

Fall 2009

The Path Forward

*Public Input on the Future
of
Gateway National Recreation Area*



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations



Gateway is different.

It is all about human contact with the environment and the resulting changes that take place over the centuries.

– Archipelago Architecture and Landscape
Architecture, New York, NY



Acknowledgements

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While this report greatly benefits from the participation and input from all these individuals and organizations, the conclusions of this report are the responsibility of RPA.

This report was written by **Elizabeth Case** and **Robert Pirani** of Regional Plan Association (RPA) in consultation with **Alexander Brash** and **Darcy Shiber-Knowles** of National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). The report was designed by **Elizabeth Case**, **Ben Oldenburg** and **Jeff Ferzoco**.

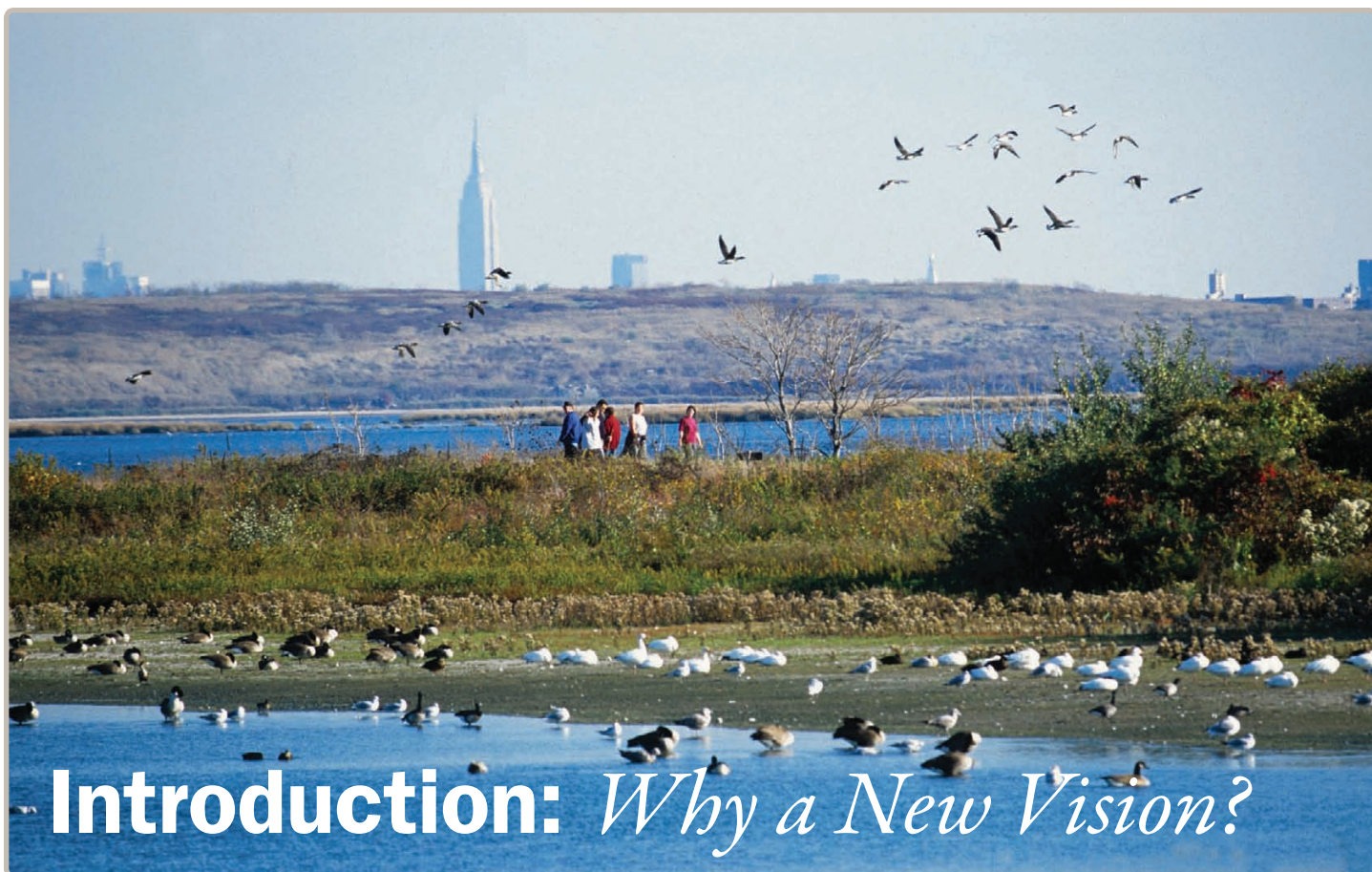




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Introduction: *Why a New Vision?*

Gateway National Recreation Area (Gateway or GNRA) is a complex place and an audacious promise. Spread across over 26,000 acres, four counties, three New York City boroughs, and two states, it is comprised of five administrative units. The park encompasses an astonishing mix of properties, uses, visitors, neighborhoods and urban contexts. Its premise – to bring a national park experience to the heart of the country’s largest city – has always been fraught with programmatic, management and political challenges.

Regional Plan Association (RPA) is proud to be considered one of the parents of Gateway. RPA’s planning and advocacy for urban parkland in the 1960s and ‘70s helped establish the interest in such a park and later the organization supported it during its early years. The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), the leading voice of the American people for protecting and enhancing our National Park System since 1919, opened an office in New York City in 2004 and immediately made Gateway a focus of their national agenda. NPCA’s engagement is an important signal of the growing importance of urban parks in the National Park System as well as among state and local parks all across the country.

Our collaboration comes at an important time for Gateway. The National Park Service (NPS) will soon be embarking on its revision to Gateway’s General Management Plan (GMP), the guiding document for NPS activities in the area. This will be the first time in a generation that NPS has systematically revised its master plan for the park.

This is a huge opportunity.

First and foremost, it’s a chance to ensure that the great potential of the park is realized, and that the visitor experience at Gateway matches the experiences at other iconic national parks. This rethinking also comes at a time when a number of public agencies and private organizations are proposing new initiatives in and around the harbor. Notable efforts include PlaNYC, the Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan, as well as the Army Corps of Engineers, Port Authority and Harbor Estuary Program’s Comprehensive Restoration Plan for the NY / NJ Harbor.

To seize this moment, NPCA, in partnership with Columbia University and the Van Alen Institute, recently completed a design competition entitled “Envisioning Gateway.” The competition generated some truly innovative ideas for what it means to be an urban national park, interventions that incorporate the latest in ecological design and address the reality of a changing climate.

The competition focused on the future of Floyd Bennett Field in the Jamaica Bay Unit of GNRA and its juxtaposition to the adjacent Wildlife Refuge. These two areas are emblematic of both the potential and challenges that all of Gateway faces. Floyd Bennett Field, arguably one of the most important historic aviation sites in the world, provides vital recreation opportunities for local families. The 1,358-acre field also houses a number of incompatible uses and derelict buildings that detract from a national park experience. The Jamaica Bay Refuge area is listed in New York State’s Open Space Conservation Plan and as an Audubon Important Bird Site. The refuge contains a salt-marsh complex supporting a great abundance and diversity of birds and other estuarine species, though pollution from sewage

overflows, storm drain outflow, contaminated sediments and wetland loss due to a complex set of factors threaten its ecological health.

This report synthesizes the best of the proposals emanating from the design competition and the public comments generated in the online response forum. Over 2000 respondents voted on the six final designs, completed a survey and provided suggestions for how to improve Floyd Bennett Field, Jamaica Bay and Gateway. RPA undertook this review and synthesis with one eye toward the competition and the other toward the political and logistic realities at Gateway and the many other planning initiatives underway. Our goal is to outline the specific attributes and initiatives that can establish Gateway as the iconic national park it was intended to be.

Our work is informed from many sources. Reconnaissance began with a review of the extensive inventory and briefing book prepared by Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Preservation and Planning (GSAPP). In addition, we examined the ninety-five entries to the design competition and an online survey crafted by NPCA where the public was asked to review and comment on the finalists picked by the competition jury. In this latter case, public input was solicited from the communities surrounding Gateway, the region, and from all across the nation.

A summary of the themes that emerged from the competition and the

public comments was then presented to a number of critical stakeholders in a series of interviews. Participants included representatives of the National Park Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Mayor's Office of Sustainability and Long Range Planning, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, the National Resources Defense Council and National Parks of New York Harbor Conservancy. Finally, RPA organized a stakeholder discussion with about thirty individuals from the community, civic organizations and city, state and federal agencies to review our draft findings. While this report greatly benefits from the participation of these individuals, our findings are the responsibility of RPA and NPCA.

As with the competition, these findings focus primarily on the assets of Gateway, Floyd Bennett Field and Jamaica Bay. We believe this information can help inform and guide the National Park Service, elected officials and the public as NPS begins scoping the issues to be addressed in Gateway's upcoming GMP. Public scoping will begin in 2009, and by 2010, NPS will begin

to develop alternatives for GNRA in anticipation of a 2012 completion date. But as the success of Gateway will involve many public and private actors, we issue this report with the intent of informing other initiatives, and perhaps most importantly, of creating common ground between the many agencies that have a hand in the management of the Bay.



Executive Summary

Created in 1972, exactly one century after Yellowstone became the world's first national park, Gateway includes 26,607 acres along the coast of the outer New York-New Jersey harbor. It was one of the first units of the U.S. National Park System (NPS) to put natural and urban habitats side by side. Along with its sister park, Golden Gate National Recreation Area around San Francisco Bay, Gateway is the National Park System's first urban national recreation area.

Gateway's size, scope and location within a teeming metropolis present several tremendous challenges. A collection of two-dozen separate tracts of land and islands, the park spans two states and three boroughs of New York City.

Floyd Bennett Field (FBF) and Jamaica Bay both play significant roles in the harbor and have the potential to become the leading light of the Gateway experience. The 1979 General Management Plan described the first manifestation of Floyd Bennett Field's unique role in the national park. For example, the GMP explained FBF's "intimate relationship to the central land base and the possibility of future transit connections," as well as its great potential for research institutions, recreational uses, and a "staging area for visitors to Gateway."

"It is in the coastal zone of one of the most highly developed ... regions in the world... It is adjacent to the most densely populated metropolis in the US... It offers an opportunity to demonstrate that abused resources can be renewed... It offers millions of Americans a chance to have national park adventures and experiences virtually at their own doorsteps."

General Management Plan, 1979

The past forty years have seen that uniqueness, that specialness of this national park, not lost but perhaps obscured by the number of competing - and in some cases inappropriate - uses on the site. While we can debate the appropriateness or political viability of removing or expanding any of these uses, most people would agree that the whole of Floyd Bennett Field is not currently the iconic national park we all seek. With its great expanse, Floyd Bennett Field has the potential to become such a park, serving as both a "gateway" to the national park experience for millions, while simultaneously serving the residents of Brooklyn and Queens, much as Central Park has long managed its multi-layered aims. Identifying and enhancing these national park qualities are the foundation for the park's ability to serve both national and local needs.

Addressing this question was the broad purpose of Envisioning Gateway. In assessing the initial inventory and design competition, the public's online comments on the entries and the discussions with public and private stakeholders, RPA identified three recurring and interrelated themes. These are the context for any future planning in Floyd Bennett Field and Jamaica Bay, and by extension, the rest of Gateway:

The urban experience is increasingly becoming the national experience. Gateway National Recreation Area is uniquely positioned relative to the challenges facing the nation and the National Park Service. Gateway manifests a growing understanding that people are part of the ecological equation, from its strikingly diverse and urban audience to its position on the front line of climate change.

Gateway National Recreation Area cannot be re-envisioned in isolation. The future of Floyd Bennett Field, the Wildlife Refuge and the larger Jamaica Bay watershed are clearly linked, and can only be truly addressed by cooperation of the federal, State, and City government - whether it is addressing sea level rise and wetland loss, linking the park through transit and greenway links or addressing non-park uses.

There are many supporters concerned about Gateway's future, but their messages often conflict. A great degree of public attention has turned to Jamaica Bay in recent years, but the results have been limited because the National Park Service, State, City, civic agencies and the surrounding communities are not always working together. The Park and the Bay lack a clear, collective and strong voice that would help it become a priority for our elected leadership.

Realizing these opportunities and overcoming the challenges will require a number of design, programming, and management initiatives. Our recommendations for meeting these challenges include:

→ Reveal Visitor Opportunities:

Opportunities for visitors to Floyd Bennett Field, and Jamaica Bay as a whole are not always clear. Revealing and focusing attention on these opportunities will improve what can often be a diffuse, if not opaque, experience. Concentrating activities, including a completed Ryan Visitor Center, along Flatbush Avenue will visually and physically anchor the Park experience.

