

Transforming *the* Landscape

Brooklyn, New York

WEST BUSHWICK INTERNATIONAL DESIGN WORKSHOP



Since its first settlement in 1638, Bushwick has embraced cultural diversity, and entrepreneurial spirit.

A community in north-central Brooklyn, NY, Bushwick was once known as “the center for American beer brewing” and home to the famous Rheingold Beer brewery. The growth of the brewing industry sparked the construction of new homes and churches in the neighborhood as well as a diverse business sector, some of which are still prominent features of today’s landscape, and created a vibrant community where people lived and worked.

After World War II, Bushwick, like many other commercial centers, underwent a period of transformation — brewery plants consolidated and relocated and other manufacturing activities closed down leaving behind vacant buildings. Through the 1960’s and 70’s, the neighborhood continued to experience a period of decline — residents moved away, stores closed down and the housing stock deteriorated.

West Bushwick holds exciting opportunities and the potential to become the center of a revitalized community. The community has put much effort over the years to improve surrounding conditions — a large number of abandoned buildings have been rehabilitated, and through the City of New York’s urban renewal program and community partnerships, new housing has been developed.

As part of the City’s ongoing effort to revitalize and advance economic development initiatives in the Bushwick neighborhood, an international design workshop was organized by the Waterfront Regeneration Trust’s International Brownfield Exchange Program and the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) in association with the Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Council (RBSCC).



This workshop, held October 18-20, 2000, brought together architects and urban planners from Germany, Northern Ireland and Canada with experience in transforming brownfield sites into new uses, with local community leaders, elected officials, city staff and professionals in the redevelopment field. It provided an opportunity to share international experiences and best practices, to participate in creating new ideas and principles to guide redevelopment, and to establish consensus regarding future objectives and design options for the former Rheingold brewery site.

October 18-20, 2000

The community of Bushwick as well as the neighboring communities of Williamsburg and Greenpoint in Brooklyn and Ridgewood in Queens, stand on land bought by Dutch settlers in 1638 from the Canarsie Native Americans. Bushwick was chartered as a town in 1660 under the name of “Boswijck”, meaning “Town of the Woods”.

We thank our European participants for their contributions, including the preparation of final concept drawings:

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Revitalizing the Rheingold Site

The Rheingold site is a 6.7-acre City-owned brownfield site with potential to satisfy much needed community services. The site is divided into two areas intersected by Bushwick Avenue, a major through fare in Brooklyn.

Population growth in Bushwick over the past decade has created demand for space to accommodate the needs of the community. While various urban renewal sites are currently being developed, large and "clean" vacant sites are no longer available. In the last few years, city planners at HPD have begun considering former industrial sites as new development frontiers. In Bushwick, the Rheingold site represents a great opportunity to:

• replace a blighted derelict site with development that will increase the economic base of the City;

• provide a center for a revitalized community and will become a focal point for the residents of Bushwick, who have worked diligently to preserve and improve their neighborhood;

• be economically efficient being a location well served by public transportation and surrounded by community landmarks such as civic and educational institutions;

• be a model for sustainable brownfield redevelopment in New York City.

HPD is currently conducting an environmental site investigation to determine the nature and extent of any possible contamination on the site. The conclusions of this investigation will be available in early 2001.



"If we achieve the vision of this plan, the lives of the people of Bushwick will be fundamentally changed. Thank you".

Bushwick resident

The International Design Workshop

Workshop participants included representatives from organizations who will be involved in the implementation of the concept plan. Among them were Jerilyn Perine, Commissioner of HPD, Assemblyman Vito J. Lopez, Chairman of New York State Assembly Housing Committee and founder of RBSCC, and Veronica White, COO of the New York City Partnership & Chamber of Commerce (a leading business and civic organization that, since 1989, has built more than 500 two-family homes on City-owned sites in Bushwick).

On the first day of the workshop, participants learned about the history of the site, the demographic composition of the neighborhood and economic situation, and

improvements and actions already initiated by the community. Small group discussions allowed participants to articulate their ideas about future uses on the site and how the site could be transformed. Participants agreed on the following objectives for redevelopment:



- a mixed-use community of housing, commercial operations and green spaces;
- community facilities (eg. daycare, community center, training center) are needed;
- there should be a balance between buildings and new green space.

On the second day of the workshop, these objectives and community needs were translated into design concepts for the site.

Results include a comprehensive mixed-use design concept that integrates green space with affordable housing, multi-family housing, neighborhood retail, and a community center. Elected officials, community leaders and neighborhood residents unanimously approved the concept.

