



New York City
Department of Parks & Recreation

Hearing before the City Council
Committee on Parks & Recreation
Committee on Waterfronts

Oversight - From Industrial Uses to Parkland: Adapting the Waterfront

June 14, 2007

**Testimony by
Assistant Commissioner Joshua R. Laird**

INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, Mayor Bloomberg has been committed to enhancing open space and promoting healthy living for all New Yorkers. Whether that has included increasing waterfront access, creating plans to add over 2,000 acres of new parkland, or launching a long term sustainability plan that will ensure a park within a 10 minute walk of every resident, this Administration recognizes the importance of improving the quality of life of our City. With over 800 athletic fields, nearly 1,000 playgrounds, 550 tennis courts, 53 public pools, 48 recreation facilities, 13 golf courses, and 14 miles of beaches, we are New York City's principal provider of athletic and recreation facilities.

New York's waterfront has always played a crucial role in the city's economy. During the boom years of the maritime industry, the waterfront was primarily used for industry and trade. Preservation and protection of active maritime and industrial uses is critical to New York City's job base, and resulted recently in creation of the Mayor's Office of Industrial and Manufacturing Businesses, and the establishment of 16 Industrial Business Zones to foster high-performance business districts. However, where industrial activity has dissipated over the years due to global trends, large swaths of the city's waterfront have stood underutilized and inaccessible to most New York City residents. In more recent years, the re-conceiving of the waterfront as a balance of maritime activity and public open space for recreation has captivated the imagination of New Yorkers.

WATERFRONT ACCESS

The city's waterfront is one of the last major frontiers for park development and the creation of new recreational opportunities. Under Mayor Bloomberg's Administration, we have begun capturing more of these precious urban spaces. New Yorkers can now enjoy our rivers and harbor as both a recreational space and a place of natural beauty. Over the last few years, we have increased waterfront access throughout the city. In Staten Island, people can now fish from an 835-foot long pier at Midland Beach. In Brooklyn, the first phase of the new Brooklyn Bridge

Park transformed a parking lot on the industrial waterfront into a beautiful overlook along the East River. With its views of the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges and wide steps cascading down to the water, the park has become a major destination.

The new five-acre Barretto Point Park in the Bronx and Fort Totten in Bayside, Queens, both add great new waterfront promenades to our portfolio. The 32-mile Manhattan Waterfront Greenway gives bikers, hikers, pedestrians, and commuters access to over 1,500 acres of parkland. This greenway, along with the opening of Riverside Park South and Hudson River Park has brought life to previously foreboding waterfronts.

Since 1993, the City Planning Commission has used the City's zoning text to leverage public access to and along the waterfront as part of many new private development initiatives. Thanks to the Waterfront Zoning plan, the public has access to a walkway along the East River in Brooklyn at Schaefer Landing and can enjoy open space by the Hudson River as part of the West End Towers development at 63rd and 64th Streets in Manhattan. When the Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning is complete, there will be a 2-mile public esplanade along the East River.

Citywide, much of the Parks Department's portfolio of waterfront properties consists of beaches, wetlands and tidal marshes that help improve water quality and provide habitat for aquatic and avian life. Other types of waterfront properties and structures under our jurisdiction include the full array of engineered structures, bulkheads, seawalls, piers, relieving platforms.

Our waterfront properties are regularly maintained and inspected by Parks Department employees. Normal wear and replacement of deteriorating surface elements, benches, fencing, and paved surfaces are handled by borough maintenance staff. More significant structural defects, such as cracks, depressions, uneven surfaces and sinkholes are referred to our engineering staff for a more comprehensive evaluation. Much of our engineered waterfront infrastructure was built over sixty years ago and has reached the end of its lifespan.

There are a number of recent and pending park projects that have or will address and/or radically change the City's water's edge. I would like to give you a brief overview of a few of these projects.

