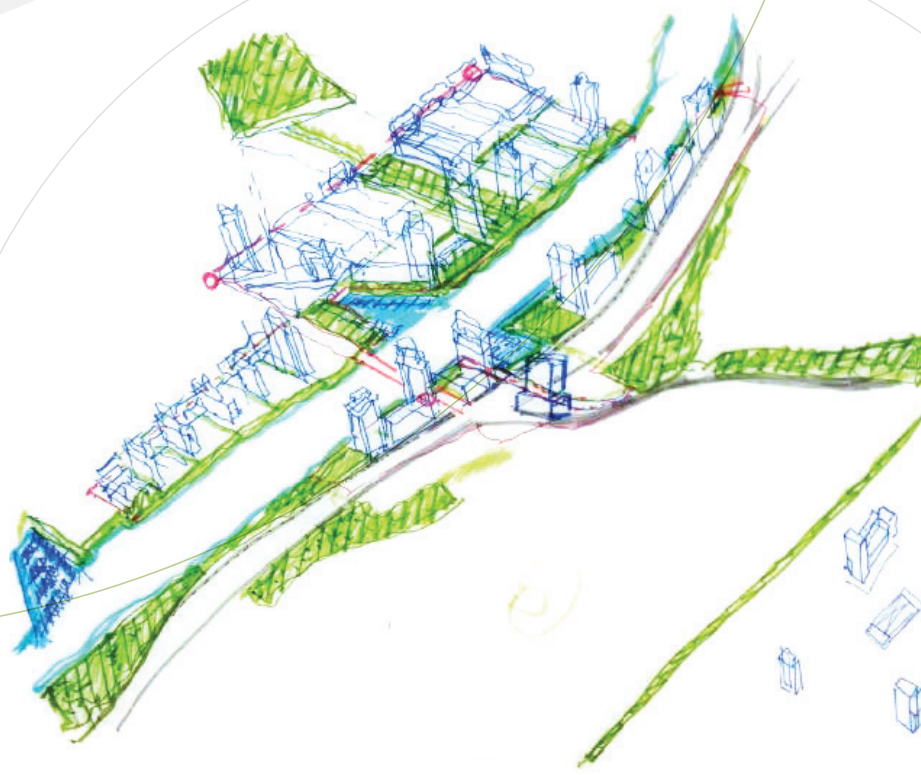
Urban Land New York Institute

Technical Assistance Panels

The People's River: A New Vision for the Bronx's University Heights Waterfront

JULY 23-24, 2014



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Executive Summary

The Urban Land Institute's New York District Council (ULI New York) convened the University Heights Waterfront Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) in July 2014, bringing together stakeholders, including New York City officials and community leaders, with a panel of land use and development professionals for a two-day session focused on exploring the development potential for the University Heights waterfront. This portion of the Harlem River waterfront is situated along the western edge of the Bronx, adjacent to the University Heights Bridge, and across from the Sherman Creek and Inwood sections of upper Manhattan.

The New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) sponsored the TAP, which was made possible by an Urban Innovation Grant from the ULI Foundation. The TAP provided an opportunity for DCP to develop further implementation strategies related to its *Sustainable Communities Bronx Metro-North* report, released in 2014. This report, funded by a U. S. Department of Housing Preservation and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant, proposes a plan for sustainable growth and development for the University Heights community. DCP's goals for the TAP included developing objective recommendations for strengthening the connection between: 1) the waterfront sites; 2) the nearby Metro-North train station on the eastern side of the University Heights Bridge; and 3) the existing upland communities. The panel was also asked to develop their recommendations with considerations for density, self-financing, and public investments.

The report that follows, which summarizes the panel's analysis and recommendations, is comprised of 5 chapters.

Chapter 1: ULI and the TAP Process gives an overview of ULI New York and its TAP program and lists participants in the University Heights Waterfront TAP, including DCP officials, community stakeholders, and the volunteer panel of land use and development professionals.

Chapter 2: Background and Assignment provides relevant background information about the study area. The University Heights waterfront parcels adjacent to the University Heights Bridge are generally underutilized and separated from the rest of the Bronx by transportation infrastructure and grade changes. Much of the area is zoned primarily for manufacturing uses even though none of the current commercial activities employ waterfront access in their operations. Major anchor institutions in the area include Bronx Community College of the City University of New York (CUNY) and the James J. Peters VA Medical Center. This chapter also provides demographic data and reviews DCP's objectives for the TAP.

