

East River Park + Esplanade

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East River Park Connection. Source: "Transforming the East River Waterfront" The City of New York"

East River Park is a portion of the 28 miles of waterfront real estate surrounding Manhattan that will one day be connected as a public amenity in New York City. The original East River Park was built in 1939 by Robert Moses as part of a plan to redevelop the industrial waterfront. In 2002, a conceptual study resulting from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's Vision for Lower Manhattan was funded by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. This study serves as the conceptual plan for the redevelopment process.

The location of the current phase of waterfront redevelopment consists of 57.5 acres in the Lower East Side between Battery Park and the Manhattan Bridge. A two block section from Wall Street to Maiden Lane was opened in July of 2011 as a showcase of the various design strategies that will be used throughout the entire project.



New two block section of the East River. Source: Ari Burling <http://ariburling.com>



Manhattan waterfront loop.
Source: "Transforming the East River Waterfront"



East River Park legacy:

“Rather than settle for a strip of land offering impressive views of the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges, Parks filled the area with vibrant activity—building an amphitheater, bike paths, playgrounds, sports fields and courts, gardens, children’s water play areas, and walking paths”



Quote and East River Park image source: <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/eastriverpark>

Site History

New York City had a vibrant marine culture during the nineteenth century. It was the United States’ major shipping port, boating was a popular recreational activity on the East and Hudson Rivers, and the city’s waterfronts had considerable infrastructure (docks, dockhouses, boating service facilities, etc.) supporting these functions. For nearly a century since, however, the city turned inward—both architecturally and culturally—and withdrew itself considerably from the waters that surround it.

The Lower East Side waterfront area has historically been characterized by industry, shipping, and low-income immigrant residences. Eventually, the once working waterfront fell into disuse, and under the City’s ownership, began falling to disrepair as well. The City has been actively engaged in reversing this trend in recent years, and the East River Esplanade and Piers—a \$165 million project revitalizing a once neglected two-mile stretch from the tip of Lower Manhattan to East River Park north of the Manhattan Bridge—is among the City’s current efforts. Today, the crumbling posturban industrial fabric is being transformed into a valuable public space for recreation, community, and maritime activities.

The existing esplanade has a narrow and severely compromised connection for pedestrians and cyclists, and FDR Drive physically separates Lower East Side neighborhoods from their waterfront. A primary concern of the redevelopment project is to improve these connections, both for east-west movement between neighborhoods and the waterfront, and for movement between the Battery and East River Park along the Waterfront Greenway—a 38-mile trail that will ring the entirety of Manhattan Island, connecting a system of diverse waterfront parks new, old, and redeveloped.

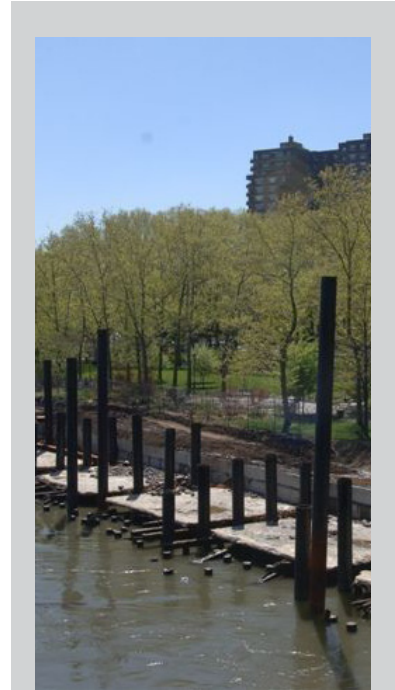


Panorama of East River Waterfront with industrial piers
Source: “Transforming the East River Waterfront” The City of New York



Map Source: City of New York

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Seawall replacement.
 Source: <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/eastriverpark>



Rendering of waterfront at night showing proposed pavillions under FDR Drive.
 Source: "Transforming the East River Waterfront" The City of New York



DESIGN TEAM

SHoP Architects
 Ken Smith Landscape
 Daniel Frankfurt and Ove
 Arup, Engineers

“The design team, led by Lower Manhattan–based SHoP Architects, worked closely with local communities from 2002 to 2006, culling feedback that helped shape the new waterfront vision”

