

LOCAL

Hamilton's harbouring dreams

Four scenarios for the future of the city's west harbour all provide more public access

Dream a little.

It's 2036 and you are sailing under the bumper-to-bumper traffic on the Skyway bridge and on into Hamilton's attractive west harbour.

The recreational master plan for the West Harbour Waterfront was approved late in 2007 and the success of the harbour plan is obvious.

You see the waterfront trail, active with walkers and in-line skaters who rented their wheels at the booths that also provide the rental canoes, rowboats and kayaks to boaters paddling out in the water.

Bayfront Park, with its two special event pavilions, is busy with picnickers drawn to the waterfront by the increased seating, trails, food booths and new washrooms.

The "signature park" with its fountains and gardens on the table lands at the entrance to Bayfront Park welcomes visitors.

Macassa Bay, the small bay beside it, has seen major changes.

It's now restricted to small, passive boating. The marina slips and moorings are gone, relocated to the main west harbour basin with its 500 to 700 slips farther east. Macassa Bay has been naturalized and is an enhanced fishing area where more than 38 species can be caught.

BY PETER VAN HARTEN

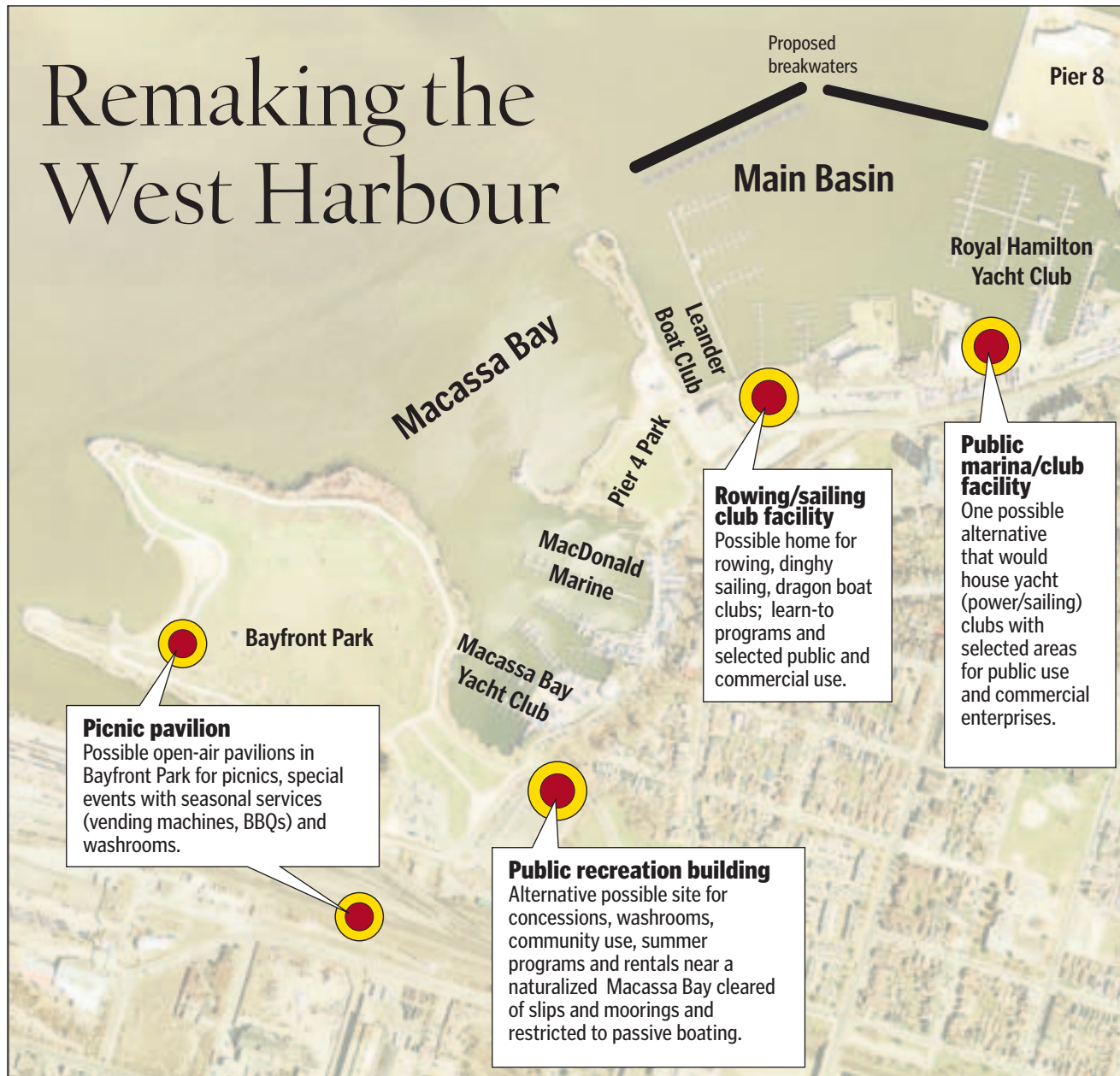
This is one possible future imagined for Hamilton's west harbour among a series of proposals being unveiled tonight.

Tackling the west harbour is the next major challenge in the city's decades-long struggle to reclaim its harbour from the monopoly of shipping and industry.

"If done properly, it will be a wonderfully diverse and interesting waterfront but it won't happen without some difficulty," said John Hall of the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan. Hall is a member of the advisory group of boaters, sailors, residents and stakeholders who sat down with the planners.

The proposals, which aim to expand public access to the waterfront, will likely mean major changes to the people who have long used the bay for their recreation: boaters, sailors and rowers.

Look into the future at some of the possibilities they dealt with.



Removing the boating facilities from Macassa Bay opened it up to naturalization. The scenarios suggest Macassa Bay as a fishing area.

It's the vital area for fish and wildlife habitat, says Hall. "You will see this wealth of aquatic plants and fish and wildlife habitat in the shallow zones."

The suggestion to move boaters out of Macassa Bay comes from a real need, said city planner Justin Readman.

Millions will be needed to restore the shorelines of the west harbour and create new breakwalls and seawalls to restore the aquatic life in the bay.

Millions more will have to be found for the relocation of the sailing clubs from their outdated facilities, leased

If you go:

Alternatives in the West Harbour Waterfront recreational master plan will be presented for public comment tonight from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre at 51 Stuart St.

from the city until 2012, and into new buildings.

A new club facility for rowing, dinghy sailing and dragon boaters in the western edge of the main basin is one of the future possibilities.

With the history of marina activity in

the west harbour dating back to 1820 and the battles with the city over revenue-producing winter storage of boats, it's not surprising boat clubs are wary of going into one new centralized public marina with room for everyone.

That same alternative — of four possible ones — also provides for a new public marina with shared facilities for the yacht club, power boaters, commercial enterprises and the city.

It's in the main basin where the tour boats to Hamilton now stop.

"There is room for sailboats and tour boats but these things are not overwhelming each other," Hall said of the future vision.

Little surprise, he says, because



Hamilton's harbour is three times the size of Toronto's harbour.

"We will have these wonderful qualities in Hamilton harbour where we have natural areas in close proximity to where boating and recreation is and someone down in the west end can wander out to Pier 8 where there will be housing," Hall said.

In 1992, there was less than 5 per cent of the harbour accessible to the public but in 2006 it was more than 25 per cent. The remedial action group has expanded its future access target to 35 per cent. It could be a wonderful place, said Hall.

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