CURRENT PROJECTS

- **West Harlem Piers (Manhattan)** is being developed by EDC. Upon completion next spring, jurisdiction will likely change over to Parks. The Department of City Planning and EDC have worked closely with the community, including Community Board 9 and groups such as West Harlem Environmental Action, to advance plans for the area, receiving extensive input from working committees made up of various stakeholders including elected officials, government agencies and community organizations. The West Harlem Piers project will transform a former parking lot between 125th and 135th streets into beautiful and vibrant waterfront park. The new recreational pier will support various activities including fishing, boating and environmental education. The new pier will accommodate a variety of vessels with the main portion allowing excursion boats and water taxis to dock at West Harlem. Dedicated bicycle

and pedestrian paths will provide a critical link in the waterfront greenway, connecting Cherry Walk on the southern end of the site with the northern segment of Riverside Park. This project was supported by a \$250,000 allocation by former Council Member Stanley Michaels.

- **Sherman Creek (Manhattan)** – Supported in part with \$200,000 from Council Member Martinez, the Parks Department is currently constructing five new street end parks in northern Manhattan at the Harlem River foot of E202nd, E203rd, E204th, E205th and E206th Streets. The transformation of these dead end pockets of broken asphalt and trash is intended to serve as the first phase of a long-term effort to reclaim the Sherman Creek waterfront and create continuous waterfront access along its shoreline. An interagency planning team led by the office of DM Doctoroff, EDC and the Department of City Planning continues to look at the broader neighborhood and explore options for linking these five parks and connecting them back to Swindler's Cove and the Harlem Speedway..
- **Randalls Island Connector (Manhattan)** - As an extension of comprehensive planning efforts focused on the South Bronx and Hunts Point, the Parks Department is working with EDC on plans to create a new greenway connection from the Bronx to Randall's Island across the Harlem River rail yards.

The Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF) is also leading an effort to construct a bike and pedestrian trail system along the Island's 4.5-mile waterfront as well as a salt marsh and freshwater wetland the Little Hell Gate Inlet.

- **Barretto Point Park (Bronx)** – One of the great new gems among the City's waterfront parks, Barretto Point Park was completed last October. In the early investigation stage, EDC coordinated the hazmat testing with the Mayor's Office of Environmental Coordination. Remediation was completed by the state's Environmental Remediation Program.
- **Hunts Point Riverside Park (Bronx)** - EDC gave a sliver of the Hunts Point Market property for Hunts Point Riverside Park to allow for expanded park space and views to Soundview Park across the Bronx River.
- **Bush Terminals Park (Brooklyn)** - EDC is leading efforts to remediate this landfill site and create new publicly accessible recreational space. EDC coordinated the hazardous materials testing with the Mayor's Office of Environmental Coordination. Remediation is being done by the state's Environmental Remediation Program. Upon completion the 24 acre park will be managed and operated by Parks. This project was supported by a \$500,000 allocation by Council Member Sara Gonzalez.
- **Fort Totten (Queens)** - The Parks Department will implement the first major phase of its master plan for Fort Totten, which will include the demolition of 1950s era buildings and landscaping which will be designed into a passive park area.
- Finally, Parks will also implement Phase I of the **Queens East River and North Shore Greenway**. This project will implement the in-park portions along the East River portion of

the planned 10.6-mile greenway from the Queens side of the Pulaski Bridge, north to Astoria Park and east to LaGuardia Airport and the Flushing Bay Promenade. This project was supported by a \$660,000 allocation by Council Member Eric Gioia.

WETLANDS TRANSFER TASK FORCE

In addition to all these great new projects, the Wetlands Transfer Task Force, created in collaboration with the Mayor and the City Council, was charged with the task of inventorying City-owned wetlands, and reviewing the feasibility of transferring those wetlands to the jurisdiction of the Parks Department for long-term protection.

