

# *Transform the Trail:* Information Session

January 15, 2026, 6-7:30pm

**the bentway**

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For more than 60 years, the area under Toronto's Gardiner Expressway was regarded as an obstacle to Toronto's flourishing waterfront.

The Bentway was founded in 2018 by a group of urbanists who believed that the Expressway could be and do more for our city.

**Our mission:** To ignite the urban imagination.



**our story**





The City of Toronto is blooming upwards, hugging tightly around the Expressway.

Today, more than 200,000 people reside next door to the Gardiner, in dense high-rise developments deficient in public space or cultural life.

Anchored under the Gardiner and guiding its complex future, we are transforming the highway from an obstacle to a **hybrid opportunity**, helping to build a healthier, more connected, and inspiring city.

# opportunity





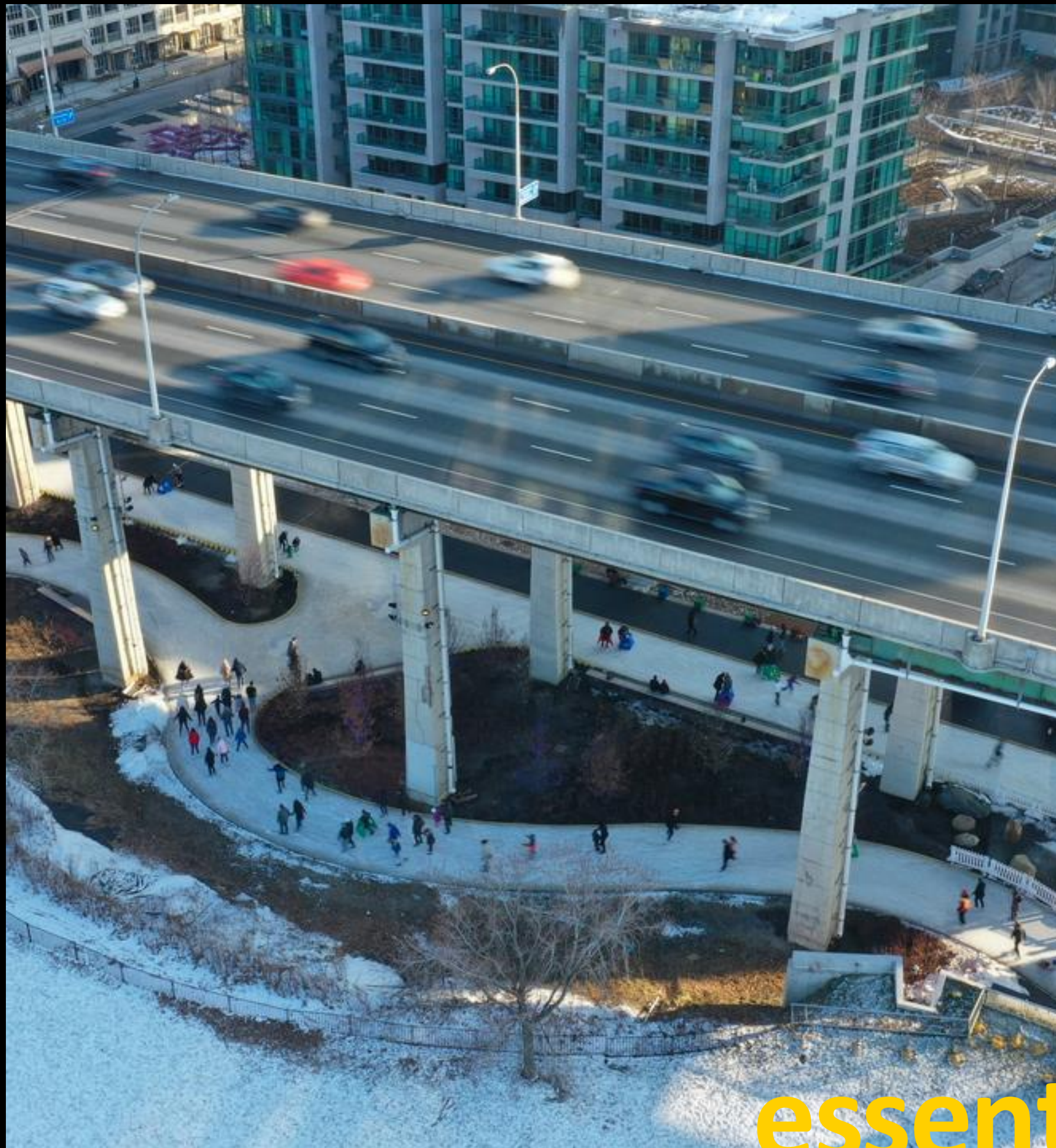
The Bentway develops public urban spaces through the lens of hybridity and connectivity; it collaborates with artists, creatives, and communities to produce imaginative, catalytic works and programming; and it facilitates—and leads—a vibrant, inclusive conversation.

It is a new kind of civic and arts institution, one uniquely suited to address the challenges and opportunities of cities in the 21st century.

The Bentway seeks to transform physical and cultural landscapes, but above all, it seeks to transform the landscape of the imagination, expanding our collective understanding of who we are and what we can achieve together.

**where we are today**





As Canada's first urban conservancy, The Bentway is charting new territory that many look to replicate. We are the caretaker to a growing network of urban parkland situated under and adjacent to The Gardiner.

Our spaces draw 250,000 attendees a year.

We are working with local and provincial stakeholders to design and plan for further expansion of The Bentway.

**essential public space**



# programming pillars



## public art

We strive to be the city's foremost public art producer, nurturing artist voices that provoke and inspire, while revealing the city anew.



## recreation

We offer year-round recreation opportunities including our iconic Skate Trail which hosts ice-skating in winter and roller-skating in the warmer months.



## education

From workshops to after-school programs to school visits, we create opportunities for learning about urban design, city building, and placemaking.





**Active participants:** Programming that engages neighbours, communities, and the general public as active, primary participants in city-building.