Chapter 3: Panel Observations and Findings presents an exploration of unique attributes and specific challenges of the study area, as related to future development. Unique attributes include underutilized waterfront parcels and views of the Harlem River, extensive transportation access, connection to unique adjacent neighborhoods, and the presence of large institutions nearby. However, the area is significantly challenged by limited pedestrian and vehicular access to the waterfront due to the presence of the Major Deegan Expressway and Metro-North Railroad tracks that run parallel to the shoreline, steep terrain, and a lack of pedestrian amenities. Many waterfront parcels in the area are also zoned for manufacturing purposes, which would require modification to allow dense, mixed-use development.

Chapter 4: Panel Recommendations presents the panel's grand vision for the area, followed by short-term and long-term recommendations. The grand vision for the University Heights waterfront area is to connect the neighborhoods on both sides of the Harlem River as one cohesive and sustainable community with a focus on water-dependent activities for local residents and dense mixed-use, mixed-income development. Short-term recommendations for the area include cost-effective pedestrian improvements near the University Heights Bridge and activating the waterfront sites with resident-oriented recreation space and a marina for small boats. Long-term recommendations include creating a special zoning district for the area to support medium- and high-density mixed-use development, increasing vehicular and pedestrian access to the waterfront sites, and decking over a portion of the Major Deegan Expressway. The chapter also makes recommendations related to sustainability, access, zoning, and financing.

Chapter 5: Next Steps provides recommended actions related to conducting additional studies (access, zoning, short-term pedestrian movement, and financing), establishing meaningful recreational space and a marina on the city-owned land in the study area to bring further activity and attention to the waterfront, and considering a sustainability master plan in anticipation of the future development of the waterfront.

1 | ULI and the TAP Process

A. Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute now has more than 32,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service, including developers, architects, planners, lawyers, providers of capital, and economic development professionals.

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, national, and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places. The mission of ULI is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to help sustain and create thriving communities. ULI's New York District Council (ULI New York) serves over 2,000 members throughout New York State and reflects best practices in leadership development, community service, and enhancement of land use policy and practice at the local level.

B. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

ULI New York convenes Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) at the request of public officials, community stakeholders, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges. TAPs provide objective, unbiased recommendations from a panel of diverse experts from ULI New York's membership who are assembled specifically for their expertise in the issues identified by the sponsor. Typically, the TAP panelists spend one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions within the study area, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way that is consistent with the sponsor's goals and objectives.

C. Panelists and the TAP Process

Panel Members

At the request of the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP), ULI New York convened a panel of volunteer members representing a wide range of disciplines to address the development potential of certain waterfront sites in the University Heights neighborhood of the Bronx.

Disciplines represented included development, sustainability, architecture, finance, market analysis, and transportation engineering. Panelists were selected who possess professional expertise relevant to DCP's objectives for this TAP.

The following individuals served as TAP panelists:

Barry Hersh
Clinical Associate Professor of Real Estate,
NYU Schack Institute of Real Estate (TAP Chair)

Shay Alster
Partner, GF55 Partners

Michael Beattie
Senior Technical Director, AKRF

Stuart Brodsky
Deputy Director, Center for the Sustainable Built Environment,
NYU Schack Institute of Real Estate

Leanne Lachman
President, Lachman Associates

Spencer Orkus
Development Director, L+M Development Partners

Jay Valgora
Principal, STUDIO V Architecture

Andrea Wong-Miller
Finance Associate, Civic Builders

Erik Wood
Project Management, HKS Urban Design Studio

Felix Ciampa, Executive Director of ULI New York, and Sarah Krautheim, Manager of ULI New York, provided organizational and technical support in preparation for and during the TAP process while Troy Simpson, a research coordinator at Columbia University's Earth Institute, served as a consulting technical writer.

Stakeholders

The TAP panel benefited from the participation of a diverse group of community stakeholders who met with the panel and shared information, ideas, and opinions on a range of issues relevant to the University Heights waterfront area.

The following TAP stakeholders were interviewed as part of the TAP process:

Robin Auchincloss
Director of Campus & Facilities Planning, Bronx Community College

Nilsa Cintron
Board Member, Bronx Community Board 7

Xavier Rodriguez
District Manager, Bronx Community Board 5

Wilhelm Ronda
Director, Planning & Economic Development,
Office of the Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.

Sponsor

The following individuals from DCP supported the coordination and organization of the University Heights Waterfront TAP:

Carl Weisbrod
Commissioner, DCP and Chairman, City Planning Commission

Carol Samol
Director, Bronx Office

Sarah Goldwyn
Director, Planning Coordination

Ryan Singer
Deputy Director, Bronx Office

Shawn Brede
City Planner, Bronx Office

TAP Process

The University Heights Waterfront TAP was held on July 23 and 24, 2014 at CUNY's Bronx Community College in University Heights.

