



Governors Island:

Guidelines for Parks
and Public Spaces

July 2006

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Preface

The following objectives and guidelines are intended to help ensure that as public spaces are planned, developed and opened on Governors Island, they match the special character of the Island, are of high quality, and are truly public in nature. These guidelines have been refined and illustrated in an effort to make them more useful and to help express our preferred vision of the Island's parks and public spaces.

The Alliance believes that these provisions can be met under a variety of redevelopment programs and overall design objectives. The guidelines are sufficiently flexible so as to enable the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation (GIPEC) and the National Park Service to meet our intent without sacrificing the creativity or flexibility of their respective general project plan and general management plan.

Because the future development program on the Island is unknown, we have not made any assumptions as to the use, type, or scale of the existing or new buildings on the Island. Their possible locations are shown in our diagrams only to distinguish them from our recommendations for the parks and public spaces.

We believe that a public framework of parks and public spaces can become valuable assets for private developers by providing marketable addresses and quality property frontages, and by opening up waterfront views to Building 400 and other historic buildings. Importantly this approach will allow for incremental development and change over time to meet unpredictable market requirements and unforeseeable future events.

The guidelines were developed by a team of urban designers and landscape architects with considerable experience in New York City park and public space design, including Bonnie Harken, AIA, Nautilus International Development Consulting, Inc.; Donna Walcavage, Donna Walcavage Landscape Architecture + Urban Design; Stephen Whitehouse, Starr Whitehouse Landscape Architects and Planners; as well as the following RPA and Governors Island Alliance staff: Jeff Ferzoco, Yonni Freemark, Robert Freudenberg, David Kooris, Robert Lane, and Robert Pirani. Renderings for these guidelines were prepared by Peter Roper, Portfolio. This effort was aided by comments from the members of the Governors Island Alliance advisory committee.

These guidelines build on the Briefing Book and Findings prepared by the Alliance as part of our 2004 Parks Planning Workshop. More than 200 citizens worked with professional facilitators to define the uses and activities that befit the Island's unique character and location. These documents are available at www.governorsislandalliance.org

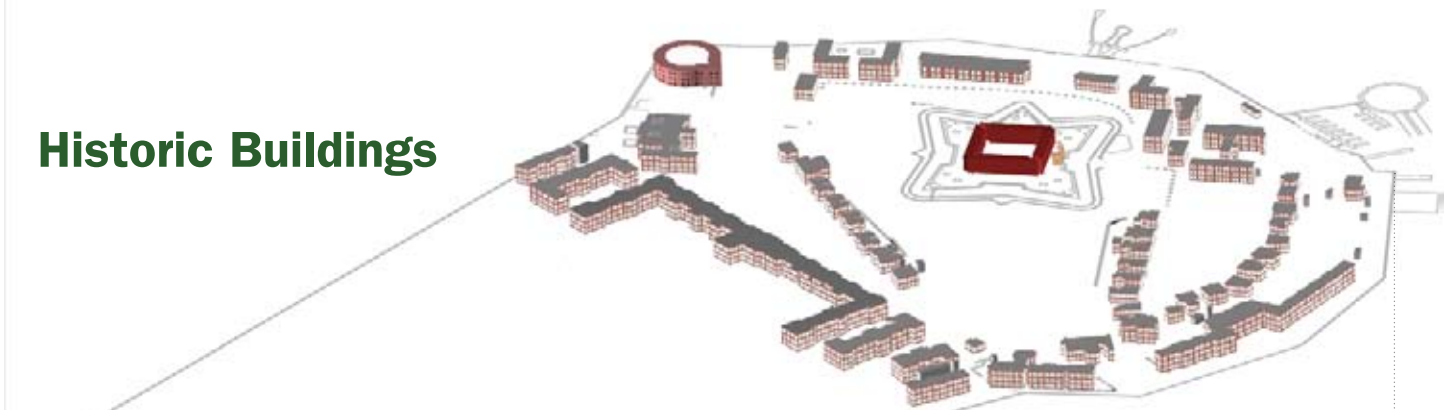
GIPEC and the National Park Service have published important statements about their goals and objectives for parks and public spaces on the Island. GIPEC's draft General Project Plan and the February 15, 2006 Request for Proposals, including Appendix E: Design Objectives for Buildings and Landscape (February 2006) and the Governors Island Historic District Preservation and Design Manual (January 2003) are available at www.govisland.com/About_GIPEC/master_planning_rfp.asp. Visit www.nps.gov/gois/ for more information about the Governors Island National Monument.

