Dear Friends, Neighbors and Supporters of GCC,

What a year! Like all of you, this year required GCC to adapt to constantly evolving circumstances and unexpected changes to the world around us. We recognize that the year included a great amount of pain and loss for many in our community. At the same time, we remain in admiration of the resilience and perseverance of the Gowanus community, our staff and supporters from across the city in the face of challenges old and new. When we reflect on this year into the future, I am confident that we will also recall the heightened care and commitment to one another as a hallmark of 2020.

Like many of the challenges GCC has engaged in over our history, the adverse impacts on our community were felt disproportionately by communities of color. The health and economic traumas amplified by the pandemic, ongoing racial injustices, and the acute toll of climate change, all reinforced our organization’s commitment to work with our community towards a just and equitable neighborhood.

Despite the immense challenges, 2020 was a year of extraordinary adaptation and progress. Underlying the progress led by our incredible staff and Board, is the steadfast support from you, our community of supporters, volunteers, peer organizations and neighbors. We thank all of you for the numerous ways in which you stepped up to support us, whether that be through your donations, participation in our first ever virtual gala, or engaging in the various virtual or socially distanced programs. With this support, our staff has been able to find creative ways to continue advancing our mission of advocating and caring for ecologically sustainable parks and public spaces in the Gowanus lowlands, while empowering a community of stewards.

With a potential rezoning now on the horizon and the long-awaited Superfund cleanup of the canal finally underway, we recognize that our work to advocate for and empower the community to engage with these processes in an informed manner, is as critical as ever. The year ahead is sure to be another filled with challenge and change. Rest assured, we remain committed to striving for a Gowanus Canal and surrounding urban environment that is clean, resilient, diverse and alive and one that serves all who live, work and play in our special corner of the city!

Faizal Karmali
Board Chair
2020 HIGHLIGHTS

We began 2020 full of momentum - moving into an amazing storefront at the Old American Can Factory, planning a busy season of stewardship and education programs, and looking forward to deep engagement with the ongoing clean-up and planning processes. There was no need to specify “in-person”, because of course it all was.

And then everything changed.

In this crazy year of loss, loneliness and uncertainty, I have never been so grateful for our staff, board, volunteers and community. The last year called for pivoting on a massive and ongoing basis, but it also gave room for find new forms of collaboration, build partnerships across geographies, and fully appreciate when you were lucky enough to be “in-person”. Having to reimagine each of our programs forced us to really examine what, why and for whom we work, and deepened our strategic planning for impactful and equitable programs and advocacy.

As I write this, New York City is reopening, and we can all feel the pull of constant busyness that used to be status quo. Over the next year, we will be be diving back into the 24/7 city - my goal for GCC over the next year is to continue to hold space for deliberate reflection, continued adaptation, and gratitude for this place and each other.

Andrea Parker
Executive Director
We develop, facilitate, and advocate for the design of parks, public spaces, and ecosystem restoration. GCC believes that if done right, a comprehensive district-wide rezoning offers an opportunity to make progress towards a more equitable and green neighborhood. Through the Gowanus Lowlands Master Plan, Gowanus Canal Conservancy seeks to ensure the community has a key role in shaping a watershed that is accessible, active, and clean for all.

NET ZERO CSO
To ensure that new development does not further contribute to pollution, we are calling for a Net Zero CSO rezoning, with new developer requirements for storm and wastewater management, along with investment in grey and green infrastructure. We are encouraged by the City’s work to date on the 2021 Unified Stormwater Rule, which will improve citywide regulations for new development, and will be looking closely at the City’s modeling as the process moves forward.

WATERFRONT ACCESS PLAN
While a clean up of industrial waste will result in a cleaner Canal, new bulkheads and dredging and capping will eliminate most of the current intertidal zone, which currently supports habitat for mussels, crabs, fish, and shorebirds. It is critical that a Waterfront Access Plan is put in place to guide waterfront design that allows critical habitat to be rebuilt, ensures equitable access, and provides permeability to manage stormwater and buffer storms.

PARKS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT
Funding and coordination is needed to ensure that our public realm is maintained, programmed, and accessible. A Parks Improvement District should be established to coordinate maintenance across property lines. A PID would fund public space and streetscape maintenance, programming, sanitation services, capital improvements, technical assistance, and workforce development.