→ Connect and Expand Access:

This active core should become the hub for improved pedestrian, bicycle, ferry and transit connections throughout the Park. An intermodal transit center and new ferry service landing at the marina would bring all visitors to a common starting point. Additional bus routes, increased frequency of service, a dedicated “beach bus” or even Bus Rapid Transit should improve access from adjacent neighborhoods while the rehabilitated Gateway Greenway could unify the Jamaica Bay units and other City and State parks.

→ Integrate Climate Change:

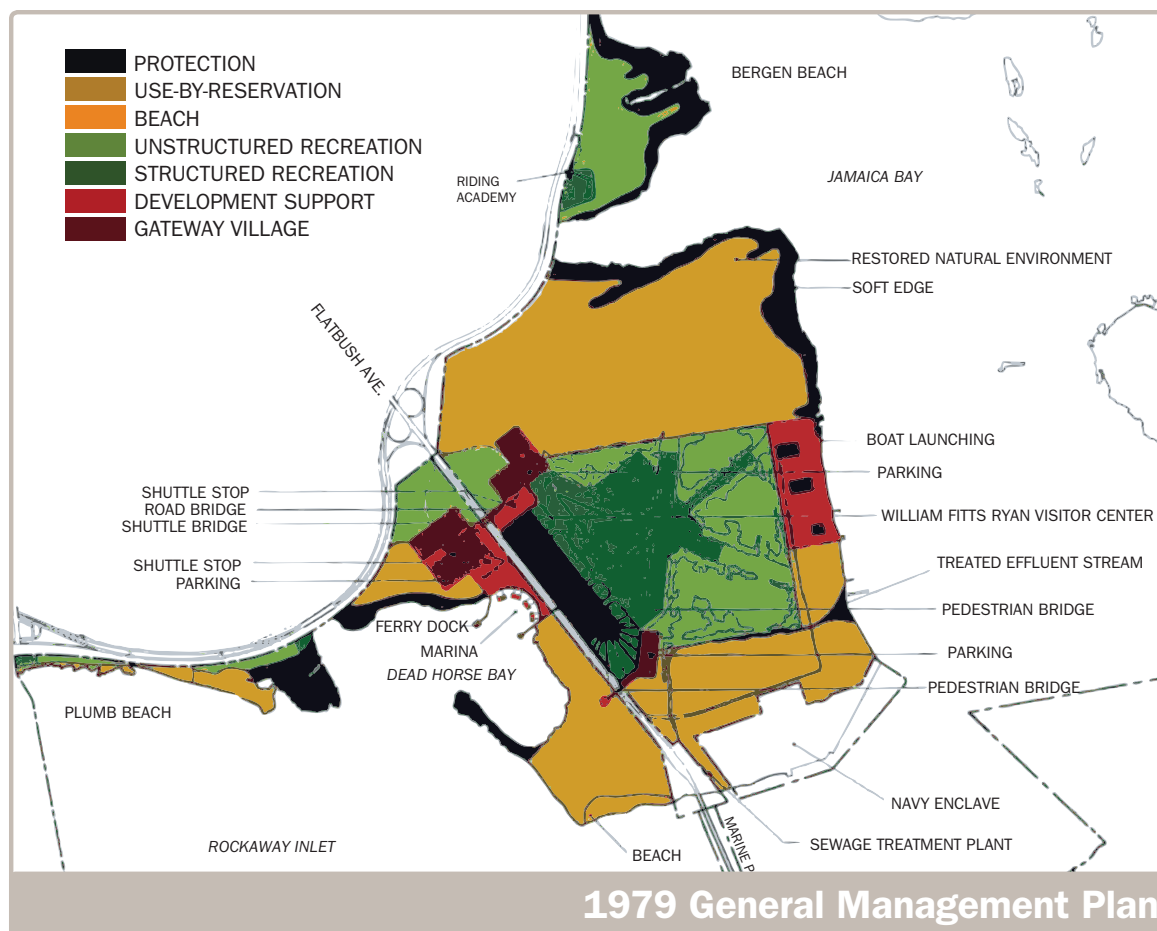
The changing climate should be emphasized in all park projects and programs. Gateway’s physical vulnerability and proximity to millions make it the place in the Park System to interpret and showcase both adaptive responses and the means of improving our carbon cycles.

→ Renature Jamaica Bay:

Building on the success of the Comprehensive Restoration Plan (CRP) and other programs, a collaborative effort to renature Jamaica Bay is the place to start adapting to climate change.

→ Institutionalize Partnerships:

The National Park Service cannot achieve these goals on its own. To succeed, a long term institutional partnership between NPS, other federal agencies, the State, City, civic and community leadership is needed. Such an arrangement can provide expertise and funding, and can coordinate decisions. Most importantly, such collaborative structure would politically elevate Gateway at all levels of government as the iconic National Park it can and must be.





2007 Visitors

GNRA

8.8 Million

Jamaica Bay Unit

4 Million

Floyd Bennett Field

1.2 Million

Wildlife Refuge

100,000

Aviator Sports

54,000



Current Land Use

→ Model Airplane Field



→ Gateway Marina



→ Historic Aircraft Restoration Project



→ Floyd Bennett Field



→ North Forty Natural Area



The Design Competition:

Searching for the Vision

In consultation with NPCA, Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) and the Van Alen Institute sponsored a design competition to create a new vision for Gateway. Launched in January 2007, the public, international competition called for innovative design ideas for what Gateway could be in the 21st Century.

Prior to the competition, Columbia's GSAPP completed a large amount of research and performed extensive community outreach to gather all relevant information about Gateway National Recreation Area (GNRA). In October 2006, a multi-disciplinary conference was held at Columbia University for the public to explore the role of urban national parks in the 21st century. This conference and research formed the foundation for the information collected and presented in GSAPP's 230-page report on GNRA. The GSAPP report was given to all Envisioning Gateway Design Competition entrants as background information. The report is available to the public at vanalen.org/gateway.

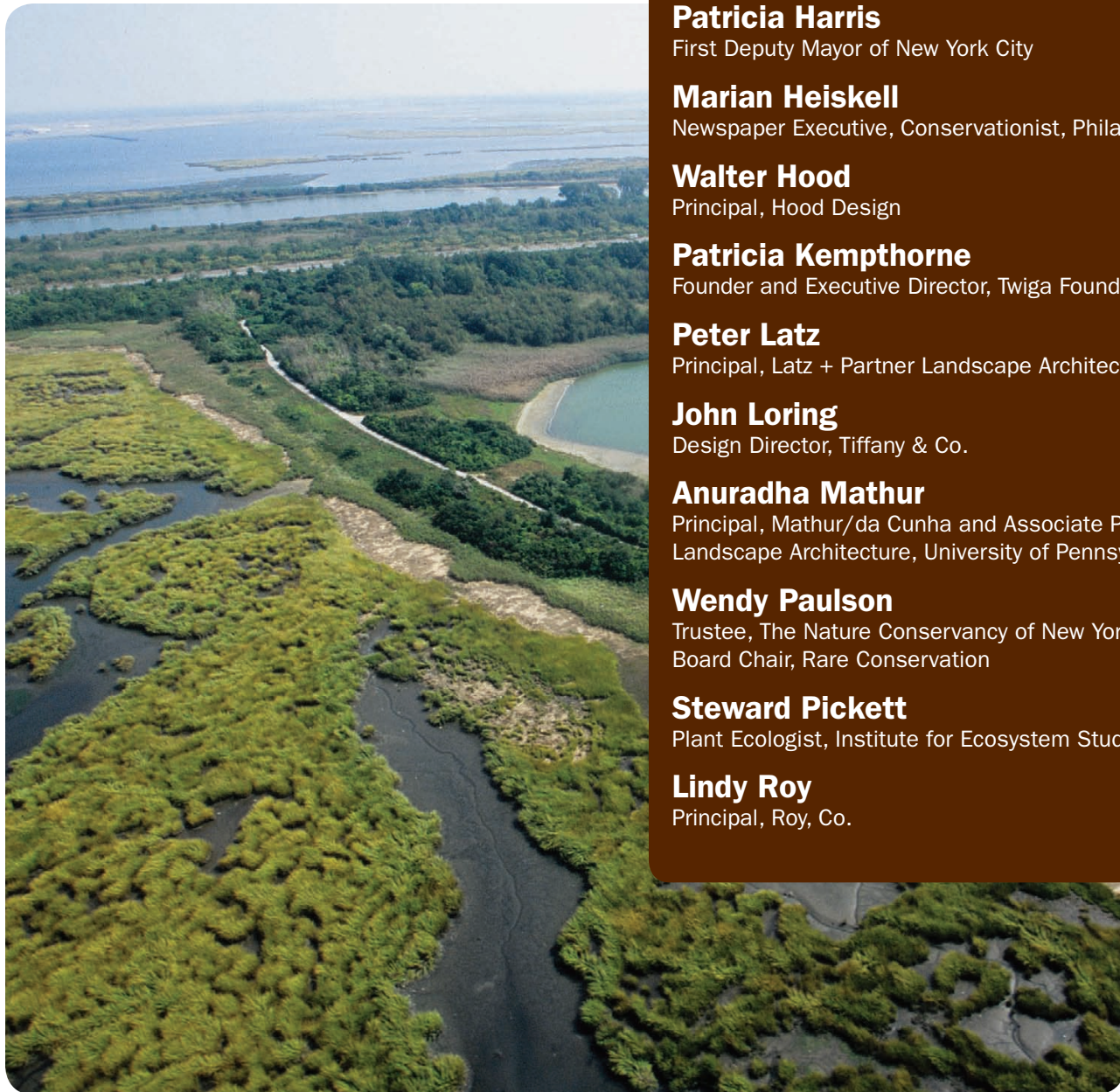
The subsequent Design Competition was intended to spark creative ideas for future uses in Floyd Bennett Field (FBF) and GNRA as a whole. Entrants were asked to outline a master plan for the whole of Gateway and to develop a site specific plan for FBF, showcasing FBF as a "park within a park" while demonstrating relationship between the site and the rest of Gateway. The entrants were asked to address seven specific conditions and challenges: ecology, history, recreation, education, waste management, access and transportation, and economic strategies for feasibility.

The jury was made up of twelve jurors and two chairs, Adi Shamir, Executive Director of Van Alen, and Mark Wigley, Dean of Columbia's GSAPP. Half the jurors had planning or architectural backgrounds, while the other half represented a wide range of stakeholders, park philanthropists, scientists, politicians and environmentalists. The jurors were paired in groups of two, comprised of one planner or architect and one non-design-oriented individual. After a day-long deliberation, the jury selected three finalists and three honorable mentions. "Mapping the Ecotones" won first place, with "Reassembling Ecologies" and "Untitled," to be referred to in this report as "Seamarks, Landmarks, Ciphers," in second and third places, respectively. The honorable mention designs were "[un]natural selection," "Urban Barometer," and "H2grOw." The jury selections were made with the hopes of representing the large number of experiences the park might offer visitors in the future, not with intentions that one winning design would be the final plan for the area. Each design was chosen because it represented a different method of changing and improving the park, and as a part of the collection of six finalists, each design highlighted different park values.

Winning Designs Must:

- Establish a relationship between their new park site at FBF and the existing ecological systems throughout Gateway
- Address the value of existing historical structures and heritage
- Provide recreational uses appropriate for an urban national park
- Similarly, provide educational uses appropriate for the site
- Address water quality in Jamaica Bay, and consider opportunities for innovative management strategies
- Rethink public transportation options throughout GNRA
- Consider Gateway's need for additional revenue sources through concessions or other economic development strategies.

The Jury



Don Riepe | American Littoral Society

Adi Shamir

Executive Director, Van Alen Institute (Jury Co-Chair)

Mark Wigley

Dean, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation (Jury Co-Chair)

Ethan Carr

National Park Service Historian, Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Andrew Darrell

Director, New York Region, Environmental Defense

Patricia Harris

First Deputy Mayor of New York City

Marian Heiskell

Newspaper Executive, Conservationist, Philanthropist

Walter Hood

Principal, Hood Design

Patricia Kempthorne

Founder and Executive Director, Twiga Foundation

Peter Latz

Principal, Latz + Partner Landscape Architects

John Loring

Design Director, Tiffany & Co.

Anuradha Mathur

Principal, Mathur/da Cunha and Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of Pennsylvania

Wendy Paulson

Trustee, The Nature Conservancy of New York and Board Chair, Rare Conservation

Steward Pickett

Plant Ecologist, Institute for Ecosystem Studies

Lindy Roy

Principal, Roy, Co.

The Three Winners



FIRST PLACE

Mapping the Ecotones

Ashley Kelly, Rikako Wakabayashi

“Mapping the Ecotones,” the competition’s first place winner, suggests leaving the current uses and the old runways in place, yet opening up a discussion for building levels in FBF via elevated pathways, as well as introducing piers and jetties that would extend and soften the edges of the site. According to Van Alen Institute, while a relatively realistic gesture, “Mapping the Ecotones” captures the idea that Gateway is a constantly shifting balance between water and land, and that its edge is “both its biggest challenge and its best asset” for people to be able to understand its complexity.