Guidelines at-a-glance

1. An overall park-like character for the Island.
2. A large, contiguous, important waterfront park in the south devoted to passive and active public use.
3. The glaxis/parade grounds developed and programmed immediately as the Island's first major public open space.
4. A continuous waterfront esplanade that offers variety in character and is accommodating of maritime uses and harbor experiences.
5. Circulation on the Island organized around pedestrian-only pathways and punctuated by public plazas and cross-roads.
6. Affordable and frequent access to the Island from a variety of locations.
7. Public spaces on the Island that are publicly controlled and managed and are a priority for GIPEC's overall operation of the Island.
8. Sustainable development principles and green technology incorporated into the design, construction, and operations of the landscape and built structures.

The Alliance's guidelines are intended to provide direction for four critical public space components: Historic Buildings, the Parks and Open Space System, Public Paths and Docks and the Esplanade. Together, this open space framework will ensure public access and allow for a better development process.

Historic Buildings



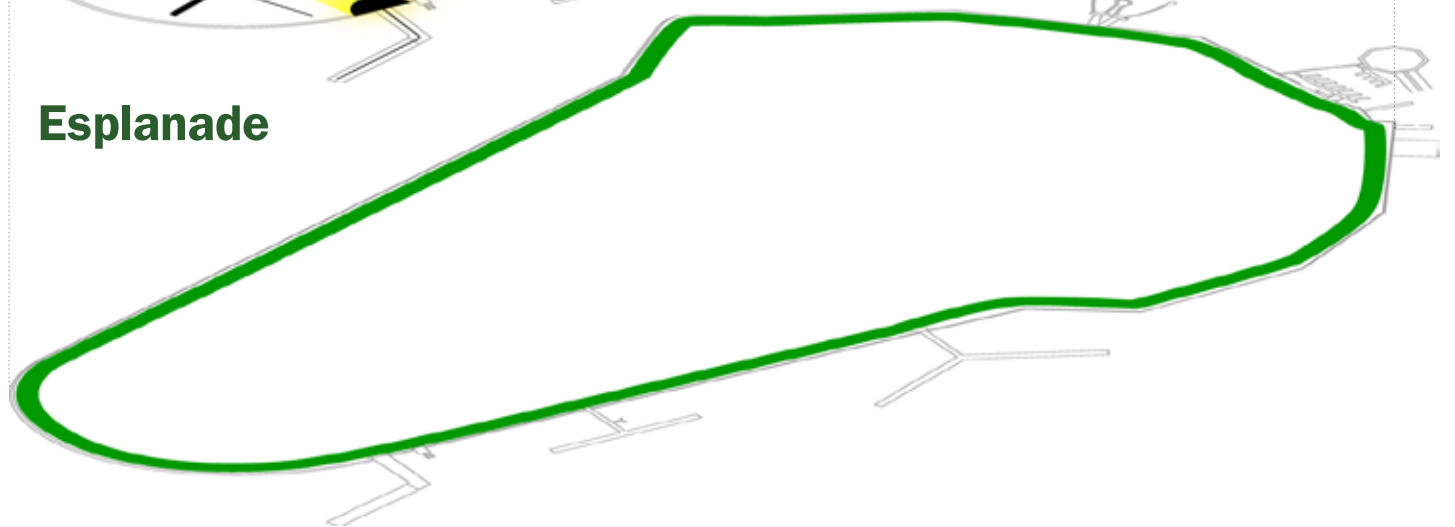
Parks and Open Space System



Public Paths and Docks



Esplanade



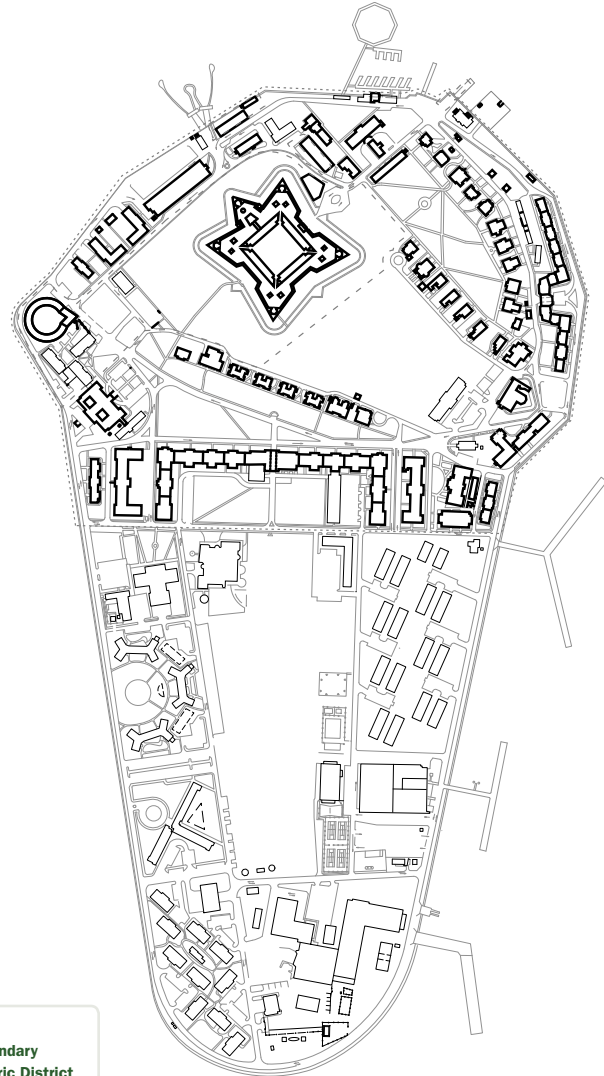
1. An overall park-like character for the Island.

The Island shall be organized around a well-defined armature of public open spaces with a coherent sequence of places and a variety of experiences, from waterfront recreation and major gathering places to restored habitat and cloistered grounds. These places and experiences appeal to New York's diverse populations.

The purpose of this framework is to affirm the importance of the campus quality of the Island as a whole. It will provide strong continuity between the north and south parts of the Island with integrated paths, open spaces, view corridors, and landscaping. It will help define development opportunities, allow for incremental development, and facilitate any changes needed to meet unpredictable market requirements and unforeseeable future events.

This framework shall meet or exceed the acreage requirement and other conditions and restrictions codified in the transfer documents. It should specifically include:

