) — a Crown corporation — involve itself in urban redevelopment in downtown Toronto.

In the course of discussing this project with representatives of the Province, Metropolitan Toronto, and the City of Toronto, it became evident to Mr. Crombie that there were some common concerns, particularly about waterfront issues and about the jurisdictional gridlock that had developed in dealing with them. This led to a decision to set up the IWC, with then-Premier David Peterson in the chair, and a membership comprising Dennis Flynn, then chairman of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto; the then-mayor of Toronto, Art Eggleton; and Mr. Crombie.

The IWC met over the next several months to identify common concerns on which concerted action might be taken, work that proved to be the foundation for tasks eventually assigned to the Royal Commission.

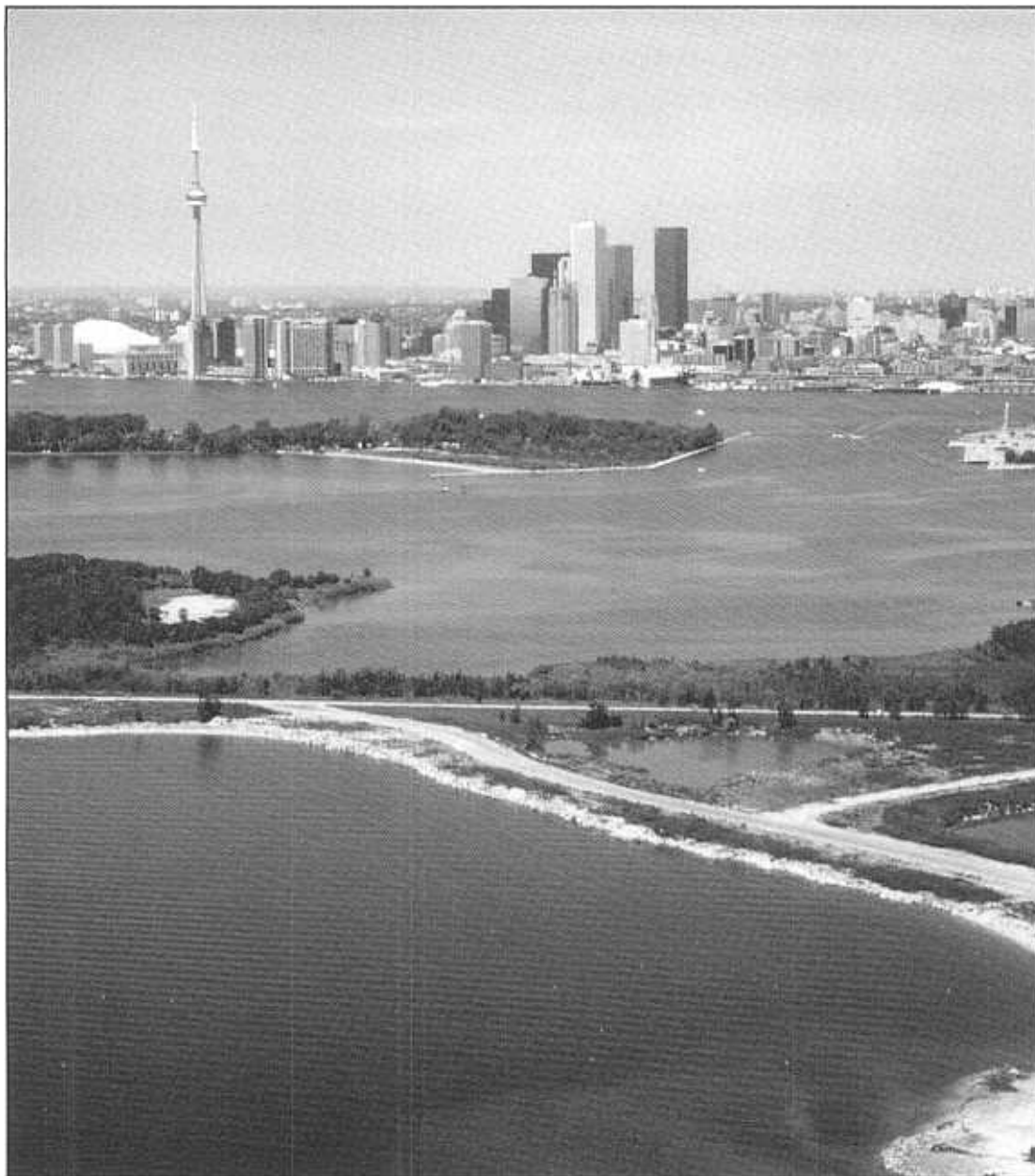
The Commission began by organizing five work groups that would look at broad waterfront issues, and planned a series of public hearings for the spring of 1989. In addition, Commission staff and experts

under contract began to analyse the port, airport, land-use, and development activities of federal agencies on the waterfront.

