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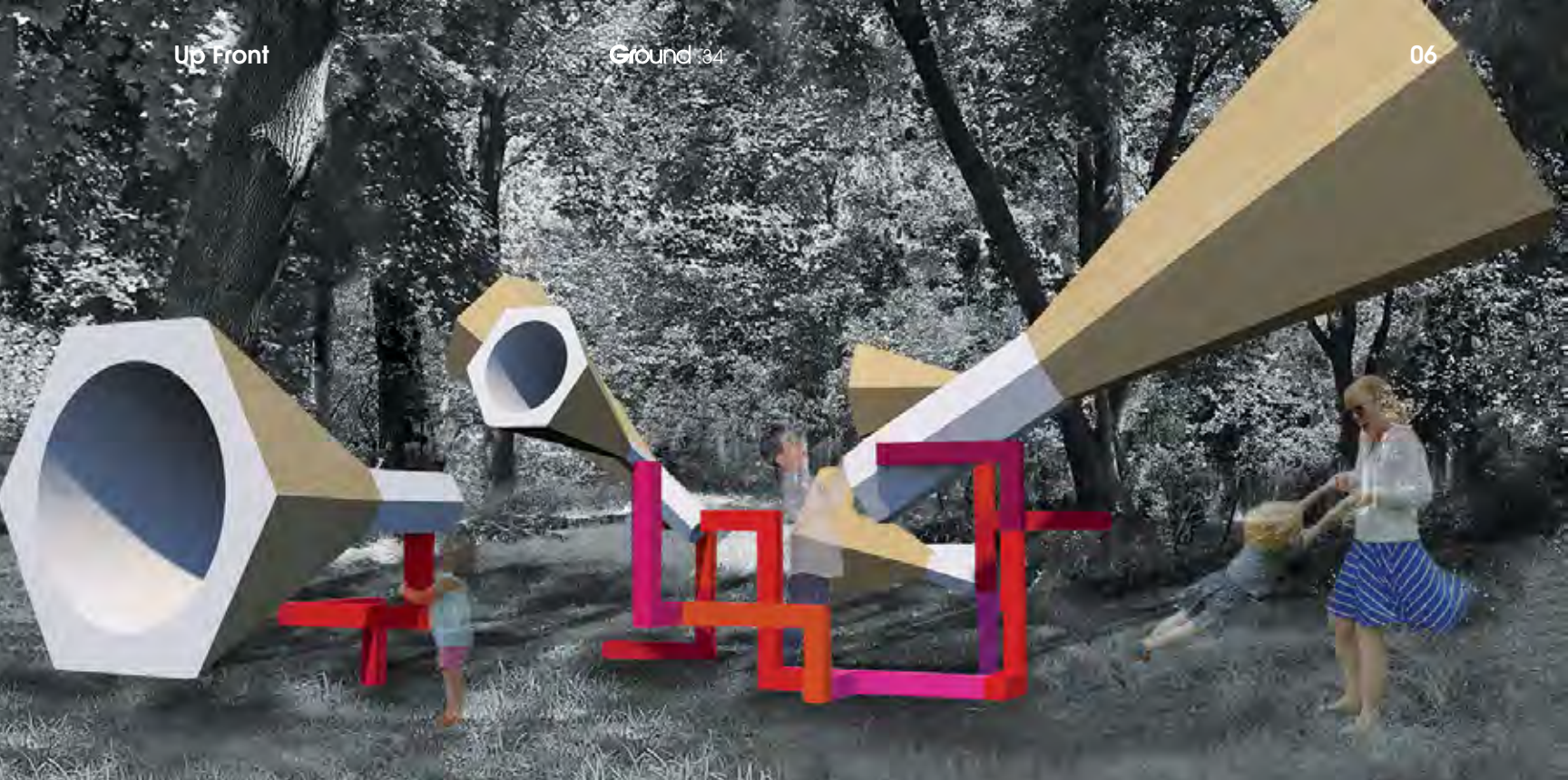
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PARKS sound-based art

Lee Lifeson Arts Park, in North York's Willowdale neighbourhood, is a new type of park that, like any good creative endeavour, is a bit of an experiment. Bordered by Victoria Park Avenue, Bathurst Street, Highway 401, and Steeles Avenue, Willowdale was once characterized by modest pre- and post-war homes on large residential lots. But like many other parts of Toronto, the area is experiencing massive change, in the form of new condo developments and housing stock turnover, from bungalow to monster home. This process has facilitated the addition of many new parks to the area, funded by development charges and Section 37 funds, but it has also restricted their size. Though the area of Lee Lifeson Arts Park is only about half a city block, the design and programming of the park speak to a desire by the local government to serve the community in a creative way.

Councillor John Filion, representative for Ward 23 and Toronto's official Arts Advocate, says that being imaginative with small spaces is fundamental to making successful new parks in Willowdale. He describes the process of acquiring new parkland in this heavily urbanized district as "difficult," but says that this hasn't stopped Willowdale from adding a new park annually in recent years. The strategy is to acquire residential lots to expand existing parks and build new pocket

sites that add up to a network capable of serving the community. This has resulted in some great community-supported spaces like Parkview Neighbourhood Garden, a volunteer-run market garden that has operated on a former vacant lot since 2008.

