

# The Nature *of* Possibility

TORONTO PORTLANDS DESIGN WORKSHOP

The Portlands has always held an important place in the life of Toronto. Once a 700 acre industrial area, this brownfield is now in transition as recreational, commercial and other possibilities begin to emerge.

On October 29, 1999, the International Brownfields Exchange brought together local and international leaders involved in the regeneration of former industrial areas. Teams of architects, urban designers, landowners, technical experts and community representatives interpreted the principles of the City of Toronto's draft Part II Plan, "Unlocking the Portlands" into design concepts that brought meaning to the principles and evoked the type of place participants wanted the Portlands to become. Four areas were considered: The Quays, Mouth of the Don River, Cherry St. Corridor and the area South of the Ship Channel.

Beth Benson, Executive Director of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, set the challenge for the Workshop: "Some may regard the Portlands as a forgotten place, but each of you knows that the Portlands is Toronto's best-kept secret. It is a place of extraordinary potential that waits for reconnection into the fabric of the City. The quality of landscape and built-form design will set the benchmark for regeneration and will determine the success of the City's efforts to spark redevelopment of this waterfront. Our challenge today is to prepare design concepts for four sites in order to:

- create better connections;
- establish a "sense of place";
- introduce multi-functioning green infrastructure;
- celebrate both the natural and built heritage of the area."



*Paul Bedford, the City's Chief Planner, compared the size of the Portlands to other waterfront redevelopment initiatives, including Barcelona, New York and the London docklands. Mr. Bedford noted that the Part II Plan for the Portlands shares many goals with these international waterfronts, including: design excellence; public and private sector working partnerships; and a vision that balances economic, environmental and social objectives.*

*Jeff Stinson, University of Toronto, professor emeritus and architect, re-enforced the idea to maintain as much of the industrial heritage as possible. He proposed that the rebirth of these lands be tied to its heritage and that the remaining artifacts and landforms be an inspiration to designers.*

*October 29, 1999*

## *Guiding Principles for New Directions:*

- consolidate and expand industrial uses;
- encourage the revitalization of large tracts of vacant or underutilized land by encouraging investment in a broad mix of uses;
- create a diverse, linked system of parks and natural areas;
- improve connections between the Port Lands and the downtown and adjacent neighbourhoods;
- enhance the amenity and environmental quality of the area;
- create clearly identifiable places and destinations in the area.



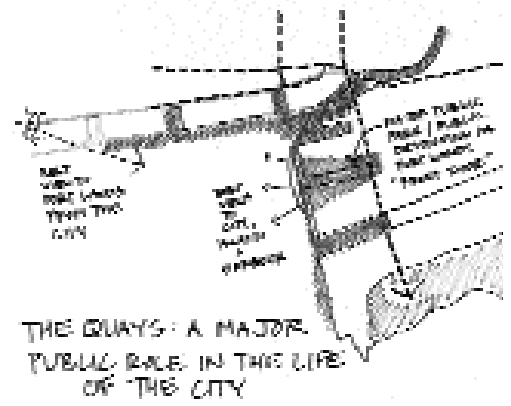
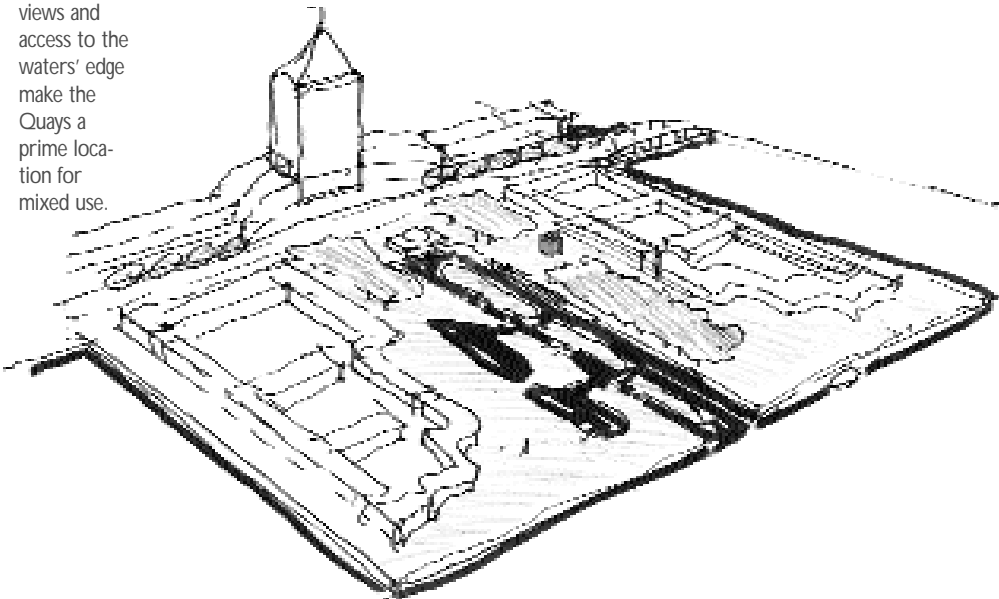
## The Quays