From the beginning, the Commission conducted open inquiries, seeking to consider all perspectives and listening to all points of view. Openness included invitations to federal, provincial, and municipal governments to participate in the Commission’s work groups and studies, alongside representatives of the private sector, labour, and academia. The Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and other invited participants accepted willingly and worked co-operatively from the start. Initially, however, municipalities were wary, fearing that the existence of the Commission might be an attempt by the federal government to extend its jurisdiction on the waterfront. As it became clear that this was not the case, and that the Commission intended to respect existing jurisdictions at all levels, a very high degree of intergovernmental co-operation was offered in every aspect of the Royal Commission’s work.

It soon became evident to the Commission, as it had been to some others, that waterfront problems were both broader and deeper than the list of issues included in the Commission’s federal mandate. They stemmed from historical forces related to the way society and the economy had evolved over the past 200 years, and to the impact each had on the waterfront and on the local and regional environment of which the waterfront is a part.

The public, ahead of governments, was aware of the nature of the problem. In the Commission’s first sets of hearings, dozens of deputants delivered the same message: by all means sort out the issues of Harbourfront and the Harbour



*Toronto Skyline, view from the Toronto Islands*

Commissioners, but help us find out how to make our lake publicly accessible, fishable, drinkable, and swimmable. This cannot happen while the rivers that empty into the lake are contaminated, the air that connects to it is dirty, the groundwaters polluted, and the soils through which they pass contaminated.

During this first phase of its work, the Commission published seven major reports, as background for the public hearings and as the basis of its analysis of waterfront needs and opportunities: *Environment and Health: Issues on the Toronto Waterfront*; *Housing and Neighbourhoods: The Liveable Waterfront*; *Access and Movement*; *Parks*,

*Pleasures, and Public Amenities; Jobs, Opportunities, and Economic Growth; Persistence and Change: Waterfront Issues and the Board of Toronto Harbour Commissioners; and The Future of the Toronto Island Airport: The Issues.*

Fortunately, the Commission had not been given specific boundaries as part of its original mandate. Therefore, work groups were encouraged to draw whatever boundaries they felt were necessary in considering the issues placed before them. The limits turned out to be broader (and vaguer) in some instances (e.g., environment and health) and narrower and more specific in others (e.g., housing and neighbourhoods).

However, at this stage of the Commission's existence, its principal geographic focus was the waterfront of the Regional Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, including the three local municipalities of Etobicoke, Toronto, and Scarborough. In many instances, the word *Toronto* came to be used as shorthand for all the communities in the region, defining the sense of place. In fact, a study conducted for the Commission in 1991 reveals that, rather than naming the individual municipalities in which they live, seven of every ten area residents think of themselves as coming from Toronto.

By the end of the first year of operations, the Commission had reached its first set of conclusions, which it conveyed to the federal government and the public through its first interim report, in August 1989. It summarizes the first phase of the Commission's work, which had focused on the waterfront in the context of Toronto's history, values, and contemporary issues:

Toronto was born on the waterfront. Long before the Simcoes. Long before the Town of York. Deep in the

mists of aboriginal time, the Toronto Carrying Place was a centre of trade, stabilized by community and endowed with spiritual significance.

When Toronto embraced the Railway Era in the 1850s, there were few hints of the City that would emerge, the City the railways would help to create. And if the City was cut off from its waterfront by dozens of sets of tracks flowing in and out of each other in the new lands south of Front Street — and it was — it is also clear that the City and its people benefitted mightily. Having secured a major share of a new technology, and established a formula for economic success that remains potent to this day, Toronto drew hundreds of industries to its shores over the years. And as energetic cities do, it began to attract people from other parts of Canada and from all over the world: creative people, people with dreams and ideas, people seeking freedom and better prospects, people whose children and their ensuing generations would keep Toronto vigorous. And the City prospered.

But as railways and then expressways cut people off from their waterfront, as people looked elsewhere to live, work, and play, and as our economic drive brought greater prosperity to more and more people, our perspective changed dramatically. The significance of waterfronts was lost and their importance diminished; the great contribution of our river valleys was no longer understood or taught and, save for a few hardy souls, the essential role of Nature in the City was all but forgotten. Progress meant industry and industry

meant railways. Railways required land for track and cities agreed to separate themselves from their waterfronts in order to capture the opportunities the railways offered.

But in our time the railways have become more interested in profit from the land than in service from the tracks; ships have changed their technologies and their trade routes; the economic base of cities is being changed and there has been a significant shift in human values. People are coming back to our waterfronts for pleasure and solace in a way that their great-grandparents would have understood.