**With creative voices:** Artists and creatives in dialogue with, and about, the city.

**Co-Creation:** Co-creation with broader communities, championing diverse voices, perspectives and expertise.

**As a Catalyst:** Work that lives a larger life beyond a single site, season, or city.

# programming approach



# winter at the skate trail

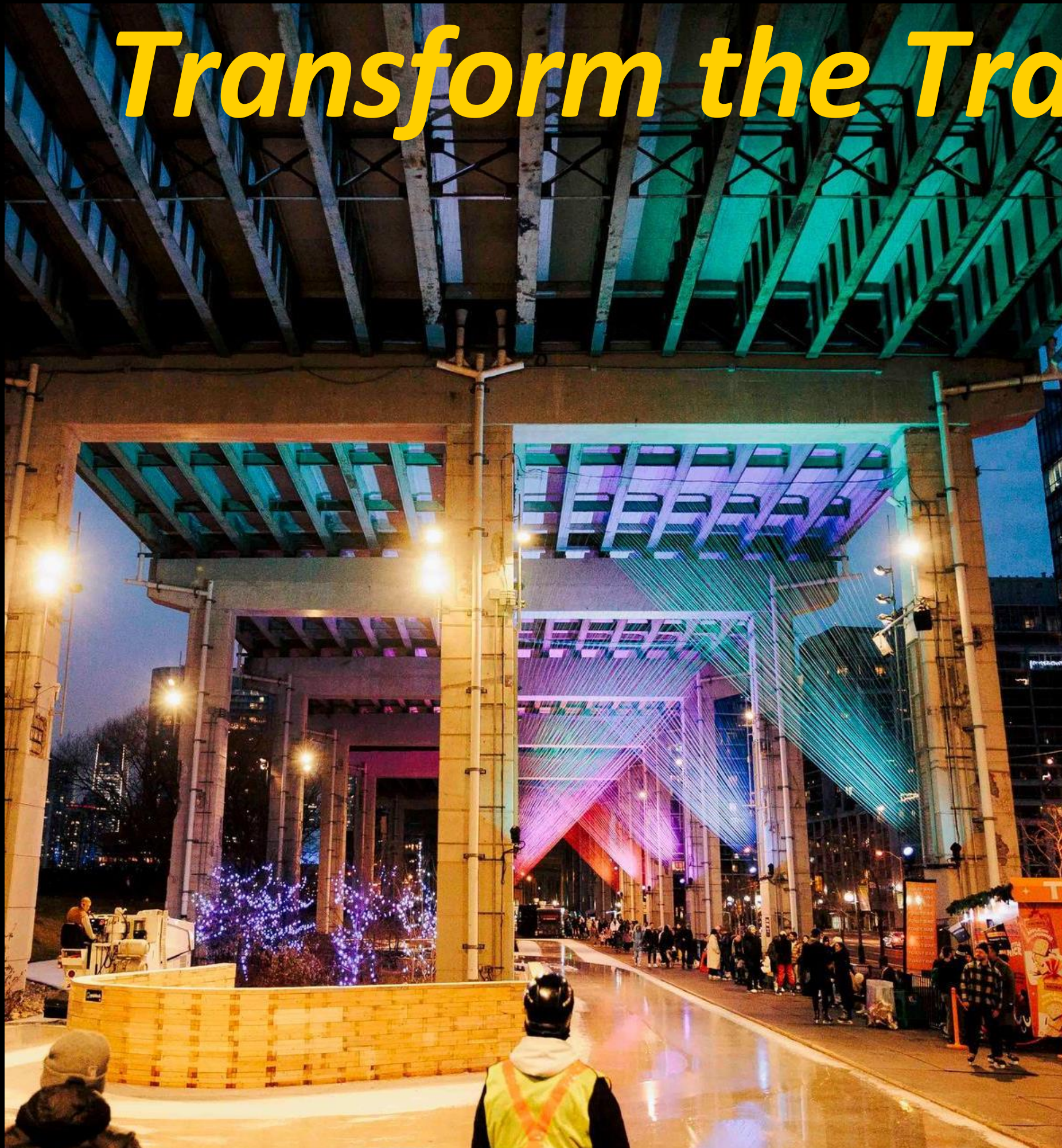
Throughout the year, The Bentway strives to support civic life and social connection in public space, and believes winter is a season to be embraced and not just endured.

**From December through February,**  
**the Bentway's skate trail becomes a beloved cold-weather destination**  
featuring a natural ice-skating rink that has quickly become one of the city's most unique distinctive urban amenities.