SECOND PLACE

Reassembling Ecologies

NORTH DESIGN OFFICE

“Reassembling Ecologies,” the public’s first choice, proposes something very different from “Mapping the Ecotones.” North Design Office encourages greater weight on the site’s ecological resources and envisions creating a stronger definition of programs and activities for park users and an enhanced structure that would allow for sensitive ecologies and recreation to coexist. Outlining how to repair and rebuild the surrounding environments, “Reassembling Ecologies” focuses on moving all active recreational uses toward the Flatbush Avenue side of the park and returning the rest of Floyd Bennett Field to “nature.”

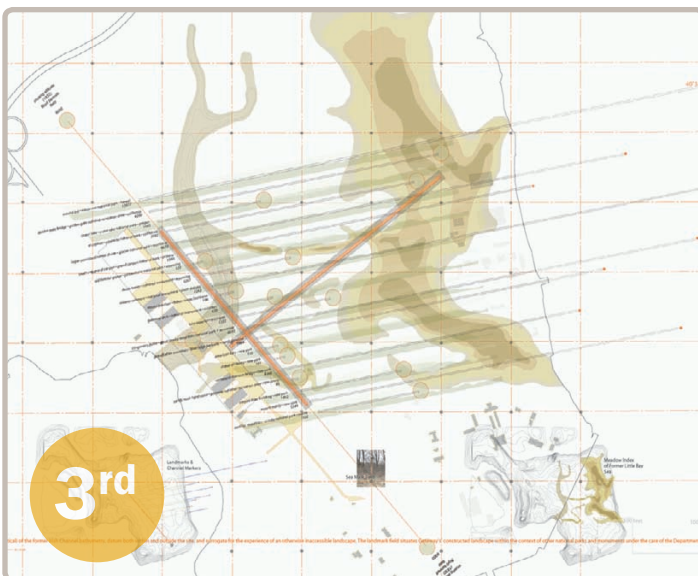


THIRD PLACE

Untitled (Seamarks, Landmarks, Ciphers)

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC: Laurel McSherry, Terry Surjan, Rob Holmes

Virginia Polytechnic’s entry, “Seamarks, Landmarks, Ciphers,” emphasizes history and the relationship between GNRA and its sister national parks. The proposal uses sculptural land forms, earthworks, and art installations to explain Gateway’s landscape within the larger context of other national parks and monuments, educating visitors about the diversity of U.S. national parks and showing how history could be a bigger feature of the experience of GNRA.



The Competition's Honorable Mentions

[un]natural selection

ARCHIPELAGO ARCHITECTURE
AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Reintroducing water into Floyd Bennett Field, “[un]natural selection” addresses the disappearing marshes in the Jamaica Bay and represents the natural relationship between the environment and humans by recreating artificial wetlands in the site, yet proposing continued recreational uses. This design explores the connections and tensions in the unique composition of GNRA, suggesting that we can move forward into the 21st Century while also preserving historic symbols in FBF.



H2grOw

Frank Gesualdi, Hayley Eber

One of the more futuristic ideas from among all competition submissions, “H2grOw” also addresses the dwindling salt marshes of Jamaica Bay by exploring the potential reality of sustainable “green” concepts in creating floating hydropods. Each pod is a hydroponic vegetative ecotype grown completely without soil floating freely around the site, and the pods show how water could be used for planting, transportation, energy harnessing, food production and recreation.

Urban Barometer

LOOP|8: Christopher Marcinkoski,
Andrew Moddrell

“Urban Barometer” re-examines the National Park Service mission in light of society’s current emphasis on “greening,” and suggests the site be used for a research park. In creating a comprehensive research institute on FBF, “Urban Barometer” splits the park into four sections; cutting-edge science and active research, stewardship, recreation and education. This design questions whether continued development of traditional open space alone is enough to sustain the changes expected in the New York metropolitan area over the next century.



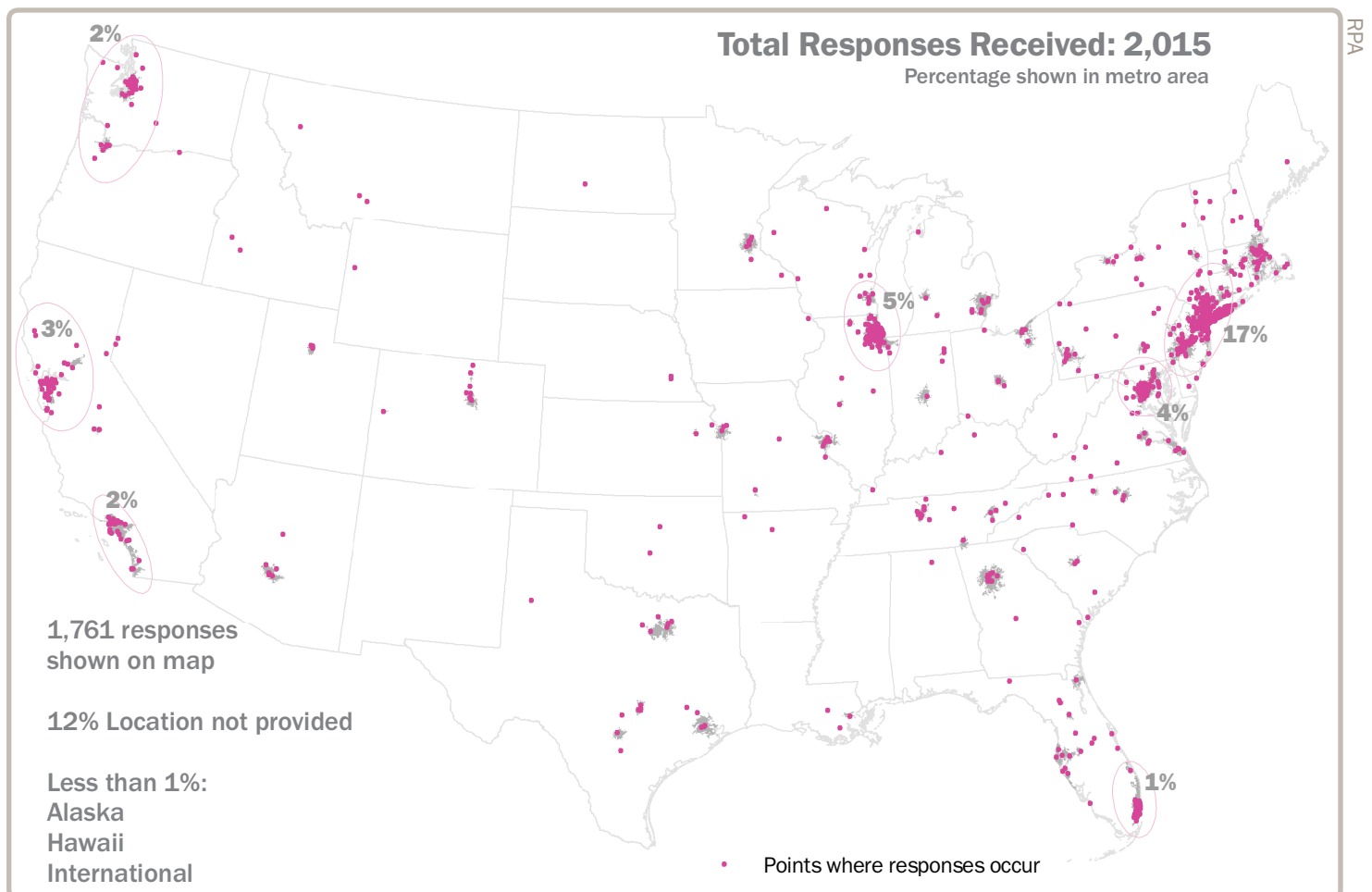
Analysis: *The Public Response*

After the jury made their selections, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) launched an online survey in order to gauge the public's reaction to the winning designs. Noting that our national parks are one of our democracy's most tangible gifts, NPCA asked the public to rank their favorite park designs out of the six finalists and then to comment on three open-ended questions. More than 2,500 responses came from all over the country and from abroad. Respondents from 46 states participated, with about half the total from the northeast. 843 responses came from NYC metro area from 232 unique zip codes; 32 came from the neighborhoods immediately bordering Jamaica Bay.

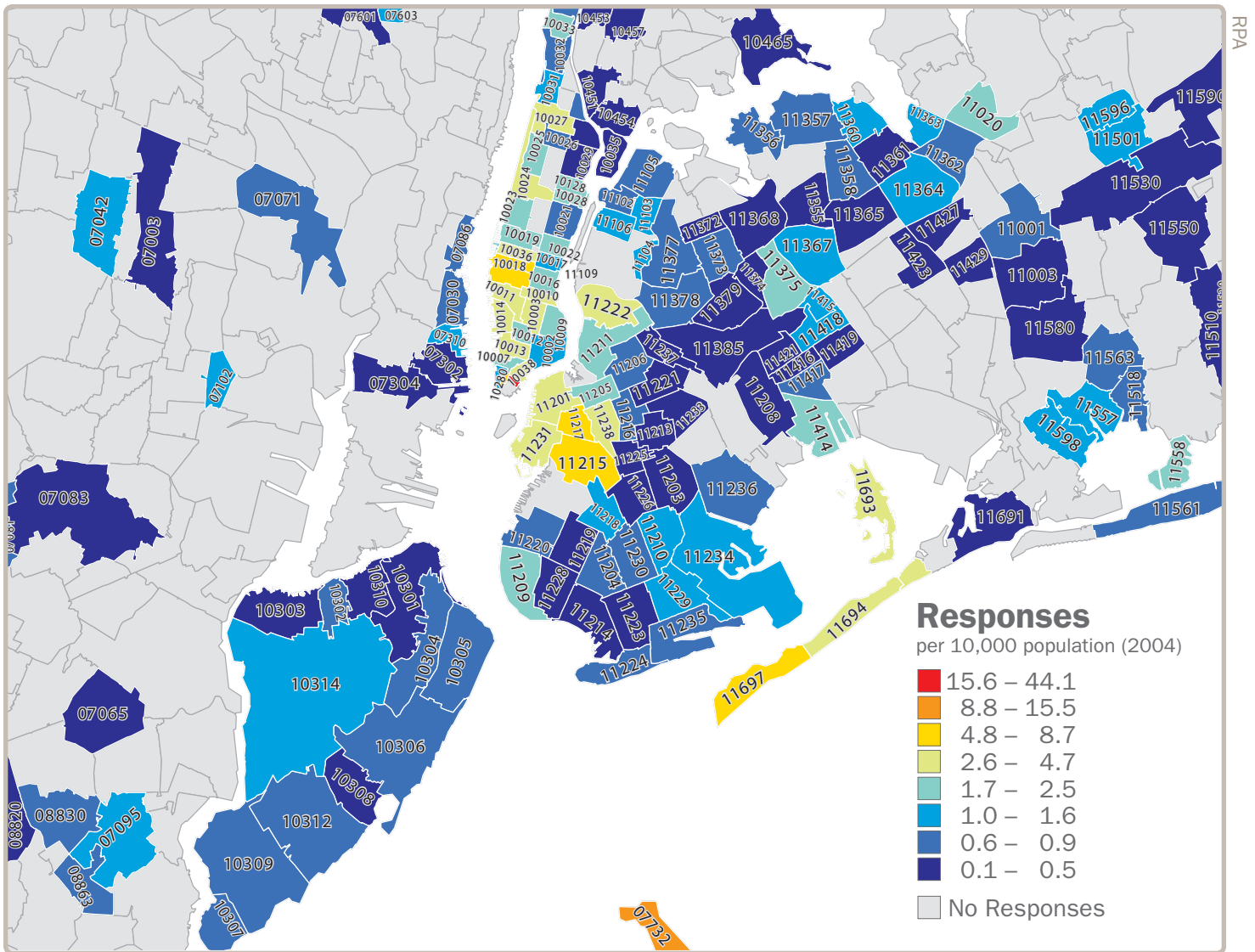
Responses to the open-ended questions (see chart on page 15) fell into eight categories:

- **Education**
- **Restoration and preservation**
- **Historical significance**
- **The role of an urban park in the interrelationship between humans and nature**
- **A mix of leisure and recreational options**
- **The public's role in determining a park's experiential offerings**
- **Maintenance and infrastructure improvements**
- **improved access via clean public transit**

Online Responses by Metro Area



Online Survey Response by Zip Code



Most Common Responses to Online Survey Questions

Question 1:

Imagine that you, your children, or future generations will be enjoying Gateway in the 21st Century. What are your hopes and expectations?

