

## FOREWORD

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UPROSE staff and Youth Justice members facilitated community participation, contributed ideas and insights, and shared the greenway plan with the larger community.

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Pratt Center staff who contributed to the development of the Sunset Park Greenway Plan and this report include Joan Byron, Justin Kray, Lori Mason, and Rachana Sheth. Paula Crespo managed the project and is the primary author of this report.



Members of UPROSE's Youth Justice program participating in a Greenway planning workshop.

## INTRODUCTION

The United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park (UPROSE)-with the support of the office of the Brooklyn Borough President and the New York State Department of State-conducted a community-led process to develop this conceptual plan for a Sunset Park Greenway. The proposed greenway will be an important link in an expanding citywide system of pathways for walking and cycling, intended to create a network of safe spaces for transportation and recreation, connecting communities, parks, and waterfronts, and creating new public spaces in dense and growing neighborhoods.

While some parts of New York City boast long-established greenways, such as the Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway malls, and the Shore Parkway walking and bike path, others, including Sunset Park, are cut off from their waterfronts, choked with car and truck traffic, and deficient in open space. The Sunset Park Greenway will thus not only serve as a link in an evolving citywide network, but also as an open space resource for residents and workers who now endure some of the city's worst environmental conditions.

In contrast to communities whose waterfronts are being redeveloped for luxury residential and commercial uses, Sunset Park is home to about 9,000 households living below the poverty line and also to an active maritime and industrial sector. It is also the host to much of the noxious infrastructure that sustains New York's economy, including power plants, waste transfer stations, and several of the region's most heavily-traveled highways and truck routes. Fewer than 20% of Sunset Park's families own cars; the overwhelming majority walk and use public transit, so the need to create safe streets and sidewalks is urgent.

With only 0.75 acres of parkland per thousand residents, Sunset Park falls far below even New York City's planning goal of 2.5 acres per thousand. A greenway network offers the potential to address needs for safe and healthy mobility, sustainable transportation, and green space to mitigate the air and microclimate impacts of surrounding land uses. But it also presents many challenges, from the practical problems of design, implementation, and maintenance, to the overarching concerns of environmental and social justice.

This conceptual plan attempts to define key issues and challenges, propose a route system and a set of street design alternatives, and identify key strategies, partnerships, and priorities for the implementation of a Sunset Park Greenway network.

As part of the process of preparing this plan, UPROSE engaged local residents in a series of planning workshops held at schools, senior centers, and community centers. Drawn from Sunset Park's diverse ethnic populations, participants (particularly young people and seniors, two of the groups with the greatest stake in creating safe outdoor space) assessed the area's physical opportunities and constraints, considered examples of street reclamation from other cities and countries, and identified priority streets for consideration. This plan represents the sustained efforts of community stakeholders to articulate a vision for a greenway that will meet the needs of a unique community, and it testifies to their commitment to making that vision a reality.



Fifth Avenue, one of Sunset Park's liveliest commercial districts.



Members of UPROSE's Youth Justice program at a greenway planning charrette.

The following section describes the key principles for developing a community-based greenway in Sunset Park. They are a strong reflection of the values that form the basis of UPROSE's work in community development. This report represents a conceptual, pre-design plan for a greenway in Sunset Park and outlines the principles upon which its design and implementation should be based.

# PLANNING PRINCIPLES

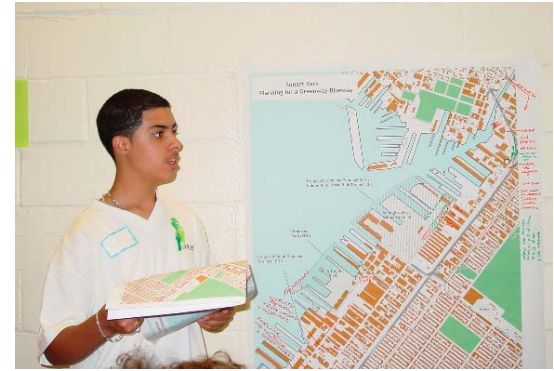
- Fostering Community-Based Participation
- Creating Needed Open Space
- Connecting the Upland Community and its Waterfront
- The Greenway and Gentrification
- Greenway Management: Keeping the Public in Public Space
- Greenway and Industry: Planning for a Mixed Use Waterfront
- Culturally Appropriate Design

## FOSTERING COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATION

A key principle of the planning process for the Sunset Park Greenway is community-based participation. UPROSE, a community-based organization which has been in existence in Sunset Park for over 40 years, led the process and brought the neighborhood's diverse interests to the table. UPROSE reached out to other community-based organizations, churches, schools, and business owners in an attempt to ensure that local voices would be heard in the Greenway planning process. UPROSE and Pratt Center staff conducted workshops on location at various community organizations and schools to educate the community about greenways and their benefits. In addition, two design charrettes were held at UPROSE to garner community feedback on preliminary design and conceptual plans. Finally, a short survey was circulated among community members as another method for getting local input into the planning process. (Further descriptions of these information-gathering efforts are presented in the appendix.)