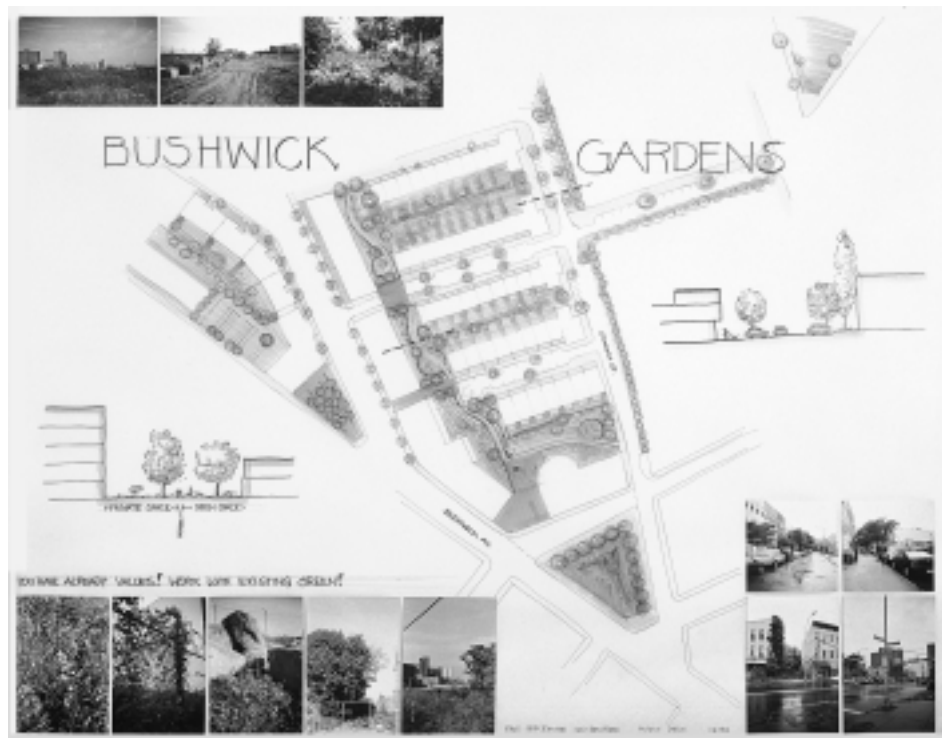
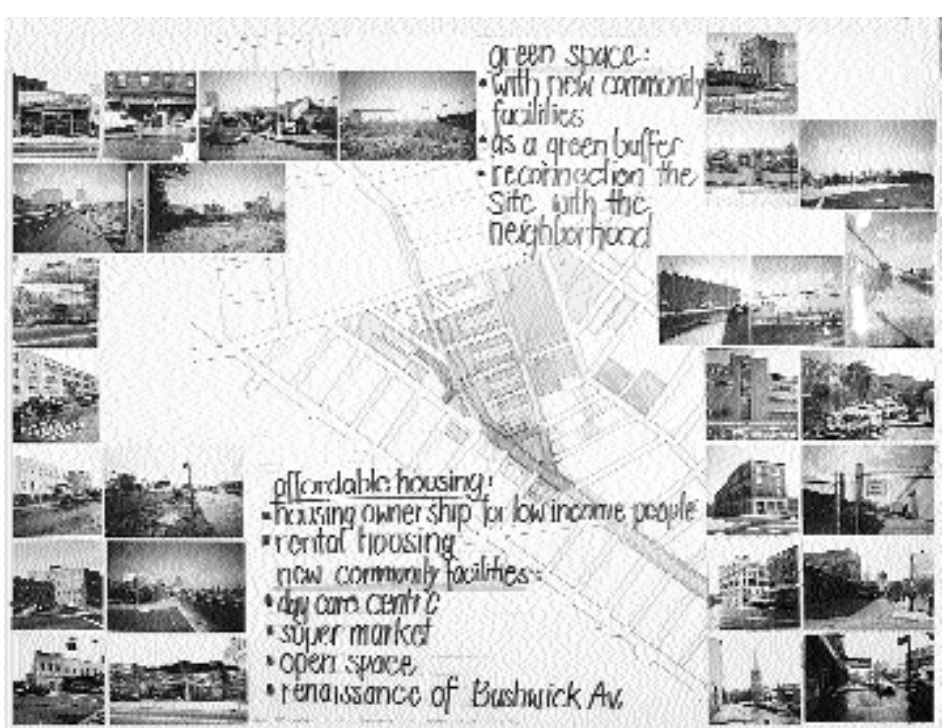
Design Concept

The design concept that emerged is a product of consensus and reflects the community's desire for action. It is a first step and a practical approach in implementing a vision for the Rheingold site.

