

Tory pushes for city, Queen's Park to work together on future of Ontario Place

JEFF GRAY > TORONTO CITY HALL REPORTER

INCLUDES CORRECTION

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John Tory, who oversaw a review of Ontario Place after it was closed, called for the creation of a large "urban park".

MICHELLE SIU

Ferris wheel, a monorail and a “megamall” in the Port Lands.

Mr. Tory, who oversaw a review of Ontario Place after it was closed that called for the creation of a large “urban park,” says he knows nothing of Mr. Ford’s intentions. But he added that he remains opposed to any notion of a waterfront casino. Plans have since advanced for a large casino expansion and redevelopment at the Woodbine racetrack in Etobicoke.

“The great cities of the world don't have casinos downtown, if you think about it,” Mr. Tory said on Friday in an interview. “They just don’t.”

A process launched by the Liberal government of Kathleen Wynne that sought private-sector partners for redevelopment of the site ran out of time and had to be mothballed as the election campaign got under way earlier this year.

Mr. Tory said he briefly raised the idea of revitalizing Ontario Place with the Premier at the launch of the annual Caribbean Carnival at the city’s nearby Exhibition Place last month, saying the future of the two sites must be co-ordinated. Mr. Tory said the Premier agreed, but that was the extent of the discussion.

Just a couple of weeks later, Mr. Ford said in a speech at the opening of the Canadian National Exhibition that he wanted to revitalize Ontario Place and “work in conjunction with the CNE.” The Toronto Star reported on Friday that Mr. Ford’s government plans an “international competition” for concepts for Ontario Place, and that the Premier was taking a personal interest in the project.

City councillor Mark Grimes, who chairs the board of Exhibition Place, said he spoke to Mr. Ford on Friday and the Premier expressed willingness to work with the city on the future of both sites. But the Premier, Mr Grimes said, did not reveal any details.

But Ontario Science Centre chief executive officer Maurice Bitran said his plans for revitalizing the site as it approaches its 50th anniversary in 2019 do not include any such move.

However, one of the now-shelved concepts solicited by the previous Liberal government suggested the idea as an option. That bid, spearheaded by developer Ken Tanenbaum, also called for the creation of a massive park and the campus of an educational institution. But Mr. Tanenbaum, who remains an advocate for the idea of moving the science centre, says he is not in talks with any government about it.

A Beamsville, Ont., man who has been trying to establish a fast-ferry from the Niagara region to Toronto has said he pitched the idea of using Ontario Place as one terminus of the service to Mr. Ford during the campaign, and that the Tory Leader was “very interested.”

Bruno Caciagli, who has been trying for more than a year to get hovercraft service running on Lake Ontario, said he met Mr. Ford at campaign events and that the PC Leader appeared intrigued and told him to submit more details through a go-between.

Transportation Minister John Yakabuski was not available to comment on Friday about a proposal to build a ferry service to Ontario Place.

With files from Oliver Moore and Justin Giovannetti

Editor’s note: (Sept. 8, 2018) An earlier version of this article incorrectly identified Ontario Science Centre’s CEO Maurice Bitran.

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