For the past year and a half, the Task Force has assessed what turned out to be more than 2,100 city-owned wetland properties. We have been in contact with every Community District in the city and convened two public listening sessions. In addition to those sessions, the Task Force organized two other separate gatherings of City agencies and other governmental and non-governmental harbor stakeholders. And for anyone who couldn't join us in person, Parks hosted a WTTF website, where information was readily available and comments on the subject could be submitted.

We believe the Task Force has accomplished a great number of its objectives in the relatively short time period allotted for its work and has gone a long way to preserve and protect our naturally-occurring wetlands across our five boroughs.

It still remains for the WTTF to report to the Speaker and Mayor on its work. In consultation with Environmental Committee Chair Gennaro and City Hall, the WTTF expects to submit its report shortly. At that point, Parks expects to work with its sister agencies to follow up the work of the Task Force as called for in PlaNYC. This will mean acquiring shorelands where feasible, and using the Task Force recommendations and updated inventory, to try to resolve other outstanding transfer issues.

CHALLENGES TO WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

Implementing many of the wonderful projects I have described does not come without challenges. The soaring cost of construction has had a significant impact on the cost of building waterfront projects.

You should also be aware that although the City and State of New York share many common goals and values when it comes to the protection of the New York Harbor as an ecological resource, some of the work we want to do may not be allowed under current DEC regulations.

DEC regulations do not recognize many recreational uses of the waterfront such as esplanades and greenways as "water dependent uses," meaning that DEC may have little flexibility in permitting new waterfront parks if they are planned to include new or reconstructed platforms, bulkheads or public access piers.

Also critical has been the determination by DEC that the shade cast by over-water structures such as piers and platforms is detrimental to the fish habitat below and therefore objectionable under state environmental regulations. This position has led to a DEC policy under which piers that collapse may not be eligible for reconstruction and degraded shorelines cannot be rebuilt or extended, even to the width of a modest pathway, except under tightly restricted circumstances and with the extraction of substantial mitigation.

Much of the City's investment in the waterfront over recent years has been anchored by plans for the creation of new parks, esplanades and greenways. This approach has been crucial to promoting environmental awareness about the waterfront and to our continued investment in its restoration. It is the City's goal to promote the redevelopment of the waterfront in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner. As we move ahead, it is crucial that we work with the State to make certain our plans promote a balanced and environmentally sound approach to waterfront development.