# *Transform the Trail*

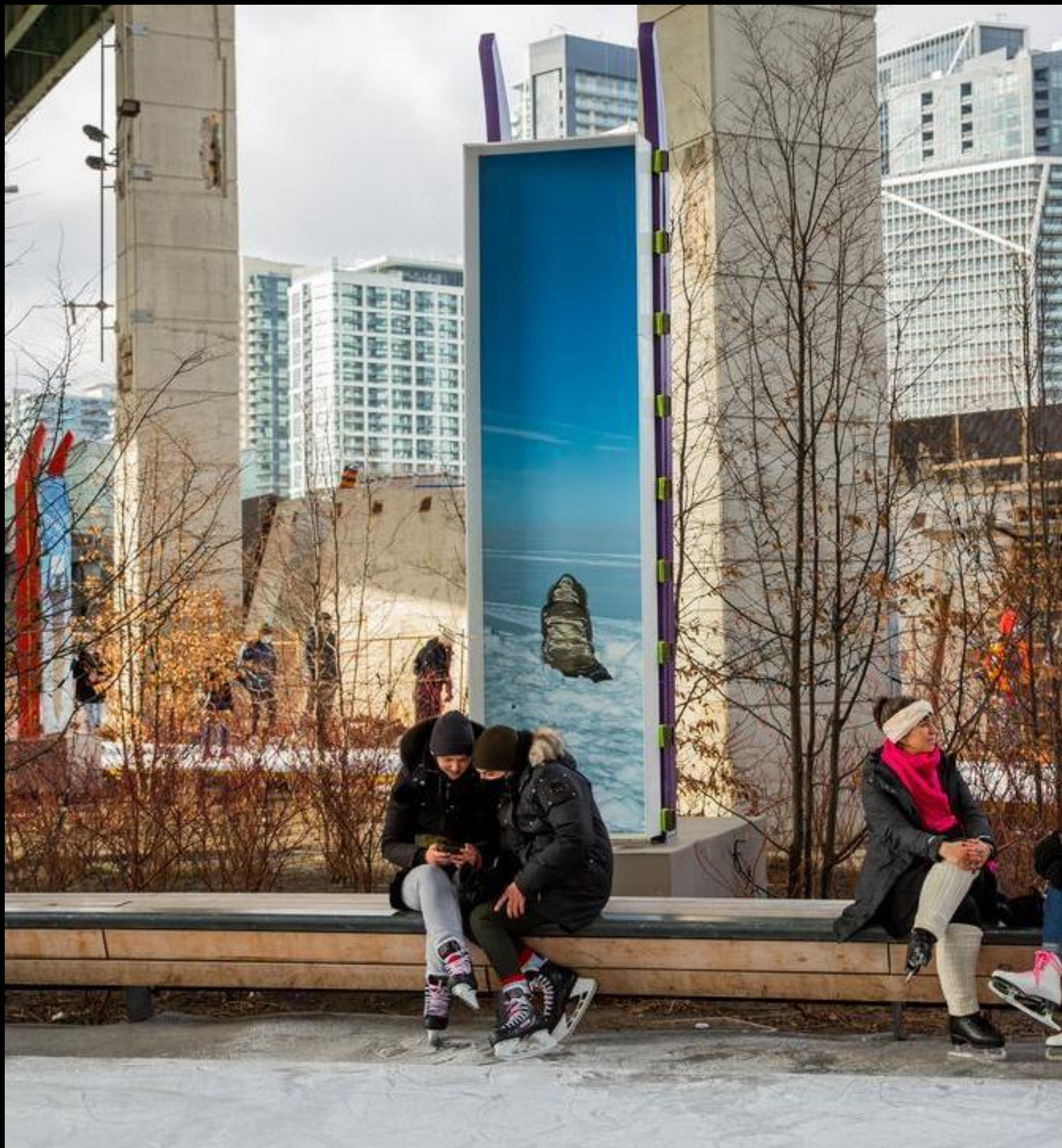


Launched in 2021, the *Transform the Trail* program seeks an artistic collaborator to build on new and existing relationships with the Bentway site, our surroundings, and the winter season.

Artists and designers are encouraged to fully embrace the seasonal climate as a means to share, inform, connect communities, and to spark public joy in all weather.

These site-specific interventions become a fixture of a Bentway winter, further animating the site's spirit and identity as a public space where art and outdoor recreation converge and energize our city.





This program supports a new, temporary commission that animates The Bentway's iconic figure-eight ice-skating trail and its surrounding footprint beneath the Gardiner Expressway.

The goals of the commission are to

- encourage artistic experimentation in the public realm,
- celebrate the unique creative potential of a Toronto winter,
- enhance the ice-skating experience at The Bentway, and
- foster meaningful connections during the coldest months of the year.

**The Bentway invites GTHA artists, designers, and collectives to submit an expression of interest for a temporary public art project exhibited from December 2026 to February 2027.**

# about the program



# program objectives

## **Art and Recreation**

Explore new techniques for merging culture and recreation to broaden audiences and augment familiar winter experiences, especially the skating experience.

## **Day to Night Experiences**

Embrace colour and light to enhance the trail and surrounding landscape equally by day and by night.

## **Uniquely Urban**

Develop strategies that respond to the Bentway's architectural features and collaborate the unique qualities of an urban winter landscape.

## **Collaborate with Climate**

Address the climate variability in winter and the natural materials within the winter landscape to find creative ways to apply and engage with them.

## **Flexible and Sustainable Design**

Adaptive and conducive to realities of the ice skating operations and incorporating a sustainable approach to design and execution.







*Moving with Joy*

by Maureen Gruben  
Winter 2021





*Beacons*

by Shellie Zhang  
Winter 2022





*The Gateway*

by Yi Zhou and Carlos Portillo  
Winter 2023





**Built in 2018, the Bentway Skate Trail is a 220m figure-eight natural ice skating rink that weaves around the iconic concrete columns of the Gardiner Expressway in downtown Toronto.**

This shared public space welcomes thousands of visitors to the skate trail in the winter time, and hosts a range of pop-up events and brand activations throughout the season.

The skate trail will be the primary area for exhibition, however, applicants should consider the site as a whole.

Due to the site-specific nature of The Bentway and the operations, maintenance, and technical requirements of the skate trail, the selected artist should be prepared to work collaboratively with the Bentway production and facilities teams to further develop and refine proposed projects with contextual considerations and site parameters in mind.

# about the site



# site features and conditions

## Ground Surfaces

Barrier-free, concrete and resin-paved surfaces, and wooden deck and boardwalk areas. The walkways are covered with skate mats.

## Bioswales

Central green areas at the skate trail of small trees and shrubs as part of our stormwater management system. It is designed to mitigate flooding.

## Lighting

Permanent, overhead safety lighting surrounding the skate trail area is on through 11pm daily. Temporary holiday lights in bioswale trees.

## Access to Power

The site has access to ground-level electrical outlets in select locations.