The significance of The Quays relative to the central downtown was a challenge for this team. The spectacular views, landmarks and artifacts that characterize this site were the starting point. The team proposed extending the Lakeshore LRT to Cherry Street. The LRT would pass through the Victory Soya Silos, which would act as an eastern "gate" to the city. The water areas between Cousins and Polson Quays were proposed as a major public open space and destination. The east/west axis of this slip would offer expansive westward views of the city.

This public park/open space would be framed by buildings on three sides. The slip itself could be extended to include a combination of storm water management ponds and new floating landscape islands. The ponds would create a series of more natural areas, filtering stormwater run-off before entering the Bay. The new floating islands could be formal or natural landscapes, or have kiosks.

Both the ponds and the islands would provide opportunities for new terrestrial and aquatic habitat.

Spectacular views and access to the waters' edge make the Quays a prime location for mixed use.



### Summary

**Connections:** Link Cherry Street with a Queens Quay E. extension of the LRT.

**Sense of place:** An urban park centered on water area between Cousins and Polson Quays, as an active public destination.

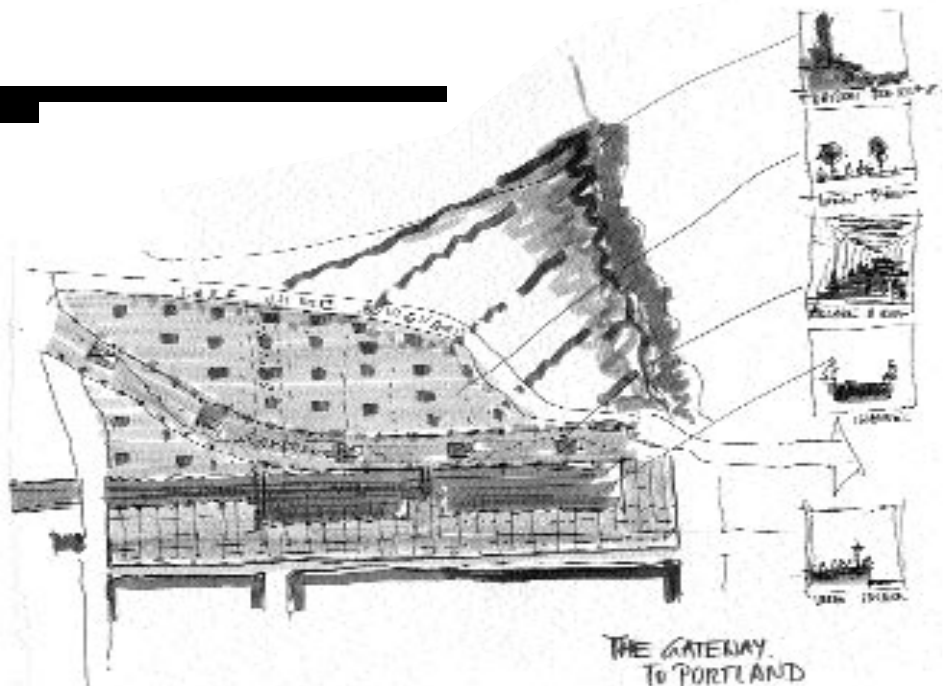
**Green infrastructure:** Central Park integrating functions; Cherry St. as a green boulevard integrating terrestrial habitat.