CONCLUSION

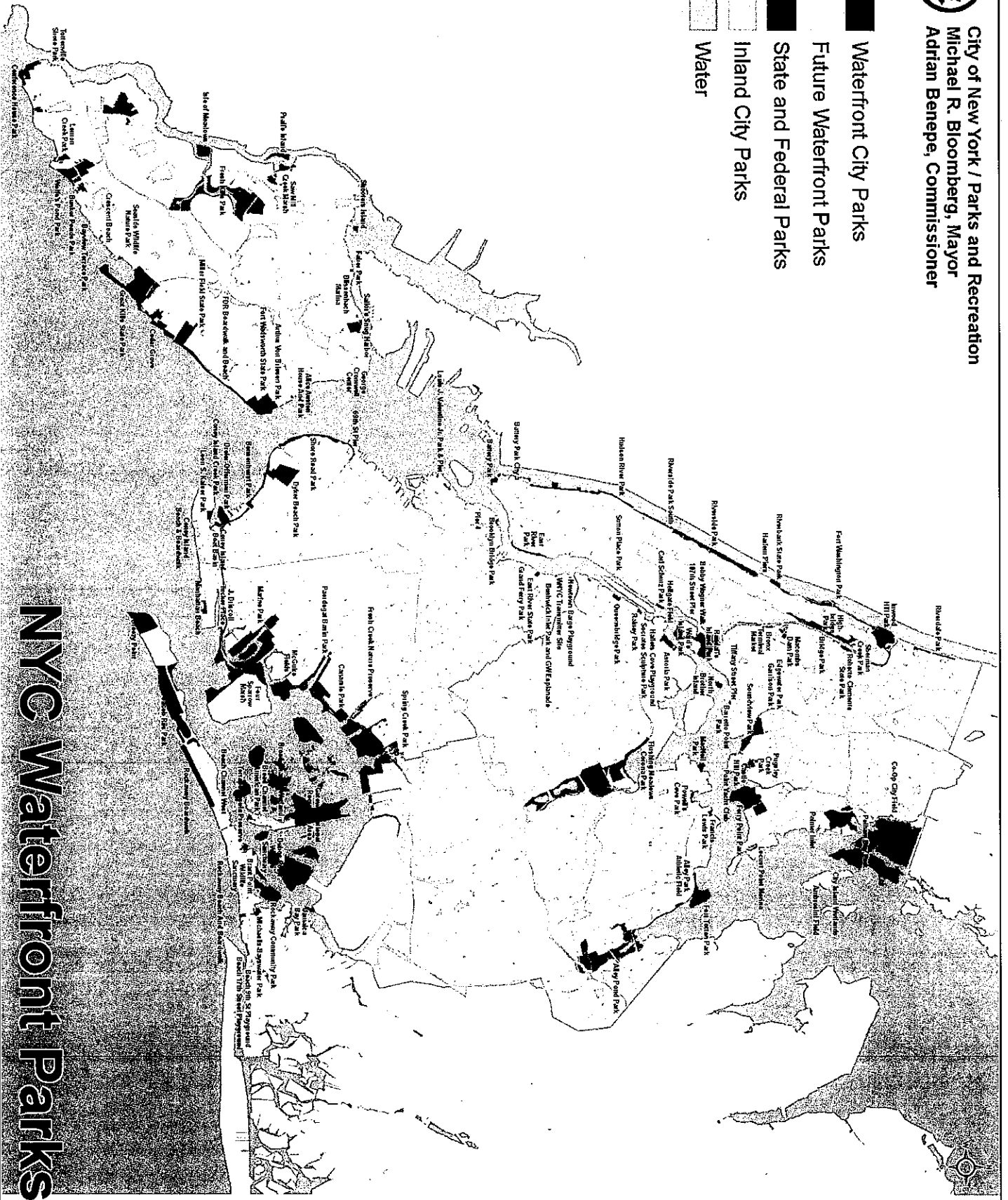
Mayor Bloomberg presented his vision for an innovative future to tackling our City's issues and we are excited to be at the forefront of that effort. The prospect of investing \$2.8 billion in capital projects over the next 10 years is exciting and daunting. Our agency and its talented staff hope to rise to the challenge of building a park system that will not only be more accessible to all New Yorkers, but will also allow us to expand the fitness, greening and community development agendas that have been our guiding principles over the last five years.

We encourage the Council's leadership in identifying new and creative sources of funding for maintaining and enhancing the city's shoreline. Parks will be working with the Mayor's Office, EDC, DOT, and the others to develop a comprehensive and consistent strategy for inspecting, maintaining, building and managing the city's waterfront.

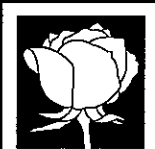


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NYC Waterfront Parks



NYRP

New York Restoration Project

*Testimony to the New York City Council Parks and Waterfronts Committees
New York Restoration Project (NYRP)*

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Good morning. I'm Amy Gavaris, Executive Vice President of Bette Midler's New York Restoration Project (NYRP). We are most grateful for the Committees' ongoing support of our work, and we welcome your interest in adapting the city's formerly industrial waterfronts into public parkland. NYRP is proud to play an important role in the transformation of our city's waterfronts. By reclaiming and restoring parks and waterfronts in northern Manhattan and the South Bronx in partnership with the New York City Council and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, NYRP has contributed to the revitalization of some of the city's most under-served neighborhoods and catalyzed the restoration of the Harlem River waterfront.

