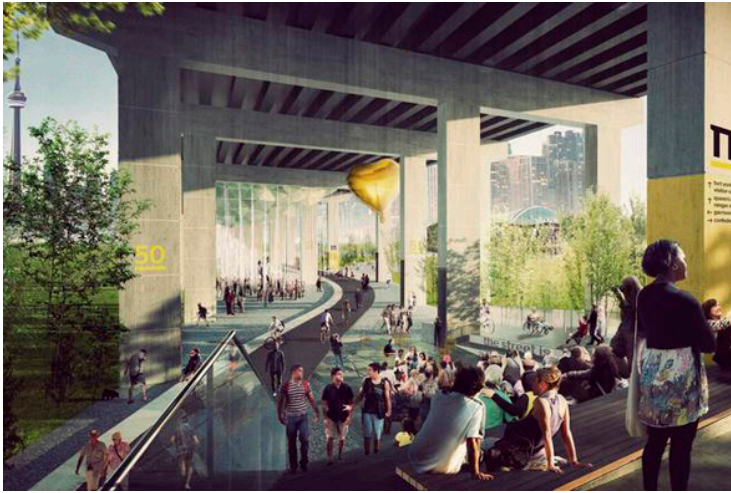




## Project: Under Gardiner An Urban Renaissance with Fort York at Its Heart

by Christopher Moore



The Under Gardiner in 2017. The artist's conception suggests the surprising beauty to be found under the once-forbidding Gardiner arches. (Credit: PUBLIC WORK)

On Tuesday, November 17, Mayor John Tory, Councillors Cressy and Layton, Waterfront Toronto CEO John Campbell, civic planner Ken Greenberg, and local citizen representatives came to Fort York Visitor Centre to announce *Project: Under Gardiner*, a partnership of private philanthropy and civic planning that promises to revive the dead zone beneath the Gardiner Expressway. Very special guests at the event were philanthropists Judy and Wilmot Matthews, who have offered an astonishing \$25 million to make this project happen. "Toronto is going to get used to saying yes to things like this," Mayor Tory declared, promising a completed project by 1 July 2017.

The Under Gardiner plan should confirm the central place Fort York National Historic Site will occupy in the new landscape of waterfront Toronto.

The urban planners' vision is to transform the Gardiner Expressway by making the blank spaces beneath it into "found space" for urban activities. The Under Gardiner promises new public spaces – for markets, gatherings, art, and recreation – along a 4 hectare, 1.75 km long space beneath the expressway, all the way from Strachan Avenue east to Spadina – right at

Fort York's front door. The Under Gardiner pathways will link to the new north-south path and pedestrian bridge over the railway corridor to Niagara and Liberty Village. (See our companion article for the latest on the bridge.)

Rather than fighting the grim industrial shadow of the expressway, the Under Gardiner planners have accepted its presence. They want to turn a more than fifty-year-old barrier into a soaring roof, five storeys high and wider than a normal city street. In the Fort York vicinity itself, pedestrian bridges will carry walkers and cyclists over Fort York Boulevard and Bathurst Street. Where the Gardiner crosses Strachan Avenue, a "grand stair" will create performance space. Tying the elements together will be a continuous walking and biking trail lined with gardens, amenities, and a series of outdoor "rooms" for public events. For Lai-King Hum of the CityPlace Residents Association, the project offers "a ribbon of possibility for community animation."

Vital to the project is the unique \$25 million donation from retired City of Toronto planner Judy Matthews and her investment banker husband Wil Matthews. Judy Matthews, who was instrumental in developing the Waterfront Music Garden and reviving St. George Street on the University of Toronto campus, says she and her husband "were looking for a space" in which to stimulate new urban development. She had never considered the Gardiner until civic planner Ken Greenberg showed her "the majesty, the monumentality, the potential" beneath the arches – "bents," in the technical lingo – that underpin the expressway, and told her this could be "the next big step in city building" for Toronto.

Waterfront Toronto will install the facilities, paths, and bridges of the Under Gardiner, with planning support from the City of Toronto and design work by the landscape architecture firm **PUBLIC WORK**. Though details of the ongoing maintenance and operation of the Under Gardiner remain to be negotiated, Mayor Tory predicts this kind of

public-private partnership in city building, rare in Toronto, may inspire similar acts of philanthropy. Already, the underside of the Gardiner is being rehabilitated in a \$145 million city project now nearing completion. The Matthews' donation means Project Under Gardiner can aim for a grand opening in less than two years.

The Under Gardiner promises to bring life to a new urban space, not through expensive new construction, but through imaginative urban design, new furnishings, and creative landscape architecture. Judy Matthews also emphasizes that “an explosion of people coming into vertical spaces downtown” means that “loneliness is a real problem. We want to create a space, but also nurture common ground.”

