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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 13-83
July 31, 2013

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Department of Environmental Protection, Council Members Lander, Levin and Gonzalez, Dlandstudio, and the Gowanus Canal Conservancy Announce Plans to Build a Sponge Park™ Adjacent to the Gowanus Canal

Green Infrastructure Park will Absorb Stormwater from the Street, Improve Water Quality in the Canal, and Beautify the Neighborhood;

Innovative Park was Recognized for Design Excellence by the New York City Public Design Commission

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Carter Strickland, City Council Members Brad Lander, Steve Levin and Sara Gonzalez, DLANDSTUDIO, the Gowanus Canal Community Development Corporation, and the Gowanus Canal Conservancy today announced plans to build a Sponge Park™ adjacent to the Gowanus Canal. The 1,800 square foot park will be located where 2nd Street dead ends on the west side of the Canal. The park will be specially designed to capture and retain stormwater that flows down 2nd Street before it reaches the Canal. 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, and the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control

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Commission for design, construction, and environmental justice were obtained by DLANDSTUDIO, principal designer of the project. DEP is providing engineering and construction administration services, the NYC Department of Transportation is providing the land, and the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation will maintain the park. The Gowanus Dredgers and Community Board 6 provided support throughout the process. The New York City Public Design Commission recognized the Sponge Park™ for its innovative design during an award ceremony held this month in the newly refurbished City Council Chamber.

“From conception to design, the plans for this park have been a true collaboration amongst the community, design professionals, elected officials, and city government,” said DEP Commissioner Strickland. “Working in conjunction with our ongoing water quality initiatives, the park will help beautify the neighborhood and improve the cleanliness of the Gowanus Canal.”

“The 2nd Street Sponge Park™ is a great example of a community-led project that improves the sustainability of city infrastructure,” said Council Member Lander. “The Sponge Park™ will give the public access to the canal while reducing runoff. With other green infrastructure planned by DEP, and the canal cleanup that will come through Superfund, I am hopeful that the Gowanus will soon be a model for sustainable development.”

“I am excited about the plans for the Sponge Park™, a unique project that will make our neighborhood more beautiful and sustainable,” said Council Member Steve Levin. “Green infrastructure is an important part of our future as a city and I am pleased to see such an innovative project taking place at the Gowanus Canal.”

“As environmental stewards for the Gowanus Canal and watershed, the Gowanus Canal Conservancy is grateful to work with DEP and our local elected officials to initiate green infrastructure projects that will help improve water quality in the canal and bring more green spaces to our community,” said Hans Hesselein, Executive Director of the Gowanus Canal Conservancy. “We hope to help initiate hundreds of similar installations throughout the area.”

“The Sponge Park™ is a unique model for urban green infrastructure in both its technological advancements and its process for development.” said Susannah Drake, Principal of DLANDSTUDIO. “Using grant monies that we applied for from state and foundation sources, DLANDSTUDIO was able to work fluidly across agency rules and standards to enable innovation not generally possible through normal procurement processes.”

“The Gowanus Sponge Park™ is an exciting project that uses green design to clean the water, bring people back to the water’s edge, and support the revitalization of the community” said Matthew Driscoll, President and CEO of the state Environmental Facilities Corp., which is supporting the Sponge Park™ with a \$535,000 Green Innovation Grant. “These green grants, part of Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Regional Economic Development initiative, are spurring economic development through sustainable infrastructure projects across New York State to reduce pollution and other adverse effects from stormwater runoff.”

“Sponge Park is built on many layers—both physical layers of dirt and stone, and also layers of interagency cooperation,” said NYC Parks Commissioner Veronica M. White. “The new park will provide recreational opportunities for neighboring communities and further the City’s stormwater management efforts. We are pleased to work with our partners at the Department of Environmental Protection, elected officials and dland Studios on this important public space.”

“The Sponge Park™ will help manage stormwater run-off, filter and absorb contaminants, and create a pleasing street end park-like experience,” said Brooklyn Community Board 6 District Manager Craig R. Hammerman. “It combines the best of form and function in a transformative, replicable, and exciting design. Hopefully, someday soon, all of our Gowanus street ends will have Sponge Parks.”

Construction of this prototype green infrastructure park will include excavating

the roadway to a depth of four feet and installing a modular system of concrete cells filled with engineered soil to store and filter stormwater runoff. Native plants will 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 will provide public access to the Canal. The project will go out to bid later this year with construction beginning in 2014. It is expected that the park will be open by the summer of 2015.

In addition to the Sponge Park™, DEP has numerous initiatives underway that will significantly improve the cleanliness of the water in the Gowanus Canal to the point where it is expected to meet health standards for boating by the end of the year. In 2009, DEP began work to rehabilitate the more than century old 1.3 mile Gowanus Canal Flushing Tunnel, which brings oxygenated water from New York Harbor to the head of the Canal. The Tunnel was taken out of operation during the summer of 2010 to allow for an upgrade to the pumping system and, when it is reactivated later this year, it will pump an average of 215 million gallons of water to the head of the Canal every day, a more than 30 percent increase over its previous capacity.

In order to reduce combined sewer overflows, the Gowanus Canal Pumping Station is currently being upgraded so that it can move more than 30 million gallons of wastewater each day to the Red Hook Wastewater Treatment Plant, a 50 percent upgrade over its previous capacity. Work on the pumping station will also be completed in 2013. In addition, later this year DEP will begin installation of high level storm sewers along 3rd Avenue in Park Slope. This project will keep millions of gallons of stormwater out of the combined sewer system and reduce overflows into the Canal and localized street flooding. DEP is also planning for the construction of roughly 500 bioswales, curbside gardens that are specially designed to absorb stormwater, throughout the Gowanus Canal drainage area. Taken together these projects represent a more than \$200 million investment that will reduce combined sewer overflows into the Canal by 45 percent.

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight 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. This capital program is responsible for critical projects like City Water Tunnel No. 3; the Staten Island Bluebelt program, an ecologically sound and cost-effective stormwater management system; the city's Watershed Protection Program, which protects sensitive lands upstate near the city's reservoirs in order to maintain their high water quality; and the installation of more than 820,000 Automated Meter Reading devices, which will allow customers to track their daily water use, more easily manage their accounts and be alerted to potential leaks on their properties. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/nycwater](https://www.facebook.com/nycwater), or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/nycwater.

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