- Large open parkland hosting more active uses (e.g. the glacia/parade grounds, the large southern park)
- Governors Island National Monument
- More intimate, cloistered and passive spaces (e.g. Nolan Park, Colonels Row)
- A waterfront esplanade that changes in character and use as it circles the Island
- Important public plazas and crossroads (e.g. around the buoy; in front of Fort Jay)
- Pedestrian paths and sidewalks
- Ferry embarkation areas



(Above) The National Monument and the adjoining Historic District shall be integrated into an overall public space framework on the Island. The *Governors Island Historic District Preservation and Design Manual* provides specific direction for protecting the historic structures and landscapes.

Organized around a well-defined armature of public open spaces, development on the Island as a whole shall possess a campus quality: buildings that, regardless of style, are inviting to the public and relate to the surrounding open space.

The final design of each of these spaces shall strive for excellence and innovation. Particular attention should be paid to the special quality of the “prow” or southern tip of the Island and to the distinctions between the east and west sides in terms of their adjacent waterways, views, proximity to land, solar orientations, seasonal qualities, winds, and potential for boating activities, etc.

Topography shall be considered when designing parks and open space on the south end. While there is significant topography in the Historic District, with Fort Jay occupying the high point of the Island, the south end of the Island is essentially flat. Adding topography to the south end would offer commanding views of the harbor and the rest of the Island, in addition to serving as a buffer to adjacent development.

Landscaping and plantings on the Island shall rely to a great extent on native species and ecologies. Public spaces shall incorporate new and restored habitat, including recreated wetlands and tidal flats, for resident and migrating birds and other species and will provide opportunities for public education and interpretation of these living communities. The Island’s existing green infrastructure of mature trees shall be incorporated into the final landscape design.

