GOWANUS LOWLANDS
A BLUEPRINT FOR NEW YORK CITY’S NEXT GREAT PARK

IMAGE: Salt Lot and 6th St. Turning Basin
GOWANUS LOWLANDS

Gowanus Lowlands envisions a network of parks and public spaces centered on the Gowanus Canal and connecting it to the surrounding watershed. The future of the Gowanus Canal is entering a critical phase, with the confluence of the Superfund cleanup, city land use studies and climate change likely to trigger significant shifts throughout the neighborhood. The Lowlands seeks to ensure the community has a key role in shaping a watershed that is accessible, active, and clean for all who live, work, and play in Gowanus. At the heart of the Gowanus Lowlands vision is a clean and thriving waterway of aquatic habitat, community activity, and bustling industry.

The canal edge will rise and fall with sloping banks, raised lookout points, and forested seating areas. Woven through this wild urban landscape will be hives of activity - performance spaces, cafes, picnic areas, boathouses, playgrounds. A system of streets, paths and bridges woven together by a coastal planting palette, site specific interpretation and industrial materials will invite people to engage with the unique history and character of the Gowanus.

An adaptive, resilient local ecosystem will take shape throughout the watershed’s network of parks and forested corridors, leveraging the city’s investment in green and grey infrastructure - green roofs, detention tanks, mitigation basins, bioswales and water treatment parks. A working landscape emerges, one that enhances access to the canal while improving water quality, building habitat for avian and aquatic species, and creating landscapes that can adapt to rising sea levels along the canal’s banks.
A CLEANER URBAN ECOSYSTEM

Gowanus was once a literal lowland – a productive tidal marshland with a deep floodplain, salt meadows and oysters the size of dinner plates. Leveraging the upcoming Superfund cleanup and DEP’s investment in green and grey infrastructure, the Lowlands includes watershed and site-scale strategies for a cleaner, more resilient urban ecosystem:

- Introducing stormwater management streets
- Restoring salt marshes in turning basins
- Building water storage and filtration gardens at street ends
- Incentivizing green roofs and constructed bird habitat
- Designing for floating and in-water aquatic habitat
- Regenerating the urban forest
- Daylighting historic creeks

FLOODING

BASEMENT CREEK
A COMMUNITY CONNECTOR

The Lowlands connects people to the canal, and supports a historic, diverse and unique mixed-use neighborhood. Streets leading to the canal are developed with a clear identity structured around the role they play in the urban network, be it a commercial corridor, a functional industrial route, or a residential street linking parks to the canal. The Lowlands improves mobility, access and wayfinding through:

- Expanding the existing bicycle network
- Connecting Brooklyn Greenway to the canal
- Enhancing emerging commercial, mixed-use and industrial corridors
- Extending east-west streets to the canal edge
- Introducing new bridges for pedestrians and cyclists
- Developing a signage and wayfinding strategy
- Developing a network of site-specific art to interpret the unique history and issues

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ACTIVE INDUSTRY

VIBRANT COMMUNITIES
A NETWORK OF PARKS

Gowanus has a strong network of parks, but many are disconnected from the canal and require improvement and renovation. The Gowanus Lowlands stitches together parks and new open space improvements, creating a network of public spaces that center on the canal. This network hosts activities and programs to invite and engage the neighborhood. The park network is composed of:

- Existing parks
- Greened corridors
- Esplanades and supplemental public access areas created through waterfront zoning
- Streets ending at the canal
- Sites over DEP stormwater detention tanks
- Creek daylighting
- Salt marsh restoration in turning basins and along edges
A WILD URBAN WATERWAY

A walk within the Lowlands immerses one in the powerful ecology of this tidal estuary. Streets dead-end at the canal, creating space for filtration gardens, get-downs, and boat launches. Street ends connect to a coordinated network of walking paths that slope up and down along the water’s edge. As the canal is remediataed, edge designs adapt to address site-specific conditions and uses, including water access and floodability. Wild urban waterway experiences include:

- Stepped get-downs
- Kayak and small boat access
- Raised overlook platforms
- Vegetated Banks
- Stormwater management sites
- Eco-education hubs
- Aquatic restoration sites
- In-water floating walkways

GOWANUS-ADAPTED VEGETATION

RECREATIONAL CANAL USE
STREET ENDS

ENLARGED PARK STREET END
STORMWATER MANAGEMENT AND FILTRATION STREET END
OVERLOOK PLATFORM STREET END
KAYAK LAUNCH STREET END

A DYNAMIC CANAL EXPERIENCE
For more information please visit: 
www.scapestudio.com and www.gowanuscanalconservancy.org