

The central city needs parks. What about Exhibition Place?



ALEX BOZIKOVIC > ARCHITECTURE CRITIC

PUBLISHED AUGUST 31, 2018

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

Downtown Toronto is starved for public spaces. We're building them under expressways and dreaming about building them over rail lines. But what about Exhibition Place? Over the past half-century, that massive swath of public land on the edge of downtown Toronto has been uglified and privatized. The neighbouring Ontario Place may be heading in the same direction.

Now a citizens' campaign is pushing for the city to reconsider these areas, as parkland that serves downtown and nearby neighbourhoods around it. They're right: It's time for a new vision here.

The campaign, called EXcluded, was launched this summer by a coalition of local neighbourhood groups. They're trying to draw attention both to Exhibition Place, which is city owned, and the adjacent Ontario Place, which is owned by the province. They argue that these spaces have been too long overlooked and underused.

"We'd like to see this public land be used for public purposes," says Ric Amis, the group's spokesman. EXcluded wants Exhibition Place rezoned as open space and an end to long leases to private operators such as Muzik nightclub. "There has been a push toward private development and that has to be rethought."

This is true. Over the past 20 years, a series of moves has eliminated open space from Exhibition Place: The construction and expansion of BMO Field. The expansion of convention facilities (there are now two). The new Raptors practice facility. And a large hotel, Hotel X, in a



“Parkdale is lacking parks, and right next to us is 192 acres.”

Exhibition Place looks grimmer than ever. Parking lots and big buildings – plus too-big roadways that provide a commuter shortcut – have taken over. It’s hard and unpleasant to walk there even from adjacent Parkdale.

No wonder. The Exhibition Place board, which includes a handful of city councillors, has a mandate to maximize revenue from the site. Its current plan is to balance sports, conventioning and culture.

Yet the Exhibition still has more than a dozen really good buildings, dating from around 1900 to the sixties. Plus the site is home to some of Toronto’s earliest colonial history: Fort Rouillé, the 1750s French trading post that was the first colonial settlement in Toronto, stood here. And there’s Scadding Cabin, built in 1794 for the early British colonial official John Scadding and moved here in 1879. So did new Fort York. See if you can find any of them between the parking lots.

Meanwhile, Ontario Place, the modernist masterpiece on islands just to the south, is open once again but in search of a purpose. It nearly got a new lease on life under the provincial Liberals; two weeks ago, Premier Doug Ford announced a new plan to “redo Ontario Place” and “make it a spectacular destination” while also co-ordinating with Exhibition Place.

Uh-oh. Judging from Mr. Ford’s history of pushing Ferris wheels and megamalls and casinos, we should all be nervous.

Instead, both Exhibition Place and Ontario Place should be knitted into the city.

Toronto’s mayor, whoever that is after the October election, needs to call for a comprehensive public review of these sites, and a change of zoning and mandate to emphasize public uses



but a long-term objective at best.

And last weekend I attended a “Block Party” to celebrate the opening of the Bentway, the multipurpose public space under the Gardiner Expressway. The space is looking magnificent and already doing its job as a venue for art and programmed events. I’m looking forward to the [IdeasCity festival](#) there Sept. 15.

What will be happening at Exhibition Place in September? Not much. That’s a shame.

FOLLOW ALEX BOZIKOVIC ON TWITTER

[@ALEXBOZIKOVIC](#)




 [REPORT AN ERROR](#)

 [EDITORIAL CODE OF CONDUCT](#)

 [COMMENTS](#)



TRENDING

- 1 High-net-worth investors now able to hold bitcoin fund in registered accounts
- 2 Troubled NDP faces its do-or-die moment in B.C. caucus meetings this week
- 3 U.S. escalates pressure on Canada for dairy concessions in NAFTA talks 
- 4 Monday’s analyst upgrades and downgrades 
- 5 Monday’s Insider Report: Two executives sold over \$7-million worth of this ‘Big 5’ bank stock 

© Copyright 2018 The Globe and Mail Inc. All rights reserved.

351 King Street East, Suite 1600, Toronto, ON Canada, M5A 0N1

Phillip Crawley, Publisher