The location, design, and programming of any new or existing building on the Island shall support the Island’s overall park-like character and the specific configuration and linkages of the open space framework. Levels of privacy shall be established by using landscape clues (changes in level, plantings, lighting, etc.) as opposed to fences, walls, gates and other architectural barriers. Where physical access needs to be discouraged, visual access shall be maximized. There shall be a minimum of enclosed, private open spaces. Any signage shall not detract from the Island’s natural and historic beauty or block sight lines. Except as needed for navigation purposes, signage shall not be viewable from the water side.

There shall be a minimum of new structures in any designated park space. Any such structure shall be appropriate in scale, of high quality and host public amenities that add to the public character of the open spaces.

Overall noise levels in the public spaces shall be lower than surrounding neighborhoods in New York City in order to maintain the distinct character and sense of tranquility and separateness on the Island.



Credit: Donna Welcavage Landscape Architecture + Urban Design

Stuyvesant Cove Park incorporates native species into its landscaping and plantings



Credit: RPA staff

The Shake Shack in Madison Square Park was designed to fit into the landscape it occupies.



Credit: RPA staff

Governors Island Diagrams (from left to right): Designs of the park should take into account the connection of parks from north to south, the distinctions between the east and west sides in terms of their adjacent waterways, views and proximity to land, as well as environmental conditions including floodplains, winds and tidal currents.

2. A large, contiguous, important waterfront park in the south devoted to passive and active public use.

The design and program of this park shall express Governors Island's dramatic relationship to the New York Harbor. As prescribed in the deed restrictions, it shall be a minimum of 20 contiguous acres but could accommodate the minimum 40 acres of park space required for the southern half of the Island. It shall have at least 1200 lf of its perimeter adjacent to the waterfront esplanade. Its overall dimension shall have an aspect ratio of about 1:1.5 and shall be comprehensible as a single landscape experience. Ideally it will be located on or near the southwestern tip of the Island.

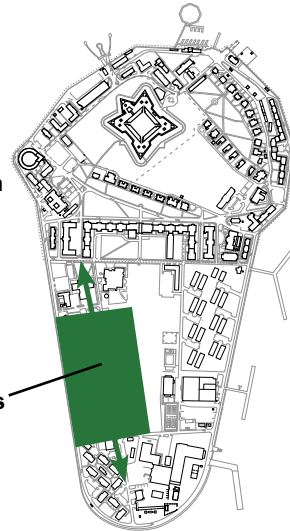
Park space in this and the remainder of the southern half of the Island shall accommodate, but not be dominated by any structured uses, including ball fields, courts, and concert facilities. Its programs shall be attractive to diverse audiences and users. The following diagrams illustrate possible locations for the minimum of 20 contiguous acres of waterfront park required for the Island. Three locations (Harbor, Channel and Prow Parks) have been selected for consideration because of the opportunities they present to meet the guidelines outlined in this document. Each of the locations offers various benefits or disadvantages as outlined within the diagrams:

Preferred Park Configurations

Harbor Park

- Views of the Statue of Liberty and Hudson River
- Summer breezes and afternoon sun
- Connection to the Esplanade

20 acres



Channel Park

- Views of Brooklyn and cruise ships
- Protection from wind
- Near Piers and active boating opportunities
- Connection to the Esplanade

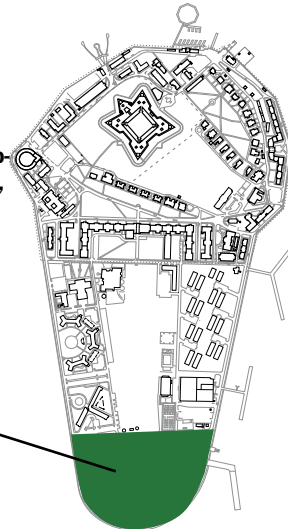
20 acres



Prow Park

- Views of Statue of Liberty, harbor, Brooklyn, and cruise ships
- Near Pier
- Connection to the Esplanade

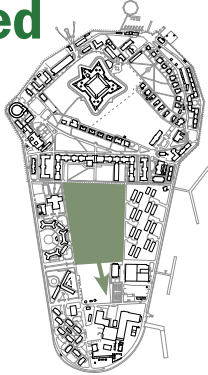
20 acres



Unsuitable Park Configurations

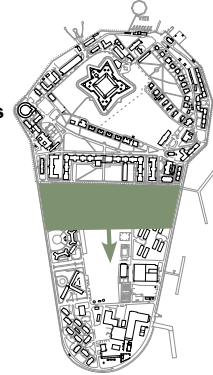
Cloistered Park

- No views of harbor or Lower Manhattan
- No perimeter adjacent to esplanade
- Privatized space dominated by surrounding buildings



