Urban Wind

Harsdale bridge waiting room blown over by wind

1910? #7228
Toronto

- Has many “overlooked” aspects of the urban atmosphere
  - Wind
  - Heat
Wind

• Toronto has no single prevailing wind
• It shifts seasonally
• In classic winter weather
  – Dry, cold wind from the NW
• In classic summer weather
  – Warm, moist winds from the SW
• Strongest winds:
  – Winter easterlies
• The Venturi effect
The Venturi Effect

- Buildings disrupt winds close to the ground
  - Act as windbreaks in some places
- Funnel the wind through gaps
  - At increased velocities
  - The Venturi effect
- Urban Canyons
  - Zones between buildings where wind velocities increase
Toronto

- Basic street grid is 17 degrees west of True North
- NW and SW winds tend to create major wind canyons on North-South streets
- Probably worse in winter
  - Winds stronger, more closely aligned with streets
Victorian Wind Canyons

- Toronto’s unpaved clay-based streets had dust problems in summer
- Always seemed worst on north-south streets
- North-south streets ice first in cold, wet weather
- Queen-Bay always a windy corner
Edwardian Toronto

• Acquires tall skyscrapers
• Wind canyons develop around them
  – Queen-Richmond
  – King-Yonge
  – King-Bay
King-Yonge

- Develops the tallest buildings in Toronto pre 1920
- Becomes notoriously windy, even in light winds
  - Pedestrians, bicycles blown over
Shelter

• Toronto’s buildings create shelter from the wind
  – As well as generating wind canyon conditions
• Some of the North-South dead end streets accumulate litter blown in from windy East-West streets
  – James St, Albert St, Toronto St
1910s-1920s

• Major phase of downtown redevelopment
• Skyscrapers move west to King-Bay, University
  – Wind canyon issues move with them
The Toronto Skyline and Seaman-Kent Hardwood Flooring

Back in 1901 when Toronto’s Skyline “From the Bay” revealed only two buildings of 10 storeys or more... In the rapidly altering skyline of Toronto we have had our share.
1960s onwards

- Skyscrapers a major part of 1960s downtown redevelopment
- TD Centre, Commerce Court
- Massive slab-like international style buildings with open plazas
- New City Hall
  - Designed in a wind tunnel
New City Hall

• Wind tunnel tests show the building will stand up to the wind
  – But no thought given to pedestrians
• Nathan Philips Square becomes notoriously windswept
  – Windiness a crucial argument in saving old city hall from demolition
TD centre

- The plaza becomes notoriously windy
- Climbing ropes have to be rigged to help people get up the stairs
  - Eventually replaced with railings
- TD centre creaks and sways in the breeze
Commerce Court

- Tried to create a sheltered plaza
- Commerce Court sways in the breeze
- Office workers get seasick in high winds
1970s Reform Council

- Led by the “Tiny Perfect Mayor” David Crombie
- Expressed its opposition to further downtown high-rise development by speaking about
  - “Windswept asphalt canyons”
Suburban Winds

- For Toronto’s print media “windswept” and “desolate” were indispensible in articles about York University 1970s onwards
- It was wise to convocate in June
"a half-completed campus where a lot of wind whistles almost constantly through sparsely-spaced buildings …. a struggling, crowded, windswept but still human institution"

– Jack Cahill, Toronto Star, 1985
President Harry Arthurs

- Presided (1985-92) over ambitious Campus reconstruction
- Arthurs hoped to erase the idea of “Windswept York”
- But his reconstruction chief (Dr Philip Lapp) still described Campus as a “windswept wasteland” in 1986
1970s Wind Issues

• Routine windiness of the downtown core a powerful argument for the creation of the PATH underground walkway system
  – TTC subway otherwise likely to be overwhelmed by the large crowds

• Planners and public begin to recognize that tall buildings increase winds
26 Jan 1978

- Strong winter winds (126 kmh SW) reach almost hurricane force in Toronto’s downtown (161 kmh gusts)
- Pedestrians blown off their feet in the downtown wind canyons, hundreds injured
- Windows blown out on City Hall, Scotiabank, Commerce Court, TD Centre loses 20 windows
• Bay & Bloor 26 Jan 1978
Strips of aluminum siding torn loose were wrapped around anything...
• Woman blown over at Bay & King, 26 Jan 1978
• Holding onto poles outside Union Station, Apr 1979
Windswept: Pedestrians at one of Metro's windiest corners, Bay and King Sts., were all but swept away by yesterday's gusts. More of the same was predicted for today.
Bay St battle: It took two to travel on Bay St. during yesterday's blasts of wind — Jean Lynch (left) and Darin Palmer join hands to keep from being blown off their feet. But Metro's woes were just an inconvenience compared with the situation in the Maritimes and Britain.
• Walking backwards on Bay St, Jan 1982
18 June 1982

- Mayor Art Eggleton opens a jogging track built around the podium of New City Hall
- Presented as a health & fitness initiative
- Track is wooden, held down by its own weight
28 Dec 1982

- The first time that the winds reach 111 kmh since the jogging track was built
- A large section of the jogging track is blown off the podium
  - While a family of 4 is standing on it
  - All 4 severely injured, father is paralysed
  - Family sues the city for $3.5 million, city pays
High winds blow family of 4 18 feet off deck at City Hall

Four members of a family were injured yesterday when high winds blew them and the jogging track they were walking on off a City Hall deck and 18 feet to the ground.