http://www.lowermanhattan.info/future/looking_ahead/24_7/east_river.aspx

Design Team

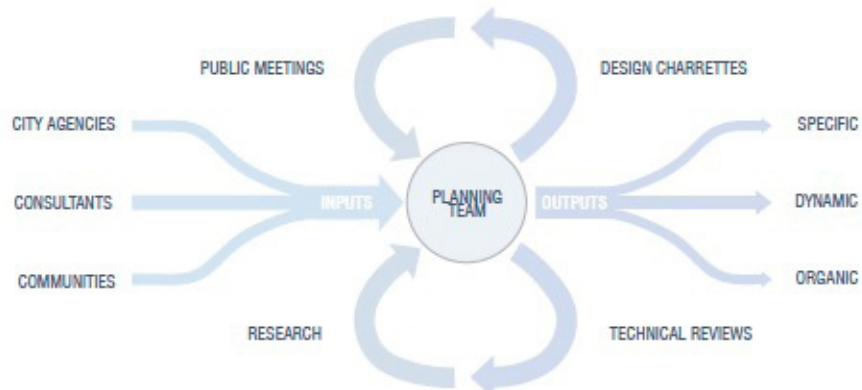
The design consultant team for the conceptual study included SHoP Architects, Ken Smith Landscape Architects, and engineers Daniel Frankfurt and Ove Arup, Associates. The client group includes the Economic Development Corporation, the Department of City Planning, the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Transportation, and the Office of Deputy Mayor for Economic Development and Rebuilding.



Source: “ Excitement Over the East River Esplanade”
 newconstructionmanhattan.com

Design Process:

- Collaborative: over 70 separate meetings have been held over the past year with the community boards, tenant associations, civic leaders, maritime experts and local elected officials.
- Review by the Public Design Commission, the State Historic Preservation Office, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Army Corps of Engineers
- Three goals of the study:
 - Create a spectacular waterfront esplanade
 - Complete the Waterfront Greenway
 - Reconnect the community of Lower Manhattan to the East River Waterfront



New Collaborative Design Process
 Source: “Transforming the East River Waterfront” The City of New York

To active the public space the East River Waterfront Concept Plan focuses on the following components:

The Esplanade: The new esplanade will consist of a recreation zone along the water’s edge with seating and plantings, pavilions under the FDR Drive to support outdoor activities, and a bikeway along South Street that ties into the Manhattan Greenway. A system of consistent paving, seating, railings, and lighting will be used throughout. Completed 2010, open to the public from 6:00 AM to midnight

Pavilions and “get-downs”: New, proposed pavilions will help reconnect the city to the river’s edge, creating concentrated areas for recreation where it is most appropriate. At Peck Slip and Rutgers Slip, the new esplanade design will mark historic locations by carving steps into the bulkhead line -- creating means to “get down” to the water.

Archipelago: In order to provide a continuous greenway between Battery Park and the new East River Waterfront, the path between the Battery Maritime Building and Old Slip will be extended over the existing shoreline, creating a walkway out over the water with a singular view back at the city.

Pier 15: The proposed pier will lift its primary recreation area to a second tier, offering new and intimate views of the tall, historic ships that could be docked in this location.

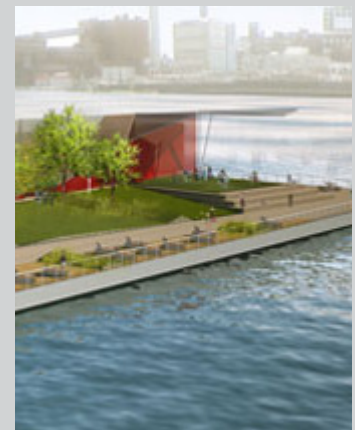
Pier 35: This large pier will be opened to the public with a second tier that will function like an amphitheater for outward viewing towards the city, the waterfront, Governor’s Island, and Brooklyn.

Sustainability: In keeping with the City’s PlaNYC initiatives, the East River Waterfront project will seek LEED certification for its pavilions and park uses. Plans aim to reduce energy demand and consumption, conserve natural resources, improve air quality, and catch and reuse rainwater water.

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Pier 15



Pier 35



Esplanade seating + native species planters



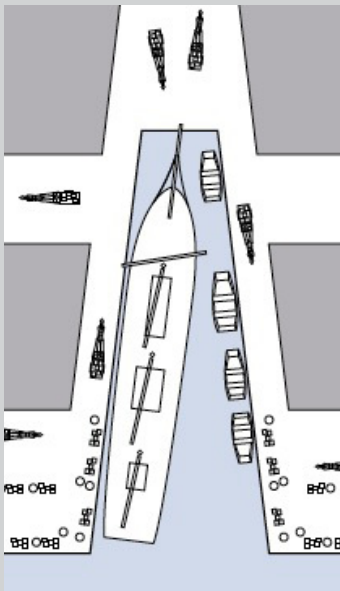
Source: “Transforming the East River Waterfront” The City of New York



