

Environment

Waterfront Park Design Forum

By Alison Ferenbach

Friends of the Williamsburg Waterfront Park, Neighbors Against Garbage (NAG) and the Brooklyn Architects Collective have initiated a design contest and a series of public forums for a park to be located on the East River waterfront between North 7th and North 9th streets. Friends Group representative Cathleen Breen said, "We want to invigorate and involve the community, and not have the design of the park be determined solely by professionals. We want the design to reflect the whole community. In addition to local professional talent, we'd like to see broad based input from students, seniors, artists, volunteer gardeners and others."

A panel of community leaders and elected officials will review ideas from the public and award stipends for development of viable ideas to be submitted to the New York State Parks Department. Suggestions will be evaluated for: beauty, "green-ness," sustainability, environmental remediation capabilities, participatory nature (how the work would interact with people), and long-term maintenance. Wendy Gibson, a spokesperson for the State Parks Dept. said, "Community input is a key component of the park development and the public forums will be a wonderful vehicle for this."

Thanks in part to Assemblyman Joe Lentol and his generous \$250,000 state

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—Cathleen Breen

grant, the State Parks Dept. began cleaning up the site last month by excavating concrete encased gasoline tanks. The J.M. Kaplan Fund, Hudson River Foundation and the New York City Environmental Fund also donated to the project. The Friends Group said, "It's a great start, but quite a bit more still needs to be raised to complete the park."

Long Rocky History

Obtaining the land for a park has been a long, colorful process said Breen: The site, part of the former Brooklyn East Terminal District, an industrial shipping railyard, collapsed in the early 1980s, and was purchased by a developer, who wanted to build luxury housing, but had been opposed by the community when he ran into financial difficulties. The land was, in the meantime, leased to a garbage waste transfer station, much to the ire of community residents who formed RENEW, a predecessor to NAG, to combat the problem. When the owners of the waste transfer station were indicted on racketeering charges, the city brought in another waste transfer station operator, who was subsequently driven

out by legal challenges from NAG.

As the use of the site was disputed, the area was neglected, the shipping terminal buildings burned down, and the derelict property was repossessed by a bank and put out for bid. Rec-

ognizing that there was no government money available to build a park, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) brought in NYU, who planned to build athletic fields, but was outbid by Norman Brodsky, owner of CitiStorage. Park advocates persevered, and

after protracted negotiations that included the State, TPL, NAG, and Assemblyman Lentol in 1999/2000 Brodsky sold two of the four blocks to create a park. In September 2003, citing financial reconsiderations in a post-9/11 climate, NYU pulled out of the park development.

The Friends of the Williamsburg Waterfront see the design contest as a way to jumpstart the park's development. Breen emphasized, "We don't want this to look like just another city or state park. We want to harness the creative energy of this community." Public access to the park will be phased in during the Spring, said Breen.

For further information about upcoming design forums, please contact Friends of Williamsburg Waterfront Park through NAG at (718) 384 2248. ☛