Filion hopes that the community around Lee Lifeson Arts Park will feel that same ownership over the park when it opens in the summer of 2016. A five-minute walk from North York Civic Centre, and an expansion of Willowdale Park North, it will join a string of linear parks that mark the piped and channelized portion of Wilket Creek between York Mills Road and Steeles. A life-long supporter of the arts, Filion envisions it as an outdoor incubator for the arts, a haven for programming and performance, particularly sound-based work.

With Planning Partnership as the prime consultant, the park is designed to incorporate permanent art installations, temporary exhibits, and small-scale performances. However, the residential character of the surroundings will determine their amplitude. Community consultation determined that adjacent homeowners were concerned about loud noises potentially emanating from a park named after members of the band Rush, Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson, former Willowdale residents. As a result, the amphitheatre in the northwest corner of the park will have small performances only. (Amplified shows will

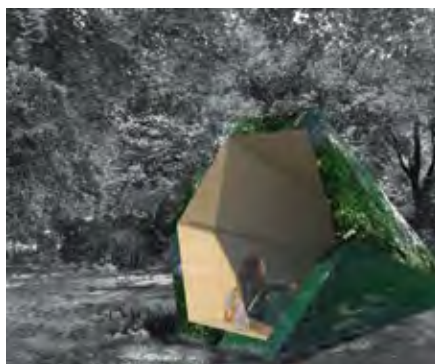
continue to take place at the nearby Mel Lastman Square.) This demonstrates the programming challenges of making a small park work in a location like Willowdale. The programming must be dense enough to offer something to the community, but not so much of a draw that crowds become a problem in this residential area. Prescribing tranquil creativity is a challenge.

North York Arts will be working to initiate community programming in Lee Lifeson Arts Park in the fall of 2016, as part of the City of Toronto's Cultural Hotspot Initiative. As a signature project of the program, a series of participatory events featuring youth, dance, and music will be hosted in the park, with the goal of engaging the community. Melissa Foster, Program and Outreach Coordinator for North York Arts, describes Lee Lifeson Arts Park as a place that will come into its own as the community begins to feel like they can use it. The details of the fall programming are still being developed, and Foster invites people to share their ideas: "Come out in September. People can contact us [North York Arts] and Councillor Filion's office if they have ideas about happenings they would like to see," Foster says.

The permanent art works in the park are already taking shape, with a mosaic by architect Paul Roth and a three-part installation by Public Studio, consisting of architect Tamira Sawatzky and filmmaker Elle Flanders, and their frequent collaborator



08



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07-10/ Public Studio's installation, *120 Mirrors*, for Lee Lifeson Arts Park in North York is a sound-based piece inspired by the idea of parks as gathering spaces for free speech and the colonial history of the site.

IMAGES/ Public Studio

Anna Friz. Their piece, *120 Mirrors*, was conceived in response to a call for permanent installations exploring the park's "art of sound" theme last year, and selected through a public vote. The piece draws on Friz's background in sound design and is inspired by the idea of parks as gathering places for free speech and the colonial history of the site.

The first part of Public Studio's piece, "Speak and Listen," is composed of underground speaking tubes through a section of berms in the park's southwest corner, carrying sound vibrations between participants at either end, in the fashion of a tin-can telephone. The second part, "The Hornucopia," is a structure made of multiple, different-sized horns that naturally capture sound with their shape. Situated among the densest plantings on the site, the horns can be rotated to capture the sounds of the park, from birds to performers. Sawatzky describes the last part, "The Horn of Reflection," as a more inward-looking piece, enshrouded by trees at the north end of the park. It's a large horn structure, scaled for a participant to sit inside and listen to a sound piece developed by Anna Friz. The exterior of the horn is chrome, reflecting its surroundings and referencing the overall title of the work, *120 Mirrors*. Inside the piece is a list detailing the items at the heart of the 1787 Toronto Purchase between the Mississaugas of New Credit and the British for the land used to establish Toronto.

This exchange of simple objects, including mirrors, gun flints, and laced hats, for rights to 250,808 acres of land, was disputed for the next few hundred years, with a settlement reached only in 2010.

The three pieces are integrated into the park, a requirement from the City of Toronto that Sawatzky says aligned with their desire to create elements you continually encounter as you move through the park, but it also posed some logistical challenges. Sawatzky notes that Public Studio was brought into the project after the completion of the master plan and while land was still being purchased for the park. The artists would have liked the opportunity to work with the design team earlier in the park planning process, and Sawatzky describes siting the work as a constant negotiation.

The hoarding around Lee Lifeson Arts Park will be gone this summer, giving Willowdale residents the opportunity to explore the newest addition to their neighbourhood and define how they want to use it. How artists and the community take on its vision is yet to be seen, but the evolution of the new space will be worth following.

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