On the morning of July 23, panelists toured the study area on foot. After the tour, the panel interviewed diverse stakeholders to gain a better understanding of relevant issues, dynamics, challenges, and opportunities in the area. TAP panelists then engaged in an intensive charrette to develop a long-term vision for the study area, strategies, and recommendations for action and further study. The final presentation is available electronically at the ULI New York website (http://newyork.uli.org).

TAP panelists participated in a design charrette, part of a two-day TAP process leading to the recommendations in this report.

2 | Background and Assignment

A. Study Area and Location

The University Heights portion of the Harlem River waterfront is situated on the western edge of the Bronx, directly across the Harlem River from the Sherman Creek and Inwood sections of upper Manhattan.

While many waterfront areas in New York City were used primarily for industrial purposes during the city's period of rapid industrialization that began in the 1800s, an 1885 map of the area indicates that very little land existed west of the then newly-opened railroad tracks that follow the shoreline of the Harlem River.[1] The area was filled in, however, in the following decades and despite some evidence of recreational use, commercial and industrial uses (e.g., a transformer house, signal station, and large gas tank) were prevalent. Consequently, the Bronx was separated from this portion of its riverfront by the construction of the Hudson Line of the now Metro-North Railroad and development of various industrial uses. This separation was further exacerbated by the construction of the Major Deegan Expressway in the 1950s, which runs north-south along the eastern edge of the Metro-North Railroad tracks.

Today, the area's legacy of mostly industrial use is evident through the presence of a mix of light commercial and industrial uses on the waterfront parcels, including a storage parking lot and a cement factory, none of which utilize the waterfront in their operations.

B. Existing Land Uses and Zoning

The waterfront parcels in the study area are zoned primarily for non-residential uses, including light manufacturing (M1-1), medium manufacturing (M2-1) and heavy manufacturing (M3-1). The LaSala parcel, located south of the University Heights Bridge, was rezoned in 1989 from medium manufacturing (M2-1) to moderate residential density (R7-2), but it is still being used for commercial purposes. One parcel just north of the University Heights Bridge is owned by the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) and is currently being used by the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) for storage. Other parcels in the area are owned by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), Consolidated Edison, and other private entities. In terms of uses, waterfront parcels in the study area include the storage parking lot, the cement factory, a scaffolding business, the Consolidated Edison facility, and a truck repair facility.

1 Crane, Melissa, Boshu Cui, Emilie Evans, James Finegan, Philip Hirschfeild, Jimin Park, and Lauren Rose. "Reclaiming the Riverfront: GSAPP 2010 Urban Planning Studio." Columbia University, 2010.

The parcels upland from the waterfront sites and to the east of the Major Deegan Expressway (between Landing Road and West Fordham Road) are zoned for commercial use (C8-3), and current uses include a restaurant, night club, and self-storage facility.

Major institutions near the study area include Bronx Community College and the James J. Peters VA Medical Center. There are also plans to develop the nearby city-owned Kingsbridge Armory into a national ice sports facility.

C. Demographics

A draft study exploring sustainable development opportunities in the Bronx indicates that the 42,708 residents within a half-mile of the University Heights Bridge are predominantly Hispanic (68%) and foreign-born (42%).[2] Per capita income for these residents is $14,878 and most households (85%) are renter-occupied units. Average monthly rent in this area as of July 2013 was $1,150 compared to $1,450 in Inwood.[3] More than half (56.2%) of the entire population of Bronx Community District 7 (CD7), which encompasses the study area, is on income support in some form.[4]

Public health concerns and access to open space are significant challenges for the area. Asthma hospitalizations are among the highest in the city, with 8.68 hospitalizations for every 1,000 people, compared to 6.61 for the Bronx overall and 3.20 for all of New York City.[5] CD7 also has limited parkland access for residents, providing seven-tenths of an acre of parkland per 1,000 people, compared to the City of New York's recommended 2.5 acres per 1,000 people.[6]

Aerial view of the University Heights section of the Bronx. *Photo courtesy of DCP.*

2 New York City Department of City Planning "Sustainable Communities in the Bronx: Leveraging Regional Rail for Access, Growth & Opportunity, 2014." In New York & Connecticut Sustainable Communities, 2014.