- Educational programs
- Restoration and environmental preservation
- History programs
- Park takes a leadership role in the nation's urban park system
- More recreation options
- Increased awareness of interrelationship between humans and nature
- Maintenance of park infrastructure
- Improved accessibility via clean public transit options

Question 2:

What role do you think Gateway as an urban National Park should play in the lives of regional residents and visitors from around the world?

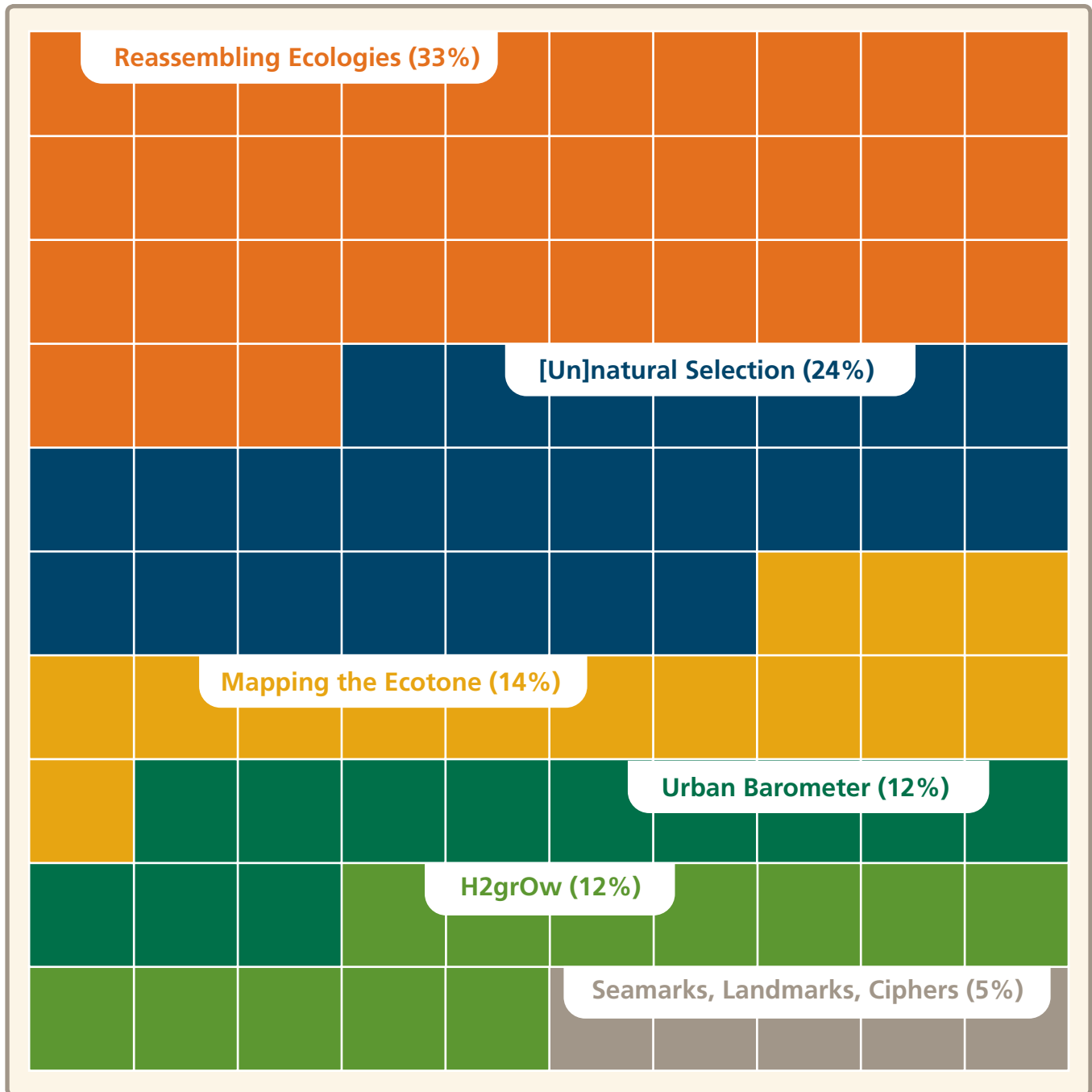
- Leader in education about environmental preservation
- Environmental stewardship
- Historical preservation
- Leader in environmental innovations
- Leisure and recreation for locals and national audience alike
- Education about coexistence of nature and humans in an urban setting
- Preservation natural space in an urban metropolis
- Inspiration for energy conservation worldwide

Question 3:

List some of the particular projects and programs you think should be built or implemented by the National Park Service or others at Gateway in the next 10 years.

- Educational programs
- Environmental restoration
- Historical preservation
- Enhance visitor experience
- More recreation options
- Public participation in caring for and maintaining the park
- Infrastructure (improvement and repair)
- Increased eco-friendly transit

The Public Votes: Most Engaging Urban National Park



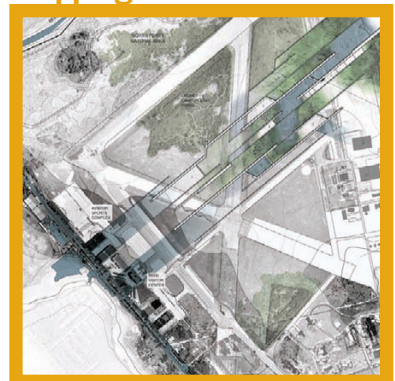
Reassembling Ecologies



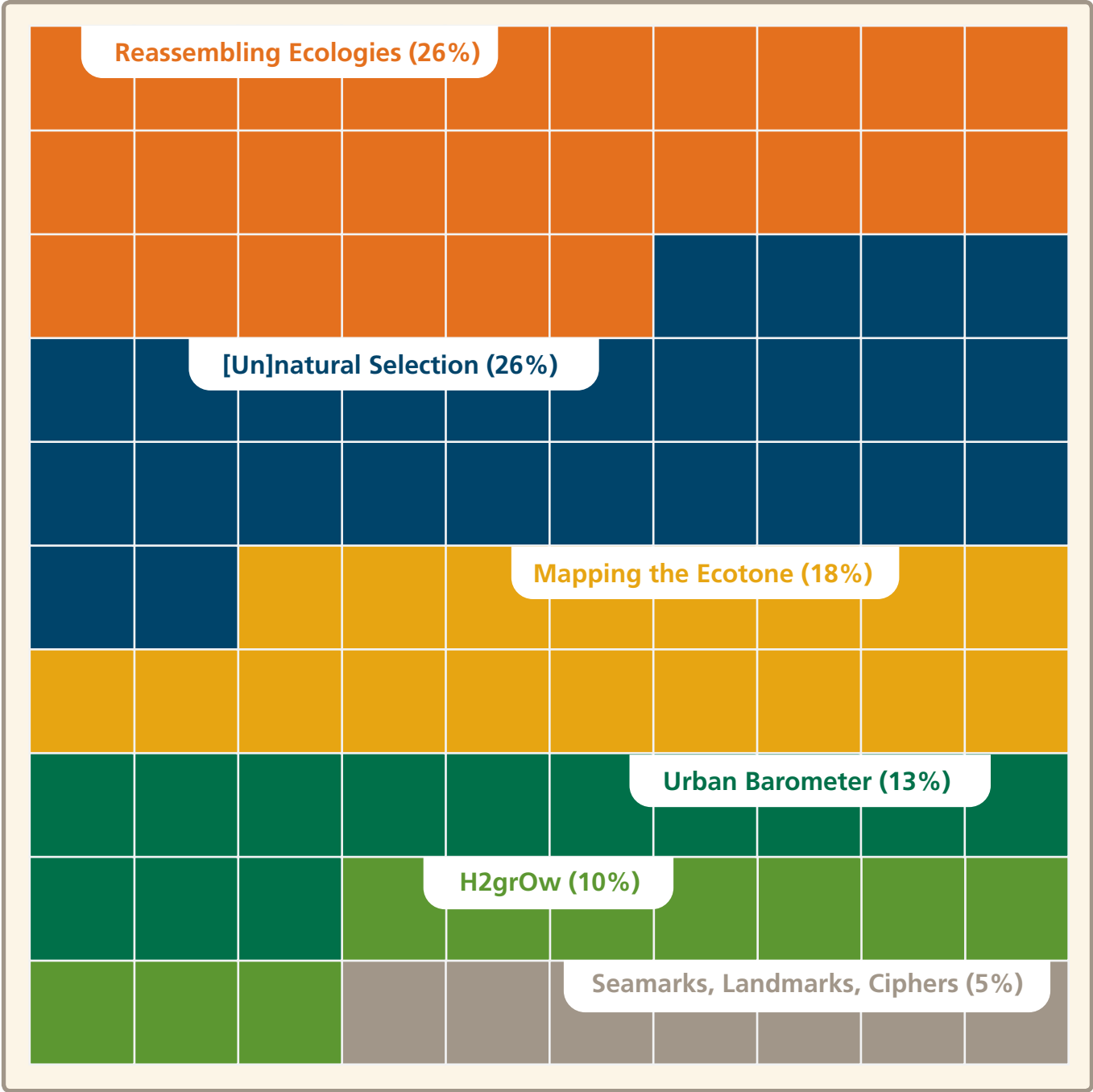
[un]natural selection



Mapping the Ecotones



The Public Votes: Favorite Design



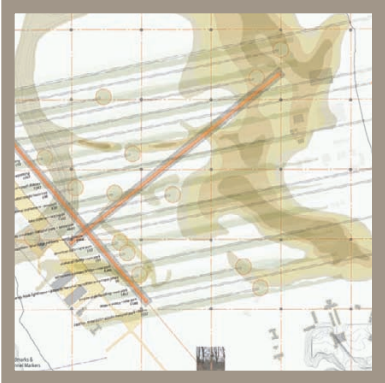
Urban Barometer



H2grOw



Seamarks, Landmarks, Ciphers



Gateway: *In Context*

Don Riepe | American Littoral Society



After careful analysis of the public responses to the online survey, the focus groups, and the larger stakeholder discussion, RPA identified three recurring and interrelated themes. These are the context for any future planning in Floyd Bennett Field (FBF) and Jamaica Bay.

→ The urban experience is increasingly becoming the national experience:

Gateway National Recreation Area (GNRA), Jamaica Bay and FBF are uniquely positioned relative to the challenges facing the nation and the National Park Service (NPS). In particular, Gateway manifests a growing understanding that people are part of the ecological equation. 79% of the USA currently lives in major metropolitan areas. The Tri State Region is slated to add 3.8 million new residents, or about 17% by 2030.¹ The United States has always been a nation of immigrants, but never more so than today. The number of foreign born residents increased by 20% in the last eight years, and by 2020, 15% of USA's population will be foreign-born. That's one in seven people. In the New York Metro Area, 40% of the population is foreign-born, and many neighborhoods around Jamaica Bay are home to these new Americans.² But while GNRA's mandate is to provide a great national park experience to this audience, protecting and evoking the area's rich history and serving as a "gateway" to the national park system, it is clear the park has yet to meet these charges in full, though it already has a large numbers of visitors.

→ Gateway National Recreation Area cannot be re-envisioned in isolation:

The future of Floyd Bennett Field, the Wildlife Refuge and the larger Jamaica Bay watershed are clearly linked, and can only be truly addressed by cooperation of the federal, State and City government. With sea level expected to rise between twelve and twenty-four inches and the 100-year storm anticipated once every twenty years by 2050, the likelihood of a damaging flood impacting the bay is growing. In many parts of the world, there is a growing movement to soften shorelines to absorb floodwaters and move structures back from flood prone areas. While

a challenge in urban settings like Jamaica Bay, the increased likelihood of storms make it imperative to consider. Salt marsh erosion is another example of the urgent need for cooperative action. Current losses of roughly 45 acres per year, are on top of the over 12,000 acres of the original 16,000 acres of wetlands that have been lost during the past century due to filling operations. The complexity of the Jamaica Bay watershed makes it difficult to find one culprit for the ongoing decline of Jamaica Bay's salt marshes. Hardened shorelines, dredged channels and impervious surfaces in the surrounding watershed make managing the bay a challenge. New York City's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) estimates the Bay receives approximately 259 millions gallons a day of treated sewage from the four surrounding wastewater treatment plants, contributing large portions of nitrogen into the Bay. Addressing all these issues is going to take cooperation from the Park, other public institutions and local communities.

→ There are many supporters concerned about Gateway's future, but their messages often conflict:

The good news is that a great degree of public attention has turned to the Bay. In the past several years, NYC DEP has drafted a Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan; the Army Corps of Engineers, Port Authority and Harbor Estuary Program have partnered to prepare a Comprehensive Restoration Plan for the NY/NJ Harbor, and New York City has prepared PlaNYC 2030. Private concessionaires like Aviator Sports have shown a corresponding interest in the park, and private philanthropic support is beginning to find its way to the park with the help of the National Parks of New York Harbor Conservancy and Friends of Gateway.