## Sound

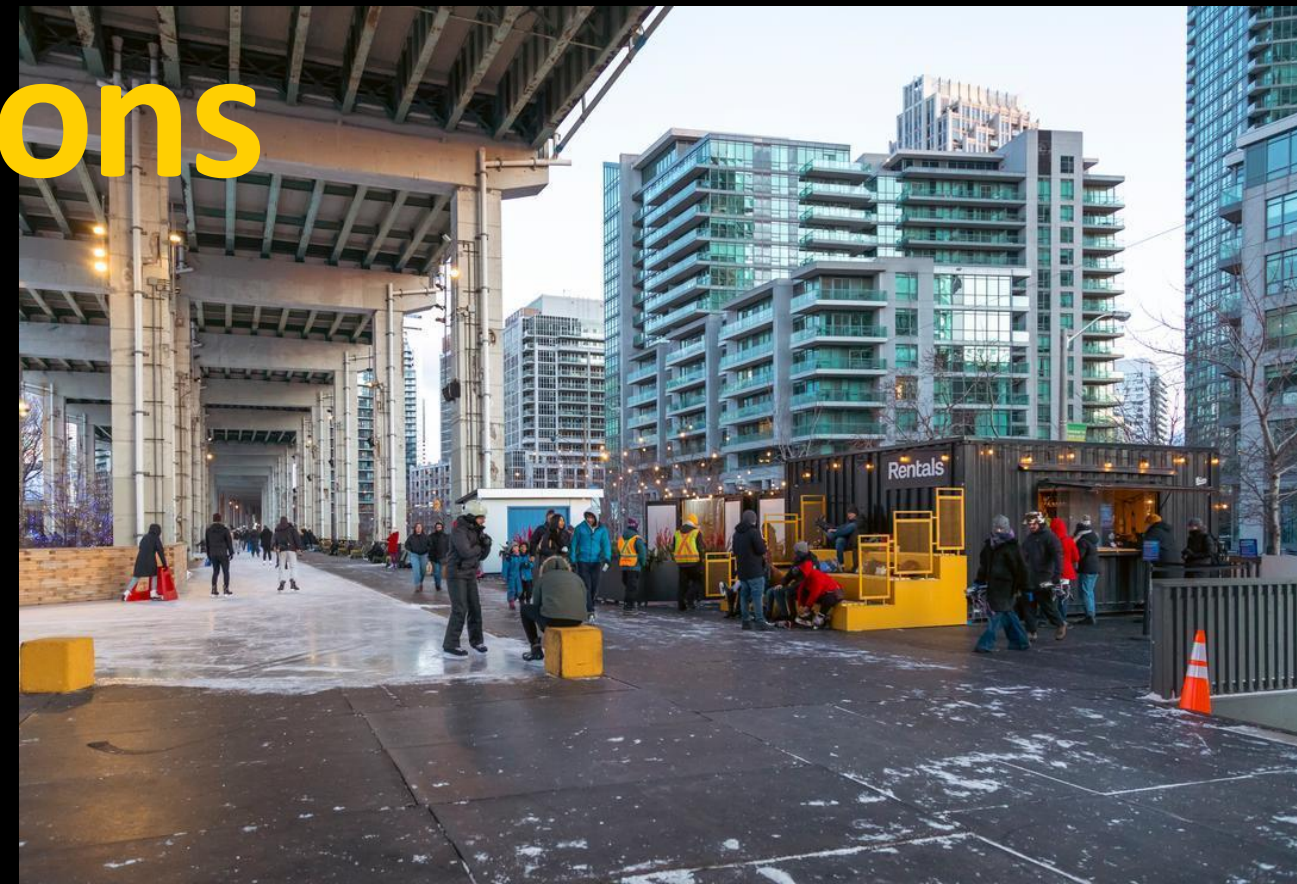
An outdoor sound system for music/announcements during operating skate trail hours.

## Seating and Gathering Spaces

Benches, chairs, bleachers, and warming containers on the skate trail deck. The deck area is a gathering space often used for brand activations.

## Site Maintenance

Daily ice resurfacing during operating hours, and maintenance of pedestrian pathways and onsite facilities. No/limited "at-height" artwork maintenance available once the skate trail is open.



