

Mississauga remakes Lakeview's long-lost waterfront

26-hectare project will rebuild wetlands from the Toronto line to the site of the GTA's last coal-fired power plant.

By: May Warren Staff Reporter, Published on Mon Oct 26 2015



Vince Talotta / Toronto Star Order this photo

Jim Tovey, once a ponytailed community activist who got a bright idea on a moonlit walk, sits at the pier at the bottom of Hydro Rd., near where the vision he began working toward in the 1990s is on the verge of becoming a reality. The Lakeview Waterfront Connection project will occupy much of the space behind him, east to the Toronto border.

It started with taking a dog for a walk.

Late one August night, Jim Tovey took his mutt Jake to burn off some energy near his home in the Lakeview area of south Mississauga.

Tovey stopped for a moment on a hill, looking at the apartment buildings to his left and right, thinking to himself how big the site was.

“The moon broke over the coal generating station and reflected off the water, and I thought: Wow, that’s beautiful,” he recalls.

“I thought, if we could ever get rid of this coal generating station, we could do something really progressive with this property.”

That moment in 1994, which Tovey jokingly refers to as the “Jake story,” was the start of the vision of what would become the Lakeview waterfront connection.



Rick Eglinton/ toronto star

An aerial photo of the Mississauga waterfront in 2008 shows the barren site of the former coal-fired power plant in the background. The new project would connect the existing Lakefront Promenade Park and marinas, in the foreground, with Marie Curtis Park in Toronto beyond to the east.

Stretching along Lake Ontario from the old Lakeview generating station to the Toronto line at Marie Curtis Park, the massive waterfront restoration project will re-create 26 hectares of wetlands, forest, meadow and beach destroyed to make way for military and industrial uses over the past century.

Peel Region council gave final approval Oct. 22. Construction on an access road should start this winter, with infilling work planned for next summer.

The project is a partnership between Credit Valley Conservation and Peel, with help from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. It will use “clean” fill from construction projects to build new land, similar to the Leslie Spit, around the power plant site and the still-operating water treatment plant to the east. That will restore pedestrian and cyclist access to a long-forbidden section of the waterfront and fill in a long gap in the Waterfront Trail.



Vince Talotta / Toronto Star Order this photo

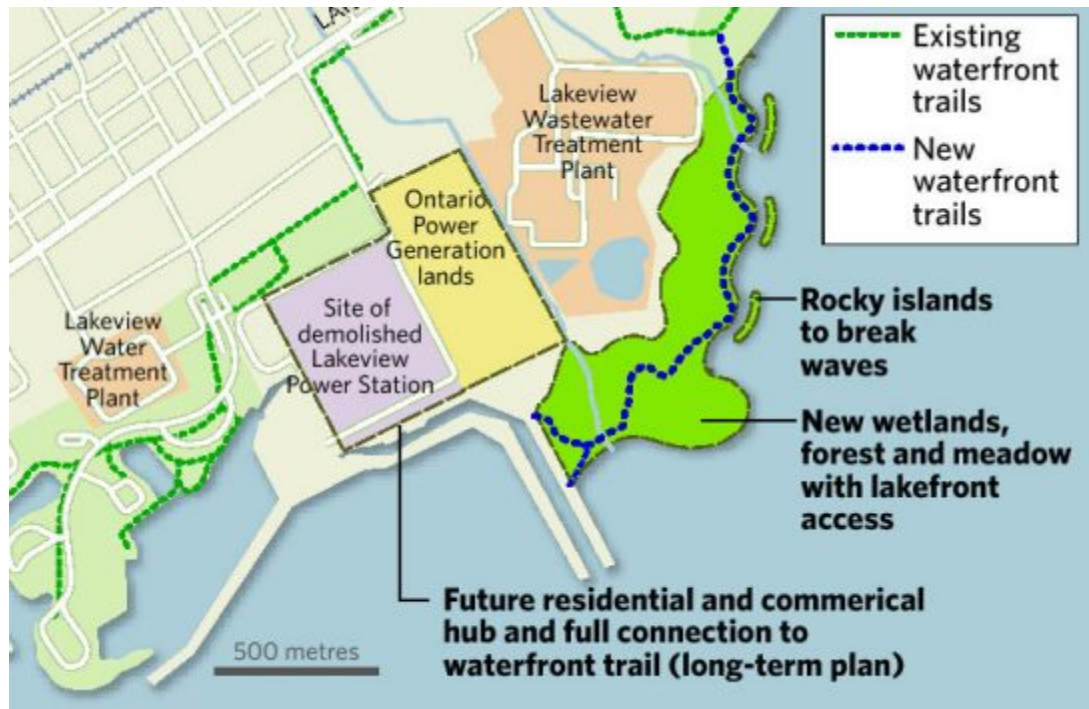
Boats bob at the Port Credit Yacht Club, beyond which lies the barren site of the former coal-fired Lakeview Generating Station. A new project would provide a pedestrian and wildlife-friendly link between the marinas of Lakefront Promenade Park and Marie Curtis Park on the Toronto boundary.