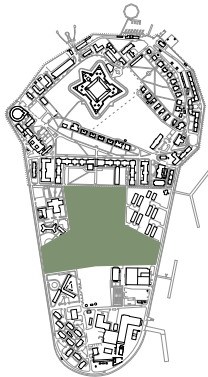
Division Park

- Limited views across harbor
- Divides Island



Corridor Park

- Limited views across harbor
- Less than 1200 linear feet of perimeter adjacent to esplanade



Linear Park

- Does not provide a park-like landscape
- Difficult to achieve active uses



Three visions for parks and public space on Governors Island

The following renderings demonstrate how each of the three possible park locations (Harbor Park, Channel Park, and Prow Park) may look in conjunction with associated development. Present in each of the renderings are the two large public parks (the parade ground in the north and 20 acre park in the south), a connected network of pathways and smaller open spaces, campus-like development, an on-island water feature, and an uninterrupted, diagonal view from Yankee pier across the Island to the neighboring Liberty Island.





3. The glaxis/parade grounds developed and programmed immediately as the Island's first major public open space.

Rehabilitation and landscaping by GIPEC and NPS shall enhance the glaxis's historic context while enabling a variety of informal park uses. Temporary fencing and plantings will allow for easy control and security of this space and the adjacent National Monument during the early construction.

Identified by the NPS as one of its "Common & Early Actions," removal of non-historic and non-contributing features will accommodate new development and provide for better connections to the Island's open spaces and historic buildings. The removal of Building 251 and Buildings 513 A, B and C will help to restore the prominence and historic character of Fort Jay. Any uses or new structures proposed shall respect the public nature and character of the area by providing adequate buffers, creating a circulation pattern that accommodates public

park uses and minimizes traffic impacts. New development at the Super 8 motel site and existing tennis courts shall restore visual connections to the water and the South Battery and create the opportunity for a pedestrian gateway from Yankee Pier and the Island's buoy feature to the glaxis/parade grounds.

Because of its sloping topography and vast open space, the glaxis could serve as an ideal location for a public performance space, if used in such a way that takes into account the adjoining historic grounds and buildings. Utilizing the glaxis in this fashion could allow for greater design possibilities for the southern parks and open space.

View across the glaxis in Governors Island Historic District, a location well-suited to be the Island's first major public open space.



Credit: Stephen Whitehouse

4. A continuous waterfront esplanade that offers variety in character and is accommodating of maritime uses and harbor experiences.



Credit: Peter Roper

Pedestrians, though not necessarily the pathways, shall always have access to the edge; they shall not be separated by private uses from the waterfront, except to accommodate ferry and maritime access. The primary pathway shall always be suitable for safe use by pedestrians and families. The esplanade shall be a minimum width of 40 feet and shall include separate pedestrian and bicycle/roller blade lanes and a planted and landscaped buffer in southern half of the Island and, where possible, in the historic district. As feasible, the waterfront edge shall include access for a wide variety of waterfront recreation, including boating and fishing; piers and get-downs to the water; and restored wetlands and other alterations to the seawalls to improve habitat quality.

The Island's esplanade shall be continuous and accommodate a variety of uses. Allowing access to the water's edge, the esplanade may also deviate from the edge, as rendered above for the pedestrian path.



Credit: RPA staff

A quality esplanade shall include public amenities such as good signage, public benches, lighting, shade trees and physical connections to the water.

5. Circulation on the Island organized around pedestrian-only pathways and punctuated by public plazas and crossroads.

These paths shall be oriented to unique vistas and reinforced with appropriate landscaping. There shall be special treatments, such as public art and plazas, where the inland paths join the waterfront esplanade. The public arrival and departure areas, such as ferry landings, shall contribute to the visitors' rediscovery of New York as a waterfront city. The relationship of land and water shall drive the design of the piers, docks, landings, and welcoming plazas. These areas shall orient visitors to the Island with landscaping as an integral part of both the first and last impressions of the Island.