The significance for Fort York is vast. Project Under Gardiner confirms that a once-peripheral zone where few ventured is now central to Toronto's new downtown. The east-west Under Gardiner and the north-south pedestrian route over the railway corridor will put Fort York at the hub of pedestrian and cycling traffic throughout the area. The fort itself will be the defining heritage landmark of the area, without any sacrifice of the integrity of the historic site. For the 70,000 people of Fort York Neighbourhood, Liberty Village, Niagara, CityPlace, Bathurst Quay, and Wellington Place, the green spaces of the historic park will be a back yard. The Visitor Centre, already a focal point, meeting place, and architectural highlight of the new neighbourhood, will have the Under Gardiner spread out at its front door.

At the press conference, civic planner Ken Greenberg observed that the Under Gardiner will take its place in



The elevated Gardiner Expressway is at its highest point in front of the fort's Visitor Centre. The ground on the right will be part of the 'Liquid Landscape' of walks and grasses to be installed when overhead work on the deck of the Gardiner is completed in July, 2016. (Credit: Stephanie Calvet)



Philanthropists Wil and Judy Matthews have made the unexpected possible. "Why give to the public realm like this?" asks Judy Matthews. "It's not just building a space, but creating a place with a variety of activities for all kinds of people where they can gather and feel a sense of community." (Credit: Bob Gundu)

the historical continuity of “this trace.” Here, he said, the original lakeshore has already seen aboriginal activity, the city's birthplace at Fort York, the 19th century Grand Trunk Railway, and the mid-20th century Gardiner. Now Project Under Gardiner, their 21st century successor, will challenge Fort York and The Friends of Fort York to up their own game in response.

The Under Gardiner promises to draw thousands of local residents and Torontonians from throughout the city, to fifty-five “rooms” along the new pathway for music, food, theatre, visual arts, education and civics, dance, sports, and recreation. At the press conference, Greenberg alluded to history, heritage, or Fort York among the many riches of Project Under Gardiner. To ensure it does not become just a scenic backdrop to the Under Gardiner action, the fort's own cultural offerings will need to be just as dynamic as the new competition.

That is a challenge worth having. Indeed, one the fort has been building towards for a couple of decades..

*Christopher Moore is a writer, historian, and a friend of Fort York. He has twice won the Governor-General's Award: once for Louisbourg Portraits: Life in an Eighteenth Century Garrison Town, and again in children's literature for From Then to Now: A Short History of the World.*

# Learning to Live with the Gardiner

by Stephen Otto

Nearly two kilometres of the Gardiner Expressway extending west of Bathurst Street is elevated on columns or structural 'bents.' Almost a third of this raised section, where the road at its highest point is 50 feet off the ground, lies within the Fort York National Historic Site. Our myth keepers don't let us forget how in the late 1950s defenders of the site fought to prevent the road's planners from placing columns within the fort itself. In the process the two major landmarks came to be defined by one another. <<http://www.fortyork.ca/images/newsletters/fife-and-drum-2010/fife-and-drum-dec-2010.pdf>> This inspired a profound wariness, particularly in the late 1990s, of schemes to take down or reroute the road. Often the Gardiner was described as Fort York's nemesis.

Yet, the last fifteen years have seen a marked softening of such views. Between the publication of two strategic studies that have guided the site's development, *Fort York: Setting It Right* and *Fort York: Adding New Buildings*, things changed. In 2000 *Setting It Right* strongly recommended dismantling the elevated expressway and replacing it below grade. A short five years later *Adding New Buildings* made a case for siting the proposed Visitor Centre alongside the Gardiner, where it later came to be built. *The Fort York Neighbourhood Public Realm Plan* of 2004 recommended *inter alia* the lands under the Gardiner be developed as a public amenity to buffer the city from its waterfront.

Meanwhile, other markers were being set. In August 2002, Fort York Boulevard opened between Bathurst Street and Lakeshore Blvd. paving the way, so to speak, for constructing a new front drive to the site that opened in Summer 2006. This new drive triggered work along the south flank of the fort: a clearing of fences that followed obsolete boundaries from the

1890s; the eviction of at least one long-trespassing squatter; and a rough landscaping of the area. The following year Toronto Culture commissioned the first segment of *Watertable*, an art installation in lights by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak hanging from the underside of the Gardiner. Since then two more segments have been added.

A design competition for the new Visitor Centre took nearly all of 2009 to unfold and saw the jury pick a brilliant concept submitted by Patkau/Kearns Mancini. Securing building tenders within budget took longer than planned, so construction didn't begin until Fall 2012. The centre opened to great acclaim in September 2014. While some elements are still incomplete, such as installing a working kitchen, landscaping the forecourt, and extending the steel-panel screen eastward to emphasize the structure's horizontal lines, the building has already become a landmark in a neighbourhood where getting noticed is tough.

