



MANUFACTURED ECOLOGY ON THE INDUSTRIAL EDGE

RECLAIMING THE VERNON BOULEVARD WATERFRONT AT NEWTOWN CREEK

Presented by New Yorkers for Parks and Jones Lang LaSalle



JONES LANG
LASALLE



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In 2006, New Yorkers for Parks' Community Design program collaborated with the Newtown Creek Alliance to conceptualize the adaptation of an industrial street-end and waterfront into an urban amenity. When completed, the site—a 100' wide and 20' deep parcel at the southernmost end of Vernon Boulevard at Newtown Creek—will introduce valuable public open space while accommodating surrounding industrial uses. Concept designs for the Vernon Boulevard waterfront were created through open dialogue with the community. The designs presented in this exhibit illustrate shared community visions that have the potential to impact not only Long Island City and Hunters Point, but to serve as a reference point for the citywide revitalization of our urban and industrial waterfront landscapes.

Project Goals

- Introduce valuable open space that coexists with current industrial activity
- Provide waterfront access
- Manage storm-water runoff
- Create link to proposed Greenways
- Raise awareness of existing creek contamination
- Drive efforts for environmental cleanup

Background

At the close of the 19th century, Newtown Creek was considered the epicenter of the petroleum industry. Today, Newtown Creek continues to suffer from the legacy that petroleum companies left along its banks. A severe underground oil spill originating at the former Exxon Mobil site released 17 million gallons of petroleum into the creek and underneath the neighborhood of Greenpoint. The spill is 50 years old, and has only recently garnered political attention, despite being 6 million gallons more than the infamous 1989 Exxon Valdez spill. New York State Governor Eliot Spitzer recently initiated legal action against Exxon at the request of the State's Department of Environmental Conservation. Sewage and storm water run-off are another significant source of pollution in Newtown Creek. Twenty CSO outfalls and 100 storm water discharges are located along the creek's perimeter, releasing approximately 2.7 million gallons of sewage into Newtown Creek per year. Newtown Creek is now recognized as one of America's most polluted waterways.

Only two parks exist along the entire 11-mile stretch of Newtown Creek, and both are on the Brooklyn side of the creek. The open space ratio in Queens Council District # 26—which includes Hunters Point and Long Island City—is one of the lowest in the city: 0.41 acres per 1000 people. The area is extremely underserved for public open space yet has great potential to be transformed in a way that balances quality of life and business needs. In this constantly changing city of eight million residents, it is essential to plan, protect and preserve these spaces.

Community Design Process

New Yorkers for Parks and the Newtown Creek Alliance conducted five public meetings throughout the summer of 2006 to gain important community feedback on the project. Diverse interests were represented at these meetings, including local residents, government representatives, members of the local business development corporation, and adjacent property owners and their tenants. Discussions at these meetings revealed that the stakeholders' priority was to create a paradigm for mixing open space and industry that would 1) maintain the industrial activity at the site and 2) mitigate the ongoing pollution of the creek through stormwater management practices.

Constituents in Hunters Point and Long Island City want access to the waterfront. Not only will the new Vernon Boulevard waterfront create waterfront access for residents, business owners and people launching small crafts, but it will offer a respite to the hundreds of workers this area hosts every day. Located just off the proposed Queens Greenway recreational path, the Vernon Boulevard waterfront will be a destination for cyclists exploring the Queens shoreline and serve as a link to the Brooklyn Greenway. The Vernon Boulevard project has the potential to be part of what will ultimately be a dynamic network that links the waterfront of all five boroughs of New York City.

The Future for Newtown Creek and the Vernon Boulevard Waterfront

Waterfront property is a highly valued amenity. Ecologists see waterfront property as prime restoration area, developers see this same property as lucrative residential and commercial property, and urban explorers see waterfront properties as prime access points to a city's water recreation infrastructure. While these interests are not mutually exclusive, they call for creating a new paradigm: mixing open space and industry. As the Mayor embarks on a Sustainability Plan for New York City for 2030, we envision the Vernon Boulevard waterfront project as a demonstration of how community planning and sustainable design can make a difference in the quality of life for this local community and businesses, while addressing citywide needs.

New Yorkers for Parks

New Yorkers for Parks is the only independent watchdog for all the city's parks beaches and playgrounds. It is the city's oldest and leading expert on park conditions, efficiency and funding. New Yorkers for Parks has worked for nearly 100 years to ensure greener, safer, cleaner parks for all New Yorkers.

Newtown Creek Alliance

Created in 2002 by Council members Eric Gioia and David Yassky, the Newtown Creek Alliance works to educate leaders and decision makers about Newtown Creek, host community events on and around the Newtown Creek and advocate for an end to persistent sources of pollution. Newtown Creek Alliance members include elected officials, environmental advocates, community residents, business leaders, Newtown Creek users and more.

New Yorkers for Parks Community Design Fellow

Jennifer Giarratana is a Master in Landscape Architecture student at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard, and will graduate in June of 2007. Her interest in Landscape Urbanism began in her undergraduate years at New York University, where she studied Urban Design and Fine Arts. Jennifer plans to return to New York City after graduation to pursue future projects dealing with urban ecology and manufactured landscapes.



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Curated by Pamela Governale, Design Program Manager, New Yorkers for Parks
Sabrina Luperio, Project Manager, Jones Lang LaSalle

Designs by Jennifer Giarratana, Harvard GSD Community Design Fellow, New Yorkers for Parks

The Community Design Program is made possible through the generous support of many funders, including:

Jones Lang LaSalle
The New York State Council on the Arts
The Cowles Charitable Trust

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New Yorkers for Parks would like to thank: members of the New Yorkers for Parks Design Advisory Group, especially: Peter Rothschild FASLA, Quennell Rothschild & Partners; Lee Weintraub FASLA; Dr. Mario Rossi, Ambient Studio; Matthew Arnn USDA Forest Service; David Vimont, AIA; Jim Johnson, DaughterPride Studio; Bill Schuck, Newtown Creek Alliance; Bernard Ente, Newtown Creek Alliance; Rebecca Olinger, Newtown Creek Alliance; Eric Baard, LIC Community Boathouse; Sheila Lewandowski, The Chocolate Factory; Richard Melnick, the Greater Astoria Historical Society.