This is dramatic, powerful, and far-reaching historical change. The people of Toronto understand this. Time and again, they have expressed their belief that Toronto's way of doing things, its values, its civic traditions could and should be used to deal with the forces that affect the future of the waterfront and the city.

Three words define the values of Toronto at its best: opportunity, tolerance, and orderliness. With a few pauses, Toronto has been a place at the cutting edge, a magnet for new ideas, and a resource in realizing them. In Toronto, as in all vigorous cities, opportunities beget opportunities.

Moreover, there has always been an ongoing opportunity to affect the course of the city itself — a sense that Toronto is a work in progress and that its directions can be changed. People

who have been in Toronto for a while begin to develop a feeling of what they want it to be, what of its many facets would benefit from change, what should stay the same.

Tolerance has meant the near-total absence of violent confrontation. There are forums where people grapple with ideas, interests, and beliefs. When compromise is possible, compromise is made, but even when it is not possible, "losers" are left with the knowledge that, next time, they could just as easily be "winners": an idea has been rejected, not the person who proposed it. This climate of tolerance has also meant that sooner or later, "New Torontonians" (new arrivals or new generations, or

both) will have their ideas and aspirations brought to the City's and the public's official attention and they will be given respectful considera-

tion. Tolerance means that everybody learns that everybody counts.

Orderliness has been important in the building of Toronto. With all the transformations the City has experienced and all the conflicts it has had to resolve, nothing has ever truly gotten out of hand. That discipline (a better word, maybe, than orderliness) has been here from the beginning — a lingering legacy, no doubt, of Governor Simcoe's garrison days. It is a value, or a virtue, that has been drawn upon by each succeeding wave of New Torontonians, reinterpreted on occasion and adapted to specific circumstances, but always enriched along the way.

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Toronto continues to recognize that freedom remains alive only in an atmosphere of order, that life here is played by a set of rules, and that the rules are meant to work for everybody. From this comes the assurance that nothing will ever get out of hand or out of control; that the City will never grow beyond its ability to solve its problems; that, when things start to go wrong, order will be restored and the right thing done.

Well, that's the faith. Easier to say than to do. Forging consensus rooted in these core values is the dull, hard work of democracy — an unrelenting, never-ending task that requires the energies, interests, and imaginations of many people over long periods of time. Sometimes their voices are not heard. Sometimes the thread is lost — or their visions are blocked. And sometimes the soul-numbing experiences of day-to-day battle create a tempting cynicism that obscures the progress being achieved.

Indeed, the values that we call opportunity, tolerance, and orderliness work best when people believe they themselves can make a difference; when they feel that their dreams can expand their realities; and when they feel that Toronto holds its own unique promise for them, a promise that can be fulfilled by their efforts, both individually and in community with others.

Armed with this appreciation of Toronto's core values, the Commission turned its attention to a first set of recommendations. The Commission had already

decided to make interim recommendations that would facilitate the ongoing process of analysis and help forge a consensus on required courses of action. It would make final recommendations on issues it felt capable of dealing with as early as possible in its mandate, in hope of obtaining early agreement and response from the community and from the governments involved.

The Commission made more than 60 recommendations in this first interim

report, more than half of which dealt with environmental issues. Most of these suggestions were directed in the first instance to the federal government,

but a number were generic and applicable to two or more levels of government. True to its mandate, the Commission was seeking the concurrence of affected authorities.

The single most important recommendation of the interim report was the proposal that a watershed approach be adopted to protect Toronto's vital ecosystem. The report said:

To begin, a broad evaluation is needed to ensure that sufficient open space is maintained and that its environmentally significant features are preserved. Across the entire watershed, a "green" strategy [should] be devised to preserve the waterfront, river valley systems, head-waters, wetlands, and other significant features in the public interest. Such a strategy would physically link the waterfront to the river valley systems, which, in turn, would be linked by the preserved headwater areas. A

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continuous trail system would guarantee public access to these natural and open spaces.

Major elements supporting the green strategy were the Commission's proposals that the Rouge River Valley be protected as a natural heritage park, Humber Bay Park East be protected as significant regional urban space, and the Leslie Street Spit be recognized as an urban wilderness park. The Commission defined "urban wilderness" as an extensive area in which natural processes predominate; there is public access without vehicles; and there are low-key, low-cost, unorganized recreation and contacts with wildlife.

The environmental recommendations made by the Commission in the report included proposals for:

- improving public access to the entire waterfront and extending public ownership;
- imposing a moratorium on lakefilling until a comprehensive lakefill policy is developed;
- establishing a waterfront-wide heritage policy;
- protecting all natural areas and wildlife along the waterfront, and rehabilitating and maintaining river valleys such as the Humber, the Don, and the Rouge;
- creating a watershed greenbelt;
- strengthening and more closely integrating the Ontario Planning Act and the Environmental Assessment Act, as well as strengthening the federal environmental review process; and
- controlling over-development, including high-rises, on the waterfront to prevent visual or physical barriers.

