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Progress on the Manhattan Greenway: Nearing the Finish Line?

Over the past several years, New York City has made substantial investments in its waterfronts and greenspaces to promote economic development and afford safer recreational options for pedestrians and cyclists, while also reducing the city's carbon footprint. The city's 2022

Executive Budget includes a substantial investment in capital funds for the completion of the Manhattan Greenway. The greenway is presently comprised of roughly 32 miles of open space, encompassing parks, playgrounds, pedestrian and bike pathways, and waterfronts encircling the island of Manhattan. The undertaking represents a multiagency effort by the New York City Economic Development Corporation, and the city's Departments of City Planning, Transportation, and Parks & Recreation.

The concept of a linked greenway around Manhattan is not a new one, dating back to the Dinkins Administration. In recent years under the de Blasio Administration, efforts have been made to bridge several critical gaps along the greenway, which, upon completion, will constitute an open space that exceeds the total area of Central Park. This would complete nearly three decades of planning to enhance Manhattan's shoreline through the reclaiming and enhancement of various waterfront assets for pedestrians and cyclists.

Manhattan Greenway Completion Requires Construction of Several Sections. While many pieces of the Manhattan Greenway are already in place, such as the Hudson River Greenway, four key points along the Harlem River and East River have significant gaps. Initial planning to eliminate these breaks in the greenway began in 2004 during the Bloomberg Administration. At the release of the Executive Budget this spring, Mayor de Blasio announced a total of \$723 million in capital funds to close these gaps, with construction planned for 2022 through 2027. (All years refer to city fiscal years.)

Inwood-Sherman Creek Gap. As Manhattan's northernmost neighborhood surrounded by hills and waterways, Inwood is



the only neighborhood on the island where pedestrians and bicyclists currently have no direct access to the greenway. The de Blasio Administration announced it was setting aside \$307 million to address the half-mile gap along the Harlem Riverfront from Sherman Creek and Academy Street to the University Heights Bridge at 207th Street, which would provide the neighborhood a direct connection to the existing greenway.

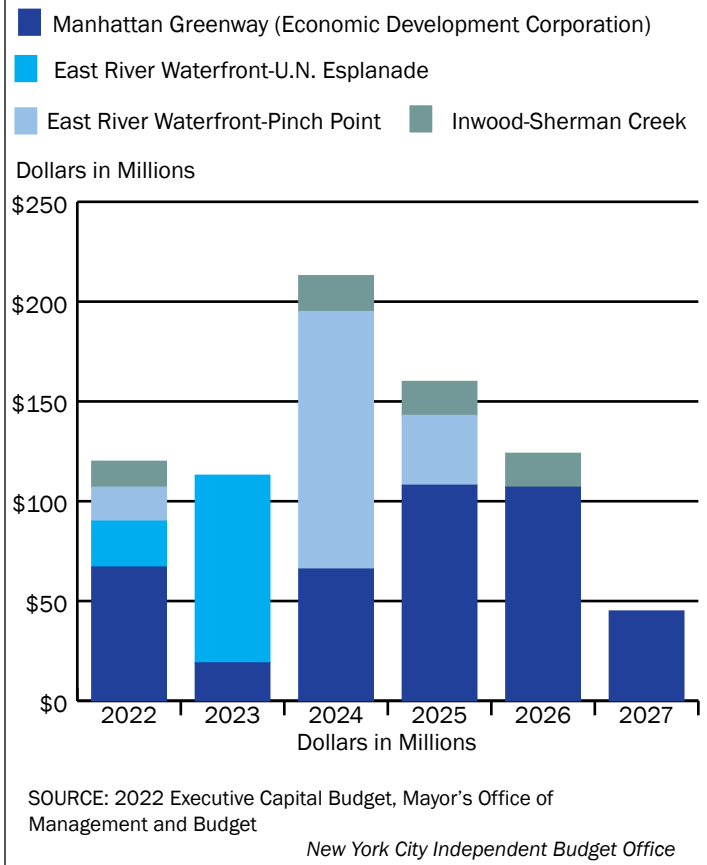
Esplanade Gardens-Harlem Speedway Gap. Currently, Harlem residents are largely cut off from direct waterfront access due to the Harlem River Drive, a subway rail yard, and private property. The de Blasio Administration allocated \$170 million to span the 1.5-mile break along the Harlem Riverfront from 145th Street to Highbridge Park. The project will also re-establish connections among the area’s parks and playgrounds.

