

OVERVIEW

The Shoelace Park Master Plan framework builds on the early works of Bronx River Restoration, founded in 1974, and the on-going stewardship guided by its successor, the Bronx River Alliance in partnership with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. The master plan is a document that can be put into action immediately and can also be used to guide future park development over the next several decades. Funding and phasing priorities outlined in this master plan provide the necessary tools for community and government leaders to begin the next sustainable chapter in the history of the Bronx River.



The Bronx River flows south through Shoelace Park, forty-seven acres of riverine open space



Regional Locator Plan, N.T.S.

Master Plan Vision

The Shoelace Park Master Plan provides a new vision of community vitality for Bronx Community District 12 through renewed focus on the Bronx River ecology and local histories. The master plan makes structural proposals for immediate improvement of river health and puts forth guidelines to maintain its health for the long term. These actions are closely coordinated with the activity needs of the community. The end result is a revitalized park along 47 acres of riverine open space that supports ongoing river health and celebrates the unique cultures of the local community. The master plan also includes Fort Knox Park, the southern park segment, south of Gun Hill Road.

Through embracing a locally based strategy, the design seeks to create strong connections between the community and its most important natural resource, the Bronx River. The park design serves two mandates: to improve the health and functioning of the river corridor, and to create a resource for the people of the surrounding neighborhoods. The master plan will energize this critical link in the Bronx River Greenway, enhance a much-used local park, improve accessibility of programmed spaces for users, and interpret the rich history of the site.

The park plan builds on the history of the site from its early settlement by Native Americans, through its role in the Revolutionary War and the Industrial

Revolution, to the creation of the Bronx River Parkway. The plan reveals the story of the park, creating views and programs that bring the history of the site to the forefront.

The master plan also creates a rigorous framework to advance the overall river health by improving the hydrology and vegetation of the site. The plan recognizes that forty percent of the park exists within the one hundred year floodplain. Accordingly, the park must be designed to withstand periodic flooding. The master plan also acknowledges the topography of the site and makes strategic use of stormwater best management practices to reduce the stress on the river system and upland zones by decreasing inundations of poor quality stormwater, which has a negative effect both on land and the river, increasing erosion and pollution. In addition, the master plan looks at re-establishing habitats within the floodplain, using native species that are well suited to the riparian environment.

Balanced with the ecological restoration of native vegetation is the cultivation of the pastoral landscapes originally created by the Bronx River Parkway in the early twentieth century. The master plan envisions a park that is a healthy recreational and educational resource for the entire community, allowing the partners to build a broader park constituency to ensure the long-term management of the park landscapes and the Bronx River.



Unregulated development, early 20th century



Bronx River Reservation river improvements, early 20th century



Garbage in the Bronx River, c. 1970



Ecological restoration project, Spring 2007

History of Stewardship and Degradation along the Bronx River

The history of the Bronx River since European settlement began has been one of cyclical development, degradation, and renewal. Up through the 1800s, the river valley remained thickly forested and the water in the river was considered so pure that, during the 1820s and 1830s, the New York City Board of Aldermen debated ways to tap into it to supply the growing city with drinking water. However, the period from 1840 to 1970 was marked by fluctuating periods of construction, pollution, renewal and environmental degradation.

In the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century (with the creation of Bronx Park in the 1880s and the development of the Bronx River Parkway Reservation in the 1910s and 1920s), parkland was designated along the river length to reclaim the river corridor for recreation and protect it from the increasing forces of residential and industrial development. However, these gains were slowly chipped away by mid-century industrial and highway development.

By the 1970s, the river had largely become a dumping ground, which led to a groundswell of grassroots efforts in the 1970s to restore the river and open up access to its banks. By the turn of the century, the Bronx River Alliance emerged out of these efforts as a public-private organization with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation and over a hundred other government, non-profit, and business partners to reclaim the river for the long term as a resource for Bronx communities and the greater New York City region.



Refer to pages 38 and 39 for enlargement of master plan

Purpose of Master Plan

The master plan is a guidance document for Shoelace Park and Fort Knox Park, key parks in the Bronx River Greenway. It provides design principles and key information for community groups, local political leaders and design firms working at the park. As a comprehensive guide for restoration and sustainable development, the master plan addresses four key elements:

Program:

- Locates major program elements to enable greater accessibility from neighborhoods and greater pedestrian safety
- Makes recommendations to integrate program with educational goals
- Uses park features to strengthen connections with the surrounding neighborhoods

Circulation:

- Creates a circulation hierarchy that allows different park experiences
- Adopts new pathways to redefine boundaries of distinct landscape maintenance regimes
- Uses topography to best advantage
- Reduces impervious surfaces coverage

Stormwater and Floodplain Resource Management:

- Suggests types of stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) for conveyance and treatment appropriate for the park
- Provides a framework to locate BMPs within the park
- Restores riparian buffer within floodplain areas to increase infiltration and improve habitat

Vegetation Management and Restoration:

- Locates three zones of landscape treatment based on floodplain location and slope
- Provides a vegetation restoration strategy for the floodplain zone landscapes
- Advocates for an ongoing re-forestation plan for the park, while maintaining key pastoral landscapes



Planning Principles

The master plan recommendations are rooted in planning principles that relate to Ecology, History and the Community.