3 Zillow Neighborhood Overview, 2013, in New York City Department of City Planning "Sustainable Communities in the Bronx: Leveraging Regional Rail for Access, Growth & Opportunity, 2014." In New York & Connecticut Sustainable Communities, 2014.

4 New York City Department of City Planning. "District Profile: Bronx Community District 7." http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/neigh_info/bx07_info.shtml.

5 Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy. "Asthma Hospitalization Rate (Per 1,000 People) by Subborough Area from 2000 to 2008." New York University, http://datasearch.furmancenter.org.

6 The City of New York. "PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York," 2007.

D. Objectives for the TAP

DCP charged the panel with evaluating the development potential of the Harlem River waterfront sites immediately adjacent to the University Heights Bridge and proposing ways to improve access to the University Heights Metro-North station, as well as improving the pedestrian environment around the station. The overall goal of the study was to connect the waterfront sites and the Metro-North station and other proximate transit options to the existing upland communities to the east of the Major Deegan Expressway, thereby creating a more integrated and complete community.

1. Development Scenarios

Evaluate and propose mixed-use development scenarios that would be feasible for the waterfront sites.

2. Capacity Analysis

Conduct an analysis of the waterfront sites and propose zoning changes, including changes to existing parking requirements, which would be necessary to facilitate and catalyze the desired mixed-use development.

3. Self-Financing

Evaluate opportunities to capture value and self-finance public infrastructure improvements.

4. Public Investments

Assess the type and cost of any required public investments necessary to incentivize development on the waterfront sites.

3 | Panel Observations and Findings

A. Unique Attributes

The panel identified the following key assets of the University Heights portion of the Harlem River waterfront:

Underutilized parcels with connection to and views of the Harlem River

The area includes approximately 30 acres of potentially desirable waterfront property, including one city-owned parcel, to the west of the Major Deegan Expressway and Metro-North Railroad tracks.

Extensive transportation access

Transit options include a Metro-North train station, MTA Select Bus Service, the Major Deegan, and proximity to the MTA subway stations in University Heights and the Inwood neighborhood of upper Manhattan.

Connection to unique adjacent neighborhoods

The University Heights waterfront area is bisected by West Fordham Road, which leads to the Fordham Road shopping district to the east, and to the Inwood neighborhood of upper Manhattan to the west via the landmarked University Heights Bridge.

Presence of key institutions

Bronx Community College, with more than 11,000 students, is less than one-quarter of a mile south of the University Heights Bridge, and the James J. Peters VA Medical Center, with more than 1,900 employees, is one-third of a mile north of the bridge.

B. Study Area Challenges

Despite its many unique and positive attributes, the study area faces significant challenges to realizing its development potential.

Access

The Major Deegan Expressway and Metro-North Railroad tracks create an access barrier between the waterfront sites and the upland University Heights neighborhood that prohibits cross-vehicular and pedestrian traffic. This barrier is further compounded by a significant grade change between the waterfront parcels and land to the east of the Major Deegan — more

than 40 feet in some areas. As a result of these conditions, the only current vehicular and pedestrian access to the waterfront sites is a loop ramp that extends down from the north side of the University Heights Bridge. This limited access may not be a significant issue for the current occupants of the waterfront sites, but it could not support the future development of more dense residential or commercial uses.

The east side of the University Heights Bridge is a point of convergence for vehicular traffic from West Fordham Road in the Bronx, West 207th Street in Inwood via the Bridge, and north- and south-bound traffic entering and exiting from the Major Deegan. As has been identified in previous studies, pedestrian amenities in this highly congested area are lacking (e.g., traffic-calming medians, pedestrian crossings, adequate signage, shade, etc.), making the experience unappealing and unsafe for pedestrians.[7,8]

Ridership at the University Heights Metro-North station is very low relative to other stations (weekday daily average ridership: 40 inbound and 212 outbound passengers, 2011 data).[9] Low ridership may be attributed to a number of factors, including higher fares than the subway and the proximity of subway stations and bus lines as alternate options, but limited pedestrian access to the station could also be a contributing factor. The Metro-North station is located on the south side of the entrance to the University Heights Bridge and consists of only a small foyer that leads to an elevator and a stairwell down to the tracks at ground level. In its present location, the entrance can be difficult to find and access.

While many New Yorkers passing through the University Heights area utilize the nearby MTA subway stations, stakeholders interviewed noted that this community also has well-utilized jitney services (e.g., $1 for a ride from Bronx Community College to the subway) and many residents own, maintain, and enjoy their own automobiles.