NEWTOWN CREEK



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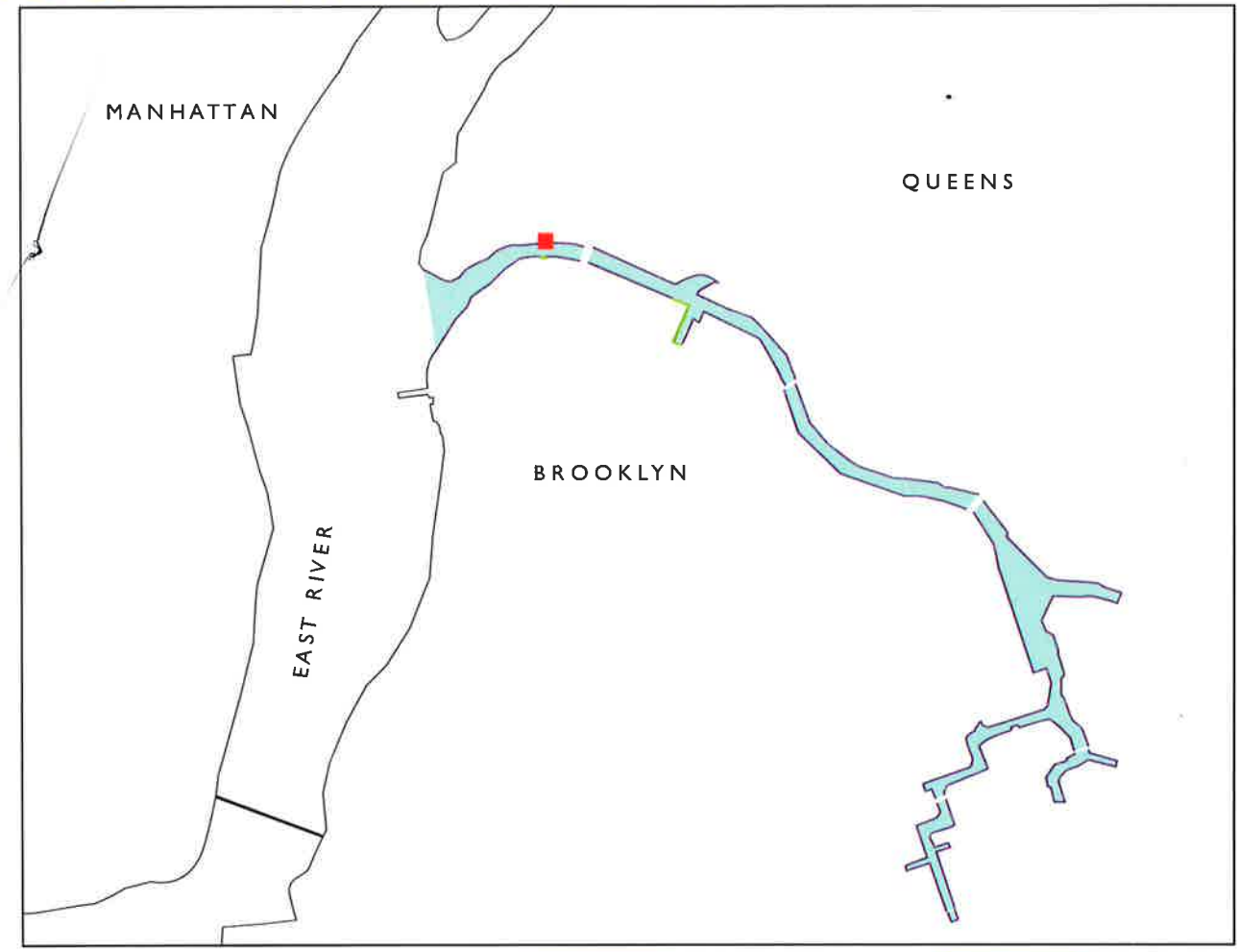
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SITE CONTEXT : OPEN SPACE + INDUSTRY



■ Vernon Boulevard Street End
 — Route to Site
 ■ Existing Open Space
 - - - Proposed Greenway

