

HtO Park

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

HtO Park is an urban beach and public gathering place located in downtown Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For years, the land functioned as an important industrial area because the location provided convenient shipping access to Lake Ontario. As factories gradually left this area to seek cheaper real estate, they left behind a waterfront disfigured by abandoned warehouses and contaminated with industrial pollution. An elevated highway constructed along the lake edge also acted as a physical barrier that isolates the waterfront from Toronto's commercial center, deterring redevelopment. Completed in 2007, HtO Park was created as part of an initiative to revitalize this abandoned area, cleanup industrial pollution, and spur economic development along the waterfront. This project serves as an outstanding model of sustainable city planning and brownfield redevelopment.

During the first phase of the project, the design team addressed the issue of soil contamination. After consulting with soil experts and toxicologists, it was determined that capping the polluted areas with clean soil would eliminate health risks and create a sub-terrain suitable for the park landscape. This method was also cost-effective because it avoided the expense of excavating and transporting the toxic material off site.

Successful remediation of the industrial brownfield cleared the way for construction of HtO Park, which now occupies six acres of waterfront property. An existing man-made inlet, built for industrial shipping purposes, divides the park into two sections. HtO Park consists of three main parts—sand beach, grass-covered park space, and planked boardwalk. Combined, they create a space that serves multiple purposes and is seasonally adaptive. The beach and grass areas naturally lend themselves to passive uses like sun tanning and picnics while the boardwalk and numerous paths encourage more active use, such as walking and bicycling. Park HtO has attracted crowds of tourists and local citizens back to its waterfront and has begun to revitalize the community by attracting new business development.

The park's design uses several sustainable design strategies that help reduce environmental impact. To reduce stormwater runoff, porous pavement is used that allows water to pass through the hard surface, encouraging natural infiltration. In another effort to reduce the park's environmental impact, the irrigation system uses lake water rather than drinkable city water to nourish the lush green space. The project also seeks to restore the lake ecosystem by creating fish habitats along the edge of the lake edge and inlet. To do this, the designers used recycled concrete that was salvaged during the beginning of the project.

Project Resources

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

Janet Rosenberg + Associates Landscape Architects
Claude Cormier Architects Paysagistes Inc.

ARCHITECT

Hariri Pontarini Architects

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Leni Schwendinger Light Projects Ltd.

COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT

Beth Kapusta

ENGINEERS

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ART CONSULTANT

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HISTORIAN

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