Zoning and Ownership

As previously described, most of the waterfront parcels are zoned for manufacturing uses. Even in the case of the one site that was rezoned more than 20 years ago to allow for residential development, no such residential development has yet occurred, at least partially because of the lack of water and sewer infrastructure. While there is one city-owned waterfront parcel that could be more easily repurposed, changes to current zoning and ownership of most parcels in the study area would be necessary to spur significant development.

7 Crane, Melissa, Boshu Cui, Emilie Evans, James Finegan, Philip Hirschfeild, Jimin Park, and Lauren Rose. "Reclaiming the Riverfront: GSAPP 2010 Urban Planning Studio." Columbia University, 2010.

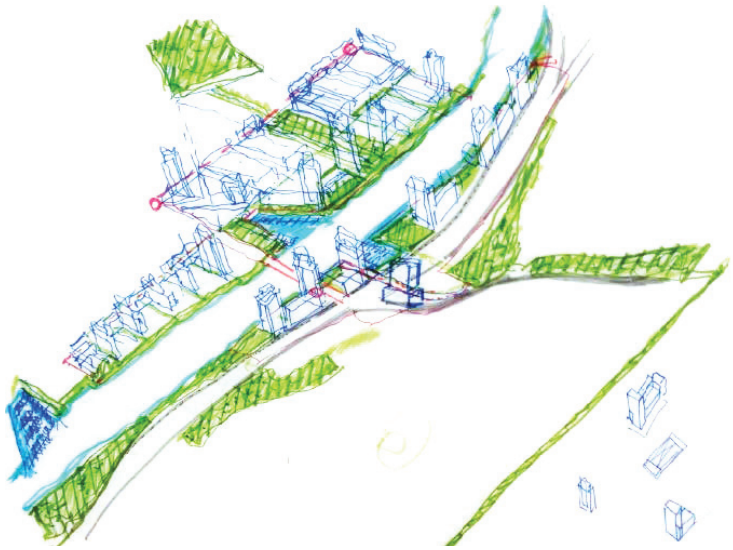
8 New York City Department of City Planning "Sustainable Communities in the Bronx: Leveraging Regional Rail for Access, Growth & Opportunity, 2014." In New York & Connecticut Sustainable Communities, 2014.

9 New York City Department of City Planning "Sustainable Communities in the Bronx: Leveraging Regional Rail for Access, Growth & Opportunity, 2014." In New York & Connecticut Sustainable Communities, 2014.

In combination, these constraints are likely the core reasons why development has failed to occur in this area, despite many attempts by interested groups to devise meaningful plans for revitalization. For these reasons, the panel believes it is more likely that development will continue to occur in other areas of the Bronx, and in upper Manhattan, before the University Heights waterfront area becomes an attractive site to developers.

University Heights Metro-North station entrance.

4 | Panel Recommendations



The TAP panel's development vision for the University Heights waterfront area, including mixed-use, mixed-density development, increased transportation access, and significant open space.

A. Grand Vision: It Starts from the Water

The panel recommended reenvisioning the entire upper Harlem River waterfront area — including neighborhoods in Manhattan and the Bronx — as one cohesive community connected by a common waterway, rather than separated by it. Substantial planning efforts and coordination between DCP's Bronx and Manhattan offices will be key to the success of realizing a stronger, better connected, and unified vision for this area. The goal for the University Heights waterfront area is to bring it to life by activating open space along the waterfront and attracting major development of middle- and moderate-income housing on the currently underutilized and undervalued land.

"People's River"

More than simply a residential development opportunity, the panel recommended rebranding the University Heights waterfront area as the "People's River" and providing access to the waterfront, paired with

affordable, river-oriented recreational activities (e.g., jet skiing, power boating, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, waterfront barbecue grills, etc.) for New York City residents. The panel recommended the construction of a marina to accommodate these recreational activities. A similar marina could be built in the Sherman Creek area, where University Heights residents could easily enjoy its amenities. A strong marketing and branding program for the "People's River" and associated marina and public programming will be critical to the revitalization of the waterfront area. The framing of the waterfront area as a unique and accessible public space for local residents would support the development of community and neighborhood attachment to the waterfront.

Access and Open Space

The University Heights waterfront has major advantages for development, including a broad variety of potential green spaces, river access and views, access to public transportation, and existing land uses that can be converted into desirable residential communities. However, there are also significant structural barriers to development that include: the steep terrain, the presence of the Major Deegan Expressway and Metro-North Railroad tracks, and limited vehicular and pedestrian access to the waterfront.