Green Space

This idea demonstrates that green infrastructure can recreate physical and visual connections with the neighborhood and serve as the "transition element" between different uses. The interesting topography of the site helped to determine the plan's open space hierarchy. The site's highest point, near the intersection of Bushwick Avenue and Melrose Street, was selected as the best location for the project's main public plaza considering its commanding view of the entire site and the Manhattan skyline. The community facility uses contemplated for this intersection will frame the public plaza.

The concept also includes green areas designed to serve as buffers between the mix-use/mid-rise buildings proposed along Bushwick Avenue and the two-family homes proposed on the "interior" of the site. Each cluster of homes will have private green space for resident's use. Group parking with dense landscaping was preposed along Stanwix Street in order to create a buffer between the new residential buildings and the existing industrial structures.



"We worked very collaboratively, and look at the results. The community got what it wanted."

Maritza Davila, Coordinator, Northern Bushwick Residents Association

You were there...

Colleen Alderson
Chelsea Albucher
Patricia Barrera
Angela Battaglia
Ilka Bauer
Elizabeth Benson
Charles Brass
Esther Christie
Nicole Comp
Maritza Davila
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Eckbert Flamig
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Karl Groger
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Gary Hattem
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Michael Hickey
Lee Ilan
Heather Jacks
Judy James-Hernandez
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Jose Leon
John Liebmann
James Lima
Daisy Lopez
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Robert Lowe
Donald Manning
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Lance Michaels
Paul Montgomery
Regina Myer
Lloyd Nakao
Yvette Perez
Jerilyn Perine
Brian Pritchard
Joseph Pupello
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Margaret Smith
Lenward Snead
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Rachel Stein
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Joel Tranter
William Traylor
Susan Wachter
Veronica White



Next Steps

The design concept requires many public actions before approval. Once approval is obtained, the plan will be developed in phases. The implementation strategy mapped out during the workshop described the public review process and identified several financing mechanisms that could be used to develop the different phases of the plan.

Workshop participants proposed the creation of a task force that will help to advance the project through the public review process. The task force will include members of City agencies, the New York City Housing Partnership and Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Council.

Federal, State, and City subsidies will be utilized in a manner that leverages private financing to the greatest extent possible. State and City subsidies will fill the gap between the cost of developing the townhouses and the sale price, which will be affordable to target home buyers. Similarly, for the rental units, low interest loans from the City will be blended with bank loans so that the debt service burden on the buildings can be covered by rents affordable to the target population.

In concluding the workshop, City officials and partners emphasized their commitment to implementation. It is expected that the first phase of the project will begin November 2001. This phase involves the construction of the first group of two and three-story family homes by the New York City Housing Partnership. It is expected that by the end of 2002, new owners could start moving into the homes. While the first homes are under construction, New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) would begin working on the implementation of the second phase, which includes the construction of the first multifamily buildings.

“When you take empty lots and you put in housing and a community center, it shows hope. This is one of my highest priorities. It is so important to the vitality and the revitalization of this community”.

Assemblyman Vito J. Lopez





Conclusion

The workshop results illustrate the potential for the Bushwick neighborhood. Participants arrived at a consensus on community objectives and the actions needed to revitalize the area, and they

agreed to work together to achieve the vision for Bushwick using a pragmatic approach to redevelopment. The Task Force proposed by participants will provide a new model to guide the translation of concept into detailed designs and implementation.

“We needed the experience of other professionals who had worked with brownfield sites before and an infusion of new ideas and methods to help us see beyond the site’s past and into its future.”

Jerilyn Perine,
Commissioner,
City of New York Department
of Housing Preservation and
Development

About the IBE

Led by the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, the objective of the International Brownfield Exchange is to add value to the work already underway in local municipalities in three key ways:

- share international experiences on the redevelopment of former industrial areas;
- create new opportunities for multi-disciplinary groups from North America and Europe to test ideas for built form, land use and landscape design;
- disseminate the lessons and results of the international collaboration to a broad audience, including local communities and decision-makers.



Waterfront Regeneration Trust thanks its partners:

Assemblyman Vito J. Lopez,
Chairman of New York State Assembly
Housing Committee
City of New York Department of Housing
Preservation and Development
Deutsche Bank
The German Marshall Fund of the United
States
New York City Housing Project
Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens
Council
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