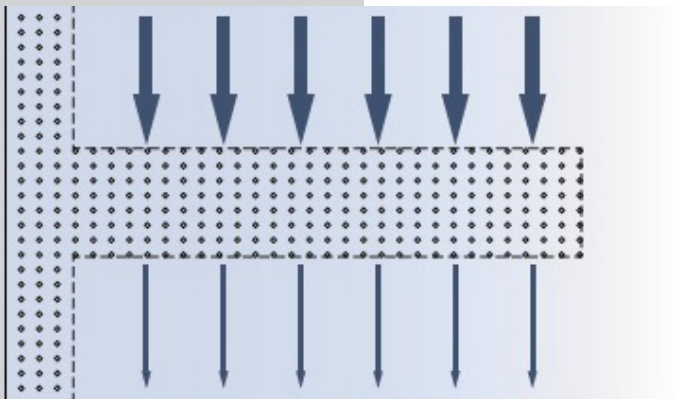
East River Waterfront

Design Strategies

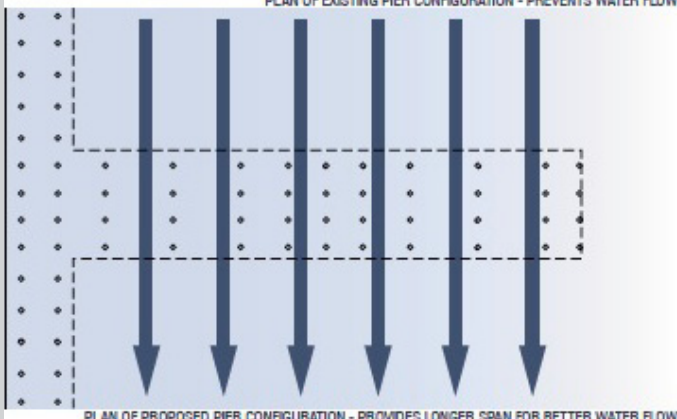
- Identification and engagement of urban linkage opportunities
- Activation piers with new destinations
- Improvement pedestrian and bike access
- Connecting the waterfront with the city
- Utilization of native landscaping
- Creation of draws for locals and visitors with seating, activities and destinations
- Breaking down the barrier of FDR Drive between Manhattan and waterfront through activation of zone below elevated road
- Utilization of slips to creat cross grain connection
- Restore ecological systems below piers



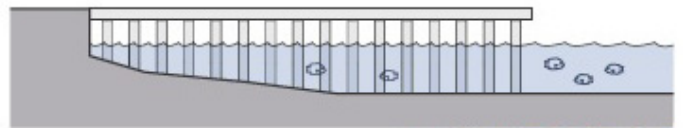
Redesign historic slips



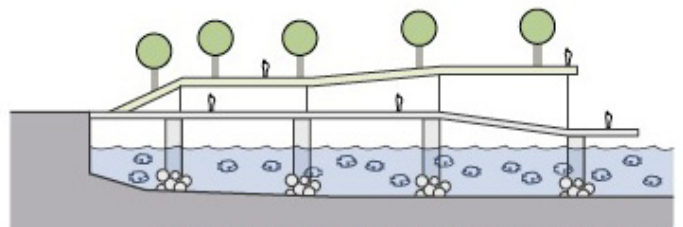
PLAN OF EXISTING PIER CONFIGURATION - PREVENTS WATER FLOW



PLAN OF PROPOSED PIER CONFIGURATION - PROVIDES LONGER SPAN FOR BETTER WATER FLOW



EXISTING PIER CONFIGURATION - ELEVATION



NEW PIER CONFIGURATION - ELEVATION OF LONGER SPAN WITH VIENDEEL TRUSS

1. WILL IMPROVE HABITAT WITH BETTER WATER FLOW
2. WILL IMPROVE HABITAT GROWTH BY ATTACHING REEF BALLS TO PIER PILE

Rendering of pier reconfiguration to restore ecological environment along the seawall.

Source: "Transforming the East River Waterfront" The City of New York



East River Park + Esplanade

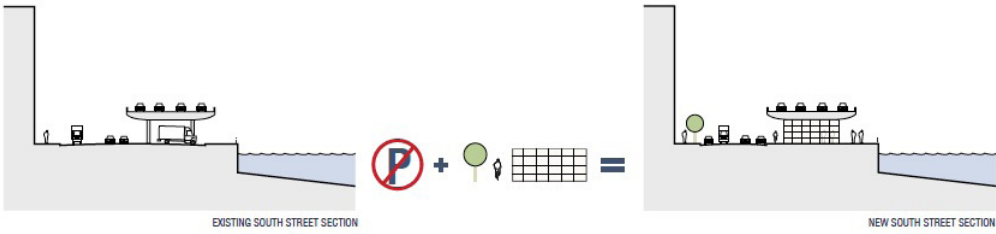


Trellises

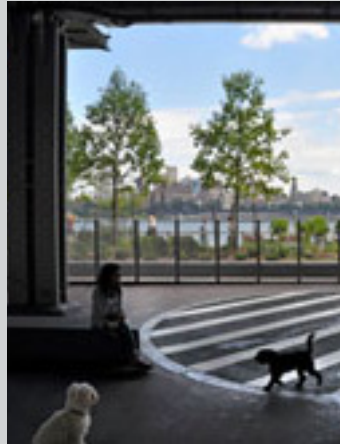
The area below FDR Drive, historically a barrier to the water, will have pavillions below to activate the urban space. Source: Robert Garcia, www.flickr.com



Seating variety



Diagrams and rendering of activating FDR Drive
 Source: "Transforming the East River Waterfront" The City of New York



Dog park below FDR Drive



Lessons Learned

Without having personally experienced the East River Park and Esplanade in New York City, our analysis relied on research, digital imagery and reviews found online.