But while the resurgent interest in Gateway is laudable, the National Park Service, State, City, civic agencies and the communities are not always on the same page or working together. Continued poor water quality, the loss of wetlands in the Bay and the failure to sufficiently connect this great park to the urban transportation matrix are just three such examples. To a certain degree, Gateway is a victim of its geography. Each component of the park is surrounded by a variety of unique neighborhoods and strong civic associations. The park's local constituency is diffuse, broken up by the specific users groups or neighborhood advocates. It is difficult to galvanize their interests in a unified manner that makes the park a priority for local politicians. Both the park and the Bay lack a clear, strong voice.

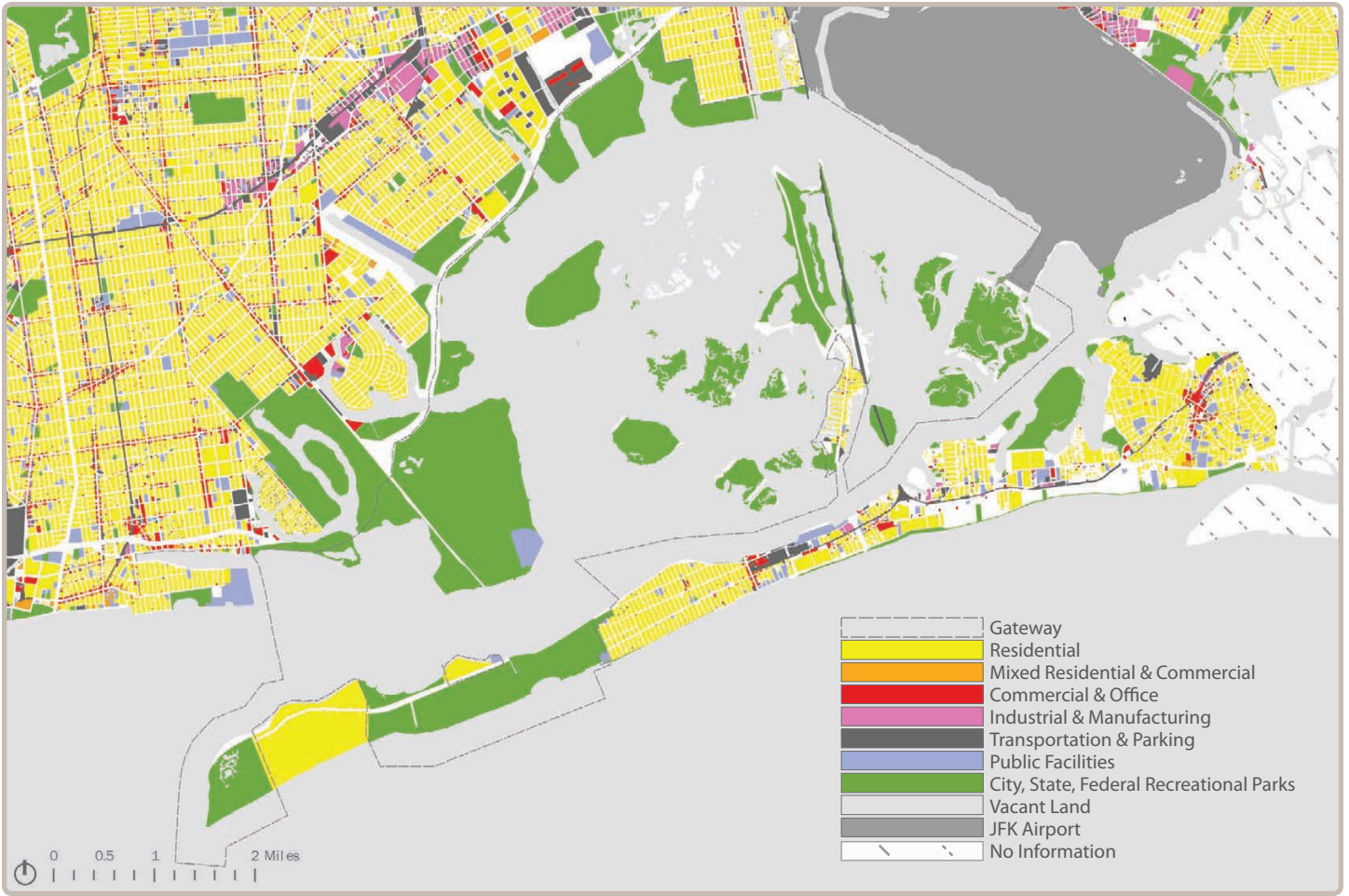
"The third most heavily visited park in the system, it is experiencing increased visitation, 5% in 2008, while most other National Park visitation is stagnant or lagging."

Barry Sullivan, GNRA General Superintendent

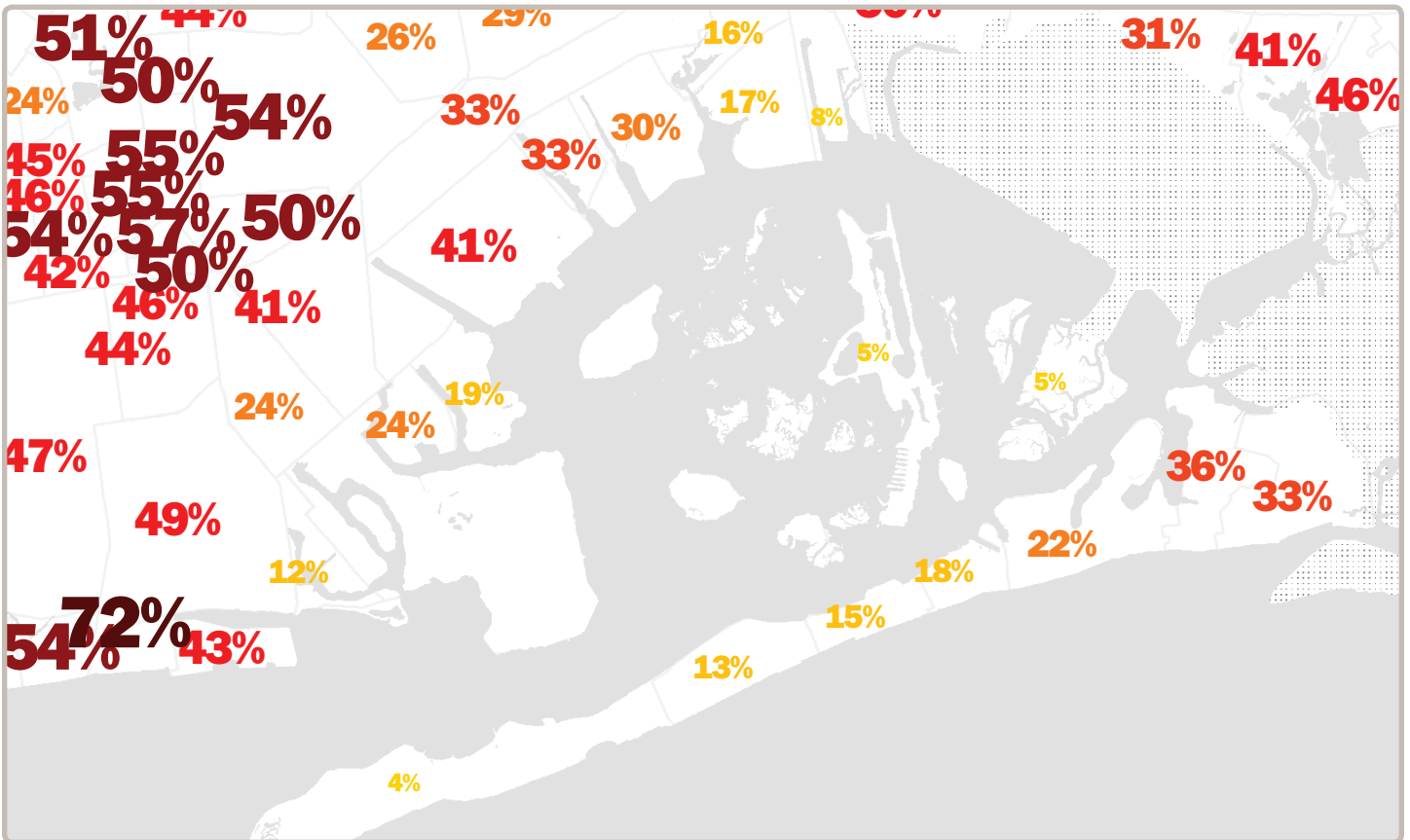
1 America 2050, RPA; New York Metropolitan Transportation Council; Federation for American Immigration Reform; 2000 Census