**Heritage:** Preserve the Victory Soya Silos as an eastern gateway to the City, reconnect Don River to Toronto Bay.



## Mouth of the Don River

Two design concepts were developed for the Mouth of the Don River. In the first, the Don River would extend south to meet the Ship Channel and is envisioned as a naturalized river course, with mature vegetation on either side, backing onto public parklands. Lakeshore Boulevard would be relocated north of the *Mouth of the Don River continues next page*



Gardiner Expressway, to separate the more natural Don River greenway and a newly-created urban park and promenade associated with the renamed "Keating Canal". The new Keating Canal would be flanked by the Gardiner on one side and shops on the other. A series of bridges, echoing the city grid, would take pedestrians across the Canal into a more developed mixed use area to the south.

The area beneath the Gardiner Expressway is filled-in with uses, ranging from restaurants, to open arcades, to markets and offices. Several ideas were put forward for the use of the upper level of the Gardiner, including a public promenade/roofscape and a domed roadway.

In the second concept, the Don River would be reconnected with the Toronto Bay and the Keating Channel would be filled in. A series of pedestrian bridges would cross the new river alignment. In this case the Gardiner would be removed either by realigning it above the existing rail corridor or by burying it.

### Summary

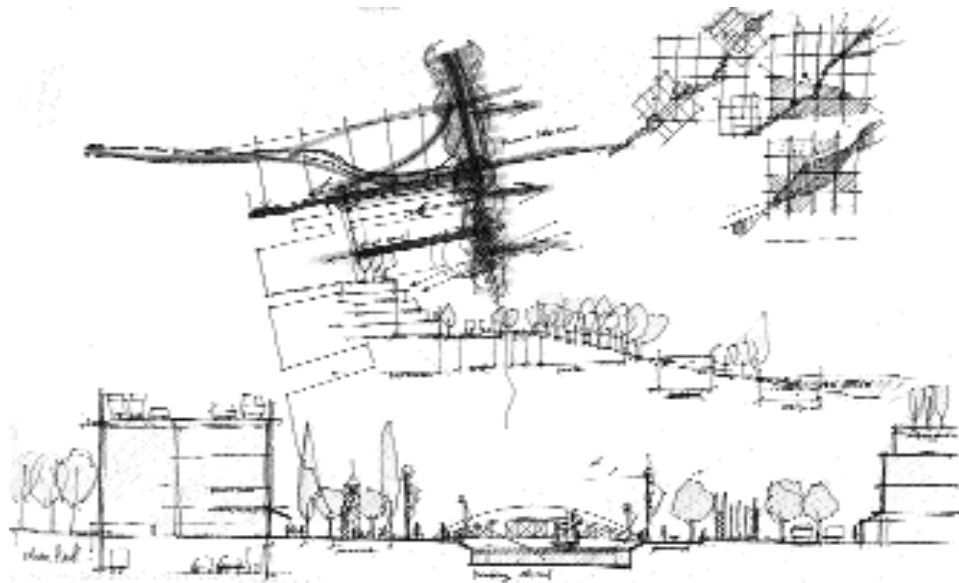
**Connections:** Relocate or inhabit the Gardiner Expressway to create a major public open space connected by a series of new pedestrian bridges.

**Sense of Place:** Creation of an action urban park on the south side of Keating Channel area, with a naturalized area to

the north that is part of the Don River mouth.

