



FRESH KILLS PARK: LIFESCAPE

STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

DRAFT MASTER PLAN

MARCH 2006



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prepared for:
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor

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1.1 FRESH KILLS—NEW YORK’S NEW PARK: EXECUTIVE STATEMENTS

The City’s Commitment to Fresh Kills Park:

Fresh Kills, which operated from 1948 until it closed initially in 2001, is the world’s largest landfill. Consisting of more than 2,000 acres on the western edge of Staten Island, it contains within its boundaries intact tidal wetlands and significant wildlife habitats. Because of its size and diverse topography, the site lends itself to both recreational and scenic uses. We hope that Fresh Kills Park, with its unprecedented size, metropolitan context, and challenging but rich opportunities for end-use development, will serve as a model for land reclamation projects around the world.

Today, it is a great pleasure to present the Draft Master Plan for Fresh Kills Park, Staten Island, a significant step toward transforming the former landfill into a green oasis for all New Yorkers.

As we embark on the development of this site, we would like to offer Staten Islanders and all New Yorkers a glimpse of the many ways we can re-imagine this extraordinary open space. Fresh Kills Park will be a significant addition to New York City’s portfolio of parks, providing waterfront access and innovative recreational uses.

New York City is known for its leadership in innovative design. The RFP and related competition, and the master plan it yielded, are the first steps toward transforming the site into a world-class amenity for the Borough of Staten Island, the City and the tri-state region. As we begin one of the most innovative and important planning projects in the City’s history, we invite you to join us to explore the possibilities.

We hope this Draft Master Plan will offer you a vivid preview of that future.

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor, The City of New York

The Significance of Fresh Kills Park for Staten Island:

Who could have imagined that in my lifetime I would one day hold such a document in my hands? For within these pages, I and my fellow Staten Islanders will be able to read and celebrate in the certainty that, with Fresh Kills, a simultaneous ending and beginning are finally here.

First and foremost, this master plan embodies a most important ending for us: that Fresh Kills will never reopen as New York City’s garbage disposal facility. Staten Islanders can finally exhale and vacate from within all those remaining pent-up fears—large and small, real and imagined, from the personal to the community-based—that for two generations both defined and stigmatized Staten Island to the nation and the world as someplace you did not want to be in or even near.

While long in coming, changes are already evident. During the intervening five years since the last ton of garbage was dumped in the landfill, Staten Island’s population has grown to such an extent that our landscape is now a place to be, a location where people want to remain, to raise a family, and even remain when they retire.

To paraphrase a famous playwright, an exit door is also the entrance into a new space, and this Master Plan is the sound of the exit door closing, leaving behind the Fresh Kills of yesterday. This document is thus the first step into our new space, the beginning in how we can—and must—redefine, through Fresh Kills, this island for ourselves and the next generations. It is an organic blueprint in how we can have a direct hand in planning, and perhaps even witnessing, the evolution of a 20th-century blight on the landscape into a 21st-century “lifescape.”

That’s the key point here: life within a landscape. For the emphasis will never again be on degradation and decomposition but on renewal and rebirth. And it is also the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to recapture what was lost, to rediscover and reincorporate into Staten Island’s geography almost 3,000 acres of land and a roadway system that I, for one, thought was lost to us.

As Borough President, it is my duty to ensure that the transformation of Fresh Kills reflects the character of this unique community. Therefore, I encourage every island resident to read this plan and participate in this exciting public process. Together we will usher in a new and promising era for Staten Island.

James P. Molinaro, Staten Island Borough President

Design in the Context of New York City Parks:

This document offers a thrilling glimpse into a visionary plan. The reclamation of Fresh Kills—with restored tidal marshes, scenic trails for hiking and biking, playing fields and playgrounds—will be one of the most significant and exciting open space projects in our city’s history. Indeed, the effort in which we are now engaged is reminiscent of the popular movements that gave rise to Central Park, Prospect Park and many of our other greatest parks. Like these achievements of the past, this Master Plan owes its existence to the vision of civic and community leaders who understand that parks and open spaces are a critical facet of the health of our children, the quality and value of our neighborhoods, and the well-being of our city.

The creation of Fresh Kills Park also shows us how government can respond to the needs of local communities and reminds us that public works can still be undertaken at the grandest scale. The park will become a tangible symbol of renewal and an expression of how our society can tap into natural processes and help to restore the proper functioning of our landscape.