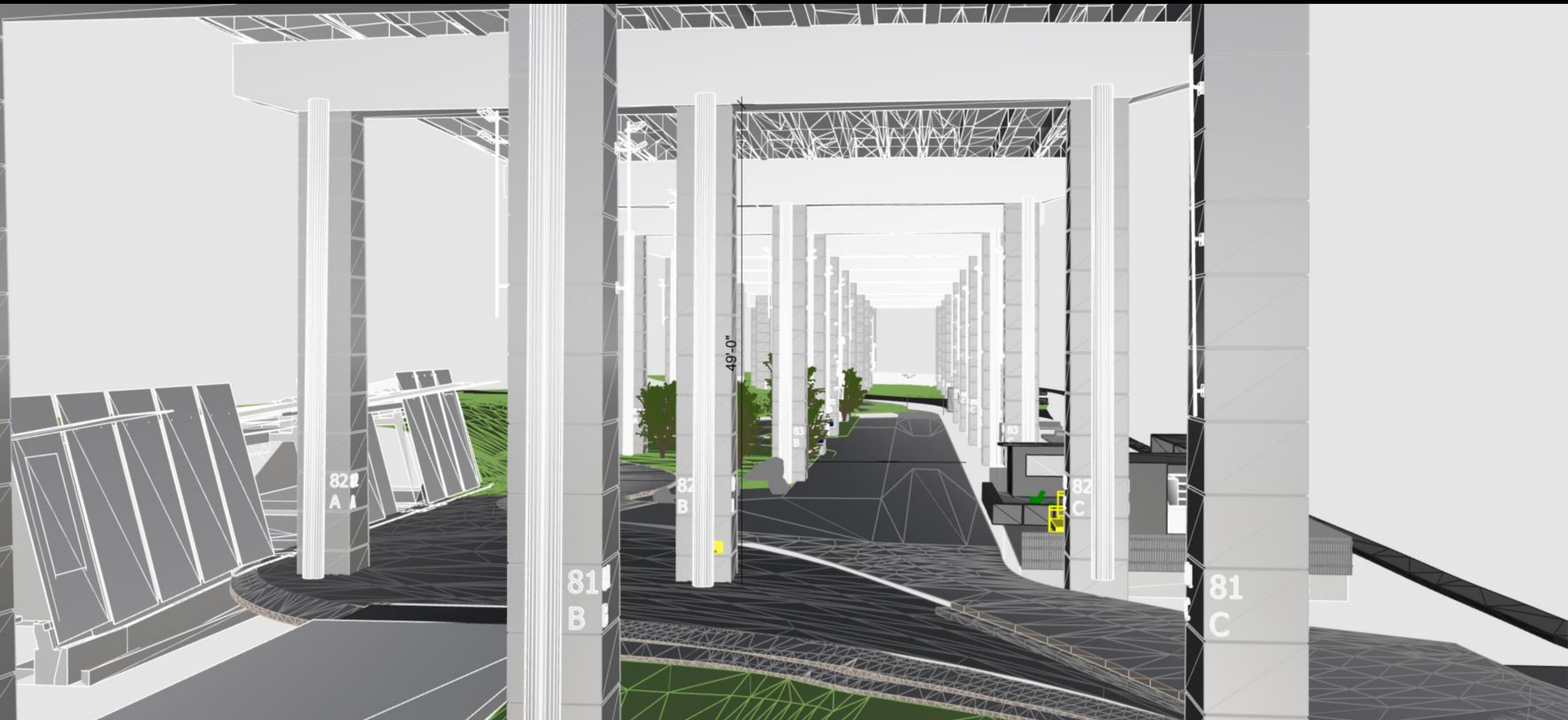


# site maps



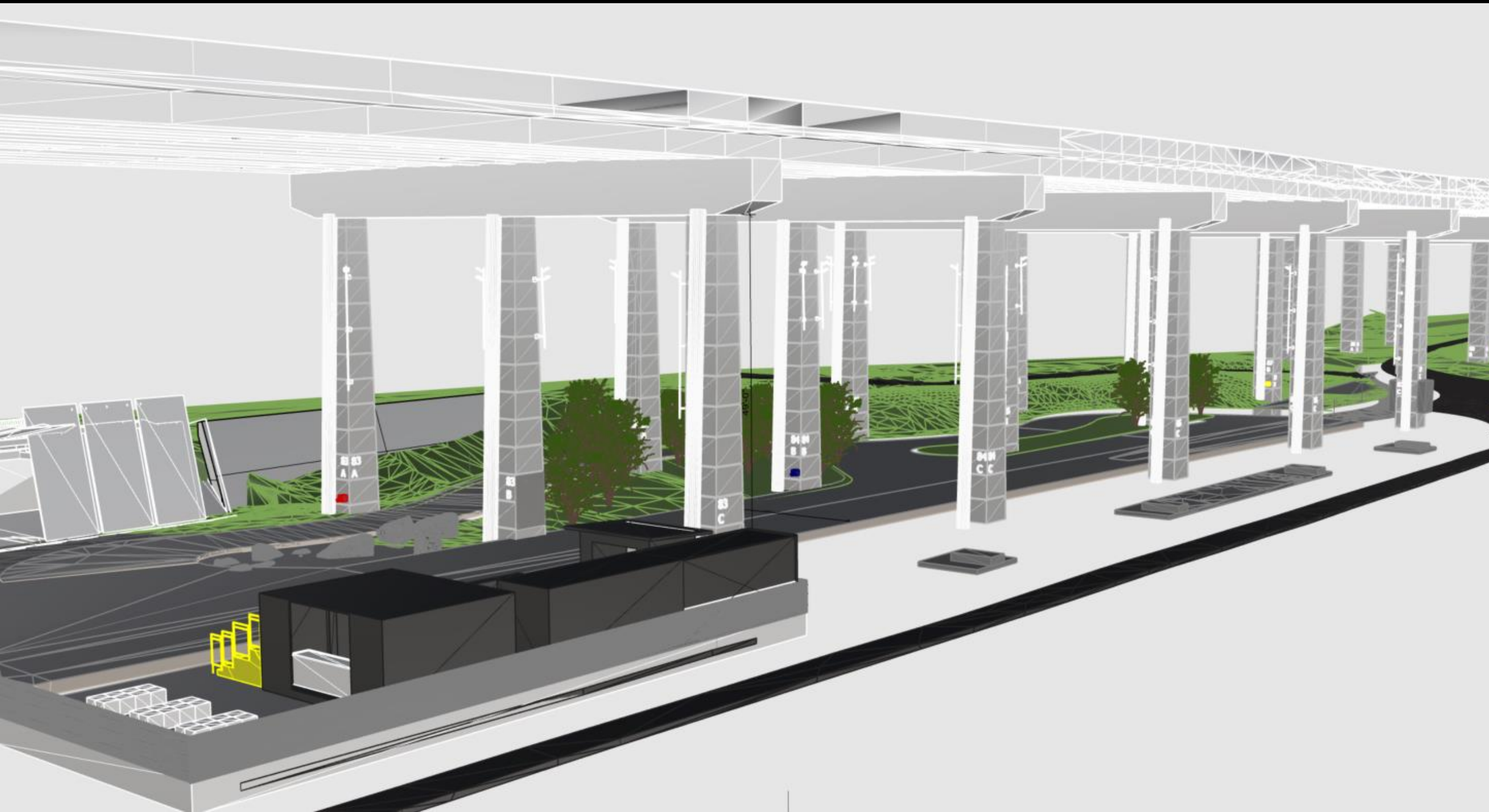
*Skate trail + sidewalk width: approx. 28'*  
*Skate trail length: approx. 327'*





