



EYE ON NEW YORK ARCHITECTURE AND CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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West Harlem Waterfront Transformations

by Alfreda Radzicki, AIA, Co-Chair Planning & Urban Design Committee

West Harlem's waterfront is undergoing a transformation that will reconnect the entire neighborhood to the Hudson River, from 125th Street to Hamilton Heights, with new piers, parks, and public access. Two of the projects, the 125th Street Pier and "Take Me to the River," a waterfront access and economic development study between 143rd and 155th Streets, were presented to a capacity crowd at the Center for Architecture on September 27. Both projects will add recreational amenities, improve access to the waterfront, and foster economic development.



Take Me to the River Waterfront Access and Economic Development Plan, West Harlem

Donna Walcavage Landscape Architecture + Urban Design with Nautilus International Development Consulting, Inc.

Participants included: Bonnie A. Harken, AIA, President, Nautilus International Development Consulting, Inc., and chair of the American Planning Association (APA) NY Metro Chapter Waterfront Committee; Donna Walcavage, Principal, Donna Walcavage Landscape Architecture + Urban Design; Nancy Welsh, who supervises the NYC Unit for the NYS Department of State, Division of Coastal Resources; and Barbara Wilks, FAIA, ASLA, Principal, W Architecture and Landscape Architecture. Rick Muller, environmental/transportation policy analyst at the Manhattan Borough President's Office and project manager for Take Me to the River, moderated the evening program.

Welsh explained that the state agency's Coastal Management Program, Environmental Preservation Fund, provided the seed money, in partnership with local agencies, for the design work for both projects. The agency, based in Albany, disburses state-wide approximately \$10-12 million in funding annually.

Wilks presented her design for the West Harlem Waterfront Park, between 125th and 135th Streets. The project was developed for EDC with the active participation of the West Harlem community. The community started the process more than 30 years ago, and the project is now on the verge of receiving permits for construction. The site is a long narrow strip, which the plan expands by adding a diagonal pier jutting southwest into the Hudson River. The pier is broken at 125th Street to create a focus on the water and a gathering place on the upland. The south pier will be a water taxi stop; the larger northern pier will be for fishing and recreation. The plan includes lawn areas, plantings, specially designed benches, and sculptures by artist Nari Ward.

Harken and Walcavage presented the Take Me to the River plan, which was initiated by Savona Bailey-McClain, director of the West Harlem Art Fund. Bailey-McClain was successful in sponsoring state designation for the Heights Heritage Area in November 2004, the 18th such heritage area in the state, to attract tourism and funding. The Take Me to the River process is in its initial stages, seeking funding of the 10-year, three-phase, \$50.5 million project.



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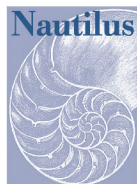
West Harlem Waterfront Transformations, continued

The 143-155 Street portion of the Hudson River waterfront is located just north of the Riverbank State Park. Access from Broadway to the waterfront is hampered by up to a 100-foot grade change, the open railroad tracks, and the Hudson River Parkway and ramps. The existing park and abutting areas suffer from erosion due to storm water runoff, compacted lawn areas, and overgrown planting.

The development plan from Broadway to the Hudson River calls for enhanced streetscape and access to the park at multiple locations. The "Gateway" at 145th Street provides opportunities for large site, mixed-use development, and access via the Riverbank State Park elevator. The "Neighborhood Center" between 146th and 152nd Streets on Broadway provides additional opportunities for redevelopment. A "Cultural Corridor" on 155th Street takes advantage of Audubon Terrace, Trinity Cemetery, and the churches to connect to the waterfront.

The park plan calls for reclaiming an area between Riverside Drive and the railroad/highway barrier, with a planted area, paths, and art called the "Enchanted Forest." A community garden, mini-golf, skate park, and basketball courts are proposed between the railroad and highway. By re-siting parking to areas below the highway, additional athletic fields can be created. Also proposed: a bicycle path, multipurpose and picnic areas, an eco/habitat area, use of temporary barges, seasonal piers for boating, and a fishing pier. Access to the park depends on cooperation with NYS and NYC DOT to improve tunnels, bridges, and stairways. Reuse of a circular overlook, historic rotunda, loggia, and oval terrace will enhance the park experience. The Q+A broached a range of topics, including access for the elderly and handicapped, the bike path, desire for a marina, billboards on private property, parking to support the playing fields, safety, and plaques for historic sites.

The event was co-sponsored by the AIA Planning & Urban Design Committee, the American Society of Landscape Architects, the West Harlem Art Fund, and the APA NY Metro Chapter Waterfront Committee, organizers of the program.



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