Ecology:

- Recognize the entire breadth of the floodplain corridor as part of the living river landscape
- Relieve the pressure on the Bronx River and upland slopes of poor quality stormwater by reducing erosion and improving stormwater management
- Create landscape and recreation opportunities that are compatible with the periodic inundation of the floodplain through new circulation and program strategies

History:

- Reveal and celebrate the rich history of the park including the 19th-century Tapestry Works at Fort Knox East
- Preserve the visual significance of the historic Bronx River Parkway and pastoral landscapes

Community:

- Enhance user safety and accessibility throughout the park
- Provide programming that is diverse and flexible to attract a wide range of users
- Create opportunities for recreational, environmental studies and outdoor education
- Involve the community in the development and implementation of this plan

Sustainable Objectives

The master plan embraces the Bronx River as the vital natural resource that defines the unique ecological qualities of the park. The preservation and restoration of ecological richness within the river corridor is essential to many of the ecological planning principles, including community goals to emphasize the role of the river in the neighborhood.

- **Protect the Bronx River and Floodplain Resources** – Enhance this landscape by moving built structures and impervious surfaces out of the floodplain to upland areas, thereby allowing for the establishment of native floodplain plant communities.
- **Manage and Improve Site Hydrology** – Provide a framework for the implementation of stormwater best management practices to effectively convey and treat stormwater runoff and enhance the Bronx River, riverine landscapes, and terraced uplands.
- **Reduce Impervious Surfaces** – Remove non-essential paved areas to allow increased groundwater recharge, improved erosion control and filtration of nutrients from stormwater before it reaches the Bronx River. Reducing impervious surfaces also lessens the urban heat island effect.
- **Maximize Vegetation Restoration** – Establish zones for planting types that respond to site conditions, including locations within the floodplain. Restore native plant communities and manage invasive species in order to improve habitat.
- **Preserve Mature Trees** – Ensure the protection of mature trees by establishing redevelopment and restoration strategies tailored to the site.
- **Focus on Long-Term Maintenance Strategies** – Selectively reduce high maintenance pastoral landscapes particularly those within the floodplain where low maintenance, diverse landscape strategies can better tolerate periodic inundation.

PROCESS

Building on the Bronx River Alliance's history of public involvement in the restoration of the river and the development of the Greenway, the Shoelace Park Master Plan deeply engaged neighboring communities and a Youth Design Team in developing a new vision for the park.



Youth Design Team makes a site visit to the park, Spring 2009

Community Outreach and Participatory Design

Community outreach began with two Youth Design Team charrettes that included middle and high school students from schools located near the park. Many of the students were also residents of the neighborhood and a number of students had conducted ecological studies of the Bronx River within Shoelace Park. The charrettes were hosted by The Learning Tree, a school within walking distance of the park.

The first youth charrette provided the foundation for upcoming design exercises and served as an introduction to the park and the overall master planning process. The Bronx River Alliance and the consultant team (from Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects) presented information to the youth. The first site visit focused on ecological concepts, landscape qualities and historic facts about the park and the river. Supporting handouts provided definitions for ecological terms and introduced the students to two standard graphic means of representation used in the planning process (plan and cross-section drawings). The facilitators utilized inquiry-based techniques to engage the students and further promote their understanding of the park and the working process of developing a master plan.

At the second Youth Design Team charrette, students went through a series of exercises to capture their ideas for the future of the park. The consultant team transcribed these plans into annotated summary plans, which were subsequently posted to the project website to encourage ongoing dialog and community input.



Plan detail from Youth Design Team charrette activity



Following the student meetings, the Bronx River Alliance and the consultant team organized two community design charrettes, both of which were held at the Bronx Community Board 12 headquarters. The project team gathered ideas for the park from community members in the first charrette. These ideas informed the subsequent development of two concept plans developed by the landscape architects that were used to solicit input at the second community design charrette held two months later. The second meeting format also included a series of "mapping" exercises, which were intended to help participants talk about master planning goals and the initial "big ideas" shown in the two concept plans.

The project team developed a website for the Shoelace Park Master Plan (www.shoelacepark.bronxriver.org) prior to the first community charrette. The site served as an online resource to further encourage student and community participation in the development of the master plan. The main vehicle for input was an online survey with fifteen questions related to how people used the park, their perceptions and program interests. One hundred and forty-five respondents were tracked on line.



Remote Control Car (RCC) track improvements coordination meeting, Summer 2009

Top Six Favorite Activities at the Park*

1. Walking	48%
2. Watching the River	32%
3. Picnic	28%
4. Biking	28%
5. Sitting	26%
6. Running	24%

*Project Website Survey Results from 09.21.2009

Other outreach initiatives included:

- Outreach committee meeting held with Bronx River Alliance staff and volunteers to discuss outreach approach
- Project notification letters sent to ten local community groups
- Surveys distributed to Community Board 12 and business owners on White Plains Road
- Media outreach conducted in advance of charrettes (a local newspaper and a local radio station provided coverage of the workshops)
- Leadership of hospital abutting the park engaged
- Meeting notices posted in park
- Notice of community design charrettes sent to property owners
- Surveys distributed in park at Bronx River Alliance recreational events
- Volunteers engaged to distribute surveys in park
- Two presentations given to local community board
- Site meetings held with members of the Remote Control Car group to discuss both short-term and long-term goals for the track