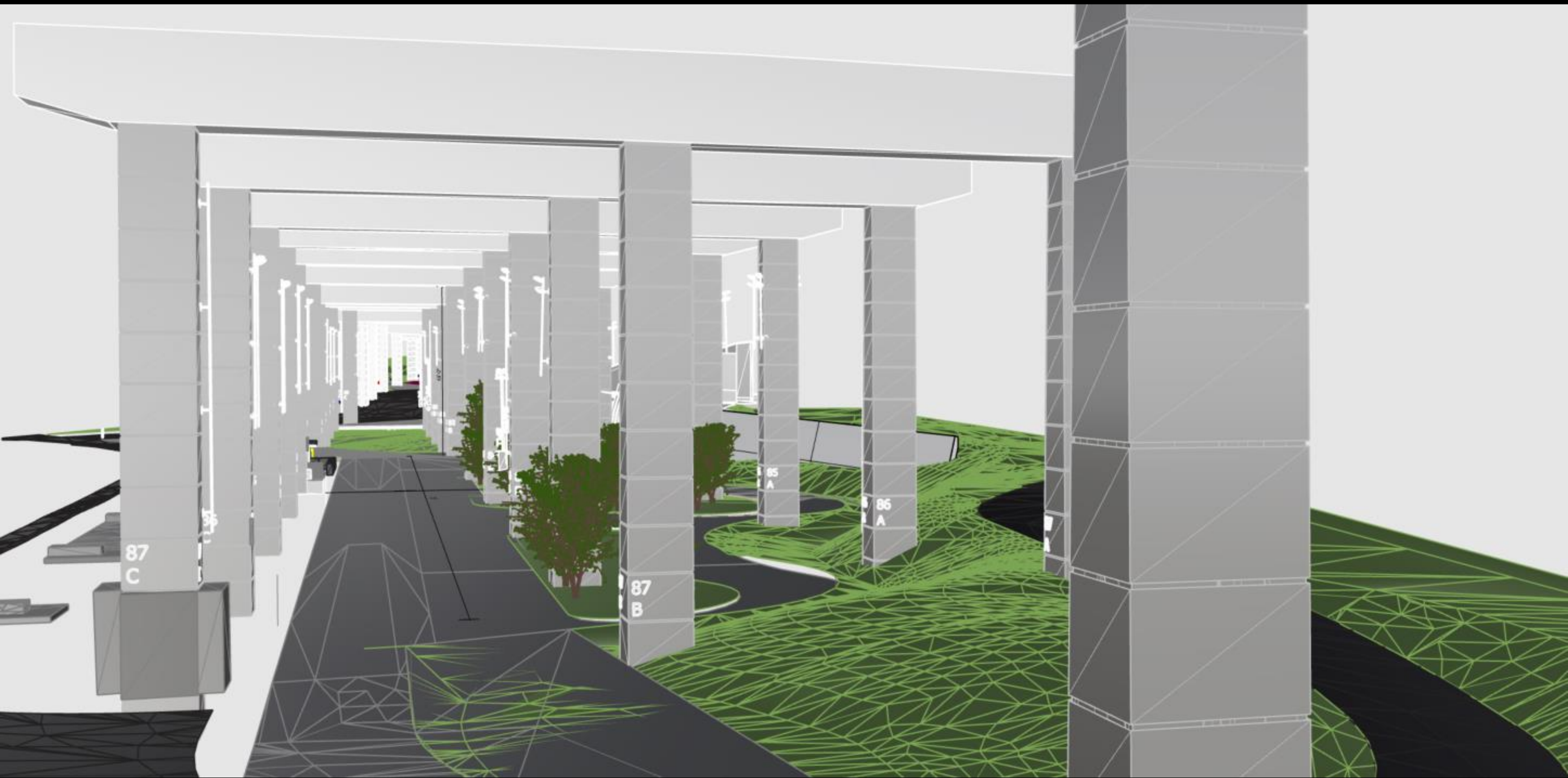
*West side of Skate Trail, facing East.  
Each bent is approximately 49' tall. Widths of the north and south faces are generally 170.18cm (67") wide,  
and the east/west faces are 177.8cm (70") wide. Each "block" on the bents is approximately 121.92cm (4 ft) tall.*





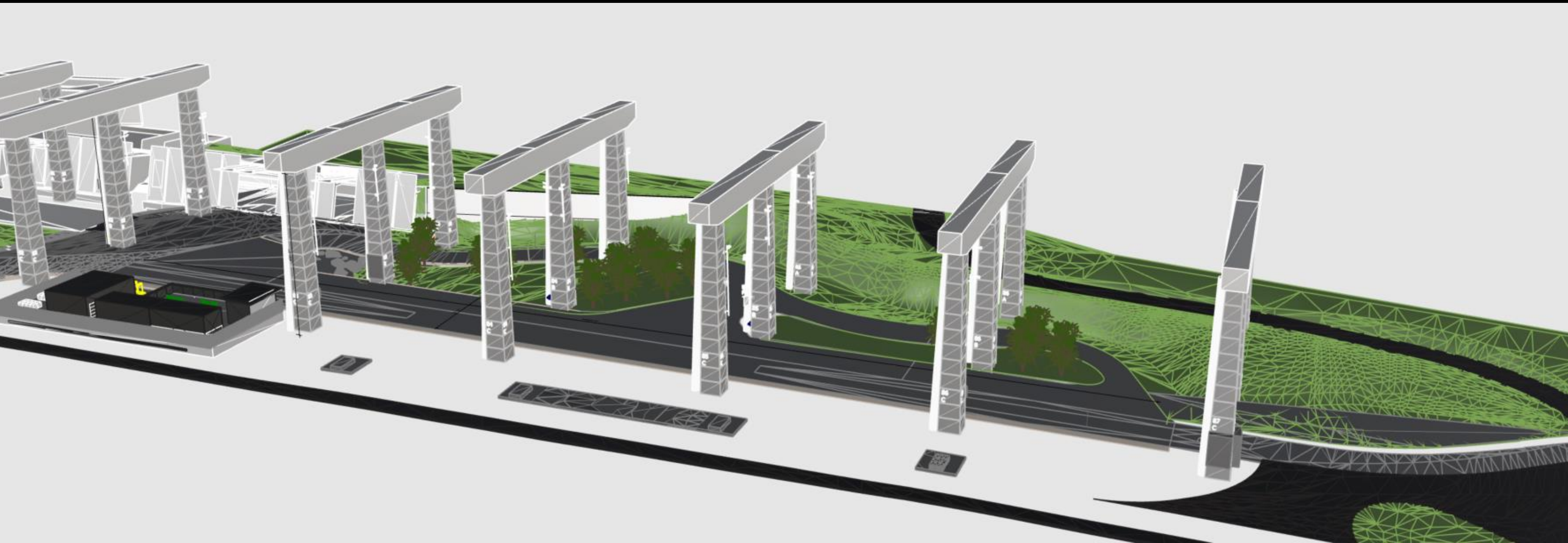
*Skate Trail view from Fort York Blvd, facing Northeast.*