United Nations Esplanade Gap. As currently configured, pedestrians and cyclists have to go on 1st and 2nd Avenues to get around the United Nations complex, which protrudes over the East River, detouring them from the waterfront and placing them in the middle of traffic. The capital commitment plan includes \$117 million to construct a half-mile long path on a causeway over the East River around the perimeter of the United Nations building, connecting the sections between 41st and 53rd Streets.

East River Pinch Point. Pedestrians and cyclists who use this section of the greenway are familiar with the dangerously narrow stretch between East 13th and East 15th Streets (which is only 4 feet wide at its narrowest point), next to Con Edison’s East River Generation Station. The de Blasio Administration announced it set aside \$129 million to build out the nearly 53-foot long section of path to increase safety and accessibility for greenway users.

Capital Plan Contains \$53 Million More Than Highlighted by the Mayor. In addition to the \$723 million capital investment announced for the four sections, IBO identified an additional \$53 million in the Executive Budget to build the Pinch Point spans of the East River Waterfront. In total, IBO identified \$776 million in capital funding for Manhattan Greenway-related budget lines from 2022 through 2027. This total consists of \$299 million managed by the Department of Transportation to close the gap along the United Nations Esplanade (\$117 million) and to build the Pinch Point spans of the East River Waterfront (\$182 million); \$65 million managed by the transportation department to reconstruct roadways throughout the Inwood-Sherman Creek area; and a \$412 million lump sum

Over Half of \$776 Million in Capital Funds Are Sourced From the New York City Economic Development Corporation



to be managed by the Economic Development Corporation for the Manhattan Greenway project across multiple sites.¹ The Economic Development Corporation has indicated that its portion of greenway funding will be used as follows: \$10 million for the Inwood-Sherman Creek span, \$170 million for the Esplanade Gardens-Harlem Speedway span, and \$232 million allocated for miscellaneous public sites.

Some Infrastructure Investments in Rezoned Neighborhoods Will Benefit Greenway Improvements. Two of the Greenway gaps—Inwood-Sherman Creek and Esplanade Gardens-Harlem Speedway—are located in neighborhoods which were rezoned under the de Blasio Administration. As part of the earlier rezoning actions, capital funds had already been committed for open space investments in these neighborhoods—\$28 million for Inwood and \$23 million for East Harlem.

Efforts to plug the Inwood-Sherman Creek gap partially overlap with projects promised as part of the Inwood rezoning. Roughly \$45 million in planned capital funding tied to the Inwood neighborhood rezoning had already been set aside for the construction of the Sherman Creek Malecón at Academy Street and to restore the North Cove.

In contrast, there is no direct overlap between the work required on the Esplanade Gardens-Harlem Speedway of the greenway and the work to create and improve open space as part of the rezoning efforts taking place in East Harlem, although they are complimentary. The Esplanade Gardens-Harlem Speedway project runs along the Harlem Riverfront from 145th Street to Highbridge Park (around 155th Street). The city's greenway-related projects under the East Harlem rezoning include \$15 million in improvements to the East River Esplanade from 96th

Street to 125th Street, as well as \$100 million to expand the Harlem River Greenway Link to connect 125th Street through to 132nd Street.

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Endnote

¹West 207th Street from 9th to 10th Avenues; 10th Avenue from West 207th Street to West 218th Street; and West 218th Street from 10th Avenue to Inwood Hill Park.

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