Members of UPROSE's Youth Justice program leading small groups at a greenway planning charrette.



A Member of UPROSE's Youth Justice program presenting findings from field research.



Members from the community and UPROSE's Youth Justice program walk along the Sunset Park waterfront as part of a greenway planning charrette.

## CREATING NEEDED OPEN SPACE

The future Sunset Park Greenway is an important link in the larger Brooklyn greenway network that will connect the long-established Shore Road Greenway with the proposed Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway. The result will be a greenway route that runs continuously from the community of Greenpoint on Newtown Creek to the Rockaways on Jamaica Bay. While this will be a major step towards building a more sustainable city that combines open space opportunities with emission-free transportation modes, the Sunset Park Greenway is even more significant as an opportunity to address longstanding issues of environmental justice in a neighborhood that has long borne a disproportionate share of environmental burdens. Sunset Park is plagued by heavy truck traffic, numerous waste transfer stations, a power plant, and other noxious infrastructure; its residents also suffer from a critical lack of park space, even by New York City standards. Therefore, the Greenway will not merely be a pathway to encourage activities such as walking, cycling, and rollerblading; it will also create important new open space for the local community to enjoy.



Sunset Park's densely built residential and industrial fabric is now unrelieved by green open space for active or passive recreation.



Fences block people off from the Sunset Park waterfront in many places.

## CONNECTING THE UPLAND COMMUNITY AND ITS WATERFRONT

The community of Sunset Park is visually and physically cut off from its waterfront by the elevated Gowanus Expressway and the busy thoroughfares of Third and Fourth Avenues. The waterfront is primarily occupied by industrial and commercial uses and has historically been largely inaccessible to the public. The 58th Street Pier is currently the only legal access community residents and workers have to the waterfront, and it mainly serves as a parking lot for commuter ferry service to Manhattan during the week. Even so, the pier is well-used for sitting, strolling, and fishing during off-hours and weekends.

The New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC) is developing a new waterfront park between 43rd and 51st Streets on the former Bush Terminal Piers 6-12. EDC projects that city, state, and federal funding will enable construction of the park to start in 2008. This will create a unique new resource for active and passive recreation, but the park's ability to meet the needs of Sunset Park's residents and workers will be highly dependent on the existence of safe and usable pedestrian routes connecting the new park to the upland community. This conceptual plan gives equal emphasis to the proposed waterfront route, and to the recommendation to create "connector" streets by implementing physical design interventions such as on a set of east-west streets to make them safer and inviting travel paths for pedestrians and bikers. Without such an approach, people in the residential upland neighborhoods will continue to be denied access to the waterfront by physical constraints, and the waterfront greenway route will not achieve its goal of meeting the needs of the local community.



The elevated Gowanus Expressway over Third Avenue is a major visual, physical and psychological obstacle to people circulating freely around the community of Sunset Park.



Looking across Third Avenue lies the upland residential area of Sunset Park.

## THE GREENWAY AND GENTRIFICATION

While rising real estate values have been leveraged to create new parks in more affluent neighborhoods, long-time residents of low-income communities like Sunset Park are already facing rising rents and displacement pressure but have not experienced the quality of life benefits that a hot real estate market can bring about. UPROSE views the Sunset Park greenway as an example of the public sector's affirmative responsibility to level the playing field by more equitably distributing public amenities throughout the city's various communities.

Still, the relationship between a community amenity such as a greenway and gentrification is complex. Most new people who move into a low-income neighborhood do so because of market pressure, not because of the presence of new amenities (e.g., parks, stores, etc.). In other words, the real estate market is not waiting for amenities to be in place before entering communities like Sunset Park. Instead, amenities tend to follow the arrival of a critical mass of affluent newcomers to a neighborhood; those newcomers may become the most vocal advocates for greenways and other improvements that long-time residents were unable to win. As mentioned above, residential gentrification is already at play in Sunset Park and threatens to be far advanced by the time the Greenway is constructed.

But while greenways alone don't cause gentrification, they can accelerate it by making a neighborhood with relatively affordable housing prices even more attractive to newcomers. Therefore, it is important to link greenway planning with other policy interventions, including the creation of affordable housing and measures to protect the tenure of low-income residents. UPROSE is in the process of developing recommendations for measures to ensure that the low-income residents who are now struggling to create the Greenway can remain in place to enjoy its benefits.



