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New Park Under Busy Downtown Underpasses To Open In Spring 2011

2010/03/11 | Story and images by Shawne McKeown, CityNews.ca

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Image courtesy Waterfront Toronto

Most people wouldn't think of taking their children to play, walking their dog or spending leisure time in a derelict area below an underpass, but the planners behind an innovative new park hope to change that.

Underpass Park, a project that aims to transform an ugly and incidental space into something exceptional, is slated to open in the spring of 2011. This new and unusual urban area will be the largest public space below an overpass in Canada and the first of its kind in the city.

Its construction, sped up thanks to [Toronto's successful Pan-American Games bid](#), starts this summer and is part of the metamorphosis underway in the West Don Lands where the industrial landscape is being transformed into vibrant residential and public space in preparation for the [2015 Pan-Am event](#).

The new public space will be located under the Richmond and Adelaide overpasses around Eastern Avenue, between Cherry Street and Bayview Avenue, with the Pan-Am athletes village and the Gardiner Expressway to the south.

"Underpass Park is a crucial step in delivering on our promise to revitalize the West Don Lands into Toronto's next great neighbourhood," John Campbell, President and CEO of [Waterfront Toronto](#), said.

While the main goal of Underpass Park is to transform the unused space into an innovative and charming urban oasis, the planners believe this \$5.3 million project, funded by the federal government, will improve connectivity in the area. The new \$300 million [River City](#) condo development, near King Street West and River, and the first

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phase of a major new public housing development are both slated to open in 2012.

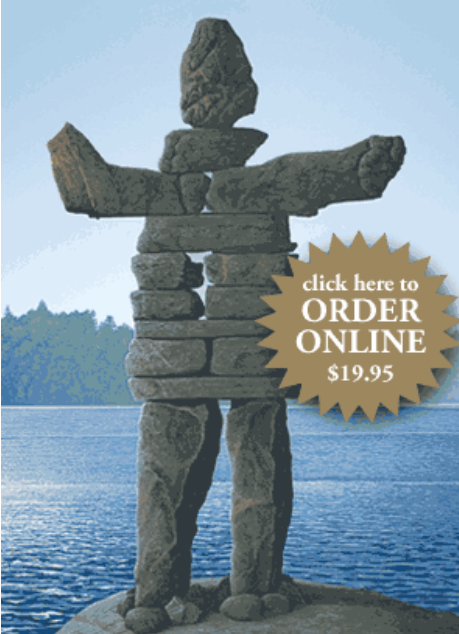
Construction on the centrepiece of the reformed neighbourhood, the 17-acre [Don River Park](#), will start this summer and work on building the area's flood-protection landform is nearly complete.

A new east-west road north of Underpass Park will be modelled after the "woonerfs" in Europe – narrow and pedestrian-friendly streets in which cars are considered guests as opposed to the priority.



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"[Underpass Park] needs to respond to how the community is going to use that space," landscape architect Greg Smalenberg said. "There has to be a number of things in a space like this to facilitate all aspects of play and recreation or as a social space to relate to the very youngest and the very oldest."

The future home of this unconventional public space is definitely unattractive and kind of scary in its current state. Parked cars and abandoned vehicles, some with crumbled engines exposed, occupy space on the significant chunk of land – 1.05 hectares - that stretches out under the roads. Old oil barrels and trash cans sit clumped in corners while boots missing their partners are strewn on the ground along with withered and empty cigarette packs among other trash.

Some of the only signs of life, aside from a few people getting in and out of their parked cars, are the racing vehicles above and a man who apparently lives in an old blue school bus on the western side of the park site.

That derelict scene will change dramatically in just over a year when Waterfront Toronto predicts Underpass Park will become a destination for people of all ages, with its children's play and climbing structures, basketball and ball hockey courts, community garden, café seating and flex space for theatre, markets and other gatherings.



People using the basketball courts and kids on the playground won't have to run for shelter in the rain. Half of

the park is covered by the concrete overpasses and the designers, [Phillips Farevaag Smallenberg](#) and [The Planning Partnership](#), take full advantage of the incidental weather protection by placing the key components in that shielded area.

Reclaimed cobblestone, excavated from the site, which was originally used as ballast on ships arriving in Toronto from Scotland, will be used as an accent in the hardscape. The rubber surface used for the athletic courts and the playground will be made from recycled materials.

The uncovered area will host the community garden and seating. Shade and salt tolerant plants will be grown throughout the park, hopefully one day poking through between the overpasses, Smallenberg said.



To ensure the area below the underpasses remains a friendly place to be when the sun goes down, appropriate lighting will be installed throughout the area, not too bright, nor too dark.

Public art is also an important feature of Underpass Park and local artist and architect [Paul Raff](#) has chosen through an open competition to create interesting pieces for the park.









shawne.mckeown@citynews.rogers.com

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 **city5**
Mar 12, 2010 6:40 AM


Not under the Gardiner...
this park isn't under the Gardiner, it's under Richmond & Adelaide at Eastern Ave. The Gardiner is south, past the rail tracks.
[Agree](#) | [Disagree](#) | [Offensive](#)

 **D.G.**
Mar 12, 2010 3:40 AM

Yes, by all means. Spend money Torontonians don't have in the first place, to remodel the area beneath a stretch of highway City Hall has been itching to tear down for years.
Agree | Disagree | Offensive

 **Praxis**
Mar 11, 2010 10:21 PM

...actually
I'd like to know who took the photographs? The black-n-white shots have a nice artistic flare to 'em. I like the first and last shots - both with chain-link fences. Great way to bookend the photos. Kudos!
Agree 1 | Disagree | Offensive

 **Bee**
Mar 11, 2010 4:34 PM

You are just being silly, if you are that scared of freak accidents you are not leaving your house anyway so what do you care about this? Go look up Gama Ray bursts, Asteroid impacts, polar shifting and the LHC and its micro black holes if you want to worry about something rare and super scary.
Agree 1 | Disagree | Offensive

 **njineer**
Mar 11, 2010 4:25 PM

It's up to you Bad bay...
Fine, if you want to focus on my statement about cars and trucks flying off the road (which does happen). But have a look at the story on CTV News, dated today, about another chunk of concrete falling from the Gardiner. I don't like driving along lakeshore under the gardiner, let alone standing underneath it. And I certainly don't want to be breathing the exhaust fumes of automobiles racing along the highway. I know, the city should close down the Gardiner to automobiles / trucks and turn it into a massive bicycle lane - then we'll all be safe.
Agree 1 | Disagree | Offensive

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