All these issues and recommendations were to be more fully analysed and considered in subsequent phases of the Commission's work.

In the same interim report, the Commission also made its final recommendations on the Toronto Island Airport and on Harbourfront, as well as its fundamental recommendations about the Board of Toronto Harbour Commissioners. They are summarized here and discussed in greater detail in Part III of this report.

The Commission recommended that the federal government terminate the Harbourfront Corporation and create a new entity, the Harbourfront Foundation, giving it a mandate to continue providing Harbourfront's wide variety of cultural, recreational, and educational programs, which would be supported by an endowment from the Harbourfront assets. The Commission suggested that lands not needed to endow the foundation should be disposed of, subject to negotiations with the City of Toronto; furthermore, the Commission felt that urban design improvements were also needed, to achieve the best physical integration of the Harbourfront area with the surrounding city and the water.

In considering the Toronto Island Airport, the Commission concluded that it should continue its dual role as part of a regional airport system. Within this system, it should serve general aviation and limited air commuter operations, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the 50-year Tripartite Agreement signed in 1983 among the City of Toronto, the Toronto Harbour Commissioners, and the federal Minister of Transport.

The Commission also recommended that a new airport plan be prepared, one



*Bluffer's Park Marina, Scarborough*

that would reflect that dual role and ensure that the airport would remain at its existing scale, be cleaner and quieter, and become more sensitive to the needs of its users. It also found a need for management improvements, including a new financial and accounting base, and improved public and user consultation processes.

The Commission recommended that the mandate of the Toronto Harbour Commissioners (THC) to operate the Port of Toronto be separated from planning or developing lands that do not serve the port function. The THC should retain its authority to operate the Port (and the airport) on behalf of the City of Toronto but should be limited to that task. The Commission suggested that, in addition to the proposed changes to the THC's mandate, greater local control of waterfront planning and a better system of accountability were needed.

The Commission indicated it would conduct studies during the next phase of its work, to evaluate how much land was needed for the port operation and which lands could be transferred to another body. It also recommended that an environmental audit of the entire East Bayfront/Port Industrial Area be carried out before there was further action to develop lands in those areas.

## **THE SECOND PHASE**

On 30 August 1989, the same day the Commission's report was released, then-Treasury Board President Robert de Cotret responded on behalf of the Government of Canada:

The government is in substantial agreement with the Royal Commission's recommendations on Harbourfront, is generally supportive of the recommendation

that the airport continue to serve general aviation and limited commuter traffic, and is open to discussions with the City of Toronto regarding the recommendation to transfer management of lands no longer required for port purposes from the Toronto Harbour Commissioners to another body.

Shortly thereafter, on 17 October 1989, the Province of Ontario also acted: then-Premier David Peterson announced broad provincial measures to ensure that Toronto's waterfront is preserved, protected, and used prudently as an accessible and attractive place for people.

These measures included:

- endorsing the Royal Commission's report;
- providing an additional, complementary mandate to the Commission, asking it to report to the Province on waterfront development issues along the entire western basin of Lake Ontario, from the eastern boundary of Durham Region to the western boundary of Halton Region;
- agreeing to join the environmental audit of the East Bayfront/Port Industrial Area, and issuing an invitation to Metropolitan Toronto and the City of Toronto to participate as well;
- declaring a Provincial Interest in that area under the Planning Act, "to prevent any major development . . . until it can be determined what is appropriate for the people and the environment";
- asking the Commission to recommend ways of linking and integrating the waterfront to the upstream watersheds

throughout the Greater Toronto region; and (in a companion move)

- appointing Ron Kanter, then MPP for St. Andrew-St. Patrick, to identify ways of protecting forever the headwaters and river valleys from the Oak Ridges Moraine to Lake Ontario.

Having said on numerous occasions that no one level of government can resolve all the issues related to the development of the waterfront in the public interest, Mr. Crombie called the new provincial mandate, added to that from the federal government, "a very strong signal of federal-provincial co-operation on these matters". Indeed, it made this Commission only the second in Canadian history to serve two levels of government. (The first had been the one called to investigate the Ocean Range disaster off Newfoundland in 1976.)

The mandate the Province gave the Commission was broad and comprehensive. Because of the waterfront's environmental significance; the extensive socio-economic pressures that characterize waterfront development; and the importance of rational planning and development of the waterfront to ensure future quality of life and the well-being of hinterland areas, the Province asked the Commission to inquire into and make recommendations concerning:

- appropriate allocation of waterfront lands to various uses — i.e., housing, open-space, industrial, and commercial uses;
- waterfront transportation in the context of the regional transportation system;
- housing and community development on the waterfront;