Fresh Kills will be unique in our city’s park system. Its vastness and rolling topography of mounds and creeks will add a layer of richness and complexity that might seem improbable within the dense urban fabric of New York. From within its valleys, visitors will feel immersed in a vibrant landscape, with little sign of the metropolis beyond. From its hilltops, views across the harbor and the Arthur Kill will provide a fresh perspective of our great city and the plains and mountains to the west.

Adrian Benepe, Commissioner, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

A New Future:

As a longtime Staten Islander, it gives me great pleasure to participate in the transformation of the massive Fresh Kills landfill property into what will become a wonderful expanse of parklands and needed recreational facilities. For 50 years, Fresh Kills served the City of New York as a vital component in our solid waste management system. Now, it will serve as an even more vital recreational asset to be enjoyed by all for many years to come.

John J. Doherty, Commissioner, New York City Department of Sanitation

A Major Cultural Destination:

Fresh Kills is one of the most distinctive landscapes in New York City, and the extraordinary nature and scope of the Fresh Kills site offer us an unprecedented opportunity to create a range of cultural attractions that will complement and enhance the other facets of the master plan. With art installations, performance venues, workshop space and cultural events, the expansive parkland will serve as a cultural destination like no other, engaging New Yorkers and visitors in the city’s unique and vibrant creative community.

Kate D. Levin, Commissioner, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

A World-Class Park of Unlimited Opportunity:

The Department of City Planning is proud to present the Draft Master Plan for Fresh Kills Park, Staten Island. After the closing of the Fresh Kills Landfill in 2001, the City of New York made a commitment to work with Staten Islanders toward redeveloping Fresh Kills into a world-class park. The Draft Master Plan is a significant milestone toward realizing a new future for this extraordinary site. Working closely with our partner city and state agencies, elected officials, local stakeholders and the general public, the design team, led by Field Operations, has developed a plan that establishes Fresh Kills Park as an important asset and destination for the residents of Staten Island, the city and the region.

At 2,315 acres, Fresh Kills is nearly three times the size of Central Park. The transformation of Fresh Kills from landfill to park will be one of the most ambitious public works projects of this magnitude, driven by an ecological restoration program that will in turn provide extraordinary settings for enjoying the natural landscape, public art and recreational activities not typically accommodated in big-city environments. The Draft Master Plan provides a blueprint for reclaiming one of the world’s largest landfills for public use, and is a critical step in the long-term development of Fresh Kills Park. The city, and the project team, is committed to making Fresh Kills Park a model of excellence for innovative open space design.

The Draft Master Plan was undertaken with an extraordinary participatory planning process involving affected stakeholders and the general public. Over the past two years, after numerous large public meetings, smaller planning and design workshops, and many additional meetings with elected representatives, stakeholders and public agencies, a vision for Fresh Kills Park developed. There is broad-based consensus for a park filled with expansive open spaces, recreational uses, innovative programming opportunities and access to the waterfront.

We are gratified to have received strong support from the stakeholders who have embraced this plan as a means to reclaim this former liability as an extraordinary public amenity. We look forward to a continued dialogue with all stakeholders throughout the park’s planning and development.

Amanda M. Burden, AICP, Director, New York City Department of City Planning

1.2 THE FRESH KILLS PARK DRAFT MASTER PLAN

The Draft Master Plan is the first major milestone in the process of imagining and projecting a new future for Fresh Kills, once the world's largest landfill, now to become one of the world's largest and most ecologically innovative urban public parks.

The Draft Master Plan describes a vision and framework for review, discussion and decision-making. Its recommendations are not fixed or final. The input of many experts, policy makers and the public will be critical to the refinement of the plan over the remainder of the planning process. The objectives of the Draft Master Plan are to:

- Outline goals, a design vision and framework plan for Fresh Kills Park;
- Demonstrate that the vision and goals are responsive to community and city agency desires, and are grounded and realistic;
- Advance discussion at the leadership level regarding design direction, finance and stewardship options;
- Build broader understanding and leadership for the project.