Swindler Cove Park is one of our proudest achievements and demonstrates how the public and private sectors can effectively work together to revitalize and develop parkland for the benefit of all New Yorkers. From 1996 - 1999, we removed tens of thousands of tons of garbage, construction debris, and sunken boats along the Harlem River. Then, we partnered with the State of New York—which invested \$8.9 million in the project—to transform the land we reclaimed into a beautiful riverfront park. In 2006 and with support from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, NYRP reclaimed an additional 600 linear feet of shoreline along Sherman Creek and connected the inlet to Swindler Cove Park and the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway by creating a pedestrian mulch trail. The project was completed this spring and now benefits over 210,000 Washington Heights and Inwood residents who can for the first time in decades access and enjoy this scenic stretch of Harlem River waterfront.

In 2003, NYRP looked across the Harlem River to the South Bronx shoreline and saw our next challenge. In partnership with City and State agencies and local community groups, we are restoring waterfront access and developing public open spaces in Roberto Clemente State Park and in Bridge Park, formerly undeveloped City parkland immediately to the south. NYRP has committed significant resources to trash collection, native plant restoration, and waterfront access projects in these parks and with the Department of Parks & Recreation was awarded a \$350,000 grant for development of public open space at Bridge Park.

Earlier this year, NYRP began forming a coalition to develop a master plan for the Harlem River. This coalition, led by NYRP, will propose a transformation of the region through waterfront redevelopment projects in both upper Manhattan and South Bronx. We hope that with significant improvements to the shoreline and the addition of public amenities, the Harlem River will become an educational and recreational destination, serve as a lynchpin linking waterfront open spaces on both sides of the river, and ensure that everyone—especially those living in impoverished and densely populated urban areas—has access to nature and to vibrant and well-designed open spaces.

We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Parks and Waterfronts Committees on your future initiatives, especially those that will improve the beauty and accessibility of waterfronts within the distressed northern Manhattan and South Bronx communities we serve.

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Statement of Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney
at the New York City Council Parks & Recreation and Waterfronts Joint Hearing
From Industrial Uses to Parkland: Adapting the Waterfront
June 14, 2007

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns about the potential redevelopment of industrial space into parkland in New York City. As you know, there are two major industrial sites in my district, the 14th Congressional district, along Manhattan's east side which could be used to create valuable park space and access to the waterfront. Specifically, the redevelopment of the former Con Edison power plant sites will be the most significant change to the East Side landscape in generations. This should be viewed as an extraordinary opportunity to create something wonderful in an area that has been cut off from the public eye for generations. I am working to ensure that this land will be developed responsibly, with proper attention devoted to creating park space and waterfront access for residents and the East Midtown Community. The East Midtown community already ranks among the last in the city in terms of parks and open space. I, along with, community leaders and fellow local elected officials have been searching tirelessly for ways to create waterfront access and additional park space in this community. This goal is one step closer to being accomplished because of the City's commitment to exploring the possibility of retaining another former industrial space, the Outerboard Detour Roadway (ODR), as a waterfront esplanade.

The ODR is a three lane, partially enclosed roadway located along the FDR, over the East River, stretching from 54th Street to 63rd Street. The Roadway was constructed by the New York State Department of Transportation for temporary use during the reconstruction of the FDR and was recently dismantled. Last July, I initiated one of the first open discussions about the possibility of using the temporary detour route as an esplanade in a community meeting I held in my District office with local elected officials, representatives from the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, the New York City Economic Development Corporation, New York State Department of Transportation, the Army Corps of Engineers, the United States Coast Guard and members of Manhattan Community Boards #6 and #8. Since that July meeting, the City has been holding a series of discussions aimed at determining the feasibility and cost of converting the ODR into a greenway that would help complete the "emerald necklace" of open waterfront space encircling the island of Manhattan. Currently, the City has been meeting with the State and with the Federal agencies whose approval is needed to create the greenway. The City has also decided to absorb the cost of removing the caissons if it is determined that the project is unable to be completed.