2 Migration Policy Institute

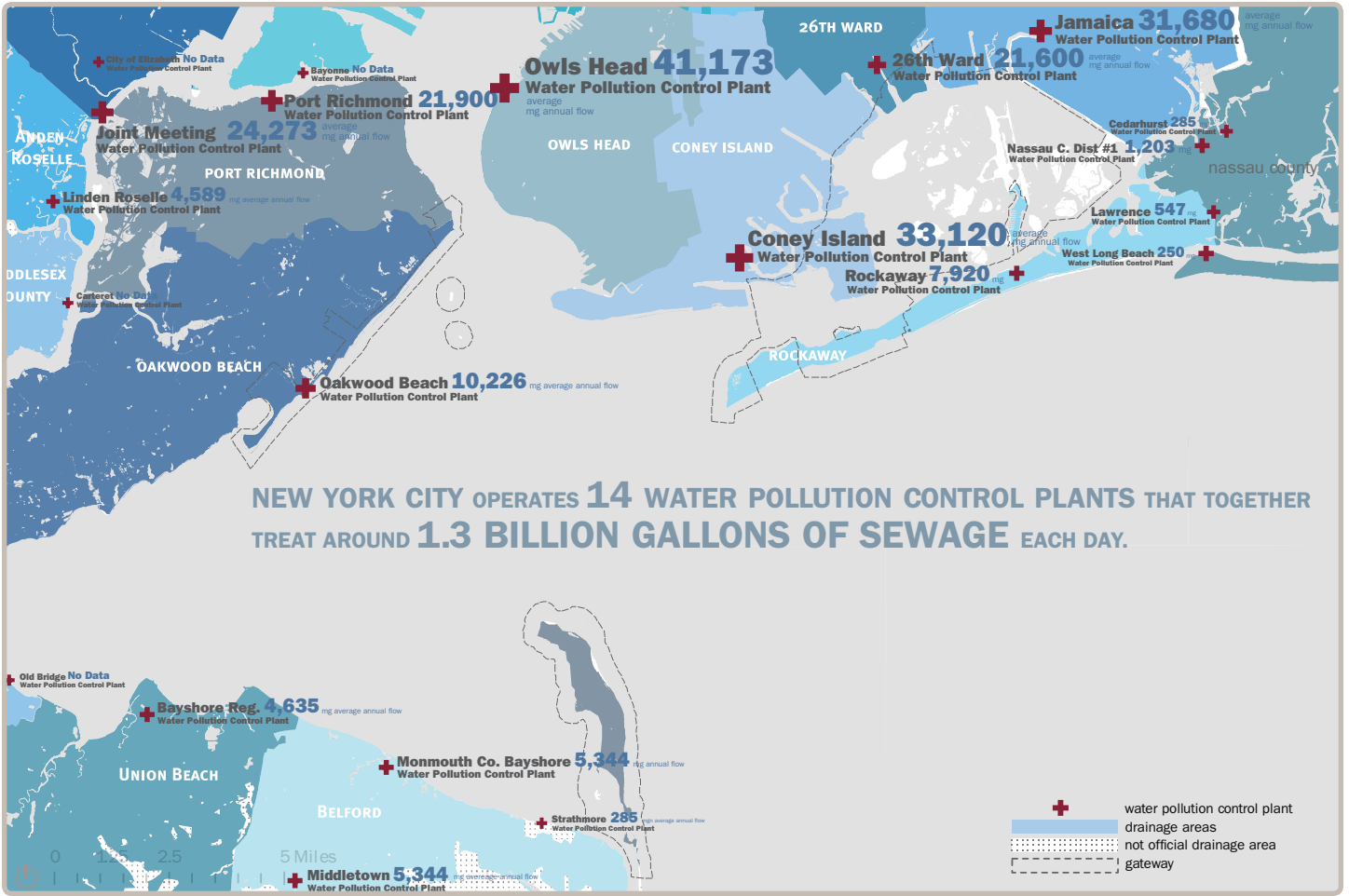
Land use



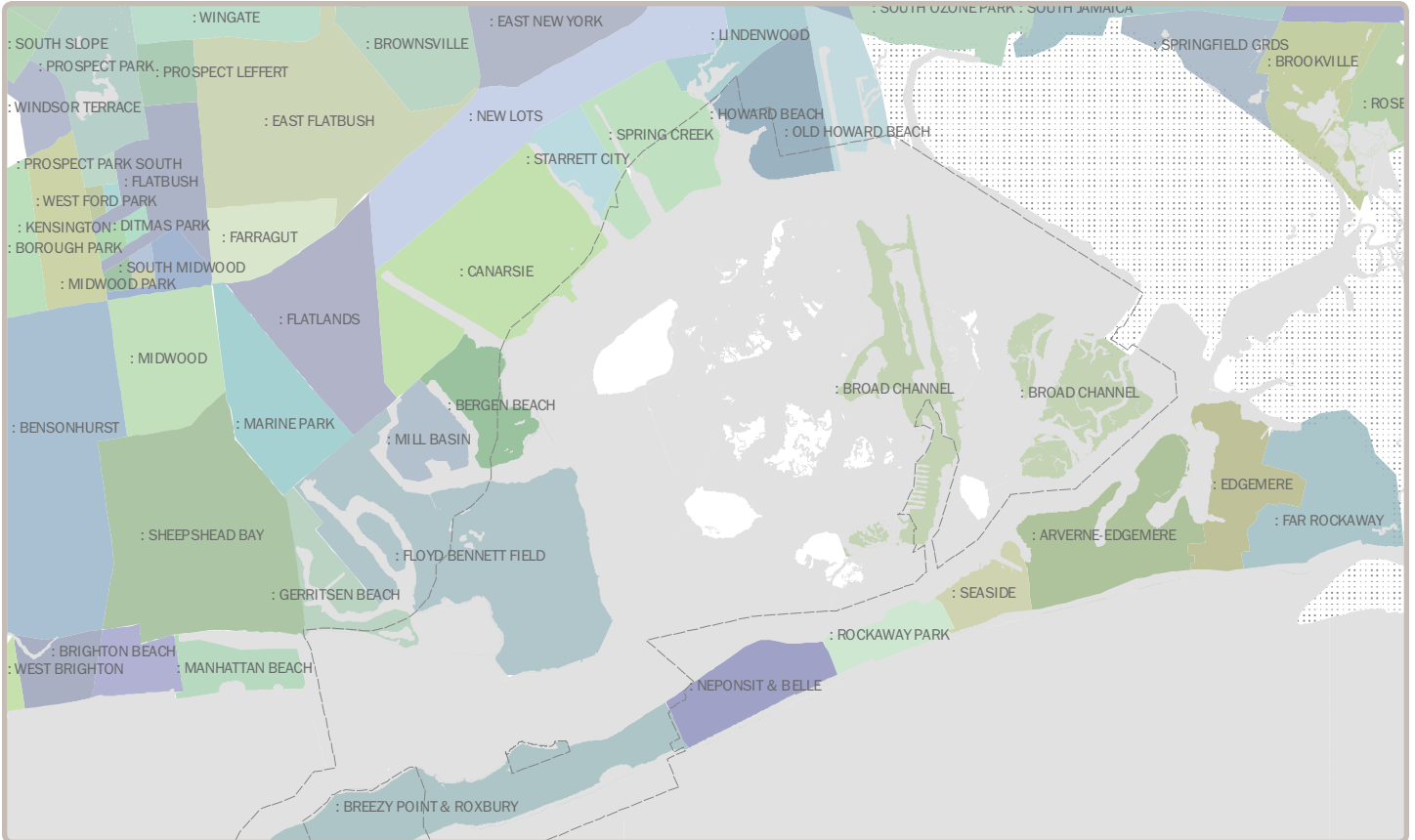
Percent Foreign-born Population

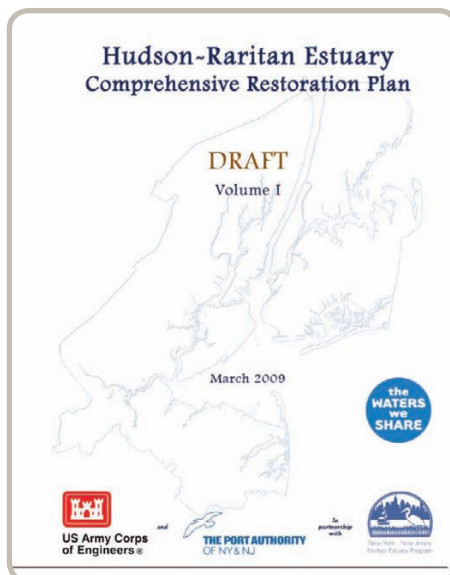
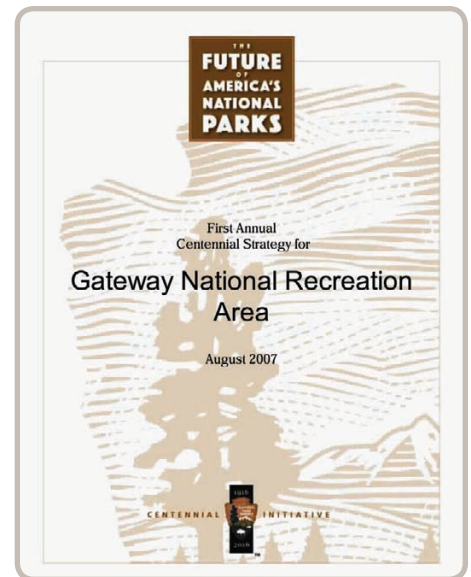
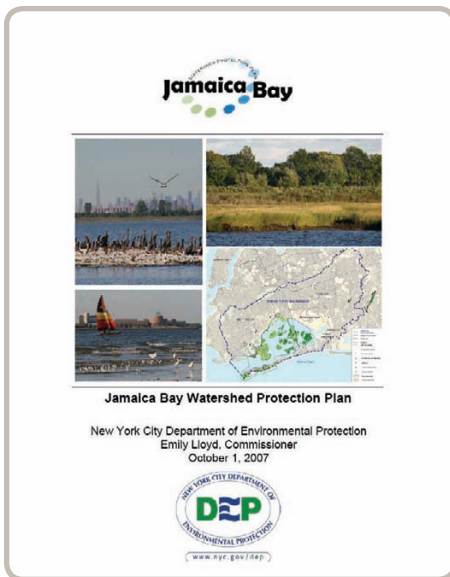


Wastewater Infrastructure



Neighborhoods Surrounding Jamaica Bay

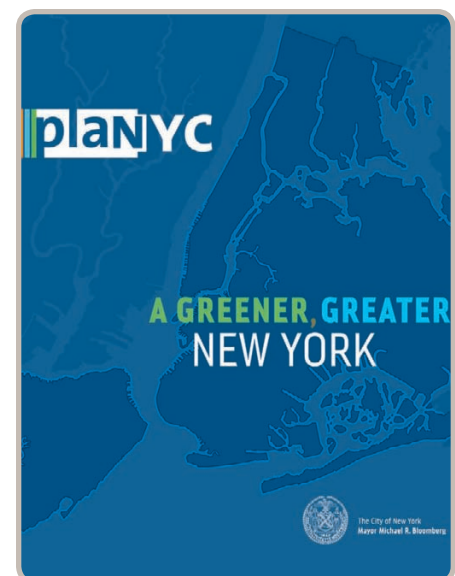
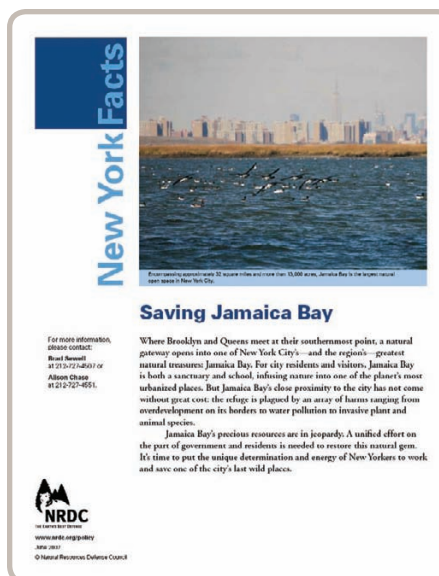
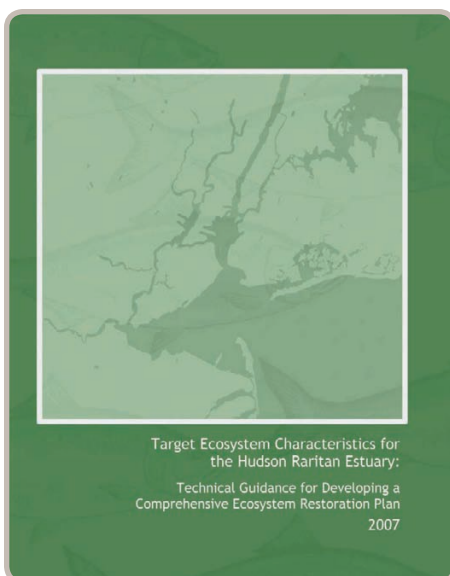




Strong partners and partnerships are already in place.

“Most important is to clean the water ... and to protect and create more undisturbed land.”

A comment from the online survey





Five Recommendations *for the* Future

Five main themes outline our recommendations
for the future of Floyd Bennett Field.

*The hangars at Floyd Bennett
Field (FBF) could help serve as a
node of activity within the park,
celebrating FBF's aviation history.*

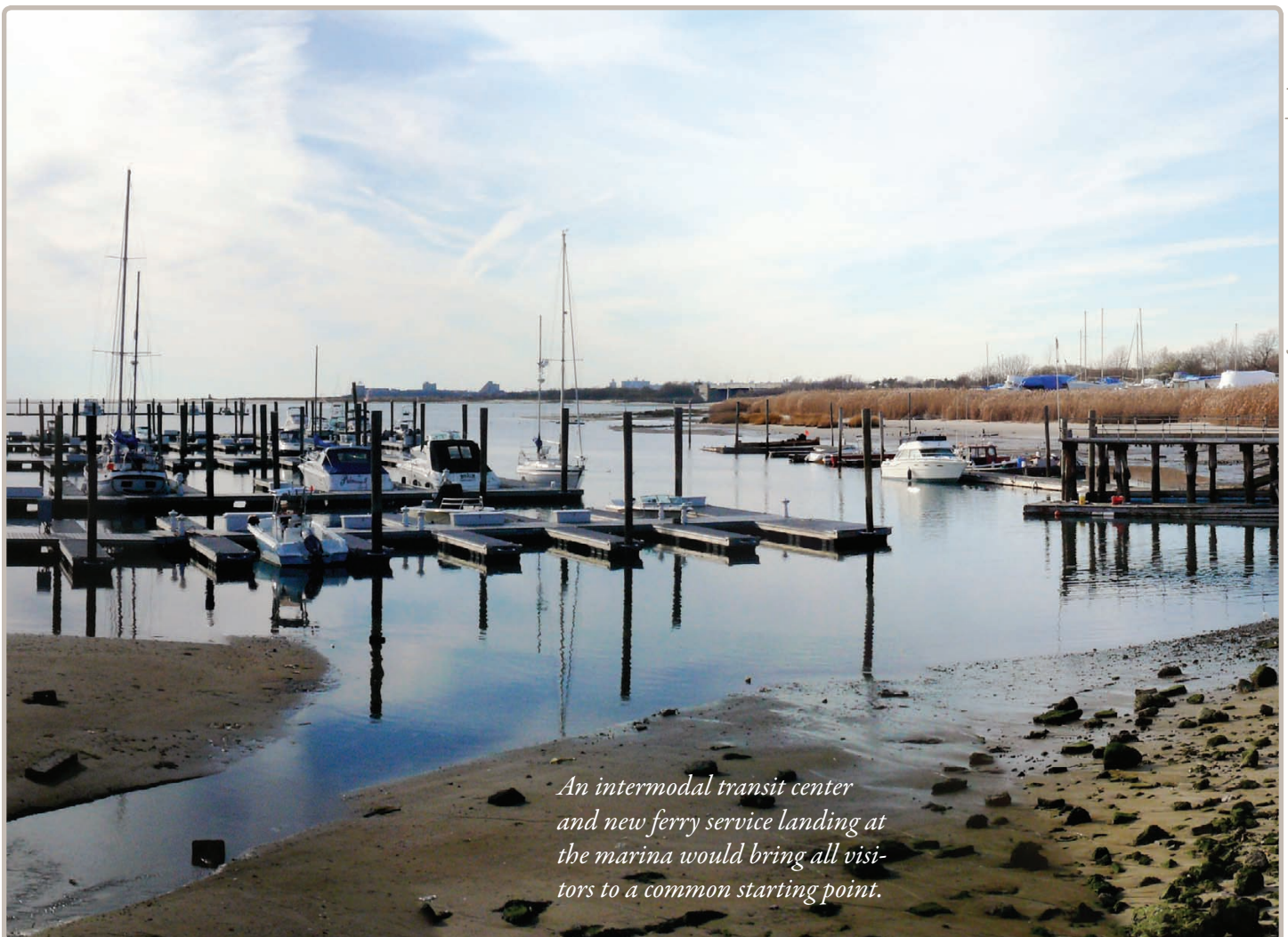
- **Reveal Visitor Opportunities**
- **Connect and Expand Access**
- **Integrate Climate Change**
- **Renature Jamaica Bay**
- **Institutionalize Partnerships**

These findings are primarily intended to inform the National Park Service as their planning team begins to identify and scope the issues to be addressed in their General Management Plan. The implications of these recommendations clearly extend beyond NPS in terms of their range and their implementation.

