

RCCAO podcast analyzes Sidewalk Labs failure

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HEATHERWICK STUDIO/SIDEWALK LABS — This rendering shows what the development could have looked like at Sidewalk Labs Quayside project in Toronto. The smart city project had been making headlines over its innovative ideas, but also over data, privacy and Sidewalk's hopes to fund transit and underground infrastructure in exchange for a cut of property taxes and developer fees. On May 7 Sidewalk Labs pulled out of waterfront project entirely.

VAUGHAN, ONT. — Sidewalk Labs failed to do its homework and never understood Toronto's complicated planning process, says a panellist participating in the latest podcast produced by the [Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario \(RCCAO\)](#).

The [podcast](#), released Aug. 24, explores why [Sidewalk Labs](#) pulled out of the proposed Quayside "smart city" project in Toronto's Port Lands earlier this year.

The podcast features public policy consultant [Brian Kelcey, founder of State of the City](#), who spoke in favour of the Sidewalk Labs Quayside project as a vice-president of the Toronto Board of Trade, in discussion with [John Michael McGrath, staff writer at TVO](#) who covers provincial politics and policy and has written extensively about the Sidewalk Labs situation.

The podcast, entitled [Sidewalk Labs – What's Next?](#), is the final instalment in a nine-part series called Conversations about Construction that was commissioned by the RCCAO.

“It certainly looked to me like the folks at Sidewalk Labs misunderstood how the process was going to work from the beginning and perhaps overestimated how much was in Waterfront Toronto’s direct control and not understanding that this was a process that was going to necessarily involve not just Waterfront Toronto but Toronto City Council, the provincial government and perhaps more,” said McGrath during the podcast.

McGrath said many people think of the Port Lands as a blank slate, but they are politically contested grounds and there are a lot of different ideas for the area.

Kelcey, on the other hand, argued problems arose because Sidewalk was trying to meet its own ambitious agenda as well as the specific objectives that were set out in terms of the Waterfront Toronto RFP in 2017. He said he wasn’t briefed on any of the specifics but believes that based on everything he’s seen throughout the process that it was a real estate deal that simply went sour.