

Sunnyside Yard Master Plan | Steering Committee 04

PROJECT: Sunnyside Yard Master Plan
DATE: 01 April 2019
TIME: 1:00-3:00p
LOCATION: Sunnyside Community Services
43-31 39th Street, Sunnyside, NY 11104

Opening

During the fourth meeting of the Sunnyside Yard Steering Committee, the NYCEDC, Amtrak and the Consultant Team shared an update on community engagement and work-to-date on rail infrastructure integration, transportation, deck accessibility, block sizes, open space and social infrastructure, programming/uses, phasing, and finance analysis methodology. The presentation was followed by a group discussion.

James Patchett, President and CEO of NYC Economic Development Corporation and Peter Waldt, Senior Director, Commercial Planning & Development, Amtrak (standing in for co-chair Tony Cosia) opened the meeting followed by a brief welcome from Judy Zangwill, Executive Director of Sunnyside Community Services. Co-chairs Sharon Greenberger, President & CEO of YMCA of Greater NY and Elizabeth Lusskin, President of the Long Island City Partnership presented the agenda for the meeting, noting that the feedback heard in the first three meetings were incorporated into the plans and ideas that Vishaan Chakrabarti, Founder of Practice for Architecture and Urbanism (PAU) and lead of the Consultant Team would share during this meeting. Greenberger noted that the Consultant Team had produced the requested physical model of existing conditions of the site (see photo at end of document). The model will be used for future Steering Committee meetings and community engagement efforts. Additional layers will be added as feedback from the community and Steering Committee is incorporated into the Master Plan.

Master Plan Update: Community Engagement

Androniki Lagos, Senior Consultant, Urbane Development, provided an overview of the stakeholder engagement work to date including updates on:

- Public Meeting 02, which took place on March 26th
- Workshops, which include:
 - 4/8: Urban Design, 6-8PM @ Woodside Houses Community Center
 - 4/9: Open Space, 6-8PM @ PS 199 Maurice A. Fitzgerald
 - 4/30: Sustainability & Green Infrastructure, 6-8PM @ Riis Settlement Houses
 - 5/1: Transportation/Mobility, 6-8PM @ TBC in Astoria
- Completed interviews
- Summer events

Lagos reiterated the team's process of inclusive and broad-based engagement, focused on meeting stakeholders where they are, the value they are seeing in candid small group and individual conversations, and the responsive feedback loop established with the design team. She provided an overview of uses they are currently hearing as priorities through their engagement work which includes housing, anchors to meet the needs of today and tomorrow, small businesses, sustainability, green/open space, flexible convening spaces, arts/cultural space and more.

Master Plan Update: Progress

Chakrabarti provided an update on the master planning work including an overview of rail infrastructure and deck clearance analysis, transportation findings to date and interventions being tested, and working section drawings of different street designs being studied. The team is exploring corridors that could accommodate a range of uses (vehicular, cyclist, and pedestrian), testing a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor and how interior streets could be designed to be smaller in width and accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, and potential future forms of vehicular movement that may not require curb cuts.

Conceptual information about block sizing and building typologies was shared before presenting three options being tested for open space and social infrastructure on Sunnyside Yard: (1) “Central Green”, (2) “Eastern Park”, (3) “Eastern and Western Parks.” These design ideas were informed by the March 26th public meeting and what the team has been hearing from the community, verbally through interviews, and through proposed plan submissions, such as one entry from Court Square Civic Association. The designers are testing options to incorporate as many of the key priorities for open space heard to date, such as:

- A greenway that connects the east and west
- Expansion of Lou Lodati park
- A large park in the center of the Yard
- Smaller and mid-sized parks hugging the perimeter of the site to act as a connector between Sunnyside Yard and neighboring residents
- A green “ring-road” with bike lanes and walking paths surrounding the Yard
- Smaller units of green space (1-5 acre parks) to be interspersed throughout
- Passive green space or ecological parks
- A band shell or amphitheater for concerts and open-air events
- Space for a community farm/garden

A variety of programs were shown that could evolve across the site. While early phase projects would identify specific programs based on policy goals and planning rationale, the team wants to ensure that a variety of programs could be applied to the same grid and open space strategy in order to maintain flexibility in future decades. Potential zones for a civic and institutional cluster, high-density housing, “commdustrial” (a mix of industrial and commercial uses), and mixed-density housing and neighborhood amenities, could emerge for each programming strategy.

Next step in the analysis is determining the ideal geographical location of potential early phases. Three geographic areas of the yard were presented, (1) West, (2) Center, (3) East, all occurring between bridges that suggest different phasing sequences. Each option would require a series of many subphases that the consultant team is beginning to evaluate in terms of sizing, constructability approach, cost, and uses.

Another major task at hand is the production of the financial model, which Kei Hayashi, Partner at BJH Advisors explained. Critical considerations/questions the team is currently evaluating include:

- How to model future demand in such a long-term project
- Phasing considerations
- Different options for how public, private, nonprofit, or hybrid entities could build out the deck and pay for major infrastructure costs
- Sequence of construction with rail yard outages and track closures to ensure rail operations are fully maintained

Group Discussion

During the group discussion Steering Committee members both responded to the material presented and provided recommendations for efforts moving forward. Key points from the conversation include:

- There still seems to be confusion about the Feasibility Study versus the Master Planning Process. The Feasibility Study was a technical study to understand if anything was feasible using hypothetical test cases; the Master Planning Process is a collaborative planning effort to determine the vision, planning framework, and potential early phase projects for the yard.
- Appreciation for the process and discussion about the collaboration between Steering Committee members and the city on the community outreach.

- During the discussion about open space design options, there was a request that the team consider CEQR open space ratios in the development of the open space and public space network. A member was interested in the idea of expanding Lou Lodati Park.
- In discussion about the financial analysis process, it was asked if creative financing and land ownership strategies could be investigated (e.g. Community Land Trust). The project team responded that it is testing a range of options and structures, and hopes for continued partnership with the Steering Committee to help recommend innovative financing strategies that the project team should explore.
- In discussion about the financial analysis process, it was asked if the team can consider philanthropy as a potential funding source and evaluate non-profit vs. private development. The project team explained that financial model is being built in order to toggle and evaluate many options like this at once.
- It was asked how to incorporate meaningful milestones to ensure infrastructure investments that are part of the plan happen in the future. The project team responded that there are ways to build in accountability mechanisms tied to investments, and recognized this is important considering that Sunnyside Yard is a generational project that would be implemented over many administrations.