**Green Infrastructure:** Don River corridor is a wide greenway corridor.

**Heritage:** Reinforce the traditional city grid and urban form south of Keating Channel.

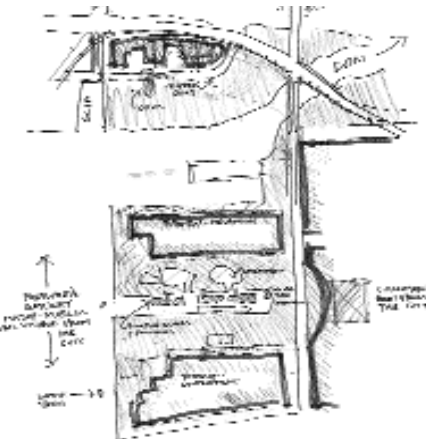


## Cherry Street Corridor

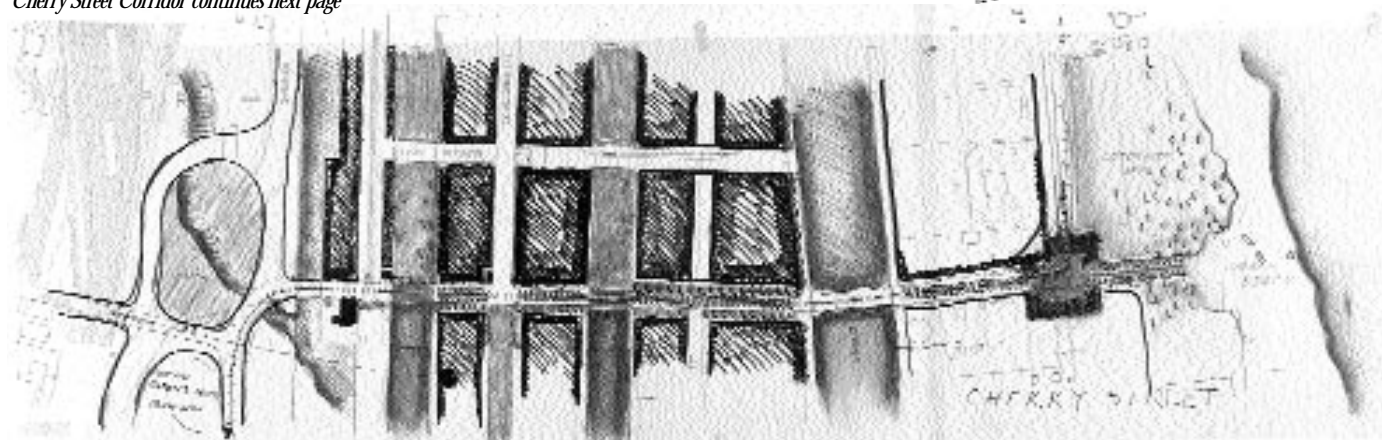
The Cherry St. Corridor was identified as a significant north/south greenspace linkage. It could connect the Don River to the system of greenspaces running between the Toronto Islands, the North Shore/Cherry Beach Park and the Tommy Thompson Park.

At a neighbourhood level, Cherry Street would function as the divide between The Quays, with a large greenspace to the west and the more developed land to the east.

*Cherry Street Corridor continues next page*

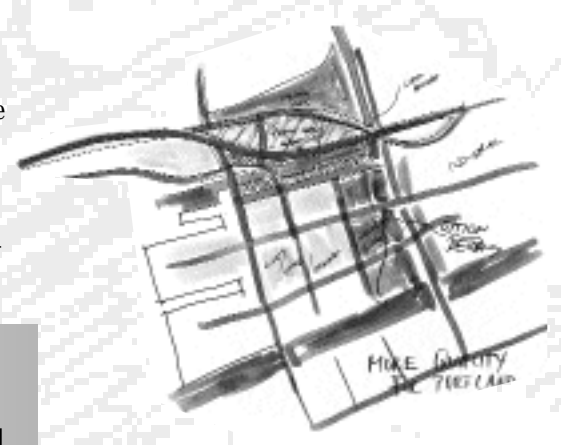


The Cherry Street Corridor is the major connection between Lakeshore and Cherry Beach.



from the eastern edges of the slips to connect to a green boulevard at Leslie Street. The intersection of Cherry Street and Unwin Avenue is a threshold to a mature stand of trees, heritage structures and Cherry Beach.

