



FRIENDS OF THE HIGH LINE

**HIGH LINE DESIGN-IN-PROGRESS PRESENTATION
PUBLIC QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSION
MAY 3, 2005**

On May 3, 2005, FHL held a public presentation with the design team of Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro. Over 400 people attended the event, which was held at the Bohlen Foundation, in the Meat Packing District. The designers shared a series of images from the Framework Plan for the entire High Line, as well as Preliminary Design details from the first section of the Line to be converted to public open space, from Gansevoort Street to 15th Street. It was stressed that the presentation represented work in progress, in that the design would evolve in many ways before the start of construction. After the presentation, the designers held an open question-and-answer session with the audience. Attendees were also encouraged to submit questions in writing. FHL has compiled these questions and answered them in collaboration with the City of New York and the design team.

Ownership and Operating:

Q: How is the High Line project going to get ownership rights from CSX Transportation? Can't they donate it to the city? If not, how can the plans proceed?

A: CSX Transportation intends to transfer ownership and control for the High Line to the City of New York to allow its transformation into public open space. In June 2005, the High Line project received a crucial federal authorization, effectively opening the way for the project to move forward. The Surface Transportation Board (STB), the federal body that oversees rail corridors, issued a Certificate of Interim Trail Use (CITU) for the High Line. The CITU enabled CSX Transportation to negotiate a trail use agreement with the City, which will transfer control of the High Line to the City for use as a public walkway and open space. The trail use agreement is currently being negotiated.

Q: Will the NYC Parks Department be the operator?

A: Operation details for the High Line are still being worked out. The City of New York will own the structure, and the Parks Department will likely have jurisdiction and ultimate authority over rules, policies and the management of the park. Friends of the High Line hopes to play a role in the governance of the completed park and is currently negotiating a governance agreement with the City, which would determine how the non profit would work in partnership with the Parks Department to support operations and public programs.

Q: When do you have to have the first phase completed? Will that stretch of the High Line be open while the other phases are still in construction?

A: Section 1A, the portion of the High Line that runs from Gansevoort Street to West 15th Street, is slated for completion sometime in late 2007 or early 2008. Upon completion, the first section will be open to the public while the next phase is under construction.

Q: When do you foresee starting construction of 1B (the second section)?

A: The timetable for the High Line's construction is preliminary and subject to change. Section 1B, running from West 15th Street to West 20th Street, will be constructed either in the same timeframe as the first section, completed in 2007-2008, or subsequently, in which case it would open 2 to 3 years later.

Crowd Control and Security:

Q: What if too many people try to access the High Line at the same time? What are your crowd control plans? How will the vegetation be protected?

A: Areas with more paving and seating will be located near access points and other locations where we expect significant traffic flow. In addition, the design team will work to develop measures to protect plants from pedestrians, including methods for temporary protection during early growth periods and during special events when the High Line's volume of use may be higher.

Q: Will it be open 24 hours?

A: Most City parks close at 1 AM, and the High Line will most likely be closed at certain hours during the night. Its exact hours of operation are still being discussed, and the design team intends to take into account the level of nighttime activity in each of the areas surrounding the High Line. Section 1A, in the Meatpacking District, may stay open later as a complement to the area's lively nightlife. The neighborhoods further north in Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen are more residential, so those sections of the High Line would likely close earlier. Other factors include the programming at the proposed event spaces on the Line, which would possibly stay open for late-night events, and the operating hours of the surrounding buildings.

Q: Please describe the measures you will take to ensure the safety and security of visitors, especially during times of the day or seasons marked by sparse usage.

(See below)

Q: Will there be security features at night? Police presence or phones?

A: Safety and security are essential to all parks, and an effective security system is crucial to the success of the High Line. It is envisioned that during all open hours, the Line will have security personnel monitoring activity on the Line itself as well as at all access points. Planners have also discussed the possibility of a closed-circuit camera system to help security personnel, especially when the Line is closed at night. Emergency call boxes may also be considered.