— .2 miles of open space



— Existing Industrial Activity
 — Existing Open Space

10.8 miles of industry



Vernon Boulevard Site from the GMDC Roof



Standing at the Vernon Boulevard Site Looking Southwest



Standing on the Pulaski Bridge, Looking West Towards the Site

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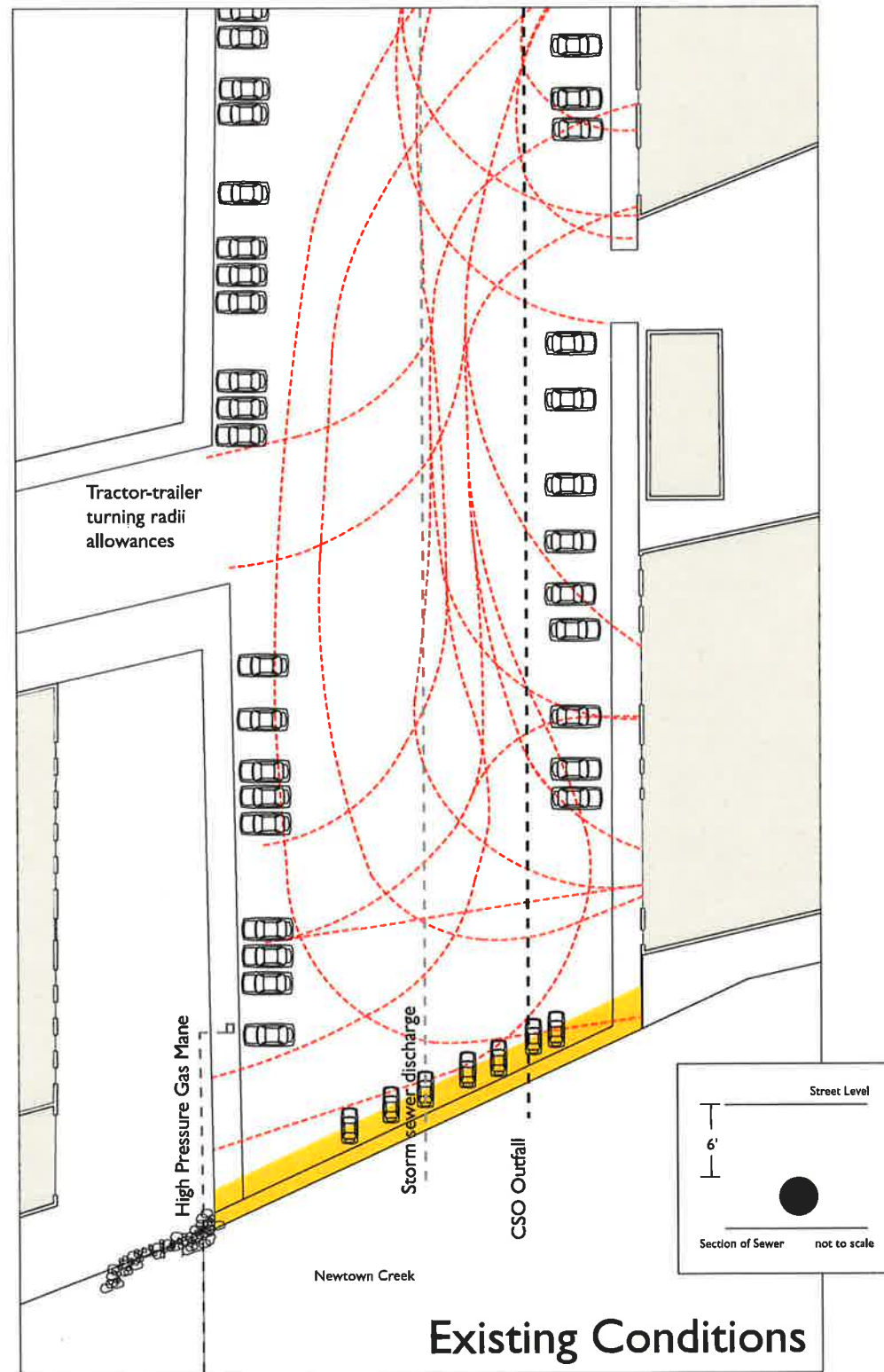
Design by Jennifer Guaratana, Community Design Fellow, New Yorkers for Parks