The street itself would be upgraded as a green boulevard, with the streetcar line running down the centre, connecting to a Queen's Quay E. extension. On either side of the streetcar line would be a double row of trees. Car traffic would run in two lanes on either side. The water areas of the slips would be extended eastwards to meet Cherry Street. The texture and surface treatment of the street would be distinctive, drawing attention to the green "fingers" extending eastwards.



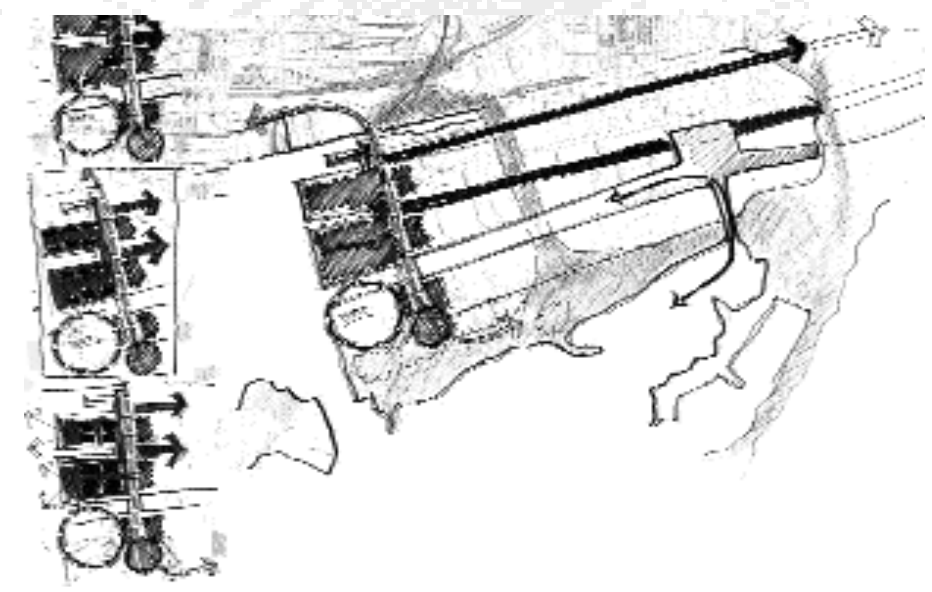
**Summary**

**Connections:** Link Cherry Street with a Queens Quay E. extension of the LRT and further extend a network of "green fingers" east-west along Commissioners and Villiers Streets. Provide either pedestrian bridges or ferry service across both the eastern and western gaps to allow for a continuous circumnavigation of Toronto Bay.

**Sense of Place:** Cherry Street as an extension of Queens Quay would create an inviting waterfront boulevard and become the defining eastern edge of Toronto Bay — a new model for Toronto's waters edge.

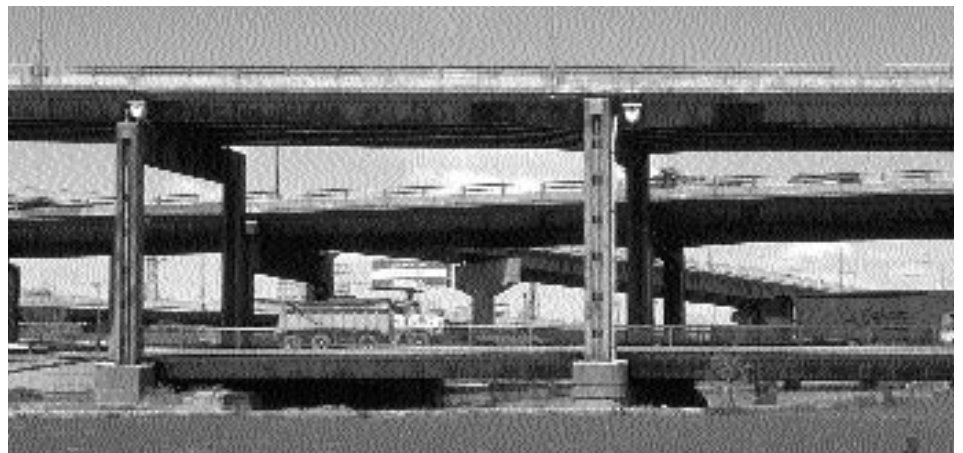
**Green Infrastructure:** Cherry St. would become part of an interconnected web of green spaces, performing multiple functions (ecological, cultural and recreational).