RPA and NPCA offer these findings as a means to engage the Park Service, other public agencies and the civic community in a dialogue about the direction and management of the park. They are not as a final word, but what we hope to be the start of

an important conversation about how best to establish Gateway as the iconic national park it should be.

We gratefully acknowledge the work of the entrants to the Envisioning Gateway Design Competition, whose words and images are reproduced in the pages that follow. Please note that these are simply for illustrative purposes and are not to be taken literally as formal proposals for the Park.



*An intermodal transit center
and new ferry service landing at
the marina would bring all visi-
tors to a common starting point.*

One: *Reveal Visitor Opportunities*

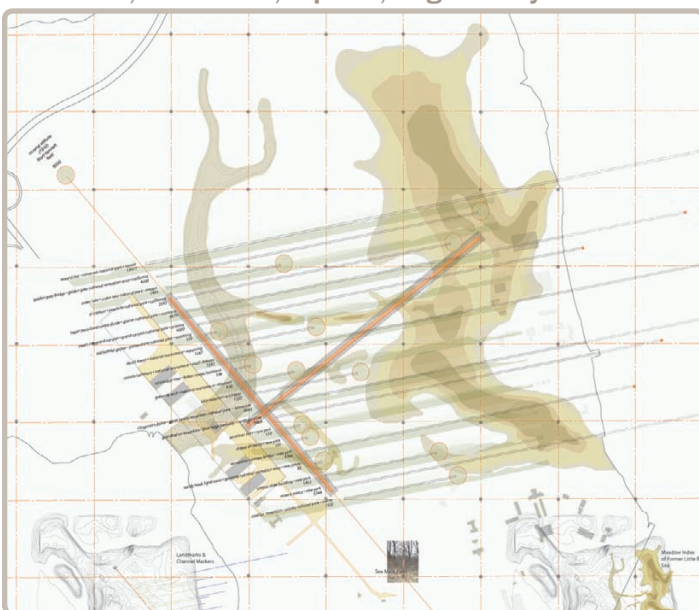
The opportunities for visitors to Floyd Bennett Field, and Jamaica Bay as a whole, are not always clear. By revealing and focusing attention on these opportunities, the National Park Service (NPS) can help improve what can often be a diffuse, if not opaque, experience.

Many of the design competition proposals recommended concentrating activities along Flatbush Avenue and moving to renature the remainder of the field and use this area for more passive activities. “Renaturing” is the term we will use to represent the restructuring and nurturing of habitats that have lost their ecological balance. In Floyd Bennett Field’s case, these changes are due to both nature as well as the consequences of man-made decisions over the years.

Reassembling Ecologies, NORTH DESIGN OFFICE



Seamarks, Landmarks, Ciphers, Virginia Polytechnic



Ryan Visitor Center



Completing the Ryan Visitor Center is one important vehicle for clarifying the Park Service experience for visitors, and showcasing Floyd Bennett Field and Jamaica Bay programs for visitors. In order to complete the Visitor Center at the former airport terminal, NPS needs another \$2 million for interior construction and \$1 million for exhibits, construction and installation.

This orientation can help celebrate the aviation history of Floyd Bennett Field by focusing visitor entry around the core of the remaining hangars and control tower. Design competition entries recommended building an Aviation Heritage Center (Mundus Bishop Design, Inc.), as well as using the remaining hangars as aircraft museums (82.M – Philadelphia). As a start, the existing Historic Aircraft Restoration Project could be relocated to this area. NPS said it plans to collect oral histories over the next two years, providing interpretive focus for the area.

“The concentration and intensification of active recreation along a central spine in Floyd Bennett Field, utilizing the existing historic central runway, is the reorganizing strategy. The goal with this move is to liberate vast tracts of land that currently have sprawling, ill-defined, uses. Intensifying activity and concentrating its footprint enables larger tracts of sensitive terrestrial and aquatic ecologies to flourish with minimal disturbance.”

North Design Office, Toronto, Ontario

Revealing the park to its visitors means finding a new way of showcasing the park's past outside of the visitor center. One of the winning competition entries, "Seamarks, Landmarks, Ciphers" (Virginia Polytechnic), uses symbols to illuminate this important history and "situate Gateway's constructed landscape within the context of other national parks and monuments."

A key challenge in realizing any new vision will be in relocating current uses and activities that are not in keeping with an iconic national park. Such action cannot be pursued until plans and funding for the next use of these areas is secure. As a first step in this process, NPS could work with these agencies to reduce their footprints and / or add to the park experience through mission-related programs.

"The existing airplane hangers and main building will be reused as mixed-use and commercial development to preserve the site's history."

LSU-2, Baton Rouge, LA

"At Floyd Bennett Field, the two major water bodies of Gateway are united at the Airfield Orientation Center. Visitors leave their cars behind here, to explore and discover the overlapping web of influences of which they are a part."

Archipelago Architecture and Landscape Architecture, New York, NY

Another challenge will be simply reducing the number of other physical assets in the park. The park is responsible for an extraordinary number of buildings, 690 total, 102 of which are located at Floyd Bennett Field. Many are already derelict, and most of the others need extensive work. The stewardship of even those in the best shape will be expensive, and distracts attention and resources from other real park priorities. This will require a close consideration of preservation mandates. As a corollary, a number of competition entries and the public's input emphasized the need for adaptive reuse of the existing infrastructure, much like Crissy Field in San Francisco.

Historic Aircraft Restoration Project



Model Airplanes

Two: *Connect and Expand Access*

Make Penn and Fountain Avenue landfills major elements of park access



In addition to revealing new visitor opportunities, the public recommendations included facilitating access to Floyd Bennett Field. With the visitor center as its core, this active area should become the hub for improved pedestrian, bicycle, ferry and transit connections.

An intermodal transit center off Flatbush Avenue, coupled with a new ferry service landing at Gateway Marina across the street, would bring all visitors to a common starting point for their park exploration. Additional bus routes, increased frequency of service, a dedicated “beach bus” or even Bus Rapid Transit should be used to improve access from inland Brooklyn and Queens neighborhoods. Of the 1.7 million households in Brooklyn and Queens, 54 percent in Brooklyn and 34 percent in Queens are without cars. That’s about 475,000 Brooklyn households and 266,000 Queens households without cars. As most visitors now travel to Gateway via private automobile, increased public transit will also help alleviate any traffic issues along Flatbush Ave and the Gil Hodges Bridge.

Building on the existing commuter ferry routes to Riis Landing, ferry transportation to the existing marina could connect with Manhattan and eco-cruises in Jamaica Bay. Additionally, a new ferry route could link all three pieces of GNRA, thus creating the sense that the park operates as a whole. Several designs proposed this triangular connection between Sandy Hook, Staten Island and Floyd Bennett.

Within the park, transportation options should also include passive recreational endeavors such as biking, kayaking, and hiking. NPS should create physical and programmatic links between the Visitor Center exhibits and locations around the park. A new trail system throughout Floyd Bennett Field could be one example that would bring visitors to the waterfront and the restored bay.

The Gateway Greenway could also help unify the park units and connect it to the city. Wayside exhibits and preserved sites, such as Battery 8, should be used to create a sense of connection

“Creating a connection between people and the water that punctures into their neighborhoods ... provides an amazing opportunity for enhancement of neighborhood vitality along Jamaica Bay. Promoting access ... and enhanced recreation opportunities ... for people to be able to reconnect with Jamaica Bay.”

Jeffrey Pronovost, Granby, MA

“At Gateway, the new identity of the park begins by uniting the various sites with the surrounding community, the water and the air above.”

Archipelago Architecture and Landscape Architecture, New York, NY

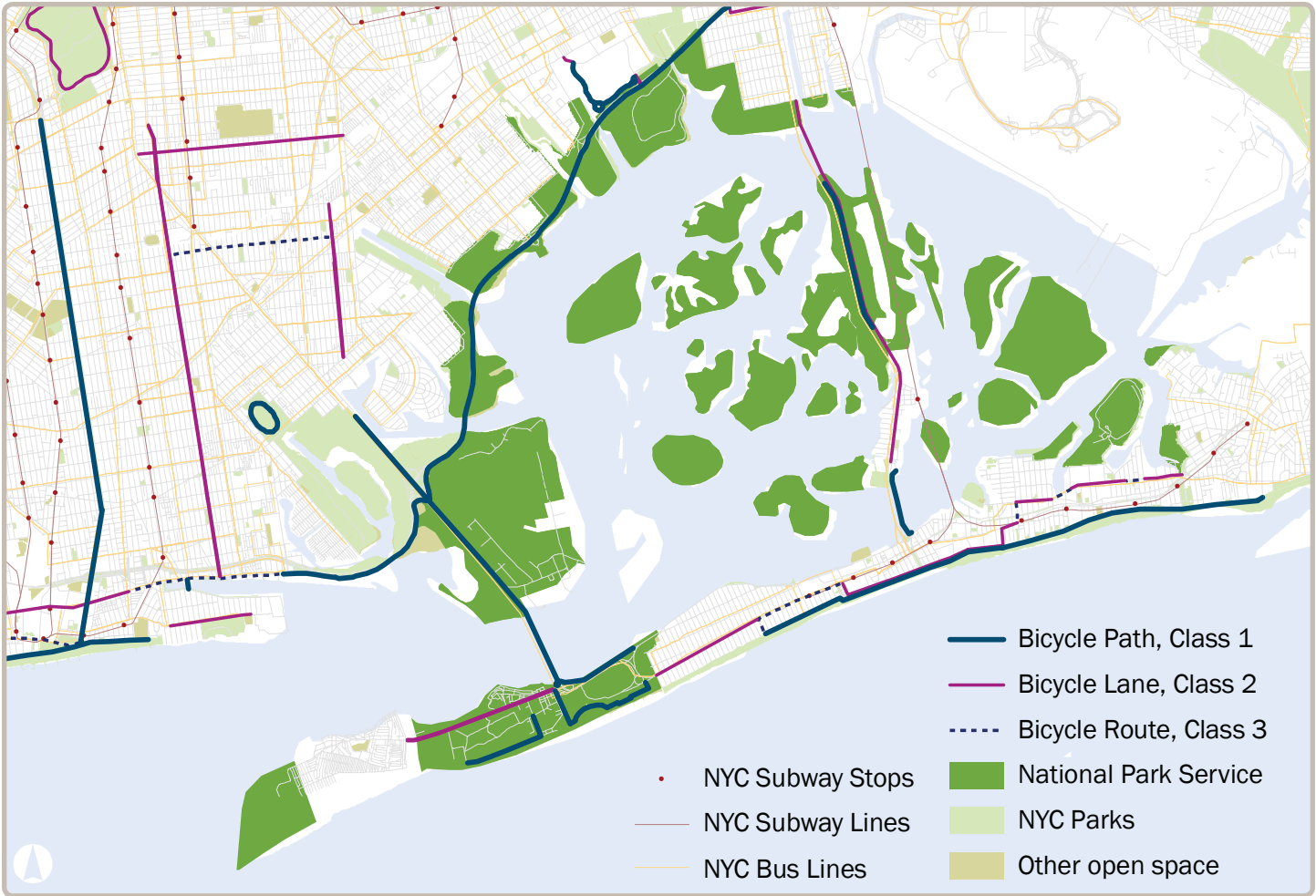
“Integrate the open space resources with surrounding communities via Green connections. By connecting existing greenways, access to recreation and ecological habitats for the residents of this dense urban area will be enhanced ... Support sustainability and provide alternative modes of transportation... By increasing the ease of connectivity via bicycle or foot ... [GNRA can become the] national symbol for the ‘GREEN-way’ of living.”

Beth Fenstermacher, Amherst, MA

“A bustling waterfront with services and the historic Ryan Visitor Center at its core, flanked by historic buildings and the new subway/transit hub.”

Mundus Bishop Design, Inc., Denver, CO

Gateway Greenway and Connections



within the park. But to make this work, these existing bike trails leading from Coney Island to Jamaica Bay need to improve their current poor condition. The pavement is cracked and uneven, and the expansion joints on the bridges are in dangerous disrepair.