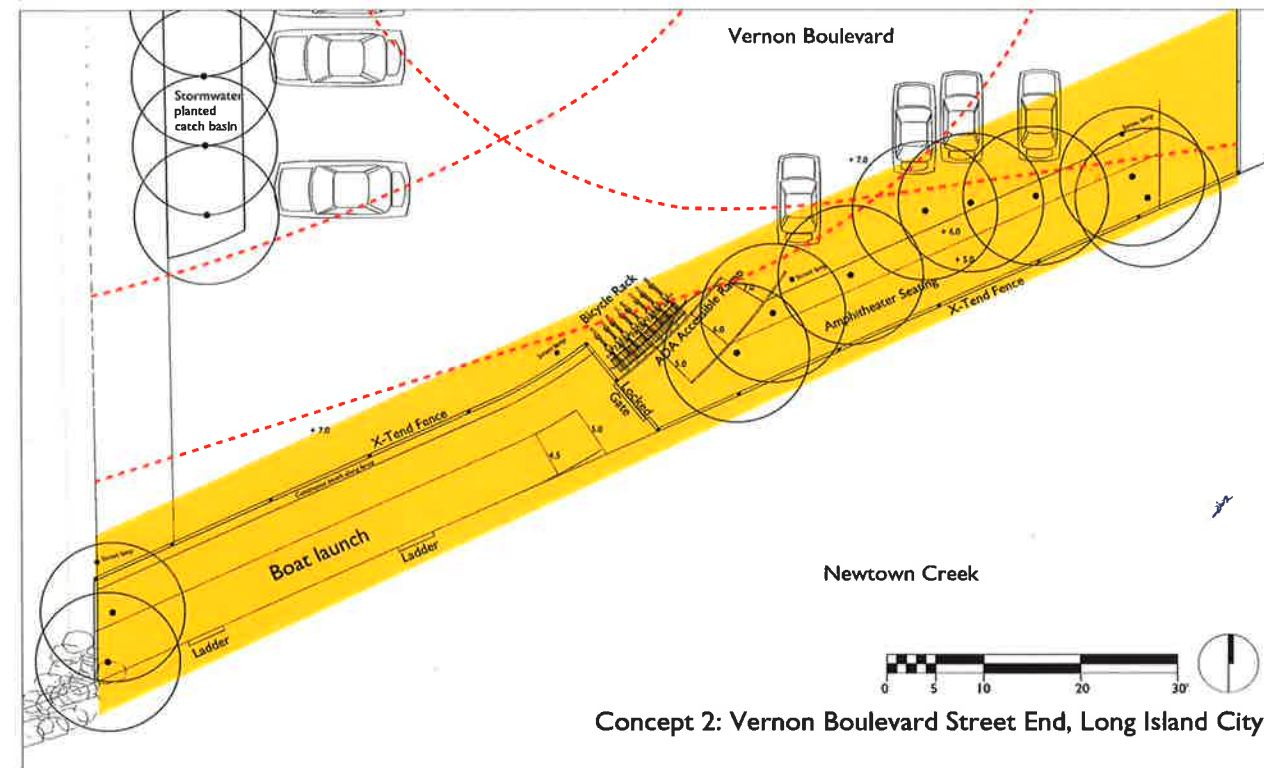
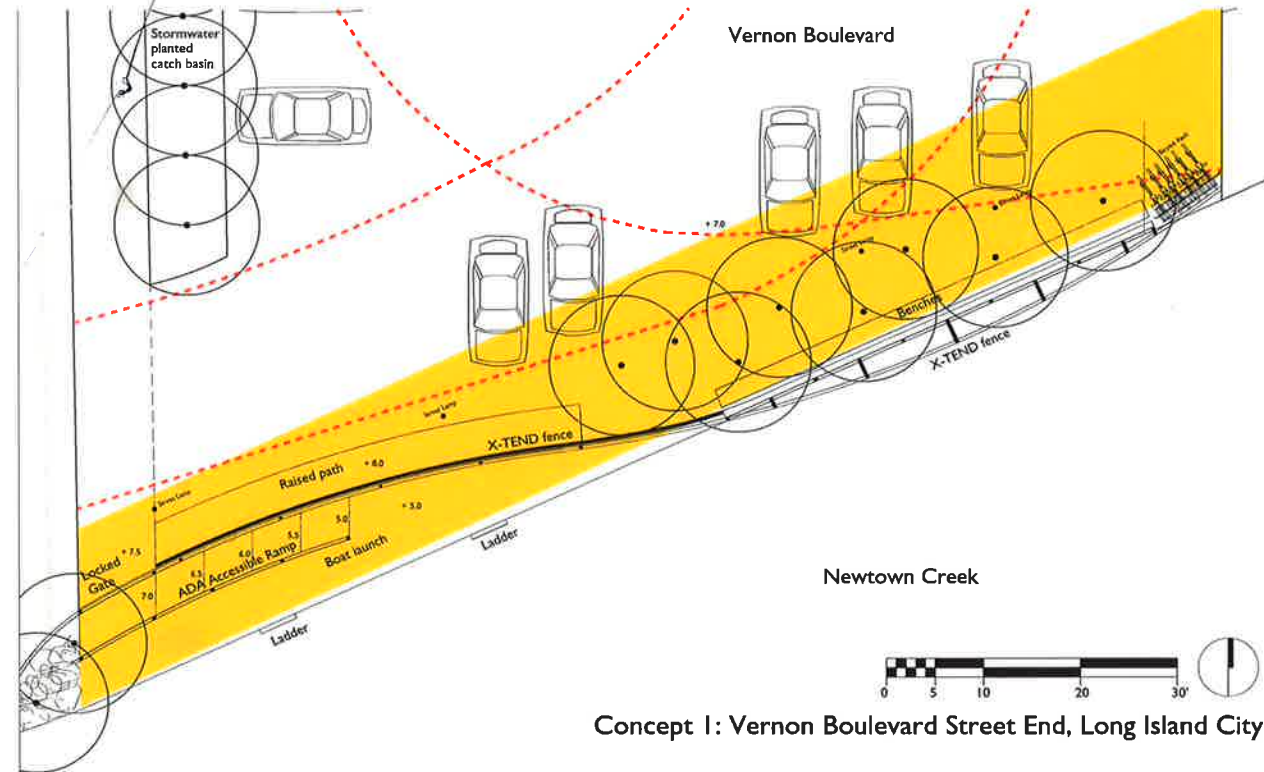
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“this site should be a paradigm for **mixing industry and open space**, to the benefit of industry”

