

# INFRASTRUCTURE AND PARKS

The Garrison Creek Community Project  
Toronto  
Brown and Storey Architects

*A series of studies for the recovery of the buried Garrison Creek in Toronto, shows ways of linking urbanism, environmentalism and infrastructure.*



Watershed study area within metropolitan Toronto. Shaded areas show the Oakridge moraine and Niagara escarpments.

The regeneration of a hidden waterway and its nearly buried ravine system is the focus of this series of studies. The aim is to create an urban storm water management system which would resurrect, link and aesthetically enhance the vestiges of the Garrison Creek ravine system in the west end of Toronto. The ambitious proposition is that current ideas of local surface storm water management by natural means (widespread in new development) can also be applied to the most difficult case of the existing city, using the present network of parks and small open spaces as a generative mechanism.

Garrison Creek, which provided a secure fresh water source for the siting of Fort York, is one of several waterways which was buried in the late 19th-century as the city grew and intensified. Bridges were buried, large tracts of the ravine were filled, and land was consumed by housing. Traces of the original ravine remain, primarily in the form of the urban tree canopy. A discontinuous series of parks, including Christie Pits, Bickford Park, and Fort York, as well as smaller pockets and a sprinkling of tilted houses which are sinking into the fill, are vestigial reminders of the once-dramatic presence of the ravine.

The study recognizes the necessity of integrating the city and its landscapes into their earlier symbiotic roles, as places of recreation, of community connection, and as natural watersheds. Bringing the creek back to the surface in the form of a series of storm water detention ponds would not only provide natural water filters, but also introduce recreational amenities within the park system, and use the original land form of the ravine as the schematic

spine of a continuous public space system connecting the neighbourhoods back to Lake Ontario.

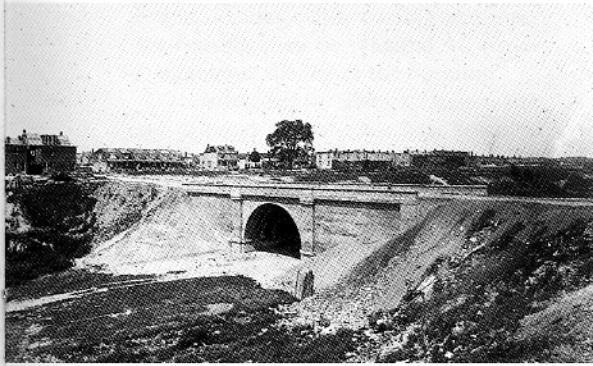
The Harbord Bridge Recovery Project, now being evaluated for infrastructure funding, is the first attempt to focus these principles in a local application. It proposes the excavation and restoration of the 1910 Harbord Street Bridge (photograph above right), a concrete structure which was buried in the 1930s. Its excavation would reconnect Bickford Park, which extends from Bloor Street down to Harbord, to Montrose Park to the south.

This excavation is part of a larger project which re-examines the storm water management and recreational potential of these parks (facing page, far right). A series of water-related features inform the design: run-off from a parking area at the edge of Bickford Park drains into a detention pond on Christie Terrace, then filters through to a canal along the edge of Bickford park, here doubling as a skating rink. The final filter is a marsh situated in Montrose Park. As well, the urban tree canopy's capacity for water absorption and retention is used as a natural alternative to extensive holding tanks. A braided circulation system of pedestrian route, bike path, and nature trail would run from Davenport, under Bloor, through Bickford Park and under Harbord to Montrose Park. Displaced earth from the excavations would be banked up along the west edge of Bickford Park, which is faced with garages. As well, high points or promontories, reminiscent of the dramatic glacial landscape of the historic ravine, would be created as lookout points and mountain climbing areas as

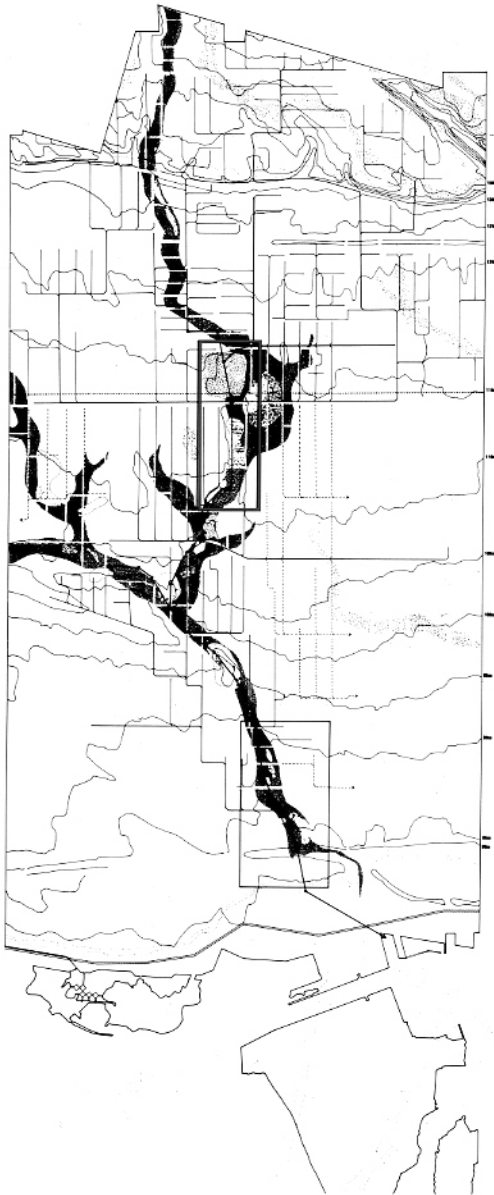
part of the reconstituted landscape.