WORK WITH GNCJ
The City still has significant work to do to incorporate community needs into its proposal. And we need to continue to fight, as a neighborhood united, through the land use process to address the needs and priorities across the neighborhood, including the environment, public and affordable housing, industry, and the arts. We stand with our partners in the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice (GNCJ), to fight for a Gowanus that is thriving, inclusive, and resilient for all.
VOLUNTEER STEWARDSHIP

GCC empowers local stakeholders in stewardship of their local landscapes through ongoing, in-person stewardship events and opportunities. Our volunteers are essential to the work we do throughout the neighborhood.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS

230 TOTAL VOLUNTEERS
1,709 HOURS VOLUNTEERED
1,609 PLANTS INSTALLED
40 TREE GUARDS INSTALLED AND 22 TREE BEDS EXPANDED

We pivoted our 2020 public Volunteer Programs to ensure volunteer safety while addressing essential site maintenance, by increasing the frequency of events while limiting the number of volunteers at each event.

We additionally focused on supporting local residents in the Gowanus Tree Network and Public Housing Gardening programs, by distributing tools, compost, and plants, expanding tree beds and installing tree guards, and helping facilitate stewardship days. Other community volunteers had the opportunity to borrow stewardship toolkits for neighborhood maintenance.

These stewardship efforts help to reduce combined sewer overflow (CSO) and urban heat island impacts, while supporting livable and beautiful spaces for community members to enjoy.
LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

We provide, support, and advocate for sustainable public space maintenance, while also building and supporting culturally responsive, inclusive programming in the public realm.

NURSERY

The Lowlands Nursery grows native, urban-adapted plants, celebrating the local ecosystem while educating and engaging the community in environmental stewardship. These native plants are installed throughout Gowanus, and can be found at the Salt Lot, in nearby tree beds, neighborhood gardens, public housing campuses, and in the yards of community members, organizations, and schools.

Plants, soil, and compost can be purchased at the Salt Lot during plant sale events or by appointment. In 2020, a new online ordering system also allows customers to reserve items online and select a contactless pickup.

NURSERY BY THE NUMBERS

- 2,373 plants distributed
- 1,022 compost buckets distributed

Gowanus Green Team, our apprenticeship program for high school youth, took place last summer with stringent physical distancing and safety measures in place. Eight youth from Gowanus, Sunset Park, and Bedford Stuyvesant developed stewardship skills and provided horticultural maintenance in the Lowlands Nursery, rain gardens, and street trees over the course of a two month period. The program included weekly virtual sessions focused on neighborhood ecology, green infrastructure, horticultural techniques, and professional development skills.

Gowanus Green Team employs youth, primarily recruited from local NYCHA public housing, in order to better understand local environmental issues and build skills and knowledge for environmental careers.

GREEN TEAM

Community members pick up their new native plants at our Lowlands Nursery, located at the Salt Lot.

GREEN TEAM BY THE NUMBERS

- 110 hours of field work
- 8 Green Team Apprentices

Green Team Apprentice Madison pots up a "Huechera" to ensure the native plant has space to grow and thrive.

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Green Team apprentices and GCC staff pose after a day of stewardship field work at the Salt Lot.
The Urban Ecology, Gowanus Blue Schools, and Community Science education programs provide place-based educational content for use by students and teachers that equips students with skills and knowledge in order to be advocates and stewards for the local environment.

**EDUCATION PROGRAMS BY THE NUMBERS**

- **300 STUDENTS ENGAGED IN VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING**
- **16 WATERSHED/ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PARTNER TEACHERS**

Students from BCS and M.S. 447 present their green infrastructure designs at the virtual Gowanus Blue Schools Design Challenge.

**REMOTE LEARNING**

In 2020, The Urban Ecology, Gowanus Blue Schools, and Community Science education programs evolved into remote learning programs to accommodate students in grades K-12.

Elementary school students took virtual field trips to the Gowanus Canal to observe spring as it emerged, engaging with native plants and exploring wildlife habitat through interactive imagery. Middle and high school students modeled green infrastructure designs for their school campuses using 3D software, received design feedback from volunteer experts, and presented their digital designs to a jury. They also learned about the importance of water quality health and testing, and how to create and advocate for cleaner waterway standards.

Students in grades K-5 participate in remote learning lessons focusing on biodiversity in and around Gowanus.

A green infrastructure design developed for MS 447 to mitigate the impacts of Combined Sewer Overflow.

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THANK YOU!