retain PARKING + INDUSTRIAL uses

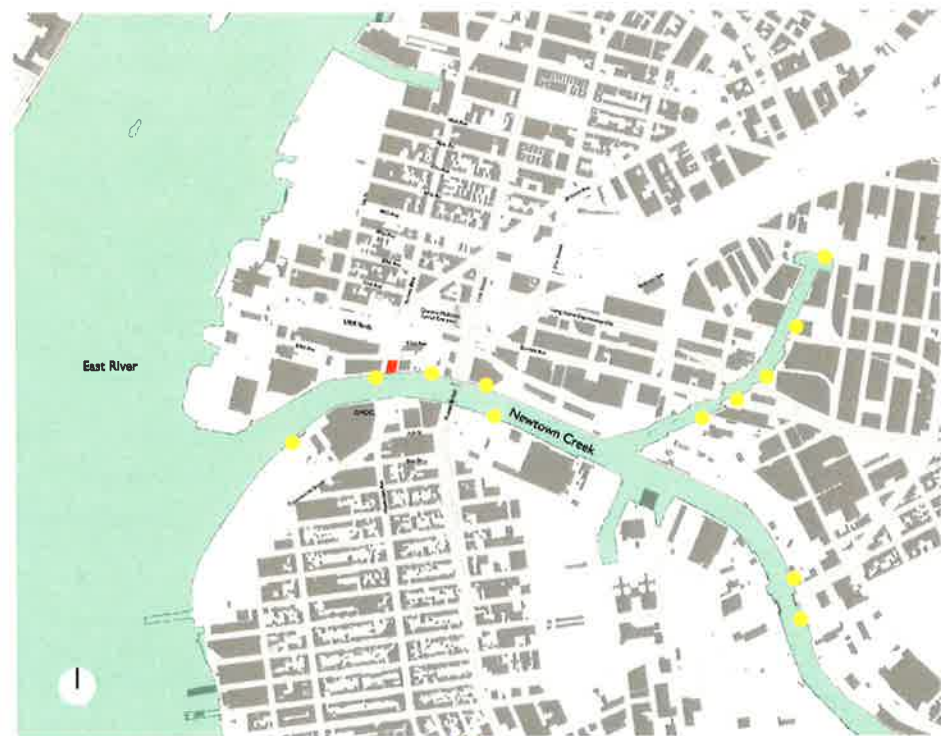


Existing Conditions

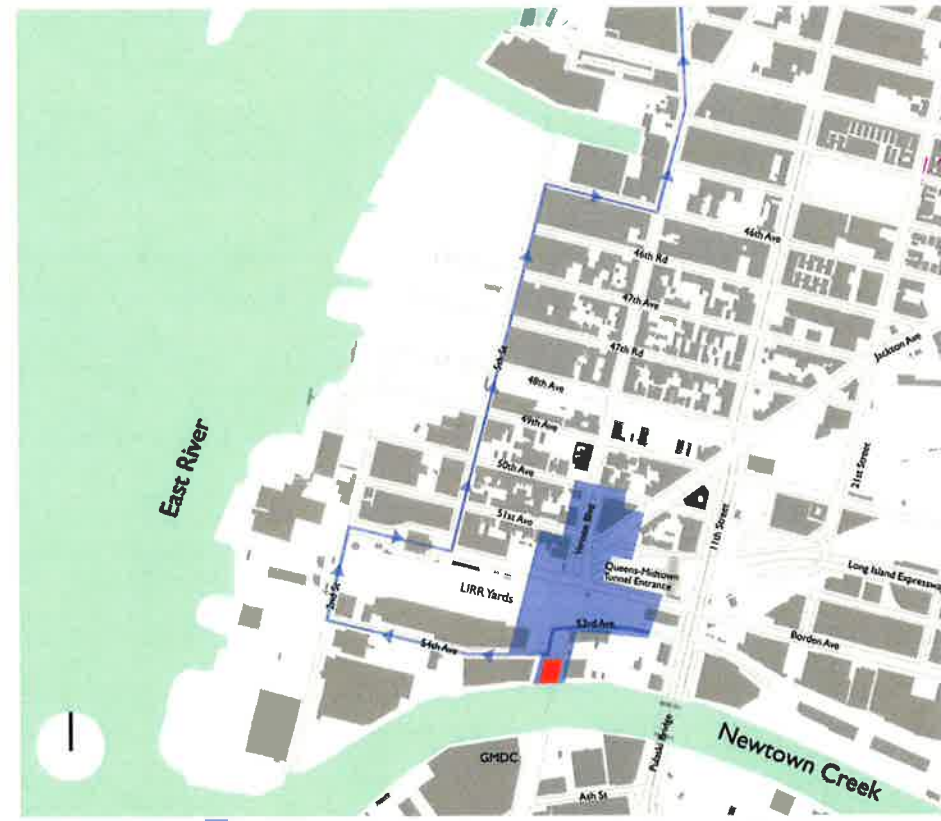


20 CSO outfalls + over 100 stormwater discharges = 2.7 million gallons of raw sewage per year spilling into Newtown Creek