“The scale is ginormous, which is really a lot of fun,” Tovey said. “This will be the first time in the history of the Region of Peel and the City of Mississauga that we’ve actually rebuilt wetlands.”

Peel stands to get about \$25 million of the project’s estimated \$56-million cost back from “tipping fees” charged to developers.

One goal is to avoid what happened in Toledo, Ohio. In [summer 2014 an overflow of phosphorus](#) from run-off caused an infestation of blue-green algae and a drinking water crisis.

“One of the things that we’ve done in the GTA is we’ve filled in all our wetlands,” Tovey said. “And wetlands are really critical for cleaning water before it goes back out into the Great Lakes.”



The start of construction will be the culmination of decades of work for Tovey, who has progressed from a self-described “community advocate” to a Mississauga councillor, working on the inside to shepherd the project through.

Tovey calls the project the “first spike in the railroad” of a \$3-billion environmentally sustainable waterfront community, planned to include 8,000 midrise housing units and a research centre to study the lakes and the new conservation area’s effects on the ecosystem.

When the coal-fired plant closed in 2005, the province had planned to replace it with a natural gas one.

But Tovey, and the citizen group he headed, partnered with the University of Toronto centre for landscape research to make a business case for a sustainable redevelopment plan instead. Their carefully costed master plan was accepted by all levels of government.

“A bunch of people sat me down and said: ‘Well, we need to get you elected if we’re going to get this done,’” Tovey recalls. “I thought that was pretty funny, because I had a ponytail down to my waist, and I’m not a politician,” the former construction project manager said, laughing.

He estimates it will take seven to 10 years to complete.

“I always tell my residents, ‘I don’t work for you, I work for your children,’” he said. “I call it creating heritage for the future.”



Vince Talotta

Councillor Jim Tovey, Professor John Danahy and MPP Charles Sousa have all worked for years on seeing the Lakeview Waterfront Connection come to fruition.

Charles Sousa, now Mississauga South MPP and Ontario finance minister, championed the project even before he was elected in 2007.

An area resident, he remembers seeing the so-called “four sisters,” the smokestacks of the power plant, every day from the windows of his high school.

“It’s called Lakeview, and we don’t have a view of the lake, so we wanted a view of the lake,” he told the Star.

For cyclists such as Dorothy Tomiuk, whose children learned to ride their bikes on the Waterfront Trail, it will mean a needed connection along the shoreline and “a respite from urban life.”

“It’s rare in life that you see something like this happen,” said Tomiuk, a member of the Mississauga Cycling Advisory Committee. “And here’s a case where the dam has been broken.”

It will provide habitat for migratory birds and other species, to reflect what the area was like before Europeans arrived, said Mike Puddister, of Credit Valley Conservation.

“Wildlife will find it,” said Puddister. “It is our field of dreams in many respects. If you’re an environmentalist, this is a dream come true.”