The process, to date, has involved site study and extensive discussion, review and feedback among the consultant team, city and state agencies, local and regional stakeholders, and the Staten Island community. Ongoing landfill capping, maintenance and management operations have been a key determinant of the Draft Master Plan recommendations. This report is the third iteration in the development of the Master Plan. It was preceded by the Conceptual Design Approach (spring 2004) and the Preliminary Draft Master Plan (December 2004). Upon review and feedback from agencies, stakeholders and the community, this report will serve as the basis for an environmental impact study (EIS) and an associated Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). This process includes a series of required public hearings with community boards, the City Planning Commission and City Council. The EIS, expected in summer 2007, will lead to further revisions to create the Final Master Plan, a basis for design that may then be used to guide further development of the site. Upon completion of the Master Plan, the first projects could begin design development and construction at Fresh Kills, allowing for public access and use of certain areas of the site by 2008-09. The first major project, planned to be open and operational as early as 2007, is the Owl Hollow soccer field complex in South Park. The administration is also committed to the construction of a park drive connection between Richmond Avenue and the West Shore Expressway, targeted for completion by 2009.

At the outset, the city has embraced an open dialogue with the community and demanded a design that would be responsive to public needs and desires. The project has been presented to the public numerous times in public and community forums during the past two years. Public outreach will continue through the environmental assessment and land use review period and during the final design and implementation. The goal of this outreach is twofold: to garner input from the community about the park that they will be using, and to build a constituency that has a vested interest in making the park a reality.

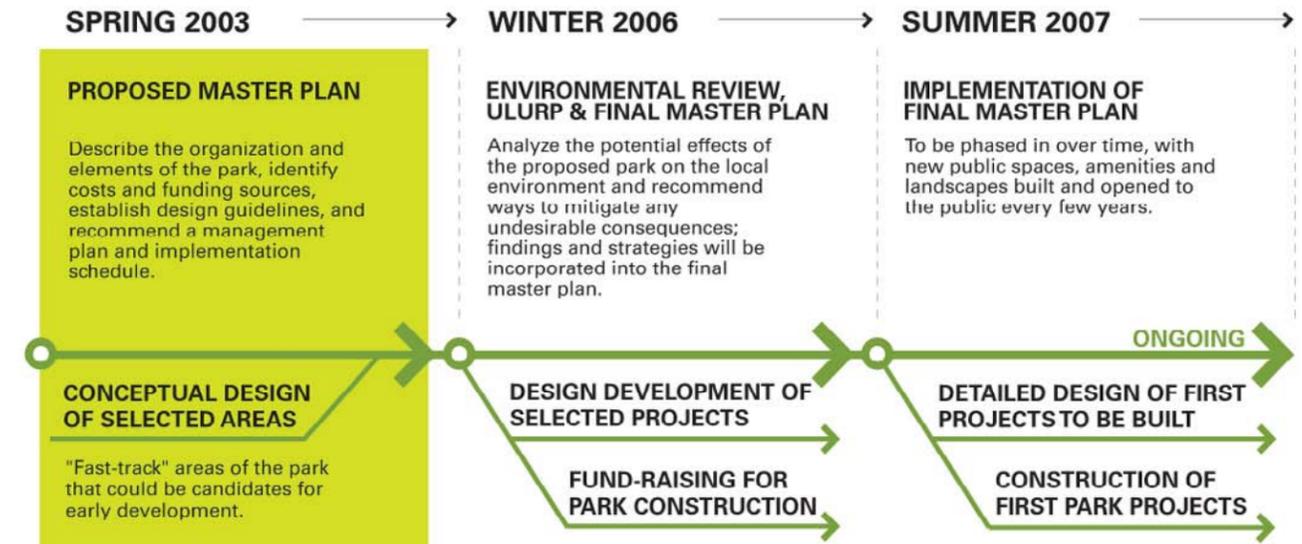


FIGURE 1: THE TIME LINE FOR MAJOR PHASES OF THE MASTER PLANNING PROCESS



FIGURE 2: COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN DISCUSSION WITH THE DESIGN AND PLANNING TEAM AT A PUBLIC MEETING ON STATEN ISLAND, MARCH 2004

1.3 THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The transformation of Fresh Kills should be a model of continued public engagement.

The scale and unusual nature of this project have generated a great deal of interest and enthusiasm at public meetings over the past two years. It is crucial to continue to engage the public so that the Master Plan reflect its needs, desires and dreams. In general, the public has expressed a strong desire for a broad mix of programs at Fresh Kills, with an emphasis on dedicating large tracts of the park to scenic passive uses, ecological restoration and habitat creation. A synopsis of main themes advocated by stakeholders during the outreach is outlined below.