I am fully committed to obtaining federal funds for this project. Not only is this an incredible opportunity to use a manmade structure to provide park space and waterfront access, but the creation of an esplanade could serve as a catalyst for building other planned or proposed east side waterfront access initiatives. I applaud the City and the State for the steps they have taken to preserve the ODR and explore the possibility of turning this structure into an esplanade that will have an immeasurable benefit to the East Side community. This is a golden opportunity for all levels of government to work together to create new park space on the East side.



New York City Council

Committee on Parks and Recreation and Committee on Waterfronts

"From Industrial Uses to Parkland: Adapting the Waterfront"

June 14, 2007

My name is Sheelah Feinberg and I am the Director of Government and Community Relations at New Yorkers for Parks - the only independent watchdog for all the City's parks, beaches and playgrounds. For nearly 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks has worked to ensure greener, safer, cleaner parks for all New Yorkers.

New Yorkers for Parks believes in the importance of promoting and preserving our coastal resources as public open space. Through our Community Design program, New Yorkers for Parks explores land-use opportunities with community groups working to create needed recreational access along our city's waterways. The program has created designs for waterfront parks in industrial areas across the city.

Aside from the vital provision of waterfront accessibility, the conversion of industrial land to parkland offers to the public enhanced park and recreation opportunities, including water-dependent recreation such as piers and boat launches and the protection of scenic resources. However, it is essential that sufficient maintenance funding is provided for these waterfront parks as they cost significantly more to maintain due to the large expense of replacing and repairing bulkheads, pilings and docking.

Queens: Reclaiming the Vernon Boulevard Waterfront at Newtown Creek

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.

Conceptual designs for the Vernon Boulevard waterfront were created through open dialogue with the community. The designs introduce valuable open space that coexists with current industrial activity, provide waterfront access, include the management of storm-water runoff and create link to proposed Greenways. They represent 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.

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.

As the City embarks on PlaNYC 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.

Bronx: Harlem River Waterfront

During the summer of 2005, New Yorkers for Parks' Community Design worked with The Friends of Brook Park and south Bronx residents to create conceptual designs and advocate for a piece of open space on the Harlem River in Mott Haven, Bronx. This project focused on creating a waterfront park for the community of over 200,000 people who have virtually no official waterfront access.

Driven by conceptual designs created by New Yorkers for Parks, with the Friends of Brook Park and residents of the Mott Haven / Port Morris neighborhoods the following grants have been awarded to further the project:

- \$100,000 from New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) that will go toward creating upland links to the waterfront with street-tree plantings in the Mott Haven / Port Morris neighborhoods.
- \$100,000 from the Governor through the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) will go toward furthering our conceptual plans for a waterfront park in Port Morris, Bronx, on the Harlem River.

In addition, The Department of City Planning, Transportation Division included this project in their recommendations for improved bicycle and pedestrian access to the Harlem River waterfront.

As a result of these milestones, New York Restoration Project recently agreed to lease the Harlem River Waterfront Park site from the New York State Department of Transportation into their Land Trust from the. To further this process, we are working with State Senator Serrano, other elected officials and agencies to secure an agreement for public use of the site.

Staten Island: Bard Avenue Street-End Park

This summer, New Yorkers for Parks is partnered with The North Shore Waterfront Conservancy (NSWC), members of the Livingston Civic Association and local fisherman to create conceptual plans for the street-end of Bard Avenue on the north shore of Staten Island. As part of the NSWC's Blue Street Program, we are working to create plans that will allow for safe, clean, waterfront access point for the public and:

- Promote water-dependent recreation in this significant maritime area
- Provide public access along NYC's coastal waters
- Protect scenic resources that contribute to the visual quality of the waterfront
- Develop street-end access compatible with the surrounding area

- Create amenities such as pier and passive park space with a small boat launch

These waterfront projects will not only to create waterfront access, but also extend the water-based transportation links to other boroughs and allow community residents access to a variety of recreational opportunities.