Private automobile use shall be prohibited, and on-Island motorized transit limited. To best accommodate this pedestrian orientation, density and intensity of uses shall be concentrated around existing and new ferry embarkation points. Management shall provide for on-Island transit and pedestrian needs, including spontaneous pick-up and drop-off opportunities for bicycling and other human powered vehicles.



Credit: Peter Roper

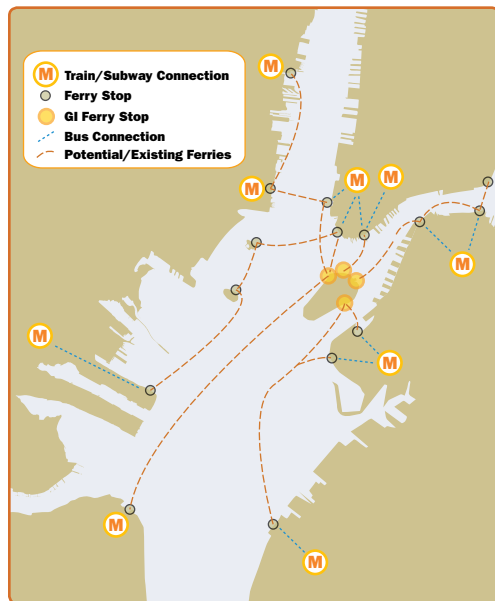
Public circulation paths shall be oriented to unique vistas, such as the diagonal view from Yankee Pier to the Statue of Liberty as rendered above

The relationship of land and water shall drive the design of the piers, docks, landings, and welcoming plazas, orienting visitors to the Island.



Credit: RPA staff

6. Affordable and frequent access to the Island from a variety of locations.



Provision of subsidized, low or no-cost transportation is required to make the Island available to the broad public. The transportation system shall be designed to accommodate the city's and region's diverse communities and visitors and connecting the Island to a variety of embarkation points and complimentary destinations.

(Left) Existing and potential ferry service (orange), in combination with bus service (blue), and nearby transit hubs can allow transit access to the Island from throughout the harbor.



Ferry service can offer a frequent and affordable way to reach the Island.

7. Public spaces on the Island that are publicly controlled and managed and are a priority for GIPEC's overall operation of the Island.

The first phase of the Island redevelopment shall include public space improvement as a priority, and, prior to the adoption of the final General Project Plan, shall program, prepare and implement the public use of the Glacis.

The final General Project Plan for the Island shall designate areas to be mapped as city parkland, including at least 40 acres of public parkland in the south, designated open space in the historic district, and the waterfront esplanade. The principle walkways outside of the mapped parks shall be memorialized by a binding agreement, easement or by mapping as public places or city streets.

A single entity shall be responsible for overall grounds management in order to establish a unified sense of landscape across the Island and promote efficient maintenance infrastructure. This overall entity shall be under direct public control by GIPEC, National Park Service or desig-

nated state or city park agencies in order to preserve the public nature of the Island. The entity shall work closely with NPS to create a coordinated set of public programming and overall visitor experience.

The entity shall provide leadership and be allocated sufficient operating funds (from direct public and private sources) to keep the Island's public spaces well maintained and offer outstanding and innovative public programs. The entity shall partner with the best educational, cultural, and recreational institutions to provide high quality public programming.



Credit: RPA staff

8. Sustainable development principles and green technology incorporated into the design, construction, and operations of the landscape and built structures.

This shall include ecological guidelines for landscaping, plantings, maintenance, stormwater and water management, waste disposal and recycling, and, where available, the highest LEED certification standards.



Sustainable development principles and green design technology:
(below) A green roof planted at The Solaire in Tribeca; (left) Natural edge and native plantings that help manage stormwater runoff along the Willamette River, Portland, Oregon (Photo by C. Bruce Forster used with permission from The Waterfront Center).

Credit: C. Bruce Forster



Credit: Annette Wilkus

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American Institute of Architects
/New York Chapter
American Planning Association
New York Metro Chapter
American Society of Landscape
Architects of New York
Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy
Brooklyn Greenway Initiative
Citizens Union
City Club of New York
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Greenpoint Video Project
Historic Districts Council
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New York Civic
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North River Historic Ship Society
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Partnerships for Parks
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