While the project sounds like an exciting and valuable effort, we have some concerns about the human scale viability of some of the proposed designs. Based on the concept renderings, we are uncertain whether the larger design moves will actually respond to human activity and needs. The renderings seem to reflect spaces with very limited character, overscaled buildings and spaces which rely on illogical entourage to make the space seem vibrant (see example below).

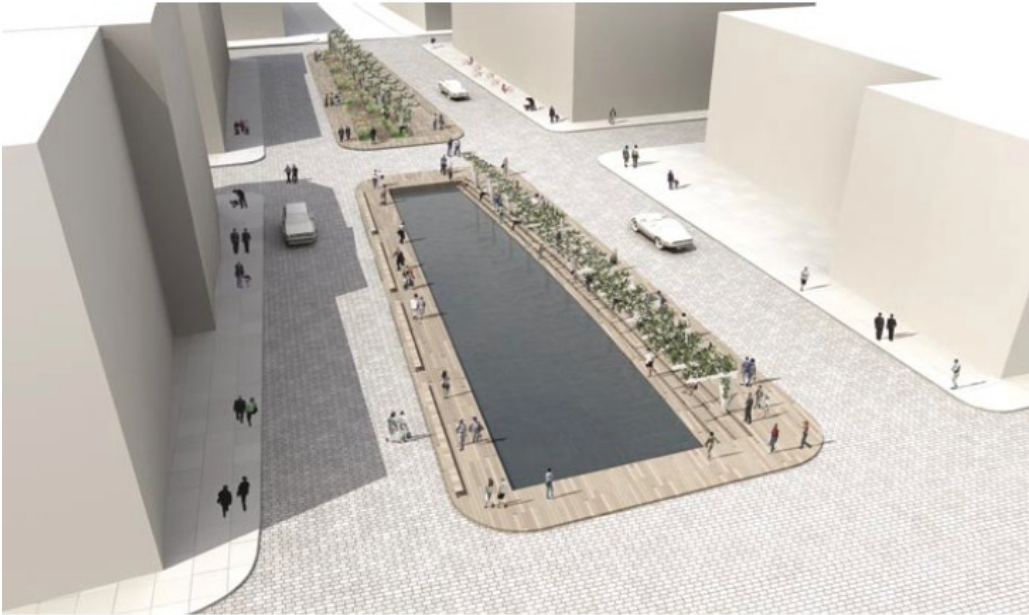
However, based on limited reviews that we found online, it seems the existing waterfront park is well loved by the city and the initial two block build out of the design has been well received. There has been some criticism of the lack of access to the water, particularly for boats.

The project has many parallels with the Seattle waterfront redesign. There is a major transportation corridor creating a barrier between downtown and the waterfront. Interestingly, the City of New York has chosen to leave the roadway in place and rely on design innovation to activate the space around it. There are also ecological restoration efforts relating to the piers and seawall that may be relevant for consideration on Seattle's waterfront.



Rendering of proposed waterfront buildings for South Seaport at Pier 17
Source: "Transforming the East River Waterfront" The City of New York

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Rendering of proposed slips connecting city to waterfront
Source: "Transforming the East River Waterfront" The City of New York



Rendering of proposed waterfront buildings for South Seaport at Pier 17
Source: SHoP Architects

User Reviews:

"Flanked by a looming housing project and the clogged FDR Dr on one side and the less-than-pure East River on the other, you might wonder what the draw is here. But take one visit – especially if it's during spring or summer – and you'll understand. In addition to the great ballparks, running and biking paths, 5000-seat amphitheater for concerts and expansive patches of green, it's got cool, natural breezes and stunning views of the Williamsburg, Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges. A drawn-out renovation brought great nighttime lighting and surprisingly clean bathrooms to the mix. It's a cool spot for a picnic or a morning run."
-Lonely Planet

"The newly-opened section looks a lot like it was designed by the same people who designed the High Line"
-Althea A, Staten Island, yelp.com

Julie Nadel, chair of the waterfront committee and a member of the Hudson River Park, called the designs more of the same. "They forgot to do the part where the boats dock," she told AN. "It's a very good, fanciful design, but it doesn't do what it was asked to do, which is provide a place to dock a boat. Until it does, the plan is a failure."
<http://archpaper.com/news/articles.asp?id=206>

Resources

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