With these positive attributes — and challenges — in mind, the panel viewed a major revitalization effort of the University Heights waterfront area as most likely occurring later in the larger development process of the upper Harlem River waterfront area that will include the Sherman Creek waterfront and the MTA's 207th Street Rail Yard in upper Manhattan. Development of these adjacent areas will make significant investment in the University Heights waterfront more desirable, especially as market maturation and strong demand for housing encourage developers to look for new locations to build housing.

The panel further applied this concept of connectivity to the domains of ecology and open space. Just as the marina proposed for the site could strengthen connections between the waterfront sites in the Bronx and nearby marinas on the Manhattan side of the river, green spaces could also be planned as a part of a larger ecological and open space network across the two boroughs. A riverfront green space and walkway, similar to the approach being taken along the Hudson River in Manhattan, could be implemented to simultaneously provide the resilience benefits of shoreline ecological restoration, as well as pedestrian access to Roberto Clemente State Park to the south.

Sustainability

Regardless of the approach to developing the University Heights waterfront area, the panel suggested considering a comprehensive sustainability

Wastewater thermal exchange at False Creek, Vancouver, an example of renewable energy generation that could be implemented on the University Heights waterfront. *Photo courtesy of 1010global.org.*

master plan to complement any large-scale development plans. The sustainability master plan could include guidelines related to site remediation, resiliency, renewable energy generation (e.g., solar, wind, and thermal exchanges), ecology (e.g., renaturing, aquaculture, etc.), and community development and job creation. If DCP chooses to pursue a sustainability master plan, the panel recommends collaborating with the Bronx Community College's Center for Sustainable Energy, as a pathway to providing sustainability-related job training in the process.

The TAP panel recommended considering False Creek, Vancouver as a source of inspiration, as it connects different parts of the city via shared water-oriented activities. *Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

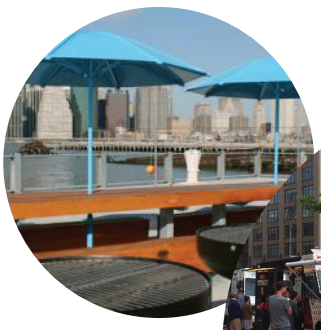
B. Short-Term Plan (2-3 Years)

General

The panel agreed that major development on the waterfront parcels in the near term is unlikely, so the key short-term goals for the University Heights waterfront are to address several problematic access issues and activate the waterfront as a public space. Doing so could begin to draw people to the waterfront and catalyze the building of a greater sense of community in the currently underutilized waterfront area.

The panel recommended making simple modifications to the DOT staging and storage area north of the University Heights Bridge by repurposing it as a park and developing a small marina in the existing inlet to the north of it. The general focus of the recreation area could be on river-oriented activities, such as small-scale recreational boating (e.g., via affordable slips for small power boats, canoes, kayaks, etc.), fishing, and jet skiing. Additional programming considerations include picnic tables, grills, and bicycle parking. Initially, it may not be feasible to make the park publicly accessible on a daily basis due to limited resources and safety concerns, so access could be limited to weekends and special events (e.g., food truck days, farmers markets, etc.).

Examples of river-oriented recreational activities and special events that could engage residents and bring attention and interest to the waterfront area. *Photos from left to right courtesy of DNA Info, Wikipedia, Flickr.*



Access and Transit

Short-term access improvement recommendations focus on the pedestrian facilities in the transition area between West Fordham Road and the University Heights Bridge. In particular, the panel supported the adoption of recommended pedestrian improvements included in the *Sustainable Communities in the Bronx* study. Such pedestrian facility improvements include installing new lighting, creating wider medians, upgrading signage, signals and crosswalks, and adding trees to the streetscape. All of these improvements would make the eastern approach to the Bridge via West Fordham Road more pedestrian-friendly, which could encourage additional use of the Metro-North station and pedestrian use of the existing walkway that leads down to the waterfront sites.

Furthermore, the panel recommended exploring the closure of Cedar Avenue between West Fordham Road and Landing Road. Doing so could provide the opportunity for a cost-effective pedestrian plaza, and potentially future development across the existing adjacent and upland parcels.

The panel also recommended exploring the possibility of constructing a second stairway to the Metro-North station on the south side of West Fordham Road that could lead pedestrians down to the waterfront sites. Such a stairway would enable pedestrians crossing the University Heights Bridge via the south side pedestrian path to access the existing sidewalk down to the waterfront without having to cross West Fordham Road. Alternatively, this second set of stairs, coupled with an elevator, could be constructed west of the Metro-North station to provide more direct access to the waterfront sites. The addition of this stairway, in either location, would eliminate the need for pedestrians to cross to the north side of the University Heights Bridge for walkable access to the waterfront. The panel also recommended exploring the feasibility of a pedestrian bridge that leads from the University Heights area to the waterfront.

