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City, Landscape Architects, Elected Officials and Environmental Groups Celebrate Completion of Green Infrastructure in Gowanus Canal Watershed



Green Infrastructure Beautifies Neighborhood, Cleans the Air and Improves the Health of the Gowanus Canal

Construction of Sponge Park™, Recognized for Design Excellence, and 70 Curbside Rain Gardens Complete

Photos of the Work and a Map of the Project Area are Available on [DEP's Flickr Page](#)

The City of New York, landscape architects, elected officials and environmental groups today celebrated the addition of green infrastructure to the Gowanus Canal Watershed. Green infrastructure captures stormwater and allows it to be naturally absorbed into the ground. By keeping stormwater out of the neighborhood's combined sewer system, green infrastructure helps reduce sewer overflows into the Gowanus Canal. Completed projects include a Sponge Park™ at 2nd Street on the west side of the Canal and 70 curbside rain gardens throughout the watershed. Taking part in today's event were DLANDSTUDIO, principal designer of the Sponge Park™, Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez, City Council Member Brad Lander, the Gowanus Canal Conservancy, NYS Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon, Community Board 6 and the Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP), Design and Construction (DDC) and Transportation.

More Information

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“DEP is proud to partner with so many groups who are committed to a cleaner Gowanus Canal,” said **DEP Acting Commissioner Vincent Sapienza**. “By keeping millions of gallons of stormwater out of the combined sewer system each year, the new green infrastructure will reduce pollution in the Canal, improve air quality and green neighborhood streets. We look forward to building upon these partnerships as we move forward with additional cleanup projects in the coming years.”

“DDC is pleased to work with its partner agency DEP to reduce stormwater runoff into the Gowanus Canal,” said **New York City Department of Design and Construction Commissioner Feniosky Peña-Mora**. “Along with local projects to eliminate combined sewers, we are significantly improving the quality of a waterway that runs through a growing and thriving area of Brooklyn. We look forward to future efforts with DEP to enhance the sustainability of our local environment.”

“It’s exciting to see what can happen when designers, community, foundations, city, state and federal initiatives come together to innovate and make our city a better place to live, work and raise our families,” said **Susannah Drake, Principal of DLANDSTUDIO**.

“Step by step, we are reducing pollution in the canal, and working towards a cleaner and more sustainable Gowanus,” said **City Council Member Brad Lander**. “From the completion of the Sponge Park at 2nd street, to the recent installment of 70 curbside rain gardens throughout the area, green infrastructure investments—together with the CSO detention tanks and high-level storm sewers—are critical steps to improving the long term health of the canal. Thanks to the NYC Department of Environmental Protection for investing in the long term health of the canal, and to the Gowanus Canal Conservancy for leading the effort locally to help achieve a sustainable Gowanus.”

“The Sponge Park is an innovative pilot project that will improve the health of our local waterbodies by capturing stormwater, and the rain gardens help to reduce contaminated sewer overflows into the Gowanus Canal,” said **U.S. Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY)**. “I was proud to secure initial funding for the Sponge Park on the Gowanus canal, and look forward to continuing to support such innovative projects around our urban waterways.”

“Our infrastructure should be as resilient as the New Yorkers that call this great city home,” said **City Council Member Stephen Levin**. “Managing stormwater is a critical step on our path towards sustainability. This project proves that taking care of our environment and providing amenities to the public are not mutually exclusive—in fact, quite the opposite is true. The more green infrastructure and open space we create, the greater the public’s stewardship.”

“We are inching closer and closer to the day we see a clean Gowanus Canal,” said **NYS Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon**. “The Sponge Park’s function of capturing and retaining stormwater before it reaches the canal will be a big help in getting us even closer. This is a great addition to the neighborhood and I congratulate the partners who conceived of this and made it happen.”

