



Urban Outdoors is the Newsletter of Neighborhood Open Space Coalition (NOSC). It is published periodically to keep New Yorkers informed of issues and information relating to their public space system. For more information about NOSC visit www.treebranch.net.

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We're Back

The old scattershot format of 5-10 loosely connected newsletter stories was not working anymore. The overall message: that government was not paying enough attention to its “common” was still true enough, but the newsletter was leaving out the details by trying to say it all in a short paragraph or two. After a hiatus to think, we are back with longer articles and shorter newsletters. We will occasionally revert back to the old format, but generally we will give each story a bit more depth and a dose of creative vision. We as always welcome your comment and story ideas. Urban Outdoors would not be possible without the great network of activists that are represented in our readership.

“Rogue” Meeting Tears into Brooklyn Bridge Park Design

At an “unauthorized” meeting, sponsored by the Atlantic Avenue Betterment Association, Fred Kent of the Project for Public Spaces laid out his opinion on what makes a “great waterfront place” and it looked nothing like the completed plans for Brooklyn Bridge Park. Using photos from other cities, he spoke of intensely used spaces with a mix of commerce and parkland, plenty of sitting room and active uses. He compared his photos with a planned barren native grassland proposed for Pier 6 off Atlantic Avenue and asked the 70 or so participants from downtown Brooklyn neighborhoods to work up ideas for the pier and the Atlantic Avenue upland based on providing “something to do”.

Contention is never far away in Brooklyn, and defenders of the current plan were in the room. They were quickly silenced by Craig Hammerman, acting in a volunteer capacity and not in his CB6 role, “We were closed out of the planning process” he said, “We are taking back our park.” In subgroup sessions, dissenters were similarly treated. Off-script ideas did not make it to paper. Perhaps this process was no more perfect than the official one that preceded it.

Nonetheless the session arrived at a long list of proposals for a more intensively used Atlantic Avenue entrance to the park. Proposals included a greenmarket, traffic calming, trolley transportation, shade and shade structures and most important, restaurants and eating places on a Pier that is to become one of the most accessible places in the hard-to-get-to park. Battle lines have now been drawn and the unanswered question is whether the manicured designs prepared for the park will “compromised” by additional input.

Gimme Shelter: Will the wrecking ball delay a Brooklyn Bridge Park

Thousands of new apartments are under construction in Downtown Brooklyn. New residential skyscrapers break the former limits of the aging Brooklyn skyline. Older office and manufacturing high rises are also going residential. In the borough with less than half the parkland per capita of any American city, the need for recreational destinations is acute, but it is feared that the partly funded development of the Borough’s iconic Brooklyn Bridge Park remains more a wish than a reality-in-progress.

It has been recently reported that the BBPark developers plan to demolish the existing pier sheds and temporarily fence off most of the planned park. Many residents in adjacent communities have awaited this park for a generation and would welcome any effort to get started, but such a radical step in a period of reduced tax receipts lead some advocates to fear additional delays in making the space useful for New Yorkers.

Perhaps last summer’s successful experiment with a floating swimming pool and temporary beach on the Brooklyn waterfront and the recent meeting at Long Island College Hospital points to a different park scenario. Before the sheds are torn down, lets consider a more piecemeal park development option, with the immediate creation of an interim pedestrian circulation system within the space (including a greenway), adaptive reuse of the pier sheds, and development of temporary uses in open spaces. Priorities can be set and the Park’s ambitious development plan can then be implemented in stages as money becomes available.

New Yorkers only need to take a free Staten Island Ferry ride to see how a Pier can be recycled as a Park Recreation Center. The Cromwell Center, just a short walk from the ferry landing, has basketball courts, a fitness room, exercise equipment and even a boxing ring; it has computer rooms, an after school program and a Senior Center. It is a loud and lively place carved out of a former ship dock. A similar place can be up and running in a small way in Brooklyn within a year and it can expand to meet the demands of its constituency before it is replaced by a new facility designed with those constituency desires in mind.

Other pier sheds can be used for small consumer and hobby trade-shows. The space can aid in creating a local sustainable economy by hosting a series of home-design shows, by showcasing solar energy and energy conservation, and by hosting special interest

exhibitions including ethnic festivals and fairs, bicycle shows, theater events, computer swap meets, “Made in Brooklyn” exhibitions, and the work of local crafts people. Markets are great people pleasers and “exhibition” markets on a pier would surely bring New Yorkers out to enjoy the fresh air and stunning skyline views offered there.

Outside the sheds, temporary landscape beds can be developed for plants that can survive in the difficult pier salt-air habitat. Those beds can be developed as an educational project for students. The student’s successes and failures can be a science experiment that will stay with them for life. It can also answer questions about what will work in the permanent park. Local artists can also be offered space in a temporary sculpture garden.

These are just a couple of ideas that can be put in place as part of an interim-use plan for Brooklyn Bridge Park. Other ideas, brought forward by mining the fertile imaginations of Brooklynites and New Yorkers might be better still. If we choose to tear everything down with no assurances of build money, it might be many years before we get to use our park. If we do the work one piece at a time, we can build our “world-class park” while we use a lively interim “people’s park”.

Some links:

(www.walkny.org) The Take a Walk, New York! program is NOSC’s citywide series of health and local tourism walks. All are welcome, and they are a great opportunity to talk to us about your open space concerns

(www.treebranch.net) Learn more about Neighborhood Open Space Coalition and its work at our website. Our listservs are places where organizations and individuals can provide or reach out for information or just look for a hand with a project. You can find Cyberpark, Cybergardens, Cyberharbor, and JamaicaBay on the listservs link on our cover page. Our website also links to our membership area where you can help us continue our service to New York. Our website links to our membership area where you can help us continue our service to New York.

(www.kaboom.org) Is your community in need of a playground? Do you know of an organization that is in need of a playground? Do you have dreams of helping design your own playground? KaBOOM! is a national nonprofit organization that envisions a great place to play within walking distance of every child in North America. The organization currently has a corporate sponsor that would like to cover the majority of the funding as well as provide volunteers to help build a playground in the NYC area. Contact Nate McMichael, at nmcmichael@kaboom.org or 202-464-6086 with any questions.

(<http://www.amny.com/news/local/am-eastside0222,0,2370773.story>) East Siders push for new waterfront park

NOTE: some links will not work in .pdf. You can use the copy and paste method or download the word file.