Police said the couple and their two sons, who were visiting from St. Marys, Ont., near Stratford, were found buried under large sections of the track, which sits on the elevated deck that rings the twin City Hall towers.

Injured were Joseph Ropp, 37, his wife, Cheryl, 34, and the couple's two sons, Curtis, 9, and Jaden, 7.

Fierce gusts

Mr. Ropp is in serious condition at Toronto General Hospital with a broken neck, broken right leg and internal injuries. Mrs. Ropp is at the same hospital and in fair condition with a broken left leg and back injuries.

Curtis is in fair condition and Jaden is in critical condition at the Hospital for Sick Children. Curtis has a broken left arm while Jaden has a head and internal injuries.

And two people were killed near Unionville in a storm-related accident after a power failure knocked out traffic lights at a busy intersection. But the City Hall incident was the most serious in Metro.

"It took one huge gust of wind and the track and the railing just flew right up," said Paul Emery, director of Metro's works department, who saw the accident at City Hall at 6:10 p.m.

"I could see it silhouette in the sky. It stayed in the air for a second and then came crashing down. I was lucky it didn't hit me. I was just 55 feet away," he said.

Police said Mr. Ropp and Jaden landed on concrete when they were blown off the track, while Mrs. Ropp and Curtis had their falls cushioned when they landed.

Blown from roof: Cheryl Ropp, of St. Marys, Ont., is taken to an ambulance yesterday after she, her husband, Joseph, and two sons, Curtis, 9, and Jaden, 7, were blown from the 19-foot-high City Hall deck and buried under sections of a jogging track that blew off as they walked on it.
Probe demanded into fall of City Hall track

By John Ferri and Matt Mayhak
Toronto Star

Toronto politicians are clamoring for a full-scale investigation of a bizarre City Hall rooftop accident that could have a young father paralyzed.

Joseph Ropp, 37, suffered an injury to his spinal column, and his wife and two sons had been brought to hospital when high winds blew them, and the jogging track they were walking on, off a City Hall deck and 18 feet to the ground Tuesday.

"He has a spinal cord injury," said a family member, "and it is not clear the full extent of it," said Pauline Jackson, spokesperson for Toronto General Hospital.

Doctors still don't know if Ropp, a Bell Canada technician in his 30s, will suffer any long-term paralysis. They added: They expect his condition, described as "serious but stable," to improve.

Setting example

"Someone is to blame for this particular incident and I want to know who," Alderman Tom Jakebok said yesterday. "City Hall should be safer in the future." He said the city of Toronto should be setting an example for development across the city.

As the rest of the track was dismantled by workers yesterday, Jakebok said he was "appalled." The track had been a scene of Toronto's "only serious accident during Tuesday's storm.

"Clearly this is a serious problem," Jakebok said. "It's the worst accident I've ever heard of." He said the city should be looking into the possibility of having a "safety program" to avoid future accidents.

"The accident is unacceptable," Jakebok added. "We need to look at the reasons why this happened and what we can do to prevent it from happening again.

Any investigation must address one fundamental question: Why was the track not anchored to the City Hall roof?

Before the City Hall track was built, officials had considered anchoring it to the building, but the cost was deemed too high.

"The cost of anchoring the track to the building was too high," Jakebok said. "We decided not to go ahead with it." He added that the track had been "designed and built with the safety of the public in mind."
Wind and Planning

• New City Hall designed in a wind tunnel
  – But effect on pedestrians overlooked
  – Gap between the towers rips out windows, jogging tracks

• First efforts to recognize wind issues in a 1974 planning document
  – Did not lead to policy
Wind and Planning

• Special report on wind issues included in the CityPlan91 process in 1990
• But wind tunnel testing focussed on the likely areas of active redevelopment at the time
  – Established downtown wind canyons were not evaluated
• Dangerous wind conditions identified on Bloor St
Wind on Bloor Street, based on a wind tunnel study. Dark shading indicates areas uncomfortable for any pedestrian activity (from J. Jung, City Planning, 1985).
Wind and Planning

• Redevelopment of the Lower Donlands has been studied in a wind tunnel
• But no comprehensive policy yet to include wind issues in urban planning
• Yet Toronto’s wind canyons have been at the deadly threshold for a century
  – And are spreading
Present Condo Boom

• 190 high rises new and under construction in Toronto

• Present generation of condo high-rises typically feature green tempered-glass building envelopes
  – Prone to shatter from heat stress
  – Fragile in windy weather

• Wind is very much a contemporary urban problem