



Mural on Degraw Street and 4th Avenue

Community and Cultural Resources

Gowanus and its surrounding neighborhoods are places rich with community and cultural resources, including schools, ecology, parks and open space, historic buildings and arts and cultural uses. These resources not only serve those who live and work in the community, but also contribute to the neighborhood's distinctive character and identity. Community and cultural resources were discussed in several working groups that met during the spring of 2017.

Arts and Culture

Within the past few decades, Gowanus has become a hub for artists and creative industries. The arts and cultural landscape in Gowanus is diverse and includes a wide variety of artists and artisans, cultural institutions, educational institutions and non-profit organizations. Many former industrial buildings, once used for warehousing and heavy industry, have been repurposed and transformed into places for artist art production and performance spaces, music venues and recording studios, and canvases for public art, among other types of uses. In many instances, particular buildings—such as the Old American Can Factory and the Box Factory at 543 Union Street—have become artistic communities managed by mission-driven private owners.

Parks and Open Space

Parks serve as important resources for providing much-needed access to passive and active recreation. Today, Gowanus has a dearth of open space. Existing parks, such as Thomas Greene Playground and Nicholas Naquan Heywards Jr. Park, provide residents and workers recreational space to be active and places to relax. Planning for growth also means exploring ways to enhance current open space for existing users and opportunities for creating new publicly accessible open space.

Schools and Youth Development

The NYC School Construction Authority (SCA) has identified needs for the construction of new school seats in District 15, including in the subdistrict that contains Gowanus. To plan for population growth, future school capacity will be assessed along with ways to meet projected needs. Schools also serve as hubs for community-based organizations and youth development more broadly.

Historic Resources

Gowanus's history and ecology, from a natural estuary and battleground of the Revolutionary War to its rich industrial past and current diverse mixed-use nature, are reflected in its built fabric, uses and stakeholders. As Gowanus evolves into its future, the framework and subsequently the Neighborhood Plan will identify strategies to remember and honor this rich history through various approaches to preservation and historic interpretation.



Thomas Greene Playground

In May 2015, Mayor Bill de Blasio signed legislation requiring the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) to lead the creation of New York City's first comprehensive **Cultural Plan**. From August 2016 to June 2017, nearly 200,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life provided feedback on the future of arts and culture in NYC. **CreateNYC** incorporated this public input and an evaluation of the city's cultural assets in a comprehensive cultural plan. CreateNYC is an exciting opportunity to create a long term roadmap for promoting greater equity, access, diversity and vibrancy and expanding opportunities for all New Yorkers to access and participate in the city's rich cultural life. Read the plan at <http://createnyc.org/en/home/>.

The Mayor also announced a commitment in 2015 to create affordable housing and artist work spaces for the cultural community. As part of that goal, DCLA and EDC developed the **Affordable Real Estate for Artists (AREA)** Initiative to work with residents, real estate developers, cultural partners, housing agencies and the philanthropic community around long-term affordable workspaces across the city that are accessible to artists of all backgrounds and are beneficial for neighborhood needs and development. Find more information at <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/programs/area.page>.

Goal 1: Promote arts and cultural uses for all community members

Expand space opportunities for art and cultural uses

Gowanus is home to many spaces used for arts and culture. In addition, City-owned or leased buildings, either existing or proposed, can be resources to reinforce this character, while parks or streets provide another setting for creative expression.

- Incorporate an arts, cultural or community use in the Degraw Street fire station.
- Support connections between arts, cultural and other organizations that need space and property owners (e.g. referrals, ongoing local registry) and consider local stewardship or oversight.
- Encourage developers to incorporate a mix of uses, such as space for not-for-profit and other organizations in connection with arts, industrial and cultural uses or business incubators, including but not limited to not-for-profit steward organizations.
- Increase access to, and ensure adequate investment in, spaces for arts and cultural uses at existing and future City-owned or leased facilities (public libraries, schools, parks, etc.).
- Work with the NYC Parks Department and the Old Stone House to identify potential improvements to Washington Park and Old Stone House.
- Support property owners who seek to preserve existing arts and cultural spaces or create new spaces in their developments, like the proposed expansion of the Old American Can Factory.
- Work to understand improvement needs at the Brooklyn Public Library's Pacific Street Branch.
- Leverage new publicly accessible open space along the waterfront for arts and cultural programming.
- Explore long-term funding opportunities to assist artists in purchasing property.
- Explore public art opportunities to activate underutilized open spaces and important nodes, such as making the Under-the-Tracks playground Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) accessible to the community. New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) public art program (Percent for Art) supports permanent works of art commissioned as part of larger City-led capital projects.

Create new community space and programming for NYCHA residents

The NYCHA community centers at Wyckoff Gardens and Gowanus Houses are valuable opportunities to promote arts and culture, while recognizing and supporting the wealth of artistic talents among NYCHA residents.

- Renovate the Gowanus Houses community space and re-open with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Cornerstone Program, alongside the existing senior center operator.

- Strengthen programming at Wyckoff Gardens Community Center.
- Support partnerships between local arts and cultural organizations with experience in operating and programming spaces with NYCHA tenants interested in spearheading arts initiatives and mentoring opportunities.

Goal 2: Support the growth and maintenance of parks and open space

Facilitate the creation of an open space network with a waterfront esplanade along the Gowanus Canal

The Gowanus Canal waterfront is a unique asset and resource that holds potential to significantly expand the neighborhood's available open space and become an iconic esplanade.