*East end of Skate Trail, facing West.*

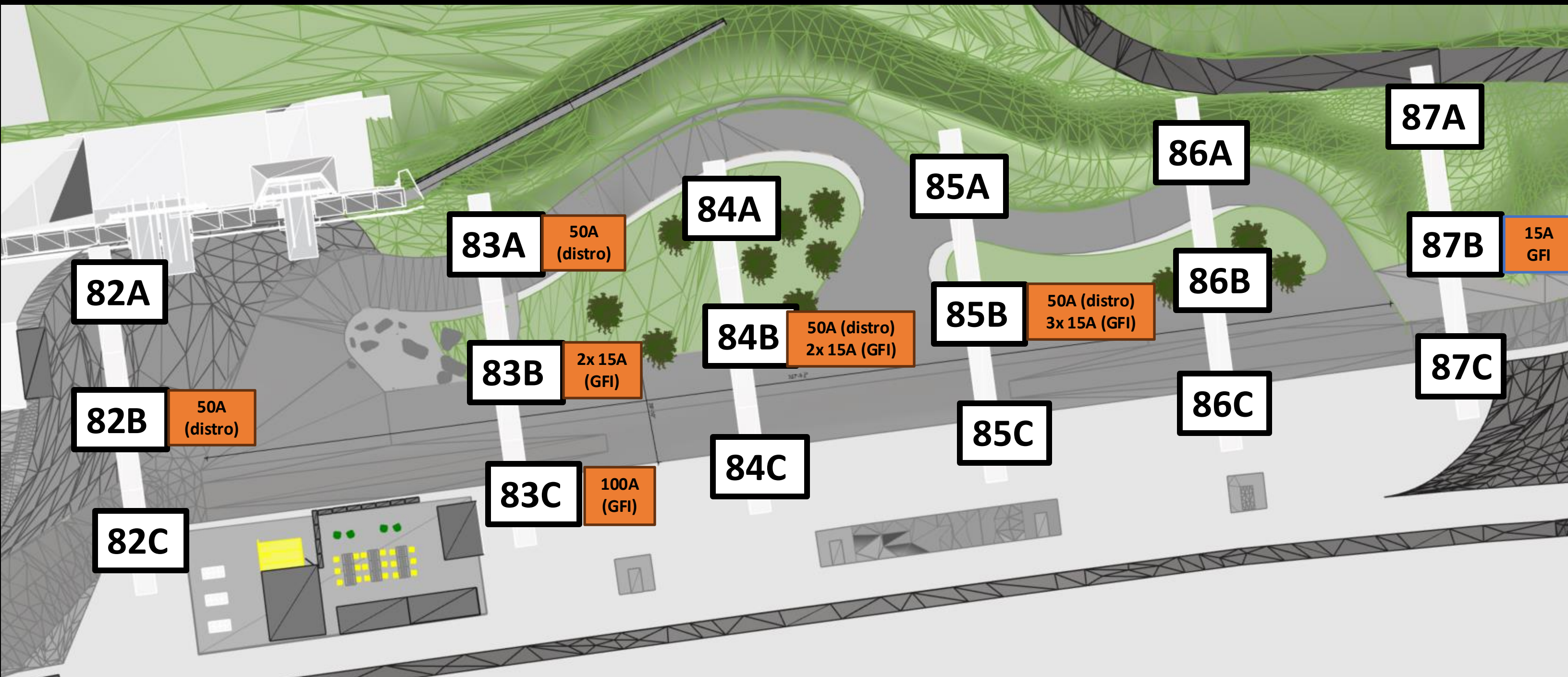




*Skate Trail, facing Northwest.*

*Note: The City of Toronto does not permit us to drill into the bents. Therefore, anything mounted to the bents must rely on a friction fit attachment system. The Bentway Production Team will work with the selected artist to refine their attachment strategy.*





*The "bents" of the Gardiner Expressway are numbered, and The Bentway utilizes this system for wayfinding purposes.*

*Electrical outlets available. A = amps*

*Distro = distribution box connection – temporary power only (distro boxes removed overnight)*

*GFI = standard three-pronged outlet – permanent power, 24/7*



# site weather and considerations

## High Winds

Consider materials that can withstand the effects of high winds for duration of exhibition; adequate ballast /weight system; design with perforation, blow through, ways wind can pass through objects, in mind. We are cautious of suspended works based on weather conditions.

## Cold Temperatures

Select outdoor rated materials and weatherproof coatings; consider the visitor experience/artwork interaction during winter.

## Precipitation and maintenance

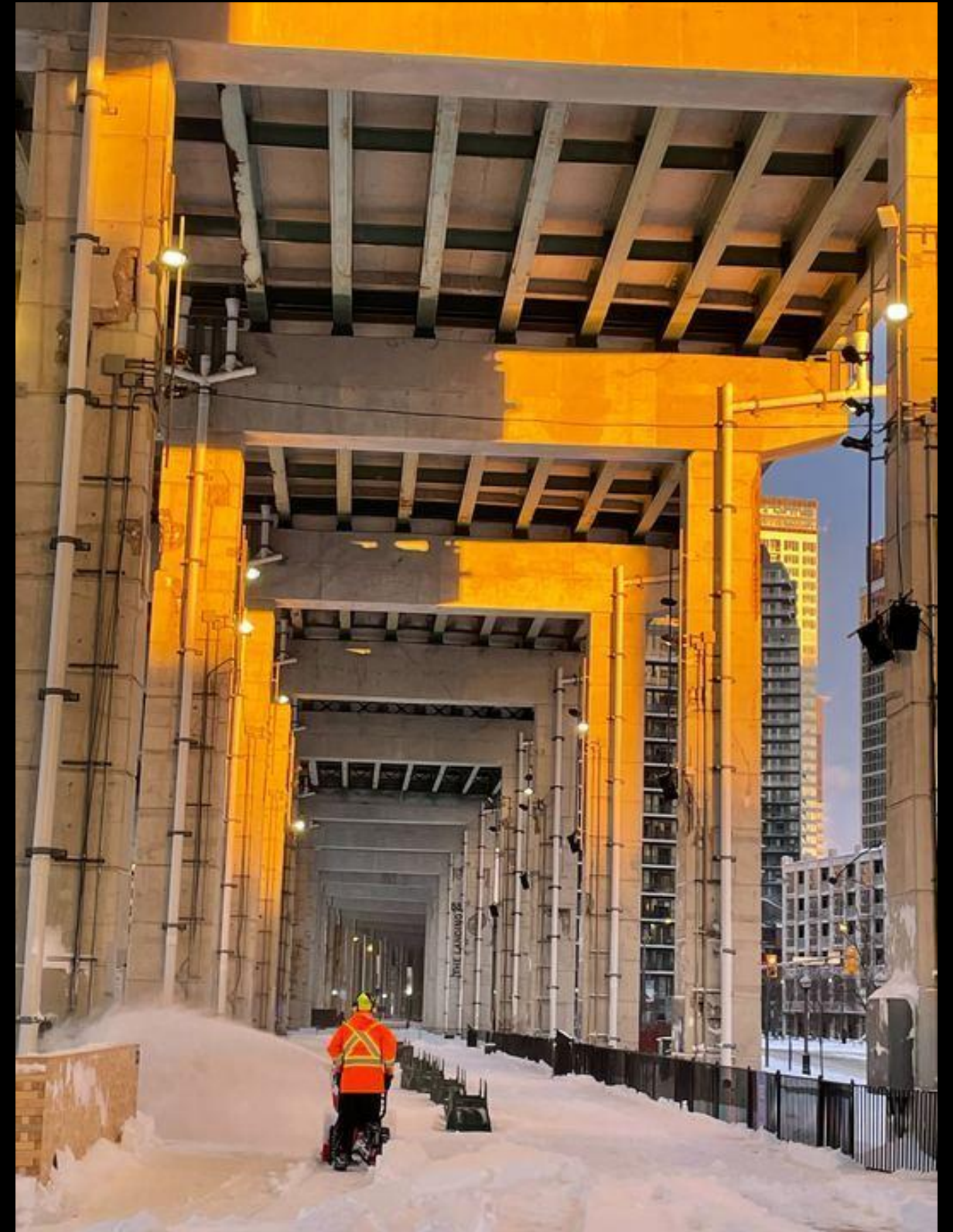
Consider possible snow and ice accumulation and weight; possible effects of salt on ground-level areas near artwork.

