

City on track to reclaim waterfront?

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A new citizens' group has pitched a radical rethink of the city's West Harbour development plan — including talks with CN to relocate the Stuart Street rail yard.

The plan, featuring a three-dimensional blueprint by local architect Bill Curran, calls for parkland, stores and condos on waterfront lands now dominated by the rail yard and vacant city-owned properties in the Barton-Tiffany area.

Curran said residents were upset to learn the city agreed to [ban residential development near the rail yard](#) this spring to settle an Ontario Municipal Board dispute with CN.



West Harbour. Pressure is being put on city hall to relocate Hamilton's waterfront rail yard. Hamilton Spectator file photo Source: Hamilton Spectator file photo

"This area ... is an essential bridge between our downtown and prime waterfront land," said Curran. "We can't afford to just throw up (commercial) buildings and surround it with a sea of pavement."

The OMB settlement, negotiated in secret, calls for the majority of the neighbourhood south of the rail yard to be [rezoned for commercial use](#), including most properties expropriated and razed by the city for its ill-fated Pan Am stadium plan. The settlement nixes the Setting Sail secondary plan that envisioned 700 new families in the area.

Most Hamiltonians weren't involved in the OMB decision, said retired engineer Bob Carr.

"I'm hoping they'll get involved now, get excited about this vision," said the North End resident, who added the group has stayed true to the [Setting Sail goals endorsed by residents](#).

One reason to get excited: Group members believe a decades-old dream to relocate the waterfront rail yard could become a reality within 10 years.

Curran said a rail yard lease between Canadian National and an American-owned rail company, Southern Ontario Railway, will run out in 2018.

"We think this is the perfect opportunity for the city to talk about the future of this land with CN," he said. "Other cities have moved rail yards, so why can't we?"

General manager Blake Jones confirmed the RailAmerica-owned company has six years remaining on its lease of the Stuart Street yard.

"We'd like to renew, but we haven't had that conversation yet," he said.

Spokesperson Lindsay Fedchyshyn said CN is not planning to move or abandon the rail yard and is not engaged in any related discussions with the city.

The OMB settlement also discourages relocation planning, thereby axing a reference in the old Setting Sail document "encouraging" relocation of the rail yard.

Mayor Bob Bratina called relocating the rail yard "key to the future of the development of the waterfront in Hamilton."

He's just not sure how or when it will happen.

"We would have to demonstrate to them that we have a viable (alternate) site that's worth considering," said Bratina, who noted a 1990s pitch to relocate the rail yard to Aldershot failed for lack of funding. A 1995 study by the city pegged moving costs at \$100 million.

Bratina said he proposed using old industrial lands near Centennial Parkway as a home for the rail yard several years ago, but council opted to rezone them for commercial use.

Jason Farr, councillor for the ward that includes the Barton-Tiffany area, said he's interested in hearing more from the group.

"In the past, it appears like we gave up on CN," he said. "Maybe it's time to restart the conversation because if there's an opportunity to reclaim that waterfront, that would be big news."

Curran said the group's first goal is to convince the city to protect the vacant Barton-Tiffany lands, rather than sell them off to developers.

The city could sell the 11 acres of expropriated former homes and industrial buildings at any time, but no development can take place until after the city completes a planned \$350,000 urban design study, said planning director Paul Mallard.

"We're saying, don't sell it yet, because once the box stores are built, the potential of that property is gone forever," Curran said. "Let's stop, catch our breath and talk as a community about a long-term vision."

A HAVEN ON THE HARBOURFRONT

A new community group's plan calls for a multi-use neighbourhood in Hamilton's West Harbour on land now occupied by the CN Rail yards. The neighbourhood would be dotted with green space, cycling lanes and mixed-use buildings. The plan also calls for:

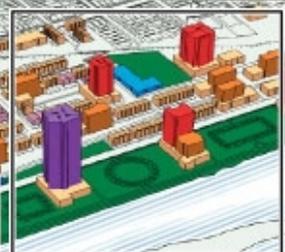
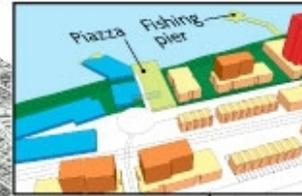
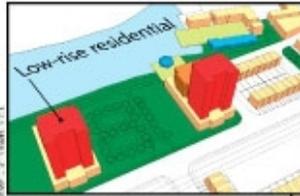
More than 10 acres of new public parks,

Housing for up to 13,000 people of varying income levels,

A green corridor along Caroline St. connecting the downtown to the waterfront,

Doubling the width of the waterfront trail and adding a separate bike trail.

Low-rise residential buildings with street-level commercial space sit along a proposed waterfront park.



A fishing pier, a spacious plaza and public buildings jut into the harbour.



A community centre, school and park at the foot of Magill St.

SOURCE: THIER + CURRAN ARCHITECTS INC.

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