

In The News: Finally! The Brooklyn Bridge Park plan

by {ga=aschwartz}

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The draft master plan to remake the downtown Brooklyn waterfront into a park will be unveiled for public comment April 30 and May 1. The plan was created through a series of public workshops held this past fall and winter. Community residents and businesses, elected officials, and neighborhood groups met with park planners to discuss what they did and did not want in the proposed Brooklyn Bridge Park.

"This is the only planning process we know of where the community has been involved on this scale from the beginning," said Lee Silberstein, the spokesman for the Brooklyn Bridge Park Development Corporation (BBPDC), the non-profit local development corporation charged with planning the park.

For much of the last two decades, Brooklyn community groups and elected officials have been building support for a grand waterfront park with views of the harbor, bridges, and the Manhattan skyline. In 1998, the state funded the BBPDC to develop a plan for the park. The proposed parkland runs 1.3 miles along the waterfront, from Atlantic Avenue to the Manhattan Bridge. It includes piers owned by the Port Authority, City parking lots, Civil War-era warehouses, and the Empire Fulton Ferry State Park.

Although there were the inevitable disagreements (which will certainly continue when the draft plan is released), in the public workshops a consensus emerged to create the park in three sections, each with a different type of use. Piers 2, 3, and 4, as well as the state park between the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges, are designated the "green heart" of the park, for open space and outdoor recreation. A "node of activity," including an indoor recreational center and possible housing, is envisioned at the Atlantic Avenue gateway to the park -- pier 5 and the land next to pier 6. Pier 1 and the adjacent land would have a concentration of commercial uses - including a proposed hotel and conference center - that are supposed to generate the \$3 to \$5 million needed to maintain the park. A center of arts and cultural activities is also planned for Pier 1 and the nearby historic warehouses.

In the last set of workshops held in late February, the design team presented drawings and models of several alternatives. Throughout the process, the most contentious issues were how to provide access to the park without bringing too much car and pedestrian traffic to any one neighborhood, and the nature of the development proposed for the park. The community will have a chance to review the draft master plan at the workshops on April 30 and May 1.

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Waterfront Shorts

Empire Fulton Ferry State Park - Community Board 2 recently approved a new design for repairing the bulkhead at Empire Fulton Ferry State Park. Community members and the groups working on the Brooklyn Bridge Park objected to the original design, and collaborated with the state to develop a more natural, landscaped solution. At the same meeting, the State presented a proposal for creating a grassy marsh in a cove north of the bulkhead. The marsh plan will be addressed in the overall Brooklyn Bridge Park planning process.

Port Authority Piers - The Port Authority took an important step that brings the Brooklyn Bridge Park closer to reality. On February 10, the Port Authority signed an agreement to sell piers 1-5 to the BBPDC as public parkland. It also agreed to continue a \$5 million project to repair the piers. At the same time, the state announced it was committing more than \$1 million for the development and upkeep of Brooklyn waterfront parks, with \$500,000 earmarked for the Brooklyn Bridge Park.

Anne Sounds Off:

People don't usually mention New York City and wildlife in the same breath unless they're thinking: rats and pigeons. Of course, the City does have wildlife, even rare species like the peregrine falcon that nests in Manhattan's concrete canyons. Wild plants and birds, fish, and other animals find habitats in our parks, in wetlands, and in the harbor.

One way to help keep wildlife in the City is make a contribution on the New York State income tax form to Return a Gift to Wildlife. (If you're getting a refund, it's almost painless. And even \$5 contributions add up.) Last year's tax check-off gave more than \$600,000 to the state Department of Environmental Conservation's fish and wildlife program. This money helped fund a number of statewide programs, including the New York Natural Heritage Program, which tracks the location of rare and endangered wildlife and ecological communities; a revised Atlas of Breeding Birds, which will determine changes in breeding bird distribution since the landmark study of the 1980s; and the Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding Program, which responds to strandings on the shores of Long Island and in New York City's harbor.



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Anne Schwartz is a freelance writer specializing in environmental issues. Previously, she was the editor of the Audubon Activist, a news journal for environmental action published by the National Audubon Society, and an editor at The New York Botanical Garden.