

# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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*Please answer questions in space provided.* Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

1. Describe the underlying values and goals of the project. What, if any, significant trade-offs were required to implement the project?

Hunts Point Riverside Park emerged from a groundswell of energy to reclaim the Bronx River as a resource for Bronx communities. The park holds deep significance as a symbol of the renaissance of the river, the development of the Bronx River Greenway, and the engagement of local communities in parkland acquisition, design, and management. The park was born from a struggle deeply rooted in the environmental justice movement for new parkland and waterfront access in the late 1990's in the low-income Hunts Point neighborhood, a community struggling with the city's highest rates of asthma and diabetes yet lacking in recreational facilities. Already engaged in a broad effort to reclaim the Bronx River and open up access to its shores, Hunts Point leaders saw the potential in a trash strewn lot, worked with residents to clean and green the site, and developed early concepts for the design of the park, many elements of which are reflected in the park's ultimate design. Hunts Point Riverside Park encapsulates the efforts of community residents and leaders to open up new access to the Bronx River and enable local residents to fully use the river as a recreational and environmental resource. This is especially important to neighborhoods in the South Bronx that have little open space and, despite being surrounded by water, lack recreational access to the waterfront. The development of the park illustrates how an asset-based approach to community organizing that looks to the strengths of a community—in the case of Hunts Point, its tremendous human talent—can find potential, galvanize change, and build momentum for other projects to improve quality of life.

The goal of Hunts Point Riverside Park from a design perspective was to capture a sense of nature on a site located between a scrap metal yard and the world's largest food distribution center. The park's sinuous paths, thoughtfully-designed details (e.g., small-scale boats for climbing, shell chairs, a pergola with seating) and dense vegetation creates spaces for recreation and respite, provides habitat, and offers a green oasis in a highly urbanized environment.

The development of a new park in an area with industrial and commercial uses reveals inherent tensions. However, waterfront access is crucial to these communities, and together, we are prepared to confront and manage these conflicts—barge, truck, and rail traffic, as well as the sensory impact of adjacent uses. In addition, we must manage public access to a river whose waters are not yet safe for primary contact. Some may question whether a waterfront park belongs in such a location, but community residents rightly ask: if not here, where?

2. How has the project impacted the local community?

As the first waterfront park in Hunts Point and the first new park on the Bronx River Greenway, Hunts Point Riverside Park is a victory for a generation of environmental justice activists who have fought tooth and nail for parkland and waterfront access in their neighborhood. Through extensive involvement in the design and development of Hunts Point Riverside Park, community members helped determine how millions of dollars were spent in their community, and when the park opened in 2007, residents could see that their efforts changed the face of their neighborhood. This type of community involvement in decision-making helps to reverse a history of land use planning that favored highways over neighborhoods, and that concentrated noxious land uses in communities like the South Bronx. The success that community residents have had in working with public agencies to improve neighborhood conditions on the Bronx River has provided invaluable experience that lays the groundwork for tackling other community problems. The park has also opened up new recreational opportunities to residents. Hundreds, if not thousands of Bronx residents launch boats from this site every year through events like the Bronx River Alliance's annual Amazing Bronx River Flotilla and regular programming by Rocking the Boat, a local non-profit that enables local youth to build traditional boats and use them in an extensive on-water education program. On weekends during the warm months, Rocking the Boat also offers community rowing days to the public from the park.

Hunts Point Riverside Park also offers space for quiet enjoyment and informal play, a rare treasure in Hunts Point. Here children safely play and have the type of contact with nature—skipping stones, discovering the critters that live at the water's edge—that defines childhood in less urbanized environments. For residents in the poorest urban Congressional district in the country Hunts Point Riverside Park provides a resource not found in some of the poshest Manhattan locales—the opportunity to contemplate the immutable, yet ever-changing natural phenomenon that is a river flowing out to sea.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION (CONT'D)

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3. Describe the key elements of the development process, including community participation where appropriate.

The story of Hunts Point Riverside Park is intertwined with the larger effort to reclaim the Bronx River that began in earnest in 1997 with the formation of the Bronx River Working Group. The Working Group brought together 65 community organizations around the common goal of claiming the river as a resource and, by 2001, had raised \$33 million to restore the river and develop the Bronx River Greenway. At this point, the Bronx River Alliance was formed as an independent non-profit to steward these funds and work with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, as well as other agency and community partners, to reclaim the river.

As the Working Group was gathering steam, Majora Carter, a member of the Group doubtful that the river touched her community, was led by her dog down a trash-strewn abandoned street-end and discovered the river firsthand. Majora then wrote a \$10,000 seed grant enabling residents and leaders to green the site and use the space as a park before its formal redevelopment. Following the allocation of \$3.27 million in mayoral funds for a formal capital investment by NYCDPR, community residents worked closely with planners and designers from the agency to envision the ultimate design.

While the vision of Hunts Point Riverside Park and the Bronx River Greenway as a whole rose from the neighborhoods that line the river, NYCDPR has been a welcoming public agency home to this project, assisting in raising funds for Bronx River projects, managing the design and construction processes through the agency's Capital Division, and maintaining and operating the parkland through the Bronx Borough office.

4. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources and square foot costs where applicable.

The capital improvements to Hunts Point Riverside Park were funded by \$3.27 million in New York City mayoral funds. Because the abandoned street-end redeveloped for the park is city-owned property, there were no site acquisition costs. The site was augmented by the donation at no cost of a waterfront parcel from the adjacent Hunts Point Produce Market, property under the jurisdiction of the city's Economic Development Corporation. Therefore, the entirety of the \$3.27 million was dedicated to design, construction, environmental remediation, and construction oversight.

Several off-site improvements were crucial to the success of the park—traffic calming measures and pedestrian improvements to the entrance implemented by NYCDOT and the GreenStreets program, as well as a safe railroad crossing provided by NYCEDC.

City support for Hunts Point Riverside Park should be couched in the context of the confluence of federal, state and local funds that were pouring into the Bronx River effort at the time. Lead by the vision outlined by the Bronx River Working Group, government and businesses dedicated \$33 million to the Bronx River—and today, that figure has risen to over \$120 million.

5. Is the project unique and/or does it address significant urban issues? Is the model adaptable to other urban settings?

Hunts Point Riverside Park is unique in that the forces that led to its creation—a renewed community organizing effort to reclaim the river, strong community leaders, receptive public agencies and elected officials—came together at the perfect moment for this park and the Bronx River Greenway to emerge. However, there are lessons to be gleaned from the creation of this park that could be applied to various settings.

One transferable lesson is that public-private models of park development can bring strong and lasting results and can do so far away from the concentrated resources of a central business district. The partnership model for park management is by now well-known—and originated in New York City with the Central Park Conservancy—but Hunts Point Riverside Park offers a model of how the partnership model can be implemented in an underserved community. It draws on a public agency that commits to investing in building constituencies for parks; it exemplifies an asset-based approach to community development; and it involves active listening and responsive planning to evident community uses and articulated desires. Hunts Point Riverside Park showcases the value of linking to a larger effort: the development of the Bronx River Greenway. The broader endeavor to reclaim the river inspired the public, brought public resources to bear, and galvanized lasting change.