**Heritage:** Celebrate the buried Taddle Creek and highlight the former lifeguard station and beach structures an integral part of the landscape.



*Ron Soskolne, President of Soskolne Associates, identified lessons that can be learned from successful international urban redevelopment projects:*

- establish clear objectives;
- vision with a realistic five-year time frame;
- understand competitive context
- distinguish investment from physical development;
- create agency to shield from outside pressures;
- define roles in public/private partnerships.



## You were there...

Elias Louis Ampas,  
Suizanne Barrett,  
Paul Bedford,  
Beth Benson,  
Diana Birchall,  
Angella Blanas,  
Rob Booth,  
Beate Bowron,  
Calvin Brook,  
Murray Brooksbank,  
Jan Brouwer,  
Bob Davies,  
Mike Doran,  
Mark Inglis,  
Andrew Judge,  
Michael Karowich,  
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Leslie Lee,  
Ye Jin Lee,  
Martin Liefhebger,  
Nina-Marie Lister,  
Julie Loehrl,  
Lynda Macdonald,  
Robert McBride,  
Alec McGillivray,  
Catherine McVitty,  
Harold Madi,  
Rob Marshall,  
Bryce Miranda,  
John D. Morand,  
Eha Mai Naylor,  
Mary Nuemann,  
David O'Hara,  
David Oleson,  
Elysse Parker,  
Eric Pedersen,  
Iris Reuther,  
Alfredo Romano,  
Chris Ronson,  
Irene Rota,  
Clinton Somerton,  
Edward Sousa,  
Lynda Schneekloth,  
Gabriele Seeleman,  
Alex Shevchuk,  
Robert Shibley,  
Ron Soskolne,  
Martin Stein,  
Robert Stephens,  
Jeff Stinson,  
Kim Storey,  
Edmund Sullivan,  
Nicole Swerhun,  
Gail Wittwer,  
Leslie Woo,  
Paul Young,  
Rong Yu,  
Yvonne Yuen



