

# **X PARK**

## **Planning Approach Narrative Summary**

The following is a brief description of proposed land use and phasing for development of the Fresh Kills Landfill as a landscape. The considerable attributes of the area are virtually unknown to the general public. Very few Staten Island residents have had the opportunity to visit the site.

This plan unveils the site's wonders through a simple strategy of repairing the ecosystem and layering a network of access points and corridors to reveal the site and integrate it into the metropolitan matrix. Pedestrian, car, bus, train and boat access and circulation feed three zones of cultural activity: the civic center; commercial center; and terraced common.

The site's most magnificent features are its water courses, topography, and size. Through a system of roads and trails that traverse the hills and valleys, provide water access, and even allow for experiencing the site from an elevated promenade, its majesty can be fully discovered.

The site has two identities. As a marine habitat, its tidal waters, still alive with fish, bird, and invertebrate communities, flow through the park and tie it to Arthur Kill and the greater New York Harbor ecosystem. Sections of park retain biodiversity and ecological value, which can support both human activities and environmental health. And, by contrast, its use as a landfill and the success of the associated engineering has dramatically modified the ecosystem. This site is a Brownfield; environmental concerns are complex and necessarily dictate a sophisticated and deliberate understanding of the site's changing opportunities over time.

Ultimately, the Sasaki Team's understanding of the environmental realm drove the phasing and programmed uses proposed for this site. Thus, ecological restoration is introduced as soon as the regulatory controls and safety issues allow with public access following immediately after the ecology can accommodate it. The proposed range and nature of public use of the site was instructed not only by the environmental constraints of the site, but by community desires and needs. What are the scenic and recreational opportunities of the site? Which of the community's economic and transportation needs can be addressed at this site? How can Staten Island's and the region's ecological health be strengthened in giving this site its new life?

While this plan provides answers to all these questions, they are certainly not the ultimate answers. The Sasaki Team hopes to have the opportunity to work directly with members of the community to share information, ideas, and dialogue in order to revise this plan into something quite wonderful, a plan that truly belongs to and enhances the communities of Staten Island and become a valued resource for all New Yorkers.

The premise of the Sasaki Team's proposed master plan for the park is to restore or enhance the ecosystem of the site before introducing certain recreational and other uses to ensure the public's enjoyment of the site, the longevity of its productive use, and ultimately, its regional prominence. Restoration has been planned to complement the closure and post-closure landfill activities of the site that, by regulation, restrict access to varying degrees. Thus, it will take nearly twenty years to completely transform the site. The Sasaki Team submits the outline of this plan for public review and assessment as a starting point to a design process that will fruitfully engage constituent groups, draw in additional stakeholders, and influence the plan to best respond to their needs and interests.

## Park Characteristics

The size of this site evokes reference to 19th century showcase parks such as Central and Prospect Parks in New York, Fairmont Park in Philadelphia, and the Lakeshore Parks in Chicago. Yet, Fresh Kills is critically different from these 19th century parks in that it demonstrates much of its historic ecological function despite its recent use as a landfill. This is a landscape that still contains tidal flows and elements of its biotic past. It is also tied into the landscape dynamic of western Staten Island, with important movement of organisms into the park. The landscape quality around the park will be addressed as part of the living capital for long-term sustainability within the park. Other great New York City parks are surrounded by asphalt while the Fresh Kills site is linked to greenlands and marine communities.

In examining the showcase urban parks, one sees universal elements, as outlined below. The Sasaki Team has used these elements to motivate details of the proposed master plan for Fresh Kills. Fundamental characteristics of the site compared to the world's greatest urban parks are:

- **The Size is Vast.** At over 2,000 acres Fresh Kills stands to be one of the largest city parks in the world. As such, one should consider its development to be a vital, ongoing process.
- **Uses and Activities Accommodate a Very Broad Range of Community Needs and Include Unique Features.** This site's plan accommodates active and passive recreation needs articulated by the City in its briefing materials, in anticipation of a more complete interaction with community residents. Activities articulated by the community and found in this plan include active recreation facilities (both in- and outdoor), mountain bike trails (near Arden Heights), equestrian trails (in the area west of the expressway), and passive recreation sites that capture the most dramatic views into and out from the park. Its Aerial Promenade, which features the Great Terrace, promises to be the component of the site that becomes the hallmark of its identity. Plans for activities at this site (and timing to introduce them) necessarily interact with an understanding of the site's changing physical conditions.
- **Cultural Features Abound.** The flare stations and bridges in the park command ideal locations for installation of public art. The commissioning of such work will incorporate these features into the design, thus memorializing the site's past use in a novel, productive way. The highest elevation of the ridgeline, in the western part of the site, is an ideal location for memorial art, the details of which will be developed through a community planning process. The plan envisions a civic center for the park. At its core will be a magnificent waterfront boulevard and park square, to be surrounded by civic uses such as a new public library (another articulated community need), entertainment venues, and the Harbor Research Institute. This institute will create a location for harbor and parkland research, an educational center for the public, and a scientific library. It will host meetings for exchange of research and study of the greater New York Harbor area. Another feature of the planned civic center is an amphitheater at which large cultural events such as concerts and theater may be hosted.
- **The Circulation System is a Prominent Feature of the Park Design.** The site's circulation system will accommodate automobile, pedestrian, cycling, non-motorized boating, and equestrian needs. A tree lined east-west entry drive that connects to Richmond Avenue will bring automobile traffic through the park. Envisioned as a classic meandering park drive with scenic surroundings and slow, posted mileage, it is meant to serve as the gateway experience for those who wish to experience the park in a car. This system is compatible with the natural resources of the site and is sensitive to the need to protect those resources. For example, the plan keeps motorized traffic away from the magnificent marshlands in the northeast section, to secure their long-term health.

Walking trails will reflect the needs of the community. People with mobility limitations or with baby strollers will find trails of sufficient width, constructed of a hard-packed surface and with a combination of flat areas and/or with a slight slope so that they can fully enjoy the park. Others can find unpaved areas of a more challenging slope to enjoy nature, traversing the site's biologically diverse fields and wooded areas. A unique walking experience, the Aerial Promenade, will be a linear gathering space where people will stroll to enjoy the views and to people-watch.

The area is ideal for non-motorized boating. The watercourses are of adequate depth and width to serve as an excellent setting from which to enjoy birds and other wildlife, and varied scenery in seclusion. One can travel nearly 4 miles by boat to see much of the park's landscape.

- **Park Access is Easy.** There will be three main entry points to the park for cars. Existing bus routes come to and near the site, and it is reasonable to expect an increased level of service once rider demand for site access increases. In the long run, the Intermodal Center will be the point of entry via commuter rail and ferry service. Existing (and planned), regional networks of bike and foot trails will connect to the park. Visitors who drive to the park will be provided with ample parking near the park entries and they will be encouraged to enjoy the park on foot or by some other non-motorized means such as canoe or kayak.
- **The Park is Safe.** The world's great urban parks are places where individuals feel safe. This is accomplished through park design, the presence of park maintenance and guides, and the size of the user population, as well as traditional policing of the grounds. In addition to these attributes, Fresh Kills has the advantage of 24-hour per day activity at the Civic Center, located in its core. It is anticipated that the ferry station at the Civic Center will host a small public safety center in order to provide resources for emergency services, whether for public safety or environmental response. Restricted access to areas such as slopes subject to settling and host to landfill monitoring equipment is an additional means of ensuring safety of park visitors.
- **The Parks Benefit from Thriving Non-Profits and Strong Civic Identification.** The master plan anticipates establishing a committee to study formation of a conservancy or friends-of-the-park coalition to institutionalize community involvement in park development and operational oversight, long-range planning, fundraising, and even, perhaps, stewardship and management of the park. The Sasaki Team will work with interested members of the community at the start of the master planning process to understand the success and frustrations of conservancy groups elsewhere in the nation.

Civic pride in a grand park is cultivated over years and across a wide range of interest groups. Fortunately, Staten Island already has a well-organized core of park and open space advocates from which to build this support and identification. Clearly, community outreach and education is a large factor in building civic pride and identification. The plan for early establishment of an advisory council to direct and organize such efforts at Fresh Kills will work to ensure success.

Commercial development planned for the Civic Center and commercial district of the park will assure revenue to cover stipulated operating costs and serve as a catalyst for economic investment in the surrounding community.