- Develop a Waterfront Access Plan (WAP) and special bulk regulations to shape the design and scale of the esplanade and adjacent public access areas with opportunities for passive and active recreation and attention to sea-level rise.
- Support inclusion of public art, cultural markers and other features that celebrate the Canal's rich history.
- Explore approaches to enhance active uses and resiliency efforts at street ends.
- Create major open space and park destinations at the proposed CSO facility at the head of the Canal and on Public Place, a large City-owned site that can accommodate both mixed-use development and park space.
- Explore additional cross-canal connections to help facilitate a continuous waterfront esplanade.

Connect parks and public areas through an open space green network

The network of existing and future open space should be knit together as a broader open space network.

- Complete \$3 million project with funds to renovate Ennis Playground, which is anticipated to start in mid-2018 and take 12 months to complete.
- Complete reconstruction of St. Mary's Playground.
- Craft a public realm plan that connects privately-owned esplanades and City parks, street ends, development sites and facilities, including improved connections between NYCHA communities and existing and future open spaces.
- Partner with DEP and NYC Parks and community-based organizations to support the installation of bioswales and other green infrastructure that align with sustainability and resiliency strategies.
- Increase permeable surfaces and install street trees for all new, non-industrial developments, along with landscaping for mixed-use developments set back from the street line.
- Create additional opportunities for new open space and explore additional cross-canal connections to help facilitate a continuous waterfront esplanade.



Whole Foods Waterfront Public Access Area

“It would be great if the PS 118 playground was open to the public during non-school hours the same way that PS 321 makes its playground accessible to the community. JJ Byrne is a few blocks and an avenue to the north, but the kids further south don't have any access to playgrounds.”

Comment from PlanGowanus.com

“Plan parks for all people, including adults, children, the disabled, elderly and teenagers.”

Comment from Gowanus Neighborhood Planning
Study Kick-Off Event – October 27, 2016

Evaluate needs of existing parks and strategic opportunities for new open space on City-owned land

In and around Gowanus, there are many existing parks and open space, including Thomas Greene Park, St. Mary’s Playground, Ennis Park, Carroll Park and Washington Park – parks that also serve the surrounding neighborhoods of Park Slope and Carroll Gardens.

- Coordinate investments to enhance current open space, such as the reconstruction of St. Mary’s Playground and Ennis Playground, and create opportunities for new open space.
- Identify community assets and develop strategic improvements that could be made to parks inside and near the study area, such as schoolyards.
- Pursue accessible waterfront open space opportunities at the CSO facilities sites at the head of the canal and the Salt Lot where it does not interfere with critical infrastructure operations.

Goal 3: Plan for schools and youth development

Assess existing school capacity and identify opportunities to meet future needs

Public schools are a resource and a major component of comprehensive planning.

- SCA has identified needs for the construction of new school seats in District 15, including in the subdistrict that contains Gowanus. The City will evaluate how to provide additional seats for such need, and potential additional seat need generated as a result of the proposed land use actions, through conventional school sitings and/or potential partnerships with private developers.
- DOE is committed to learning environments that reflect the diversity of NYC and will engage community members, incorporate community input and make data related to school diversity more transparent. The *D15 Diversity Plan* process will create a community based middle school diversity plan for School District 15.

Identify opportunities for schools to act as community hubs that reflect the neighborhood’s arts, industrial and artisan character

Existing and future schools represent an opportunity to partner with community organizations in need of space and that offer youth-based programs and adult education.

- Support new schools that adopt a focus on environmental, engineering, technology and arts disciplines. Encourage school partnerships with community groups willing to provide educational opportunities to students
- Support workforce training and career development programs that can occur in new schools.

In June 2017, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) released its diversity plan, Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools. As part of the plan, the **D15 Diversity Plan** process has been established to create a community-based middle school diversity plan for School District 15 in Brooklyn and help shape district-level policies across New York City. For more information and updates, visit <http://d15diversityplan.com/>.

Goal 4: Develop strategies that recognize, interpret and celebrate the neighborhood's history and explore a range of historic preservation tools

Identify historic interpretation and placemaking strategies to reflect Gowanus's rich history

Gowanus has a rich history, from a natural estuary used by Native Americans as hunting and fishing grounds, to serving as a battleground site during the Revolutionary War and later becoming a hub of industry and commerce after the construction of the Gowanus Canal.

- Develop partnerships with City agencies and community-based organizations to develop appropriate strategies for historic interpretation for Gowanus.
- Identify physical design elements that can celebrate the neighborhood's history, such as markers, temporary or permanent public art, and wayfinding and signage.
- Partner with the Old Stone House on historic and cultural programming.
- Identify opportunities to incorporate remnants of the neighborhood's industrial past, such as the Kentile Floor Sign, into places that are visible to the public.



The Old Stone House in J.J. Byrne Playground



The Old American Can Factory, 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue

Explore opportunities to preserve historic buildings

- Encourage use of federal and state historic preservation tax credits for eligible properties, particularly the loft-style buildings that contribute to the neighborhood character.
- Evaluate potential historic resources to identify Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC)-eligible properties for landmark designation.
- Research expansion of the Carroll Gardens Historic District.

Align zoning and land use to help facilitate efforts to preserve and adaptively reuse buildings

To facilitate efforts to preserve and adaptively reuse buildings, the framework proposes to align zoning with the neighborhood scale and character of the area (see Land Use and Urban Form, pages 78-109, for more details).

- Create a land use framework that encourages retention and reuse of key historic buildings, enforces a sense of place and responds to surrounding context.
- Support property owners who seek to preserve existing arts and cultural spaces or create new spaces in their developments, like the proposed expansion of the Old American Can Factory.