The TAP panel recommended implementation of short-term pedestrian improvements near the University Heights Metro-North station that include vegetated medians and improved crosswalks, drawn from the *Sustainable Communities in the Bronx study. Photo courtesy of DCP.*

The panel also considered intermediate and long-term access improvements, recognizing that a major overhaul of the overloaded Major Deegan–Fordham Road interchange would be a long-term project, most likely undertaken as part of a regional corridor improvement.

Zoning

There is no question that a change of zoning for the waterfront sites is needed to promote development. It would be relatively straightforward to rezone the area to another existing, generic category, such as R7A. However, a new special district, with unique features that reflect the waterfront opportunity, the mixed-income community desired, and unlock the neighborhood's economic potential would be optimal for the University Heights study area.

Financing

Most of the improvements listed in this section, such as the pedestrian amenities and improvements, and the development of the waterfront recreation area and marina, would require public financing. To help reduce costs, the panel recommended creating the proposed "Regatta Park" on the city-owned parcel and using simple materials to construct the elements of the adjacent marina. Because the park may not ultimately remain in this location, the panel recommended against shifting its management to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks Department) and formally designating the area as a permanent park.

The panel noted that this stage requires more upfront cost to the City of New York relative to potential revenue opportunities. However, there are some revenue-generating opportunities worth considering, such as renting licenses to food and beverage vendors, as well as renting out jet skis, kayaks, and canoes, but those opportunities should be made available at no cost for the first few years to attract people and commercial interest to the waterfront. A temporary or pop-up market could provide a testing ground for the long-term viability of the waterfront site as a recreational destination for the community prior to permanently changing the site's current use. Downtown Brooklyn's Dekalb Market, which utilized shipping containers to create a marketplace for food and other retail vendors for one year, may be a good model for DCP and collaborating city agencies to pursue.

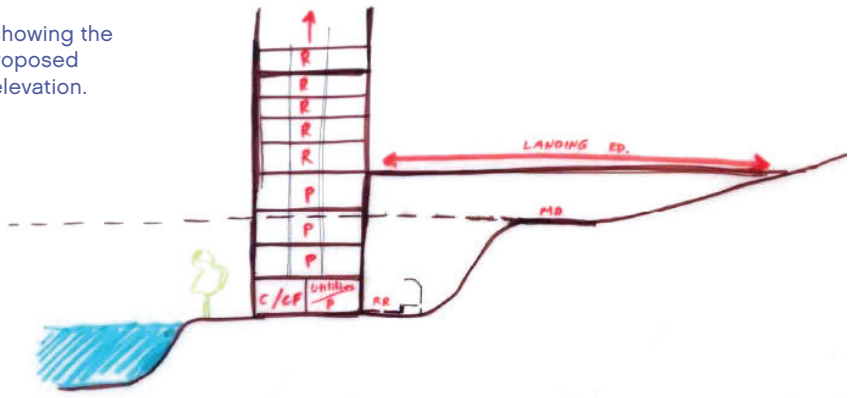
C. Long-Term Plan (10-20 Years)

General

The panel recommended both a modest and ambitious approach to the long-term development vision of the University Heights waterfront area. Each plan supports the implementation of the broad vision of the area as an integral piece of the collective development of the upper Harlem River waterfront and the continued emphasis on public facilities on the waterfront as core programming.

The modest approach to development consists of promoting mixed-income residential development on the waterfront sites themselves by upzoning the private parcels and providing utilities and additional vehicular access via a new bridge from Landing Road down to the waterfront. The ambitious approach to development calls for adding to the land bridge from the uplands area with a series of decking that fully covers the Major Deegan Expressway and Metro-North Railroad tracks north of West Fordham Road. This approach would create new land value that the City of New York could then sell to generate revenue to cover the cost of the decking.

The Rockefeller University in Manhattan, built over the FDR East River Drive, could serve as an example for decking over the Major Deegan Expressway in an ambitious development approach for the University Heights waterfront. *Photo courtesy of Flickr.*



Drawing showing the panel's proposed decking elevation.

