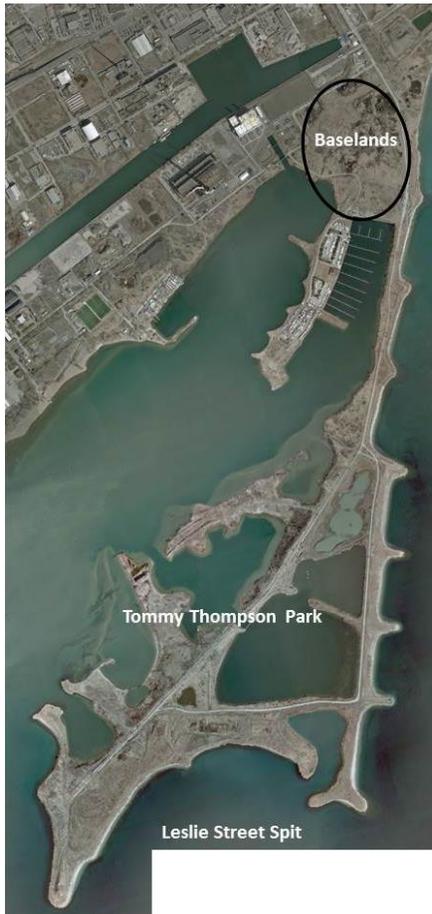


The Baselands Trails Master Plan – Frequently Asked Questions



The Baselands are located just to the west of the foot of Leslie Street, south of Unwin Avenue and east of the Outer Harbour Marina Road. They form the entrance to Tommy Thompson Park and are included in the area referred to as the Leslie Street Spit.

Like much of the Port Lands, the Baselands are “reclaimed land” – that is the area resulted from infilling activities. This portion of the Port Lands was created during a period when there were no regulations around infilling, and when there was little understanding about the potential effects of some of these materials on human health. Some of the materials that were placed in the Baselands in the 1950s and 1960s, such as lead impacted fill, would not be acceptable today. Over the next several decades the Baselands naturalized through the growth of plants, shrubs and trees and, soon after, birds and other wildlife followed.

In 1992 Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) designated the Baselands as an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) due to the unusually high diversity of plant species and the cottonwood forest, which is now limited in area in the Toronto region. In 2015, the City of Toronto adopted an Official Plan Amendment that incorporated the designation of new ESAs.

The Baselands was included as an ESA because of its rare plant, animal and vegetation communities, its significant levels of diversity and its significant ecological functions, which include the wetland/water storage functions, as well as migratory bird stopover habitat. In fact, in 2000 Birdlife International designated the Leslie Street Spit, including the Baselands, as an Important Bird Area due in part to its use by migratory birds.

As part of Baselands Trails Master Plan work, studies were undertaken to investigate the soils and it was determined that several contaminants, including lead, needed to be addressed to ensure safe use of the site. The project team has reviewed the studies and, together with Toronto Public Health, considered a range of options to allow for safe public use while retaining the valuable natural characteristics that make the Baselands special.

The agreed upon solution is a trail design that will safely cover and prevent contact with contaminated soils through a variety of treatment options:

- The Multi-Use Trail along the Outer Harbour Marina Road and the Martin Goodman Trail will receive an asphalt surface treatment

- The Accessible Nature Trail will receive a granular surface treatment (i.e. granite screenings) with an elevated boardwalk in some areas
- The Nature Trails will receive a more natural sand/dirt surface treatment and some areas may include an elevated boardwalk

The trail designs will help ensure that the public will not come into direct contact with contaminated soils underfoot while on the designated trails. Further, the design will encourage visitors to stay on the trails and not wander off. Signage at each trail will inform visitors about the historic land uses and contaminant issues, and remind trail users to stick to the designated paths and not harvest plants or animals from the Baselands.



Baselands Trails concept plan

Areas that are not part of the trail system may still contain contaminated soils, however, ample vegetation already covers most of these soils, even during the winter months. Areas that are sparsely vegetated may receive additional topsoil and/or seed to encourage more growth, which will further reduce the potential for exposure to contaminated soil. In addition, exposure to contaminants is expected to decrease over time and the safety of the entire site will improve as vegetation and organic materials continue to accumulate. A monitoring plan will be developed to regularly inspect the trails to ensure the surface treatment remains intact and that vegetation communities continue to develop adjacent to the trails.

Taken together, these measures will make the Baselands suitable for passive public uses such as hiking and nature appreciation. Any other activities such as picnics or other recreational uses are not appropriate.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why was the Baselands created in the first place?

The Leslie Street Spit, including the Baselands, was initially created to accommodate additional port-related facilities, the need for which was anticipated in connection with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959. For a variety of reasons the land was never required for this purpose and these facilities were not built. A number of concepts and uses for the Baselands have been suggested over the years, but this land is now part of the City of Toronto Official Plan Green Space System and will remain parkland.

