

Expo 2025 bid receives strong support

by Don Wall May 27, 2016

Ontario construction stakeholders have come out in full support of a proposed Toronto Expo 2025 bid.



Speaking in support of a Toronto Expo 2025 bid at a media conference held at Toronto City Hall on May 24 was Toronto city councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, - Photo: DON WALL

Twenty-five leaders from a broad array of private firms and construction and trades associations recently signed a letter urging the City of Toronto to back the proposed bid.

Then, on May 24, a trio of stakeholders — Mike Yorke, president of the Carpenters' Union Local 27, **Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**, and Ken Tanenbaum, vice-chair of the Kilmer Group — appeared at a media conference held prior to an executive committee meeting at Toronto City Hall to speak to the matter.

Yorke, Manahan and Tanenbaum were joined by former mayors Art Eggleton and Barbara Hall and ex-premier David Peterson at the event, which was hosted by Toronto city councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, who has taken a lead role in ramping up support for the bid.

Supporters have identified Toronto's Port Lands as the ideal Expo 2025 site. It includes 880 acres of largely vacant former industrial lands — sections of which are contaminated — currently being master-planned by Waterfront Toronto.

Tanenbaum, whose firm played a major role in building the Pan Am Athletes' Village on the West Don Lands, has further rounded up support in the broader business community and announced that 40 business leaders have agreed to fund a cost-benefit analysis of a proposed Toronto bid.

"For the last six years I been involved as the co-developer at the Pan Am Games Athletes' Village in the Canary District," Tanenbaum said. "And what I was really inspired by was the power of alignment around a bold vision. The West Don Lands sat derelict for 25 years and it was this moment that brought the stakeholders together to get big, bold things done."

Manahan said, "Right now, if we do get the 2025 Expo — I am being positive that we will get it — it will have across-the-board benefits in terms of building housing, transit infrastructure, obviously water and sewer facilities will need to be added there, so all of these things will be a net benefit."

Tanenbaum and Manahan were also questioned by members of the executive committee. In the end, the committee voted to accept the private proposal to undertake a cost-benefit analysis. The next step would be city council approval.

The City of Toronto is the major landowner at the Port Lands. Current planning calls for flood-protection and naturalization at the mouth of the Don River, environmental assessment and consideration of land-use options.

Politically, Toronto Mayor John Tory has said he wants to see both federal and provincial governments on-side with promises of funding support. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau wrote in a recent letter that if city council approves a bid, the federal government will "explore next steps."

Eggleton called it a "chicken and egg situation."

Wong-Tam said bid proponents have been working in a technical working group with Waterfront Toronto, the Toronto Port Lands Company and the Toronto Port Authority to determine the technical requirements to have the Port Lands ready for the exposition in 2025.

The private business analysis of the bid would update a report issued by Ernst & Young in 2014 that suggested a World Expo 2025 would create 190,000 new jobs, add \$15.5 billion new value to the GDP within Canada, including over \$8 billion in the Toronto area, and create \$5.4 billion in new tax revenues. Costs have been estimated in the billions.

Peterson said, "Don't be frightened by the money."

The construction stakeholders identified numerous other economic and social benefits.

Yorke said he had been involved in the Expo 2015 bid a decade back and last year visited Milan, Italy, the 2015 host, to get an idea of how an exposition transforms a community.

"They had investments in infrastructure, they had investment in mass transit, they had investment in hotels, restaurants. Actually, the Milan expo is credited with taking the Milan area, the Lombardy region, out of recession. So that is a huge impact on economic development, and I wanted to see that, take that message back here."

The Port Lands are ripe for redevelopment, said Yorke, who also is championing the proposal as a way to combat youth unemployment.

"I was just down there recently and that area, it is just desolate, there are salt piles, there are barren lots, I think we have an incredible opportunity to transform that part of the city," he said.

Tanenbaum said what he witnessed at Pan Am job sites was a spirit that comes from diverse groups working together on a large civic project that inspires all citizens, including new Canadians who make up so much of Toronto.

"The nice thing about an expo is that, unlike an Olympics, it is not very prescriptive in what has to get built. With an expo you have a requirement to create a services pad, on which you are going to invite the 169 member nations (of the Bureau of International Expositions) to come and build their pavilions using Canadian lumber and Canadian steel and Canadian labour, Canadian architects perhaps, Canadian engineers, so it really engages the entire community," said Tanenbaum.

No theme has yet been identified for a Toronto Expo 2025 proposal but Manahan said with diverse international contributions, there are opportunities to be innovative, experimenting with energy efficiency, using different types of processes and materials and exploring mobility and transportation.



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