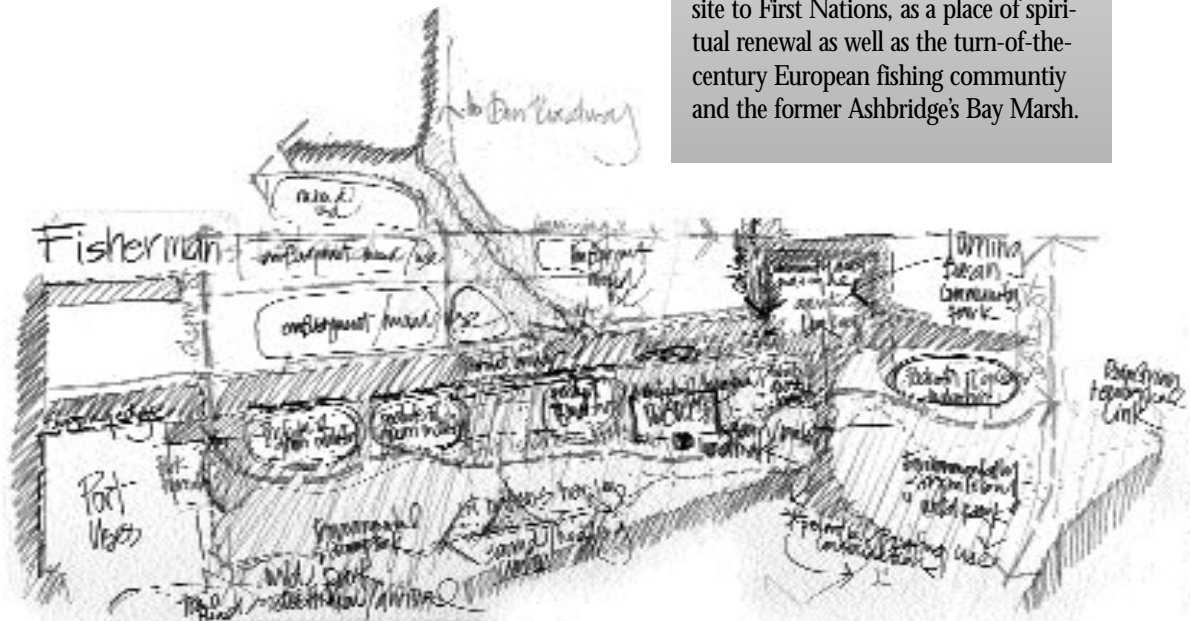
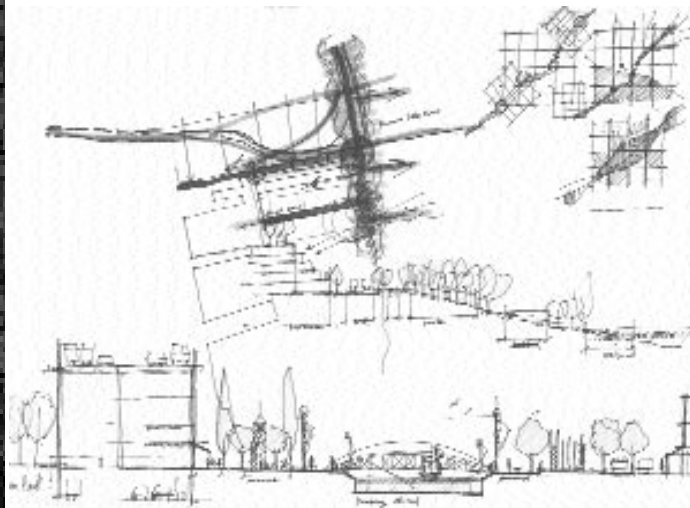
## South of the Ship Channel

The starting premise of this team was that the entire site south of the Ship Channel possesses unique characteristics that should be preserved. This "wild" character is heightened by the site's short distance from downtown. The site is a major habitat linkage between the Don River and Tommy Thompson Park. In an effort to emphasize this, the circulating channel to the east of the former Hearn Generating Station would be reconnected to the Ship Channel.

The long view of the Ship Channel was retained, and framed to the north with development, creating a formal edge. The south edge would have a more picturesque setting with "pockets" of development set within the landscape.

A green parkway on Unwin Ave. would connect street cars to the interior of the site. The site would be suitable as an "off-grid", sustainable community, echoing its former days as Fisherman's Island.

The team proposed that the Hearn Generating Station be reused for cultural activities, exhibits, trade shows and performances. The memory of the former Ashbridge's Bay Marsh should be recalled thorough habitat regeneration, interpretive signage and discovery walks, etc. The First Nations heritage of the waterfront should also be celebrated by recalling the spiritual importance of this site.



### Summary

**Physical Connections:** Cherry St. and Leslie Street as the key links to the City and the creation of a new east-west parkway road. A small pedestrian bridge across the Ship Channel at Carlaw Avenue.

**Sense of Place:** A new "Green Island" for Toronto. A unique place off-the-grid with sustainable development and renewable energy sources.

**Green Infrastructure:** A large major, multifunctional park.

**Heritage:** Recall the importance of this site to First Nations, as a place of spiritual renewal as well as the turn-of-the-century European fishing community and the former Ashbridge's Bay Marsh.