To say the project has been worthwhile is an understatement. The Visitor Centre at Fort York is a \$22 million bet that has paid off handsomely in mirroring the city to itself. It is symbolic yet practical. It functions as everything from a community centre to a place where site visitors are welcomed. Big enough to hold several hundred people comfortably on occasion, it has a surprisingly small footprint that doesn't chew up acres of green space, thanks to clever siting and design. But most of all, building the Visitor Centre was a bold initiative by council that has led to one of the most imaginative city building projects in Toronto's history. Hurrah for the Matthews! Hurrah for City Council! And a third cheer for Fort York as it continues its long climb back from obscurity!



At a reception at the fort in 2006 Mayor David Miller was persuaded to fire a cannon at the Gardiner, which withstood the assault handily. (Credit: Matt Blackett, Spacing magazine)



In the design competition for the Visitor Centre, Patkau/Kearns Mancini included as part of their entry this eerily prophetic perspective view of the building's forecourt under the Gardiner. Note the Watertable artwork was included in the sketch. (Credit: Patkau/Kearns Mancini, architects. Rendering by Patkau/Luxigon)

## *Fort York Bridge Project Announced*

On November 24, just one week after announcing the Under Gardiner project, made possible by an astonishing \$25 million gift from Judy and Wil Matthews, Mayor Tory returned to the neighbourhood to report the signing of a \$19.7 million contract between Build Toronto on behalf of the City and a team led by Dufferin Construction Company to construct the long-awaited Fort York Pedestrian-Cycling Bridge. Work on it will get under way immediately, and is expected to be completed by Spring 2017.

Most readers will recall that this link was designed originally as a single span supported by a pair of inclined arches to cross both the Toronto-Hamilton and Toronto-Georgetown rail corridors between Bathurst St. and Strachan Ave. It ran from a bridgehead south of Wellington St. to a point on the Garrison Common west of the fort itself. When Council's public works and infrastructure committee considered the matter in 2011 it sent the scheme back to staff with instructions to find a lower cost design. At that time the

structure was estimated to cost \$22.4 million. Build Toronto has now met the committee's goal through much hard work, consultation, and a call for design-build proposals. Instead of one bridge, there will now be two joined by a ground-level section where the structures touch down on a proposed park.

Dufferin's team brings much experience to the project. The company itself has been in the business of building things since 1912. Among them have been dozens of Ontario highways, the Highway 407 ETR, and the Air Rail Link spur from the Georgetown rail corridor into Pearson Airport. Pedelta are the civil engineers on the team. Headquartered in Barcelona but with a Toronto office, they have designed for Fort York one of the first sets of stainless steel bridges in North America. DTAH bring to the bridge their architectural expertise and more than twenty years experience with the landscape of the Fort York National Historic Site. Lighting experts Mulvey & Banani and geotechnical consultants Golder Associates, who'll be advising on the bridges'



*This birdseye view shows how the paired bridges work together to connect the south extension of Stanley Park (left) with the Garrison Common at Fort York (right). Also how they give access to parklands at the east tip of the so-called Ordnance Triangle (foreground). (Credit: Dufferin/Pedelta/DTAH)*



foundations, make up the rest of the team. MMM Group was the project's manager.

Dufferin Team's proposal includes an unprecedented technical innovation in North America: the use of Duplex Stainless Steel throughout. Called Duplex because it has a different metallurgical makeup that makes it twice as strong as other stainless steels, this subtle difference contributes to the engineers' ability to design more slender, lighter and transparent bridges. At Fort York both structures span the rail corridors almost perpendicularly rather than at an angle, to minimize the crossing length, which contributes to their strength as well.

An overview plan of the parks and open spaces in the west downtown shows clearly that the Fort York Bridge is the missing link to realizing a large network of useful bike paths and off-road walking paths. This would have been so even before the Under Gardiner initiative was announced. But now we have two significant pieces of infrastructure designed to meet at Fort York, and to be completed in less than two years. We're reminded of the question posed by a Toronto newspaper contemplating an earlier building boom in the mid-1840s: "Who shall say what Toronto may not yet be?"



Top left: Much consideration was given to how the south bridge landed on the Garrison Common. The viewing platform, stair and westward-leading ramp seen here are meant to soften its impact compared with a scissoring ramp that was proposed originally. (Credit: Dufferin/Pedelta/DTAH)

Bottom left: This plan shows the grand scheme for connected parks and open spaces in the southwest downtown. Fort York is where this green system intersects the Under Gardiner corridor that is highlighted in red. (Credit: DTAH, Toronto)

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