“As curbside and street end rain gardens pop up around the Gowanus Watershed and the city, there is an incredible opportunity to engage the community in understanding the issues of combined sewer overflows and how we can all pitch in to solve them,” said **Andrea Parker, Executive Director, Gowanus Canal Conservancy**. “We look forward to using Sponge Park as an outdoor classroom for our green infrastructure stewardship training program, middle school STEM curriculum, public walking tours and more.”

“If Man is a blind, witless, low brow, anthropocentric clod who inflicts lesions upon the earth, as the great landscape architect Ian McHarg put it, then it is up to all of us to support the restoration of nature’s design especially in our urban environment,” said **District Manager of Community Board 6 Craig Hammerman**. “Green Infrastructure is a wonderful way to reintroduce smart, sustainable features to our landscape. In the end you can’t beat Mother Nature.”

The Sponge Park™ is located at the foot of 2nd Street where it dead ends on the west side of the Gowanus Canal. The 1,800 square foot park has been specially designed to capture and clean the stormwater that flows down 2nd Street before it reaches the Canal. It is estimated that the park will capture nearly 1 million gallons of stormwater annually. The roughly \$1.5 million park was developed through the grassroots efforts of DLANDSTUDIO and the Gowanus Canal Conservancy, with funding from the City Council. Grants administered by the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission for design, construction, and environmental justice were obtained by DLANDSTUDIO, principal designer of the project. DEP provided engineering and construction administration services and DOT provided the land. The Gowanus Dredgers and Community Board 6 provided support throughout the process. The Gowanus Canal Community Development Corporation assisted in the development of a workforce training manual, funded by DEC, for long term maintenance of the project. The innovative design of the Sponge Park™ has been recognized by the New York City Public Design Commission, The American Institute of Architects and The American Society of Landscape Architects.

Construction of this prototype green infrastructure park included excavating the roadway to a depth of five feet and installing a modular system of concrete cells filled with engineered soil to store and filter stormwater runoff. Native, mostly woody, plants absorb, filter and evapotranspire water through their roots and leaves, as well as act to phyto-remediate toxins from the runoff. A ten foot wide walkway over an overflow sand filter area provides public access to the Canal.

In addition to the Sponge Park™, earlier this year DEP and DDC completed the construction of 70 specially designed curbside rain gardens in the neighborhoods of Boerum Hill, Carroll Gardens, Gowanus, Park Slope and Prospect Heights. In total, the rain gardens have the capacity to collect and absorb nearly 133,000 gallons of stormwater when it rains. It is estimated that they will capture more than 6 million gallons of stormwater each year, thereby reducing sewer overflows into the Gowanus Canal and improving the health of the waterway. The rain gardens also green the neighborhoods, clean the air and provide shade in the summer months.

In addition to building green infrastructure on streets and sidewalks, DEP also partners with other agencies to add green infrastructure at schools, parks, and public housing. For example, DEP partnered with the Trust for Public Land, the School Construction Authority and the Department of Education on a "green" playground at P.S. 261 that manages nearly half a million gallons of stormwater annually in the Gowanus Watershed. DEP also administers a Grant Program for private property owners. In the Gowanus watershed, DEP partnered with the New York Restoration Project to add green infrastructure to the Gil Hodges Community Garden. For more information on the program or to apply for a grant visit the [DEP website](#).

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing approximately 1 billion gallons of high-quality water each day to more than 9 million residents, including 8.5 million in New York City. The water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, comprising 19 reservoirs and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,500 miles of sewer lines and 96 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. DEP has nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 in the upstate watershed. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program, with a planned \$14 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).

The Department of Design and Construction is the City's primary capital construction project manager. In supporting Mayor de Blasio's lenses of growth, sustainability, resiliency, equity and healthy living, DDC provides communities

with new or renovated public buildings such as such as firehouses, libraries, police precincts, new or upgraded roadways, sewers, water mains in all five boroughs. To manage this \$15 billion portfolio, DDC partners with other City agencies, architects and consultants, whose experience bring efficient, innovative, and environmentally-conscious design and construction strategies to city projects. For more information, please visit nyc.gov/ddc.

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