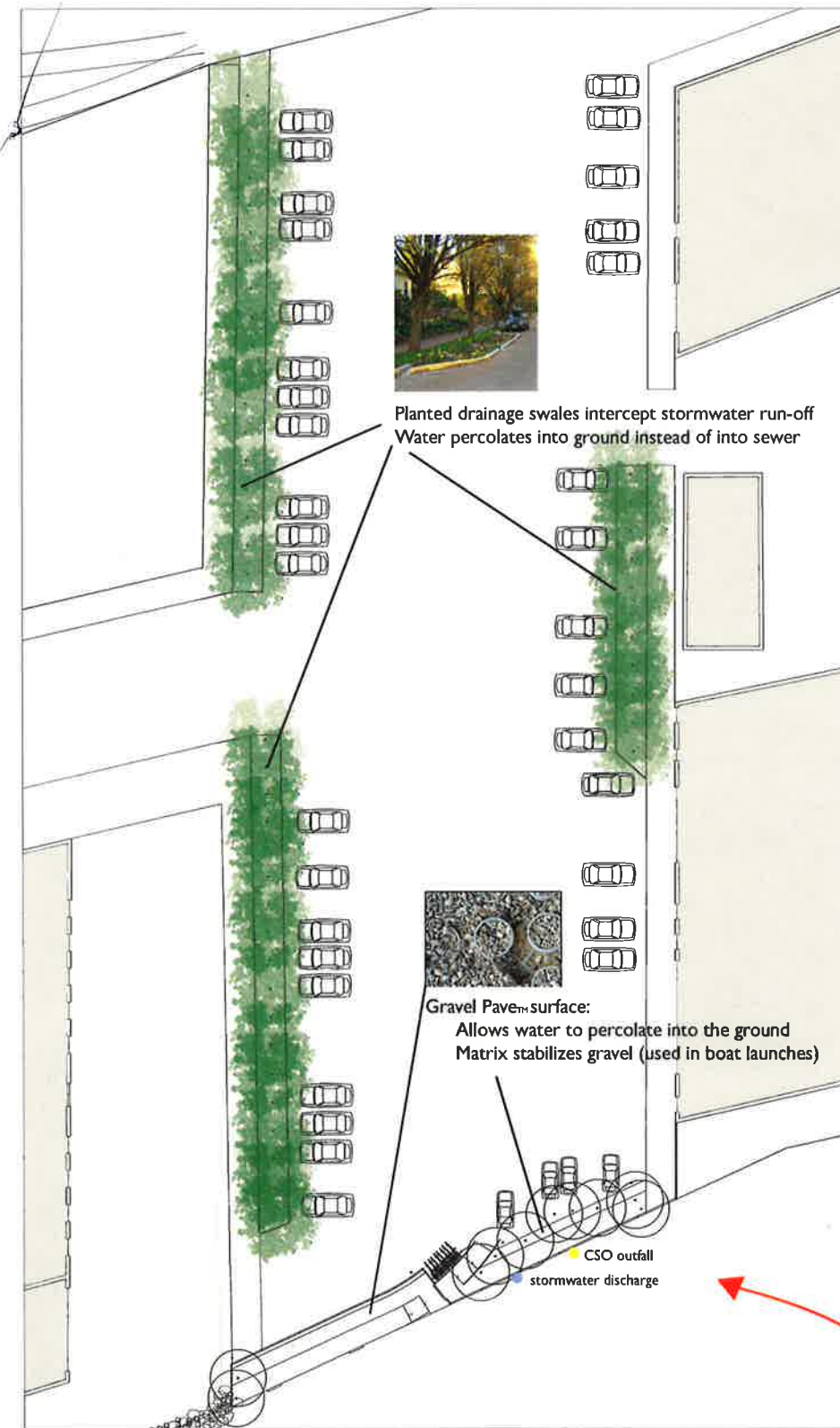
reduce **STORMWATER** run-off



● CSO Outfall Locations along Newtown Creek



■ Stormwater Drainage Area Emptying into Newtown Creek at Vernon Blvd
 — Pipeline to Bowery Bay Water Treatment Facility



Planted drainage swales intercept stormwater run-off
 Water percolates into ground instead of into sewer

Gravel Pavement surface:
 Allows water to percolate into the ground
 Matrix stabilizes gravel (used in boat launches)

● CSO outfall
 ● stormwater discharge

1 CSO outfall + 1 stormwater discharge ON SITE

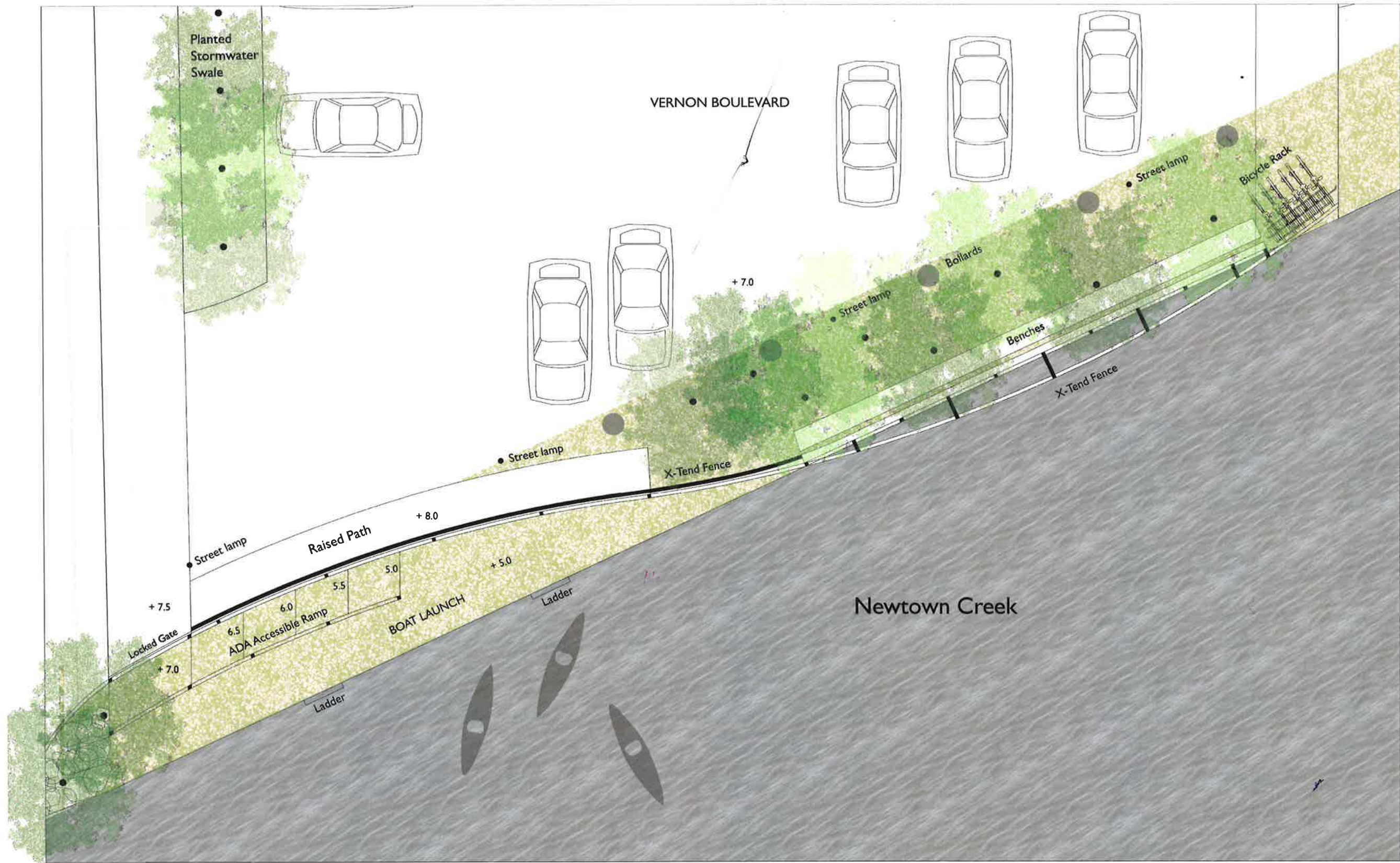
MANUFACTURED ECOLOGY ON THE INDUSTRIAL EDGE : RECLAIMING THE VERNON BOULEVARD WATERFRONT AT NEWTOWN CREEK

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SITE PLAN: CONCEPT 1



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VERNON BOULEVARD WATERFRONT

CONCEPT I



This waterfront site is a 100'-wide and 20'-deep parcel at the southern end of Vernon Boulevard, where the street meets Newtown Creek. The street-end condition is, like the current state, of the creek itself, a vestige of a thriving industrial economy. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, a vehicular and pedestrian bridge crossed Newtown Creek at this exact location.; in 1954, it was replaced by the taller Pulaski Bridge about 300' east of Vernon Boulevard. What remains at the site is a 100' wide abrupt end to Vernon Boulevard at the creek edge, and a precarious 5' drop-off into the creek.

