Make Your Mark On The Waterfront Competition Winners: Combined Team Design Proposal

The goal of the collaborative design proposal for The East River State Park is to acknowledge the past, present, and future of the Williamsburg Waterfront and its surrounding communities. This proposal recognizes the industrial history of the site while simultaneously acknowledging the current plan and its potential as a community-inspired urban landscape. The team proposes to accomplish these goals by improving waterfront access and stabilization, providing community, art and educational features, and incorporating smart, sustainably-designed technology. Through the implementation of these features, the overall plan for the Park will result in loosely programmed areas within the open green space for both active and passive users. In effect, many types of users will be able to enjoy the park simultaneously from sunbathers and concert go-ers to students learning about local eco-systems and sustainable practices. Moreover, the plan designates areas for art exhibitions throughout, grassroots organizations to meet, educational classes for all ages, flea markets and other local events, and informal gatherings.

Here is a list of design objectives incorporated into our team design:

Waterfront Access and Stabilization

1. Temporary Canvases will be installed to allow for immediate shade for park users. The Temporary Canvases will then be replaced by Living Canvases (tree plantings) that will create permanent shade and areas for gathering, relaxing, and education. The planting of tree groves in geometric configurations will create "outdoor rooms" throughout the site. The trees are dense at the park entrance and then fade away as one moves closer to the shore and to views of Manhattan.
2. The existing feeling of intimacy created by the natural coastline will be preserved. The riparian buffers will remain but will be improved so as to further stabilize the water's edge. These infrastructures will be modified to provide stability for the coastline as well as access points to the beach for park visitors.
3. Tidal stairs will be implemented as the primary means for visitors to access the water's edge. These wide stairs will provide seating at low tide and a means of measuring the water at high tide. Grass pavers just above the tidal waters will provide amphitheater-like seating and offer views of NYC skyline.

Community, Art and Educational Features

1. An Educational Pier will be constructed adjacent to the ruins of the existing pier at the northern end of the site. This pier will function in coordination with nearby eco-islands which will house renewable energies including wind turbines and solar panels to power on-site lighting. With regards to education, the proposed Pier will allow users to walk along the water where they may view (but not access) the eco-islands as well as view floating gardens integrated into the structure of the pier itself.
2. Play/Interactive areas for children are proposed within the existing industrial features on the site. This enables children to be aware of the industrial heritage of the area while at the same time providing opportunity for fun. The areas recognize the interconnectedness of the natural elements of the park - vegetation, sand, and water - and include "lawn waves" as a special topographical feature.
3. A bermed building for bathroom and maintenance facilities will be built on the southern side of the site. This bermed building and the demolition of the Southern most concrete platform allows for more physical permeability and visual access on the site. It will also house a Living Machine that will process the gray and black water on the site and return it to the adjacent wetlands. The building's form will allow for the public to easily view this process from the exterior.
4. By making water visible on the site through features such as the wetlands, bioswales [visible troughs for collecting storm water runoff], eco-islands, children's water feature, and river's edge, the relationship of water and land will be realized by the park visitor.
5. Art-the display and performance of artistic works-will be encouraged throughout the site. Temporary exhibitions, festivals, and creative uses of the Park should be encouraged during every season. More permanent art can be incorporated into the design through competitions or invitation. For example, industrial end pours on site can be reused as seating areas throughout and local artists can modify each end pour through tiling, painting, and collage.

Sustainable Technologies

1. To truly make a park sustainable, these principles must resonate through every part of the design including its form, materials, plantings, and technologies. In this case, the team has tried to incorporate sustainability into all of the above components of the Park. The examples for the East River State Park include, but are not limited to the living machine for treatment of on-site gray and black water, eco-islands with wind and solar power, bioswales, reduction of impermeable areas, and material reuse.