Is the rest of the Leslie Street Spit contaminated?

The Baselands were the first part of the Leslie Street Spit to be created in the late 1950s and 60s. This was before regulations and guidelines were in place to govern what is suitable to be placed into aquatic or natural space environments. By 1976 lakefill quality guidelines were in place to direct the responsible management of lakefilling, ensuring that contaminated materials were not disposed of in our lakes. Most of the Leslie Street Spit was created after these guidelines were put in place and we are not aware of contaminants in terrestrial areas.

What were the contaminants found in the Baselands and should I be worried about them?

Soil sampling carried out as part of the project revealed elevated levels of metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and heavy fractions petroleum hydrocarbons. These contaminants tend to be stable in soil and unlikely to go into the air. The main concern exists when a person becomes exposed to the contaminants through the ingestion of soil, breathing in dust from disturbed soil, and direct contact of soil with the skin. As the soil is mostly covered by vegetation, and park users tend to move along the park trails, it is unlikely that incidental exposure to these contaminants would be a health concern.

Should I be worried about lead?

Exposure to lead is of greatest concern, especially to young children. Children absorb lead more easily than adults and are more vulnerable to harm from lead. Children often put their hands in their mouths, and in rare cases, can ingest relatively large quantities of soil. In the Baselands, the risk from exposure to lead in soil to children will be low if they stay on the trails, do not play in soil, and practice good hygiene such as washing their hands.

Are lead and other contaminants manageable by applying a surface treatment to the trails?

Yes, by covering the trails with a layer of clean soil and/or gravel materials (known as capping), plus an additional surface treatment, it is not possible to contact any contaminants directly underneath while you are on the trails. Capping the contaminants is a standard practice for reducing exposure to soil contaminants and is commonly used in many environmentally impacted sites.

What more can I do myself to reduce my risk?

Although we do not anticipate that the normal use of the Baselands would be a health concern, there are many actions you can take to further reduce your exposure to lead and other contaminants. Those include staying on the trails and not playing with soil, washing hands after visiting the park and before eating, making sure children and adults remove their shoes at the door and use washable door mats.

What more can be done to make the entire Baselands safe?

Another approach to remediating the contaminants would be to remove all vegetation in the off trail areas and place a layer of clean materials (rubble, gravels and soils) on top of the existing soils. This approach is not recommended given the significant ecological communities and functions that have

developed at the site. It is unlikely you will be exposed to contaminant levels of concern in the Baselands as long as you stay on the demarcated trails and practice good hygiene such as washing your hands.

What about the piles of concrete that I can see on the Baselands? Should I be worried about them?

The concrete piles are a remnant of the creation of the Baselands – they were likely placed toward the end of lakefilling actions in the area and are not a source or concern of contamination. Some people enjoy the concrete piles as cultural artifacts that remind them this is a man-made area.

When will the Baselands Trails Master Plan be implemented? When will the trails be built?

Implementation for the trails will be completed in phases and based upon funding. The Multi-Use Trail adjacent to the Outer Harbour Marina Road will be constructed in late summer-fall 2016. The timeline for the implementing the full Baselands Trails Master Plan is not yet finalized (pending funding).

What can I do to make sure I do not come into contact with contaminated soils before the trails are built?

You may choose to avoid visiting the Baselands until the trails are completed. However, if you do choose to visit the Baselands it is recommended to avoid direct contact with the soils (i.e. do not touch or dig in the dirt with your bare hands), clean any mud or dirt off your boots before leaving the site and rinse them off again outside when you get home, and washing your hands after visiting the park and before eating.

I have frequently visited the Baselands since they were first developed. Should I be concerned for my health?

No, the likelihood of significant lead exposure from past visits to the park is low. We do not anticipate that the passive use of the park would result in adverse impacts to health. We are also unaware of any cases of lead poisoning that would have been associated with park use.

I've foraged for and eaten plants and snails from the Baselands. Should I be concerned for my health?

It's unlikely that you would have been exposed to high amounts of lead or other contaminants if you've eaten plants or snails harvested from the Baselands, however, foraging for wild edibles is not recommended here, or in any other natural environment park for a variety of reasons. Removing plants and animals easily impacts sensitive habitats, especially in the Baselands where wet soils are prone to compaction. Harvesting plants and animals also depletes resources very quickly resulting in less food for wildlife, less seed dispersal and more invasive plants. Lastly, removing plants from Toronto's parks, forests and ravine systems is prohibited under Parks By-law Chapter 608.

Should I be concerned about the health of the wildlife that lives or migrates through the Baselands?

An ecological risk assessment of the contaminants has not been completed for the Baselands, but anecdotal observations suggest there are no major concerns for wildlife populations that use this area. There are currently no standards regarding acceptable lead levels for wildlife in Ontario.