The southern-most portion of Vernon Boulevard where the site is located, and the territory to its east and west, remains an active industrial area. Because Vernon Boulevard dead-ends at this location, its current use is parking for area employees, a billboard staging area for nearby business Vista Media, and a thoroughfare for two product distribution centers located on both sides of the site.

The street is as active below ground as it is above ground. A storm water sewer runs directly down the center of Vernon Boulevard, 6' below the surface, opening out into Newtown Creek (it is one of 100 other storm sewers that spill into the creek). A combined sewer overflow regulator and outfall also exists at the end of the street, to the eastern portion of the site. This CSO outfall is one of 20 located along Newtown Creek, contributing to the creek's poor water quality, and making water access at this site undesirable after heavy rain events.

The desire of the Newtown Creek Alliance and community members was to provide (1) water access for kayakers from the Vernon Boulevard street end, and (2) for those less willing to climb into the creek, a place for people to socialize and experience the waters' edge. These objectives were met by dividing the site in half. The boat launch area is located in the western half of the site, out of the immediate path of the sewer discharge pipe and the CSO outfall. The eastern half of the site is reserved for the seating area. The spatial delineation is achieved through the use of a single material: a flexible metal mesh fence that behaves like a fabric. Rather than a foreboding barrier, the fence is treated as a sculptural element. It ribbons through the site, dividing the boat launch from the seating area, functioning as a safety measure at the water's edge.

This concept attempts to keep costs low by proposing minimal excavation. The park remains at grade except in the boat launch area, which is excavated 2.0' to bring you closer to the water. Ladders provide access to the water for those wishing to kayak or canoe. This area is accessed by an ADA-compliant ramp. The eastern portion of the site includes a bench that runs along the waters edge, for picnicking, reading, or fishing. The majority of trees are planted in this area of the site. A grove of eight Dawn Redwood trees (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) shade the picnicking area. Dawn Redwood is a fast growing deciduous conifer that is salt tolerant and withstands soil compaction -- excellent survival qualities for an urban street tree. Furthermore, coniferous trees are not susceptible to the Asian Longhorn Beetle, a common parasite in New York City.

Protective bollards are proposed at the northern most part of the seating area to prevent vehicular traffic from driving into the park. These bollards can be made of any material. Community members proposed using locally manufactured materials, and enlisting local artists to construct the bollards. A hypothetical artist's rendition is shown in the drawings.

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SITE PLAN: CONCEPT 2



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VERNON BOULEVARD WATERFRONT

CONCEPT 2



In Concept 2, the site is terraced to the waters' edge, creating an amphitheater-like space in the eastern portion of the site. The site hinges in the center at an ADA compliant ramp that leads to the boat launch area to the west and to the amphitheater area to the east. The eastern part of the site includes benches under a grove of eight Dawn Redwood trees (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), a species that is salt tolerant, withstands soil compaction, and is resistant to the Asian Longhorn Beetle. The western part of the site is reserved for the kayak and canoe launch. The same fence material is proposed in this scheme as in Concept 1, serving both aesthetic and safety functions. In this scheme, fence panels of varying heights layer against one another, negotiating the heights of adjacent buildings and vehicles with the ground plane and water surface.

Concept 2 involves more excavation than Concept 1. The boat launch area is terraced in two levels. At the higher level, the grade is 5.0' above water level at low tide and 1.0' above water level at high tide. At the lower level the grade is 4.0' above low tide, and will be submerged under water at high tide. This scheme also proposes the use of ladders to enter the water during low tide. The amphitheater is terraced in three levels, at 7.0', 6.0', and 5.0' above low tide level (3.0', 2.0', and 1.0' above high tide level). These "steps", in 1-foot increments, function as seating for those who wish to relax at the water's edge.

A significant priority of the community was to mitigate storm water. Sewage and storm water run-off is a significant source of pollution in Newtown Creek. Twenty CSO outfalls and 100 storm water discharges are located along the creek's perimeter. Approximately 2.7 million gallons of raw sewage empty into Newtown Creek per year. The site at the end of Vernon Boulevard includes both a CSO outfall and a storm water discharge. Furthermore, the site is located in an area of almost 100% impervious surface. The portion of Vernon Boulevard within the site boundary makes up about 10% of the total impervious surface in the drainage area served by the CSO regulator at the terminus of Vernon Boulevard. Thus, by proposing storm water management interventions on the site, there is potential to eliminate run-off from 10% of the drainage area.

The stormwater management intervention includes two parts: First, the surface material proposed throughout the park in both Concept 1 and Concept 2 is the "gravel pave" system (or a similar product). This permeable material consists of a honey-comb like matrix that is placed below grade to stabilize the surface and to hold gravel in place. This solution provides structural support and allows water to percolate into the ground, rather than run-off into the creek. Second, planted drainage swales are proposed along both sides of Vernon Boulevard. Based on the Portland, Oregon, "Green Streets" model, these swales will intercept storm water before it enters the sewer. Tall grasses, succulent plants and grey birch trees would be planted in these swales to absorb the runoff. Redirecting and reabsorbing storm water runoff from Vernon Boulevard diverts the water from the sewer, reducing the potential for the CSO to reach capacity, the frequency of overflow events, and ultimately reducing the toxicity levels of Newtown Creek.



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Community Design Workshop 11 July 2007 / Meeting Notes: Intersection between industry and **COMMUNITY DESIGN WORKSHOPS**

canoe/rowboat; Site as a template for combining industry and open space, to the benefit of industry; Footbridge over railroad; Channeling stormwater; Permeable surface over entire street;



Community Design Workshop 25 July 2006 / Meeting Notes: Maintenance: Permeable paving throughout



just the edge? Possible to mix and match elements of concepts; add some "green" to option number

2. / Define location of park / Site / land use considerations: Vernon Boulevard is not a through-way it



habitat / Funding: Creating more "open water"—development projects looking for mitigation?