Land Use and Zoning

The panel recommended that a special zoning district be created to encompass the study area and support the creation of the residential development over the decked portion of the Major Deegan Expressway. Zoning changes could allow primarily for residential uses with a commercial overlay wherein special attention could be paid to a preference for taller, mid-rise buildings between 15 and 20 stories, as well as open space for recreational use. Because of the grade change in the study area, the opportunity for taller, mid-rise buildings would not necessarily detract from the development potential of the upland sites. Special Waterfront Districts across the city have been used successfully to create parks, visual corridors, and public amenities and could be considered for the University Heights waterfront area.

The panel also suggested exploring an extension of the existing R7 zoning currently in place at the La Sala site to other areas north of the University Heights Bridge currently zoned M2 and M3. R7X zoning could also be used to allow for an increase of Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to 5.0, which the panel indicated could support more than 3,000 dwelling units in the area, an appropriate complement to the potential for up to 15,000 units across the entire upper Harlem River waterfront area. However, if zoning changes are established to allow for high FAR over the decked portion of the Major Deegan, it may be necessary to limit construction to 4-6 stories on the waterfront sites to protect the value of the decked land. It would still be necessary to address the transition from the decking level down to the waterfront. The plan and zoning should be aimed at encouraging a vibrant, mixed-income community linked to the existing University Heights neighborhood.

With the addition of residential development, community amenities will be needed to accommodate an increase in population in the study area. Such amenities could include neighborhood retail, restaurants, childcare, and at least one school, in addition to the waterfront public areas that feature a marina and a park, as well as a continuous waterfront walkway that connects with Roberto Clemente State Park to the south.

Access and Transit

In addition to the previously described pedestrian improvements, it will be necessary to account for additional pedestrian and vehicular trips caused by large-scale development. As a part of the decking over of the Major Deegan, the panel recommended that Landing Road, which currently terminates in a dead end as it approaches the Major Deegan, be extended across the Expressway and Metro-North Railroad tracks and terminate at a multi-level parking garage and entryway to the new development site. Ramps could be constructed to provide access to a lower-level service road that runs the length of the site and ultimately leads to an emergency vehicle-only crossing point at the north end of the site. Depending on whether DCP pursues the modest or ambitious approach to development, the existing loop entrance to the site from the University Heights Bridge could remain, but would likely be used for emergency and service purposes only.

A second significant improvement to access and transportation would be an extension of the Metro-North station platform to the north side of West Fordham Road. The platform extension would enable the station to

accommodate a full-sized train, as well as the addition of a second station entrance on the north side of West Fordham Road that would eliminate the need for pedestrians to cross the busy intersection to access the current station entrance.

Financing

Major development of the University Heights waterfront area would require a series of public actions (zoning and investments). The panel recommended a series of studies to examine the quantity and magnitude of the necessary public investments, depending on whether DCP chooses to pursue the modest or ambitious development approach.

Elements that would require public or private financing include:

- Connector bridges at Landing Road and north end of the site
- Shoreline improvements
- Utility connections and expansions (e.g., sewer, stormwater)
- Extension of Metro-North station platform north of University Heights Bridge
- Remediation assistance (potentially via Brownfield tax credits)
- Disposition of city-owned parcel for mixed-income housing
- Educational and community facilities
- Parking
- Decking

One of the core issues to be resolved is related to establishing the appropriate amount of residential units at various income levels to support the development and entice interest in the site.

TAP panelists indicated that even after activating the area via the previously stated short-term initiatives, the city still might have to act as the "first-in" developer. This could be accomplished through a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the city-owned parcel for a subsidized housing development that could help increase the value of adjacent privately-owned properties and catalyze future development that includes market rate as well as affordable housing.

5 | Next Steps

The University Heights Waterfront TAP panel recognized the currently underutilized study area as rich with opportunities and challenges for community- and place-making. The panel believed that with an inclusive, thoughtful process, the study area could be reinvented to better serve existing community members, strengthen connections between Manhattan and the Bronx, exemplify sustainable urban development practices, and activate public spaces in and around the Harlem River. Taking into account the significant barriers to development, the panel recommended conducting additional studies (access, zoning, short-term pedestrian improvement, and financing) and considering a sustainability master plan to complement future development.

To help build the momentum required to inspire an inclusive transformation process, the TAP panel recommended implementing pragmatic, cost-effective strategies to improve pedestrian access on and near the University Heights Bridge, as well as developing the city-owned waterfront site as a recreation space and marina. Once complete, the city could launch a "Celebrate Upper Harlem River Waterfront" event series to bring attention to the area.

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Serving as the principal forum of real estate professionals in our area, reflecting the Urban Land Institute's best practices in leadership development, community service, and enhancement of land use policy and practice.

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