## Day to Night Conditions

Consider sunset timing for proposed AV elements, or lighting treatments of artwork.

## Skate Trail conditions and activation

Consider the installation, maintenance and ongoing use of natural ice skating rink during winter operations. Note: We recommend a 12 ft clearance for artwork mounted at height to mitigate interference.





# an invitation to apply

We are looking forward to hearing from **Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA)-based artists, designers or collectives** seeking an opportunity to work in the public realm and create a new outdoor experience within this dynamic public space.

Applicants must demonstrate an ongoing creative practice and have a history of public presentation.

We encourage applications from **artists, designers, and collectives** at varying stages of their career.

The Bentway is committed to fostering a positive and supportive environment that promotes equity, diversity, and inclusion. We invite applications from Indigenous and racialized people, people with disabilities, and people from 2SLGBTQ+ communities.





# project budget

The artist will be paid a fee of \$18,000 CAD for the design and consultation on the project.

The Bentway will provide a production allocation in the range of \$70,000.00 - \$80,000.00 CAD.

This production allocation is inclusive of all materials, fabrication, shipping, equipment, site preparation, engineering, maintenance, installation, and deinstallation of the artwork, and contingency.

The production allocation will be managed by The Bentway staff in consultation with the selected artist.

The Bentway will provide supplemental funding for marketing and promotions, as well as curatorial and production support throughout process.





# selection process

This public art commission will be awarded following a two-stage review process.

## Stage 1: Expressions of Interest

The initial round of applications will be reviewed by the Bentway Selection Committee and evaluated in accordance with the criteria detailed in the CEOI.

**Up to three (3) shortlisted applicants** will be invited to participate in Stage 2 and prepare design proposals for further consideration.

## Stage 2: Design Proposals

Shortlisted applicants will meet with the Bentway team for an information and onboarding session, either in person or remotely, and will be given a fulsome brief for preparing the design proposal, high-level budget, in accordance with the allocation noted above, and project schedule.

Each shortlisted artist will be paid **an honorarium of \$500.00**.

Following the submission deadline, complete design proposals will be evaluated by The Bentway Selection Committee, and staff will provide additional feedback on the technical and logistical feasibility of the proposed artwork.

Following deliberations and the final decision, the selected creative will be contacted by end of March 2026.



# selection criteria

- Demonstrated experience and ability to execute temporary and site-responsive work in public space.
- Ability to respond to the Bentway's stated project objectives and align with programming principles, production approach, and allocated budget.
- Ability to engage with the scale and unique, seasonal conditions of the site to offer an impactful design and storytelling experience in the public realm.
- Ability to engage broad audiences and shape a thoughtful viewer experience encountering the site on foot, or on skates!
- Ability to respond practically to, and work creatively with, the realities of skate trail operations, and a busy public space that welcomes thousands of skaters each season.



# how to apply

**A complete Stage 1 application package includes the following components:**

**1. CV** - PDF format, no more than three (3) pages maximum

**2. Expression of Interest** - a maximum of two (2) written pages in response to the following questions:

- Please explain your interest in the commission and the stated project objectives.
- Please explain your interest in creating public artwork for the winter season and how the climate and Bentway site will inform your approach.
- Provide a brief perspective on your artistic practice and how this opportunity will benefit you at this stage in your career?

**3. Work Samples** - detailed information on 2-3 relevant projects, in development or completed. Please include the following information for each project:

- project title, location, project overview, role on team, team members (if applicable), budget and duration (max 1 page).

**4. A Letter of Reference** - from a previous commissioning body.

**Note:** Please do not include proposal information or sketches of a proposed concept. These will not be accepted at this stage.



# key dates

- **Application deadline (Stage 1):** February 6, 2026 at 11:59pm EST
- **Shortlisted artists notified (Stage 2):** February 18, 2026
- **Deadline for design proposals (Stage 2):** March 10, 2026
- **Selected Artist notified:** end of March, 2026
- **Project development:** April-November 2026
- **Project installation period:** 2-weeks held, mid-November 2026
- **Public presentation:** mid-December, 2026 through February 2027



# Q & A





# thank you!

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**Renee Castonguay**

Manager, Programming and Engagement

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# the bentway

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