

March 31st, 2022

Honourable Lisa MacLeod  
Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries  
Hearst Block, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
900 Bay Street,  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2E1

**RE: ONTARIO PLACE – A New Approach Needed for Landscape Integrity**

Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries,

The Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA) is following with great interest the recent redevelopment proposal for Ontario Place and wishes to express our concern about the loss of landscape integrity within the scheme published in July 2021.

As the voice of the profession in Canada, the CSLA – in collaboration with its provincial and territorial component organizations – is dedicated to advancing the art, the science and the practice of landscape architecture. As such it remains an advocate for its members on a wide range of issues such as urban design, urban renewal, sustainable development, human health and well-being, climate change, cultural heritage, and social justice through site design and landscape restoration. [<https://www.csla-aapc.ca/csla-aapc>]

The Ontario Association of Landscape Architects (OALA), a component association of the CSLA, has issued two letters on the matter of the Ontario Place redevelopment: to Minister Tibollo (28 February 2019), and to Minister MacLeod (16 September 2021). The CSLA supports both the spirit and the content of these two missives especially given that Ontario Place is an award-winning park/public space, and the outstanding collaboration between the teams of the landscape architect Michael Hough and architect Eberhard Zeidler.

The green islands were originally designed to frame the architectural pods and provide a rich waterfront edge experience for all peoples, woven with native treed groves and rocky coves for shelter from the lake. The resultant variety of experiences and ecological environments of the cohesive marriage of modernism and the natural beauty of the Ontario landscape, were created to ensure social and cultural exchanges. **Ontario Place has long been regarded – both here and internationally – as an iconic achievement in both the Ontario and the Canadian landscape realms. The CSLA Cultural Landscape & Legacy Committee certainly considers this site one of Canada’s greatest cultural heritage landscape achievements and a precedent for professional innovation and urban renewal on our waterfronts.**

**Moving forward: next steps/opportunities**

There have been numerous modifications to Ontario Place over time that have deviated from the original vision and executed architectural and landscape intent. From its national perspective, we are cognisant of the Province’s challenge of creating a timely and respectful redevelopment of this unique asset. However, the CSLA affirms that this ‘legacy’ Cultural (Heritage) Landscape should neither be overwhelmed conceptually nor

physically with redevelopment that removes the foundation of the landscape realm. Such are our concerns about the recent west island proposals where illustrations show removal of the intended island landscape quality, and creation of an indoor, tropical theme park experience – a highly energy consumptive facility that negates the iconic concept of Ontario Place’s replicated natural islands and shoreline environ.

At a minimum, as the Province moves towards the next ‘legacy’ edition of Ontario Place, there must be a clear articulation of and enhancement of the ascribed Heritage Values and physical Character Defining Attributes of the Ontario Place landscape. Through the lens of understanding community future needs and aspirations (incl. Indigenous voices) a serendipitous opportunity awaits to reimagine and regain a dynamic public place that generations have revered.

As we look at how well-designed outdoor parks and natural open spaces have contributed to the health and enjoyment of thousands in our city through the pandemic and years of intensification of urban areas, careful realization of the importance of this globally recognized cultural park must be actioned for the future.

### Landscape Architectural Leadership

Landscape architects have demonstrated their great contributions to the ecological, social and economic viability of the iconic Ontario Place. As such, landscape architects will be vital in providing the continuity for Michael Hough’s seminal work and will be instrumental in its remaking as a major attraction and destination.

The CSLA and OALA can bring this level of expertise to the table for a comprehensive dialogue to form the appropriate master plan: one that rebuilds a continuous green space connecting all islands, and one that builds on the success of Trillium Park and the William G. Davis Trail for all users of the waterfront.

We encourage the Province to take a closer look at the significance of the landscape integrity of Ontario Place and the methods of restoring the heritage landscape character to re-create a treasured and dynamic waterfront landmark again. The CSLA will continue to monitor this evolving situation.

Yours Truly,



Carolyn Woodland, OALA, FCSLA, MCIP, RPP  
President  
Canadian Society of Landscape Architects



John Zvonar OALA, FCSLA  
Chair  
Cultural Landscape & Legacy Committee  
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cc. Premier Doug Ford, Mayor John Tory, CSLA Board, OALA Council, CSLA Cultural Landscape and Legacy Committee, ACO Toronto Branch