Q: How do you keep the High Line from becoming a congregation venue for the homeless?

A: Staff security patrols will ensure the safe and proper usage of the park (see above). Security sweeps will be made before the High Line closes each night to prevent overnight loitering. The planners of the High Line are looking at solutions used in other parks and public spaces.

Integration into the Surrounding Neighborhood:

Q: What design elements are you considering to link or relate the High Line to the Hudson River Park?

A: Although there is no current plan for a physical connection, such as a pedestrian overpass linking the High Line to the nearby Hudson River Park, the design team has expressed interest in exploring such a connection. While the two have much in common, the High Line's design team emphasizes the Line's distinction as a "slow space," a more contemplative, meandering experience fulfilling a different public need than the larger, faster Hudson River Park.

Q: As for new construction on either side of the High Line, what are the building regulations?

A: The shape of the High Line district, in particular the developments directly adjacent to the Line, will have a tremendous impact on the way the Line is used. To a great extent, the future of the High Line district depends on the newly created Special West Chelsea District, which was approved unanimously by the City Council in June 2005. The Special District, which stretches from West 16th Street to West 30th Street between 10th and 11th Avenues, is intended to "provide opportunities for new residential and commercial development, facilitate the reuse of the High Line elevated rail line as a unique linear open space, and enhance the neighborhood's thriving art gallery district." The provisions of the Special District include mechanisms that permit the transfer of floor area away from the High Line and specific regulations for developments constructed adjacent to the Line. These provisions are an effort to maintain the broad vistas and open feel of the Line, while encouraging new residential and commercial developments to revitalize the district itself. More information is available online at www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html.

Q: How will adjoining land/property/space be planned to draw people into the High Line? How will this new piece of landscape impact adjacent businesses and homes?

(See below)

Q: What connections are proposed to adjacent land uses, the waterfront, and the far West Side development at 31st-33rd Street?

A: The connections between the High Line and its surroundings are crucial to the success of the project. Just as the surrounding neighborhood will affect the feel and use of the High Line, the new public space will exert influence on the district itself. The High Line will likely create a significant draw to the neighborhood, benefiting local businesses and making the area's street life more vibrant. Owners and developers of several properties abutting the Line plan to incorporate it into their developments, seeing it as a great opportunity to draw in High Line visitors. There are currently no plans to connect the Line directly to Hudson River Park (see above) but the river is easily accessible from all High Line access locations.

Site History, Preservation and Education:

Q: What capacity are you embedding in this project to educate NYC students to the values, history, ecology and sheer appreciation of the city?

A: The High Line project represents a significant educational opportunity in all of these areas and more. Friends of the High Line currently runs an after-school education program in conjunction with the Parks Department's Chelsea Recreation Center. As the High Line project continues to move forward, FHL plans to expand this program to reach a broader range of school-age children in the High Line Community and beyond. The details of the education program are still evolving, but the High Line itself will certainly include elements that take full advantage of its potential as a wonderful interactive teaching tool.

Q: Will the history of the High Line be an integral part of the redesign?

(See below)

Q: Will there be historical information and pictures about the original planning and building of the High Line like on the Brooklyn Bridge?

(See below)

Q: Will there be a memorial plaque or similar recognition tribute to Peter Obletz on the High Line?

A: The design team understands the importance of paying homage to the High Line's history, as well as that of the surrounding neighborhoods, but design details to this end are still in the preliminary phase. The current plan incorporates several historical "found objects" from the Line's past, which may or may not be accompanied by explanatory markers. Possible historical topics for exploration and interpretation on the Line include its planning and construction, use as transportation infrastructure, role in the industrial West Side, abandonment and subsequent reclaiming (of which Peter Obletz was a significant part). In the place of traditional plaque-style historical markers, the design team will most likely use innovative curatorial techniques in combination with found objects.

Q: Since learning of the "Preservation" project several years ago, I have always looked forward to experiencing the High Line "as it was". Will any sections be preserved "as is" albeit "behind glass"? (including rail lines etc.)