- **Activate the park:** Most people want to see a mix of active programming, including recreation and sports facilities, restaurants, educational and cultural institutions, and waterfront amenities, but many caution against allowing too much development. The majority hope to retain large sections of quiet, scenic landscape, while offering concentrated areas for active programming.
- **Create opportunities for large-scale recreational activities:** People see the opportunity to create extensive pathways and trails for walking, running, organized marathons, bicycling and horseback riding. They also would like an area dedicated to mountain biking trails. There is also an interest for sports fields (particularly soccer and tennis) and more flexible-use, large-scale meadows for picnicking, kite-flying and community events. Some expressed a desire to see a golf course, an amphitheater and a night-sky observatory.
- **Create neighborhood park amenities:** There has been strong support for improving existing recreational and park amenities and building new ones, responsive to the needs of local residential communities.
- **Capitalize on Fresh Kills' vast scale to improve regional natural resources:** Many people recognize Fresh Kills as a rare opportunity to restore natural systems, create wide-open spaces, and improve ecology and habitat in the region. A significant number envision extensive areas of passive park with diverse wildlife and plant habitats.
- **Build new roadways to mitigate the impact of the park on local congestion:** There is widespread concern among Staten Islanders about the effect a destination park may have on traffic in already congested areas. Many people see transportation improvements as the key to managing anticipated impacts, and as an opportunity to help improve local connectivity, with a new east-west connection to the West Shore Expressway. People recognize the need for park drives in a four-square mile site, but many want to limit these to only a few main circulation routes.
- **Create opportunities for waterfront recreation:** People are excited about the existing water resources of Fresh Kills, seeing opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, fishing, bird-watching, picnicking and strolling. Marinas and launch ramps for motorized boats have also been supported.
- **Create educational opportunities:** Many people value the importance of educational opportunities and recognize the international significance of the conversion of Fresh Kills to parkland. The history and workings of the landfill can be explained through educational exhibits. An ecology center could involve local youth in ecological science experiments.

- **Create opportunities for art and culture:** The unique nature and scale of the site suggests opportunities for environmental art, performance art and cultural event programming. People are generally interested in seeing an arts program at Fresh Kills, including artwork installations, community and art workshops, a museum or gallery, an amphitheater, events and displays.
- **Demonstrate renewable energy systems:** The public is supportive of a park design that includes sustainable energy demonstrations harnessing solar, wind, water and methane power. Many feel these experiments would give the park a cutting-edge identity and augment its educational value. A few worry that windmills might have an adverse effect on ambient noise levels or on bird life.
- **Concentrate commercial facilities:** Opinion is fairly consistent among local residents that large-scale, commercial programs should be located primarily in the center of the park, rather than along its edges, but that any such development be limited. Most people understand that commercial concessions are needed to activate the park and generate operating revenue. Support for these elements, however, is not unanimous. People are especially skeptical about chain restaurants and generic development, but are amenable to distinctive, thoughtfully designed facilities.
- **Promote youth recreation:** Many people feel that Staten Island has too few sports facilities, particularly year-round facilities. Noting that the borough is growing and there is an increasing number of school-age children, participants suggested that the Master Plan incorporate facilities such as an NCAA-class indoor track and field training center, indoor aquatic center and indoor tennis center.
- **Landfill operations:** There is a clear need to accommodate and avoid conflict with landfill operations and maintenance. Coordination with landfill operations is a major priority of the master planning process.
- **Environmental Health and Safety:** Some people have voiced concern for health and safety at Fresh Kills, and have asked for the city's commitment to ensuring environmental regulatory standards are met and maintained. The city has in fact made this commitment, and extensive on-site infrastructures, monitoring and maintenance will ensure the site is safe for public use. The city will not allow any part of the site to be opened for public use until regulatory standards have been clearly met.
- **Process at Fresh Kills:** The Fresh Kills Park Draft Master Plan is the result of extensive site analysis, community needs assessment and outreach, landfill operations consideration, and studies and reviews of other landfill models. For a project as big and complicated as Fresh Kills, decision-making based upon informed consensus among the primary representatives is critical. The Draft Master Plan represents a milestone in terms of describing a vision and framework, and will serve as the basis for further review, discussion and decision-making.