/ is there an option to include sidewalks in the greening of the sight?

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Community Design Program

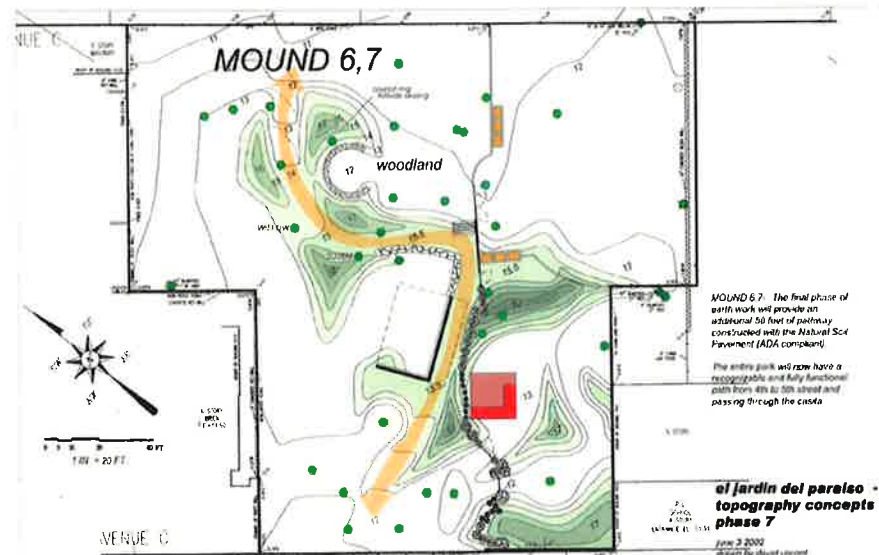


El Jardin del Paraiso

New Yorkers for Parks is New York City's oldest and leading citywide parks and open space advocacy organization. For nearly 100 years we have built, protected and promoted parks, playgrounds and gardens in all of the five boroughs. Today, through public education, research, planning and technical design assistance, we work to ensure greener, safer and cleaner parks for all New York City communities.

The Community Design Program

Our Community Design Program enables New Yorkers in underserved neighborhoods to take ownership of their local parks and open spaces. New Yorkers for Parks Community Design engages community groups in a participatory design process to create parkland that integrates and reflects the unique goals of their community. It also empowers them with skills, specifically targeted at strategic planning and organizing. New Yorkers for Parks assists city residents in advocating for healthier, more livable neighborhoods.



El Jardin del Paraiso, East 4th & 5th Streets, between Avenues C & D

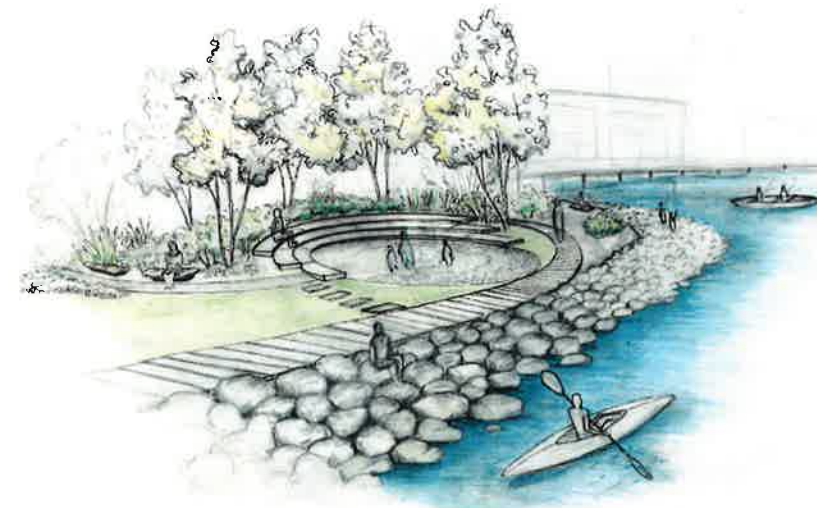
Designs that Transform Neighborhoods



Proposed Waterfront Park Site: Park Avenue Street-End / Exterior Street, Mott Haven, Bronx

Harlem River Waterfront

One of the current projects New Yorkers for Parks is working on is with The Friends of Brook Park. We are currently advocating for the designs created for a new waterfront park on the Harlem River in the South West corner of the Bronx. The Mott Haven site has the potential to become a destination within the neighborhood as a park that celebrates this unique location on the Harlem River Waterfront.



Proposed Harlem River Waterfront Park

List of Projects

- Edgecombe Avenue Garden Park in Sugar Hill
- Henry Hudson Parkway in the Bronx
- Flushing Meadows – Corona Park in Queens
- Prospect Heights Community Farm in Brooklyn
- El Jardin del Paraiso on the Lower East Side, Manhattan
- Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx
- Harlem River Waterfront in the Bronx
- Vernon Boulevard Street End, Queens
- Fox Playground in the Bronx
- Floyd Bennett Field on Jamaica Bay
- Westerleigh Park in Staten Island
- Hunts Point Living Memorial in the Bronx
- And others...

What We Do

- We hire design interns from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design & the City University of New York School of Architecture, Urban Planning and Landscape.
- We lead a series of public workshops to learn the goals, needs and visions of community members for their open space.
- We conduct an in depth site analysis and research toward the creation of conceptual designs.
- We host a reception or exhibit to showcase renderings and the participatory design process.
- We provide strategic planning and advocacy training.
- We help identify resources and available funding.
- We assist in navigating agencies and key decision-makers such as elected officials.
- We provide ongoing advocacy support and guidance in presenting plans to stakeholders.