(See below)

Q: The projected High Line seems like a nice simulacrum of the High Line minus its "ruined" flavor. For historical and experiential purposes, will any part of it be untouched? Part of its beauty is being a relic- rusty and ruined- as opposed to a clean and safe replica.

A: It is important to point out that the entire High Line site must undergo structural restoration and remediation for pedestrian use prior to the construction of the future park. This work includes new waterproofing and drainage systems, a process which includes the removal of surface materials currently on the Line. Because of this, historical artifacts removed during this phase can be returned later, where appropriate, to their precise location on the Line. The design team recognizes the appeal of the Line's current "ruined" ex-industrial state, and is committed to capturing the spirit of the High Line as it is now through careful material and plant selection.

This will be achieved through the preservation of existing railings, sections of rail track and ballast, unusual and found conditions, wild and opportunistic plant species, north-south sightlines, and a slow meandering experience through various conditions. In addition, the design team is investigating the opportunity to 'preserve' specific sections of the line "as is" in areas where the concrete, steel, and waterproofing is intact and there is no ballast.

General Program:

Q: If one of the goals is to preserve the "secret garden" aspect of the High Line, why have such grand and visible entry points? (Noguchi Garden Museum comes to mind, more in keeping with the slow nature you seek to achieve.)

A: The design of the access points takes into consideration both the reuse of the High Line as a public open space and its physical structure. The five Special Access Locations along the High Line each include an ADA-compliant elevator and a set of "slow stairs." The wide, shallow stairs fulfill a specific design purpose in that they are intended to serve as a transition from the busy, fast-paced city streets below to the wild landscape of the High Line surface above. This is intended to be a slow journey, an experience unto itself. Along the way, the stairs pass through the six-and-a-half-foot-thick steel and reinforced concrete structure of the High Line. Visitors will have the opportunity to come face-to-face with the Line's construction materials and substructure for a truly tactile sensory experience. The stairs will have a significant and safe presence on street level, to announce, welcome and invite the public up into this experience. On the surface of the Line, however, the slow stairs will be more understated as they transition into the simple aesthetic of the High Line landscape. In addition to the slow stairs of the Special Access Locations, there will be seven Primary and Secondary Access Locations, in which the stairs will be built to a smaller scale.

Q: At one meeting, use of High Line space was discussed- an area for rock concerts and political rallies. Have these plans been changed?

A: In general, the basic strategy for programmed events is to locate them adjacent to the High Line or in areas where they will not interfere with the primary walking path of the High Line. The preliminary framework plan includes several programming spaces: an Event Lounge, an Event Space and a Seasonal Stage, each intended for public or private gatherings of a modest scale. The larger public gathering spaces discussed earlier in the design process were modified due to space and usage concerns. The High Line will be relatively small in comparison to the city's other public open spaces; because of its size, shape and access limitations, the Line may not be an ideal venue for large-scale gatherings such as concerts and rallies. However, the programming spaces included in the plan are intended to be flexible and adaptable to different types of gatherings. Consistent with other public parks, the use of the High Line for programs and special events will be reviewed and approved by the Parks Department.

Q: Will there be performances, museums etc?

A: One or more of the programming spaces (see above) will most likely be adaptable for use as a venue for small-scale performances. The Dia Art Foundation recently announced a proposal to build a large-scale new gallery space at the southern terminus of the High Line, at Gansevoort and Washington Streets. The Foundation hopes to take full advantage of the High Line's proximity; its plans will most likely involve entry into the exhibition space directly from the Line.

Q: What about restrooms?

A: The framework plan includes two to three public restrooms, integrated into the access points.

Q: Why is there no access point at the West end of 30th Street? Isn't the dead end dangerous?

A: The exact locations of entrances in sections 1B, 2 and 3 have yet to be determined. The preliminary framework plan shows two access locations at 30th Street; the primary access location is shown less than one half-block from the Line's northern terminus at the West end of 30th Street. Proper measures will be taken to ensure that safety and security at this point are consistent with the Line as a whole (see "Crowd Control and Security" above).