Renovation of Sunset Park's older buildings is a sign of gentrification.



New residential construction: this example on a small infill lot on Second Avenue signifies the area's strong housing market.

## GREENWAY MANAGEMENT: KEEPING THE PUBLIC IN PUBLIC SPACE

In other neighborhoods where the increased land value created by rezoning and public infrastructure investment has been tapped directly to fund the building and operation of new open spaces, responsibility for the ongoing management of those spaces is often given to business improvement districts, conservancies, and other forms of public-private partnerships who are perceived as able to bring private resources to supplement the operating budgets of the public agencies (particularly the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.) But relying on such a model could be problematic in a community such as Sunset Park. The quasi-privatized model's dependence on major new private development and increased property values validate an agenda of gentrification, which would threaten the neighborhood's viability as a maritime and industrial enclave, as well as the relative affordability of its housing for a multi-ethnic, working class population. On the other hand, existing and future waterfront businesses will benefit from the creation of a greenway, and private contributions from them could help ensure a well-maintained public amenity.

Still, privately managed open spaces differ from parks that are truly public in ways that are often less than ideal. Space uses and programming decisions are driven by the need to maximize revenue, operating hours are often shorter than city parks, spaces may be maintained by workers earning less than public employees doing comparable work, and policing may target young people and other 'undesirable' users. These and other characteristics generally make these places feel more private than public and tend to exclude the residents—especially young people—who are most in need of the new open space.

Thus, any plan to vest responsibility for the Sunset Park Greenway's management with a new or existing private entity would need to structure a partnership that would give the community a real voice in how the Greenway is operated, as well as holding public agencies responsible for providing basic public services.



Hudson River Park

## GREENWAY AND INDUSTRY: PLANNING FOR A MIXED USE WATERFRONT

While greenways in some neighborhoods are intended to support (and are made possible by) the transformation of industrial areas to residential, Sunset Park remains a vital space for manufacturing and maritime businesses. UPROSE sees the Greenway as part of a strategy to enable residents and industry to co-exist. Several key waterfront businesses have expressed willingness to provide space for a right-of-way along their properties, where it will be an amenity for their employees. There are several special benefits that the Greenway will create for the waterfront's industrial community. By attracting people to the waterfront, the Greenway will increase security in an area that is now almost deserted during evening hours and on weekends. Also, besides creating an alternative means for getting to work (on foot, by bike), the Greenway will enable local workers to access the waterfront. Workers will be able to enjoy lunch outside in newly created green space, particularly the waterfront

park that is being planned for the Bush Terminal piers. Finally, by encouraging non-vehicular modes of transportation, the Greenway will reduce the volume of car traffic in the waterfront area.

Developing a street design vocabulary for an industrial neighborhood that will reinforce rather than undermine the manufacturing sector—and that can stand up to heavy use by trucks—is another special challenge of planning for the Greenway. However, the design and implementation of the Greenway cannot by themselves prevent commercial (or residential) displacement; land use policies that protect manufacturing must be maintained and enforced. The designation of Sunset Park as one of New York City's Industrial Business Zones (IBZ) at present protects industry and prevents conversion to residential or commercial uses that are able to pay higher rents for land. Yet the identification of Sunset Park as an area with "potential" for residential development in the "leaked" document created for the city by Alex Garvin Associates highlights the need for extending the protection the IBZ offers beyond the term of the Bloomberg administration.



The waterfront greenway will exist alongside active industry. Trucks making daytime deliveries in Sunset Park's In-Place Industrial Park.

## CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE DESIGN

The physical elements that compose the Greenway (e.g., sign markers, route signs, etc.) should be designed in a way that celebrates local cultural and other values. Rather than accepting a generic design template or one used in previous greenway designs, local stakeholders should be involved in the aesthetic design process for physical greenway elements so that the final product communicates a sense of identity and ownership. Sunset Park's ethnic diversity will present a special challenge in the design of signage. We recommend that a specialist be engaged to work with community representatives to come up with a multi-lingual palette of signage for informational, directional, and interpretive signs for the Greenway. In addition, the design team should make use of the opportunity to memorialize the participatory nature of the Sunset Park Greenway design process by incorporating the names of the people and organizations who participated in the Greenway's design into elements like benches and plaques.



A mural at P.S. 24 symbolizes the neighborhood's ethnic diversity.

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE DESIGN, CONTINUED



Relatively affordable and high quality produce stores entice Sunset Park residents to cross Third Avenue under the elevated Gowanus Expressway.



Signage in six languages is a testament to Sunset Park's ethnic diversity.