These physical connections should be anchored in a series of improved public access nodes all around the bay. The newly-renovated wildlife refuge center should be one such important node. The Penn and Fountain Avenue landfills are very large green spaces. Because of their proximity to urban areas, they are great potential access points for local neighborhoods. While long term plans to improve these sites exist, the Park Service will require additional funding for their management and programming to make them work.

“The vision of linking all of the parks at Gateway, either via roadway as driving tours or linking via bus, monorail, train, etc., should be foremost, for the parks are really part of the whole.”

A comment from the online survey

Community Threads of Basins and Waterways, Jeffrey Pronovost



Three: *Integrate Climate Change*

Often present in the online forum's public comments, the effects of climate change are key to Floyd Bennett Field's redesign.

Jamaica Bay is filled with natural features and built infrastructure that will be affected by sea level rise and flooding associated with climate change. This includes the many buildings structures within the park itself, most of which lies well within the area inundated by the 100-year flood (which, according to recent projections, could occur once every 20 years). But it also includes critical subway tracks, roads, bridge abutments and JFK airport. The Bay may already be feeling these impacts. Wetland loss within the Bay is well-documented. These defining features of the Wildlife Refuge may well be lost without concrete action.

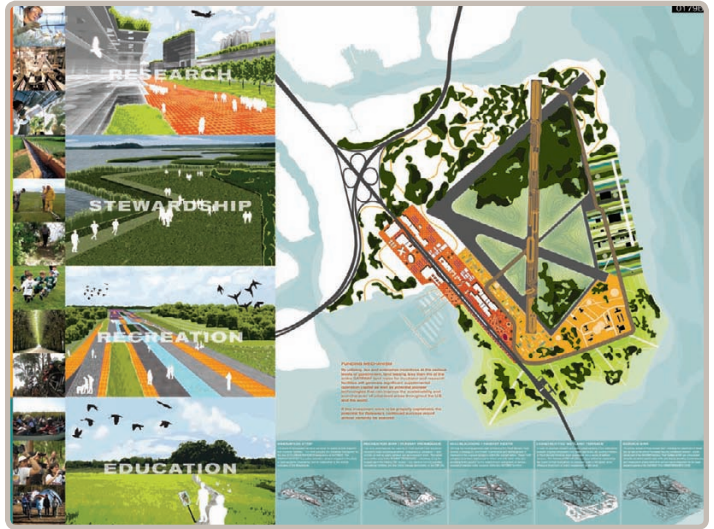
The upcoming General Management Plan should integrate climate change in its projects and programs. Gateway's physical vulnerability and its proximity to millions of people in the world's great media center make it the place in the Park System to interpret and showcase both adaptive responses and the means of improving our carbon cycles. Questions about strategic retreat from shorelines, energy generation and conservation, new technology and green infrastructure should be incorporated into the visitor experience. The National Park Service (NPS) should use Gateway as an opportunity to highlight its research and stewardship in these issues.

One means of showcasing climate change is the proposed Jamaica Bay Institute at Riis Landing. The research center could be used as a testing ground for water treatment strategies and habitat restoration efforts, including the various means of addressing wetland loss. The focus of the research would be local—creating a swimmable, fishable Jamaica Bay—but the results would be global. Much of the infrastructure at Riis Landing, like docking space at the old Coast Guard station, already exists.

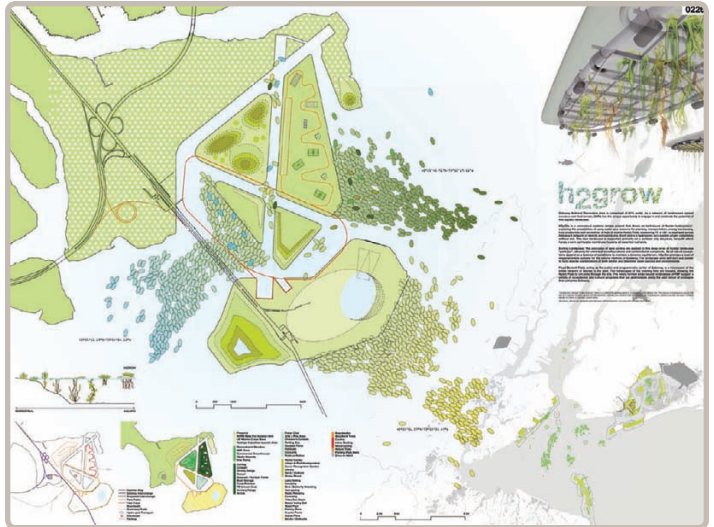
Another specific proposal would be for NPS to deepen its commitment to youth programming. NPS should aim to enhance existing school, afterschool and summer programs, giving local children maximized opportunity to learn about ecology, wetlands, marshes and the wildlife there.

While a proposal to earmark space to a public high school focused on environmental science would help create a core audience for NPS programs, the dedication of public space within a national park for parochial interests is always problematic. Perhaps academic laboratory space and pre-set field sites open to a greater number of high schools would be a great alternative.

Urban Barometer,
LOOP|8: Christopher Marcinkoski, Andrew Moddrell



H2gr0w,
Frank Gesualdi, Hayley Eber





“On a marginal landscape with great biotic diversity, we believe that people should be educated that ecosystems are in necessary flux, a cycle increasingly complex with today’s global climate shifts.”

Ashley Kelly and
Rikako Wakabayashi,
Brooklyn, NY



“That Jamaica Bay and GNRA help influence nation on climate change issues using bully pulpit of NPS in NYC media capital.”

Barry Sullivan,
GNRA Superintendant

Warbler Watching



“A National Eco-Urban Research Zone—a territory that both promotes stewardship of existing natural and native resources, but also engages in the active exploration of the relationship between dynamic ecosystems and on-going anthropologic urbanization.”

LOOP|8, Larchmont, NY

“The park is simultaneously a measure of, and a solution toward, one of the greatest ecological challenges of our time.”

GRO Architects,
PLLC, New York, NY

“With the inclusion of a charter school at Floyd Bennett Field, Gateway can become the center of environmental education in the New York area, educating through both passive learning (camping, fishing, hiking) and active learning (lectures, hands-on farming).”

Leander Grayson Krueger,
Stamford, CT

Four: *Renature Jamaica Bay*

One place to start the adaptation to climate change will be a renaturing of Jamaica Bay. The Bay has been the subject of hundreds of years of human use and change. The National Park Service (NPS) can work in partnership with the many other agencies and individuals focused on this in a conscious effort restore and improve its functionality.

For many competition entries, this included softening the waterfront edges of Floyd Bennett Field, with goals of restoring natural resources and providing a means of adapting to climate change.

But such an effort should be comprehensive in scope and ambition. Building on the research and success of the Army Corps of Engineers, Port Authority and Harbor Estuary Program's joint Comprehensive Restoration Plan (CRP), DEP's Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan, the Harbor Estuary Program and similar efforts, a collaborative effort to renature Jamaica Bay should focus on restoration efforts of upland grasslands, maritime forests, freshwater streams, existing tidal wetlands and benthic habitat.

Building on the consensus and the framework created by the CRP technical ecosystem characteristics, NPS should work with other public agencies to create a comprehensive program and management mechanism for the Bay's restoration, identify gaps in habitat and target funding sources for collaborative projects. A joint statement on the desired future conditions for the Bay could be a first step in this process. But the rate of current

wetland loss, and the impact that this loss would have on other park uses as well as other city infrastructure requires that this process move quickly.

"Original flocks of migratory avian, aquatic mammalian species will return to the area en route on their various journeys, thus re establishing colonies throughout the world to balance the planet ecologically as a whole."

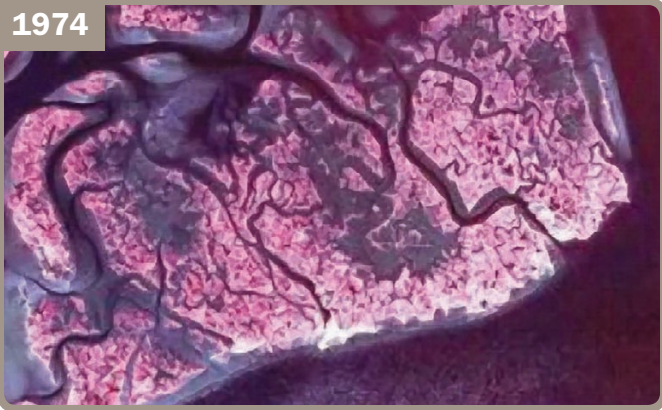
A comment from the online survey

"It is all about human contact with the environment and the resulting changes that take place over the centuries."

Archipelago Architecture and Landscape
Architecture, New York, NY

Infrared Photos Wetland loss at Duck Point and Elders Point, 1974 & 1999

1974



1974



1999



1999



[un]natural selection,
ARCHIPELAGO ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



“With the inclusion of a charter school at Floyd Bennett Field, Gateway can become the center of environmental education in the New York area, educating through both passive learning (camping, fishing, hiking) and active learning (lectures, hands-on farming).”

Leander Grayson Krueger,
Larchmont, NY

“Gateway should provide and urban oasis, devoid of concrete and filled with greenery. It should enhance the cultural lives of residents, as well as inform visitors of the area’s rich history.”

A comment from the online survey

Richard Rudnicki, design competition entrant



“The future vitality of Gateway National Recreation Area lies in enhancing its connection to water by creating a new water experience and restoring a water system. Creating an interactive, educational water treatment system within the Floyd Bennett Field site and restoring areas of former wetlands will allow for the treatment of all the site runoff, and provide a unique educational and recreational experience for New York City.”

Richard Rudnicki, Central, SC

Five: *Institutionalize Partnerships*

Achieving the aforementioned goals of revealing visitor opportunities, expanding access, incorporating climate change and renaturing Jamaica Bay will be impossible for the National Park Service (NPS) to address alone, especially since many of the issues affecting the park extend well beyond the park's boundaries.

Moving forward on this agenda will require close cooperation with state and local agencies. A formalized partnership between local, city, state and federal authorities is critical to establish Floyd Bennett Field, Jamaica Bay and Gateway as a signature national park and a regional treasure. Just as the initial development of Gateway was guided by a commission for its first ten years, it may now be time to re-cast a broad commission and empower it to bring together the community, city, state and federal partners needed to realize the potential of Floyd Bennett Field and Jamaica Bay.

A long term institutional partnership can bring to bear the necessary expertise and funding. It can help ensure that agency decisions at all levels of government reflect common goals and are coordinated. Most importantly, the creation of this collaborative structure, which ideally would be authorized through federal legislation, would help elevate Floyd Bennett Field and Jamaica Bay, and Gateway as a whole, in the eye of the public and their elected leadership.

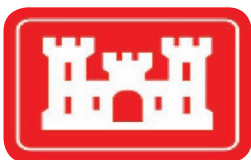
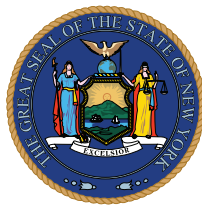
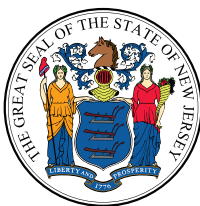
The mandate of the partnership should stem from the integration of the park's General Management Plan's treatment of Floyd Bennett Field and Jamaica Bay with the state's and city's decisions about the surrounding land and infrastructure. Other specific cooperative ventures, including wetland restoration projects, the creation of the Jamaica Bay Institute and stormwater management could also be part of the purview. Over time,

the partnership could be a template for addressing issues at other Gateway Units. But whatever its scope, the partnership's work must be heralded by detailed measures of accountability.

Like any true partnership, such a collaborative effort will be difficult to launch and even more difficult to maintain. But the alternative is bleak. Since its inception, Gateway, and Jamaica Bay and Floyd Bennett Field in particular, have suffered from a lack of public, financial, and institutional support. This cannot continue, for Gateway is one of New York City's greatest unrealized assets.

The experience of the past thirty years makes clear that without a formal collaborative authority taking responsibility for the future of the Floyd Bennet Field and Jamaica Bay, it is unlikely that these park will see any large degree of positive change in the future. Integrating Gateway into the public's eye, while simultaneously elevating it to iconic stature, will require a major coordinated effort.

The first step in the process is for NPS to take. By asking the State and City to help develop a new vision for Gateway, NPS can start the process of pulling together the collective will to see this vision realized. The American system of national parks was the first of its kind in the world, and it provides a living model for other nations wishing to establish and manage their own protected areas. Bringing that model to the nation's urban areas will be a real achievement for the National Park Service in the 21st Century. As a unique, natural, historical, urban national park, teeming with problems as well as potential, Gateway National Recreation Area urgently requires a new vision, one that educates while also truly serving the region as well as the nation.



NEW YORK CITY AUDUBON





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