A debate is beginning to emerge in Toronto around the viability of the proposed? \$60-million, 4 kilometre, tunnel 60 metres underground, which would intercept the 12 storm sewers between High Park and Strachan which currently run directly into the lake. The intention is to make the beaches swimmable again, but perhaps there is another dimension, and the issues related to the Garrison project ought to give pause to the makers of public works. While the invisible pipe solution is the most economically viable, it fails to acknowledge the potential of infrastructure to bring delight to necessity. One need only look back in Toronto's history to R.C. Harris and the enduring contribution of his great visionary works of urban, engineering and architectural significance to get some idea of what is possible by bringing infrastructure projects into the public realm.

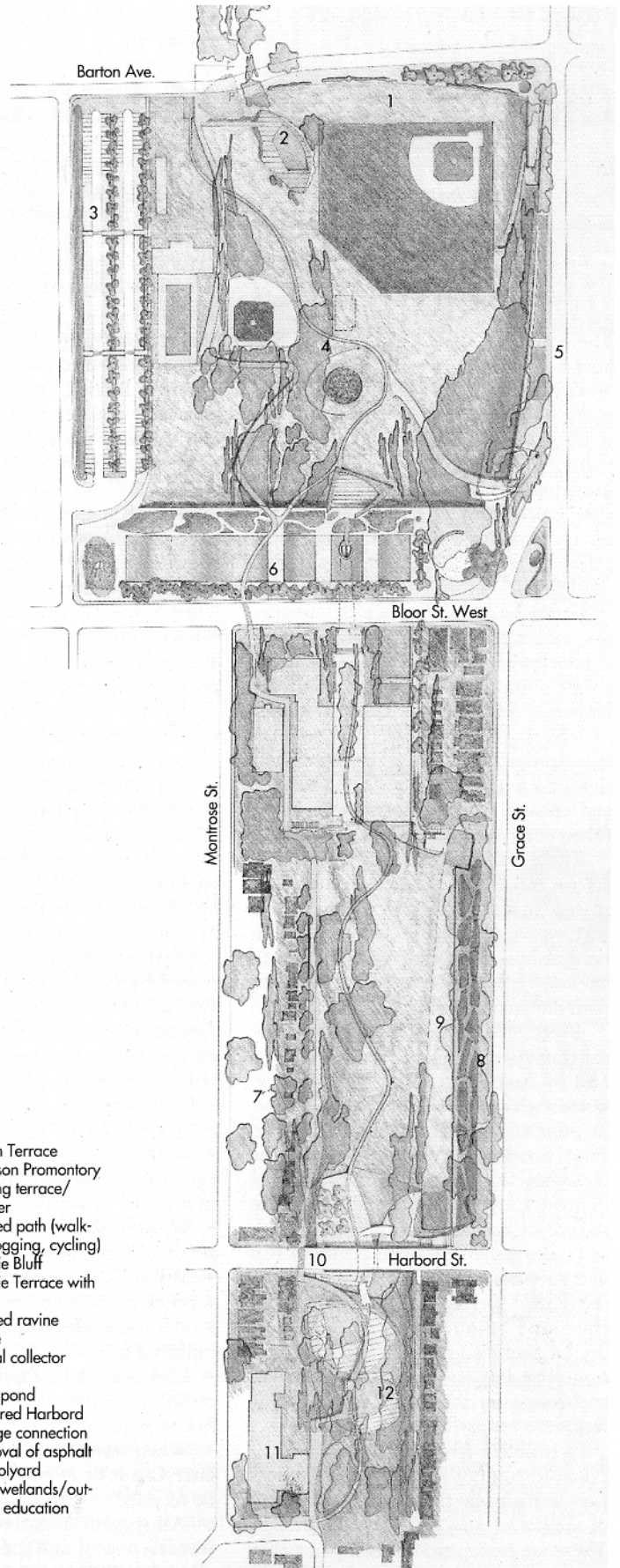
If one of the legacies of modern town planning is the invisible efficiency of the hygienic infrastructure, perhaps, as ecological concerns permeate the consciousness of urban dwellers, it is both psychologically and physically necessary to make urban support structures more tangible and visible. This expanded notion of infrastructure would come at a higher cost, but it would ultimately pay back the city in terms of an unquantifiable amenity, as well as showing a capacity for locally managing the difficult intersections between urban and natural systems. While suppressing these systems won't hurt anyone, it could be a huge lost opportunity to tap the latent potential of infrastructure to enhance the quality of life in the city. **Beth Kapusta**



Harbord Street Bridge. Built 1905, buried in the 1930s. City of Toronto Archives.



Garrison Creek Ravine. The creek was buried in a Victorian sewer in the 1880s and the ravine filled in over time (dark areas). Traces remain as a set of unconnected parks and schoolyards.



- 1 Barton Terrace
- 2 Garrison Promontory
- 3 parking terrace/  
aquifer
- 4 braided path (walk-  
ing, jogging, cycling)
- 5 Christie Bluff
- 6 Christie Terrace with  
ponds
- 7 restored ravine  
profile
- 8 vegetal collector  
ponds
- 9 linear pond
- 10 restored Harbord  
Bridge connection
- 11 removal of asphalt  
schoolyard
- 12 new wetlands/out-  
door education

WILLOWVALE PARK/BICKFORD RAVINE/HARBORD MONTROSE CASE STUDY