Q: Glass is great on projects and then terribly impractical- dirty and alienating- in practice. What makes you think it is a good idea to use it in this context?

A: Glass will be used strategically in the design in locations where transparency is most important. In particular, transparency at access points is an important safety feature, to maintain open view corridors and insure that visitors don't feel trapped or isolated. All materials shown at this stage are preliminary and will be developed further in the design process.

Q: The High Line is a Rails-to-Trails project. What will cover the rails to make walking safe?

A: "Rails-to-trails" refers to the conversion of former railroad transportation infrastructure to a trail system intended for public use. In order to qualify, projects do not have to preserve the actual rails, just the rail-bed. For the most part, the rails themselves will be replaced with a planking system designed for pedestrians. However, the planking system has been designed to work with the height and scale of the existing rails, and the design team intends to "preserve" parts of the original rails as historical artifacts in certain spots along the Line (see "Site History, Preservation and Education").

Q: How will you ensure that the elevators do not become shabby or otherwise unpleasant on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis?

A: Regular cleaning and maintenance of the entire space, including access locations, will be included in the High Line's operations. Elevators will be routinely checked for wear and tear. The design team is considering several material possibilities, including scratch-proof and self-cleaning glass options.

Q: How is the surface of the steel structure to be prepared and coated?

A: In general, the steel structure will be stripped of lead paint and repainted with exterior-grade bridge paint. Where the steel structure had been damaged due to water infiltration, the rusted steel will be removed prior to repainting.

Q: How will the large water feature be supplied? Will it dry out?

(See below)

Q: How will the water feature be mosquito-proofed?

A: The details of the water feature, and the entire High Line design, are preliminary at this point. A water feature would have its own constant supply of fresh water and would not dry out. As for mosquito-proofing, there are several safe, effective methods regularly used in public water features including aerators, pumps, and recirculation systems. The High Line's planners have not yet decided on a method, but will develop one well in advance of construction.

Ecology and Green Technology:

Q: How do you keep the actual plants that are there now, since you are removing what is there to waterproof it?

A: The High Line's site preparation requires the removal of everything currently on the Line (see "Site History, Preservation and Education" above). Careful studies of the existing plant species on the Line have been conducted by the design team's horticulturists, ecologists and landscape architects. Preliminary plant communities developed for the Line build upon and use many of the current plant species to produce a primarily wild, native, resilient, and low-maintenance landscape with greater diversity, seasonal change, and height and color variation.

Q: With respect to the choice of vegetation, will you attempt to preserve/accommodate existing species, many of which are unique stowaways and hence a form of historical documentation, or will you simply choose other species based on their aesthetic and/or ecological properties?

(See below)

Q: What percent of native plants will be used?

(See below)

Q: To what extent are the plantings focused on native species to avoid use of alien and highly invasive species?

A: The plants currently on the High Line include both native and non-native species, according to an analysis by the design team's horticulturists, ecologists and landscape architects. The design team, and many of the project's supporters, agree that the diverse mix of self-sown plant species is central, interesting and historically relevant to the High Line, and the plantings included in the preliminary design attempt to reflect that nature. Additionally, plant species have been chosen for their diverse foliage and blooms, seasonal robustness and ability to maintain shape and color year-round, so the High Line retains its appeal even in the winter. Native plants will be given primary focus among the Line's flora, and invasives will be avoided and controlled where necessary.

Q: Won't young trees be killed by the complete frost?

A: Part of the design team's rationale for focusing on native species is their natural ability to survive New York's seasonal climactic changes. Plant species, including trees, have been chosen for their hardy nature (see above) and will not be affected by winter weather.

Q: Any hopes for an edible landscape (food crops) in some places?

A: Food crops are unlikely to be used on the Line for several reasons. Most importantly, limited space and the anticipated high volumes of pedestrian traffic would make it be unlikely that food crops would reach harvest stage in such an environment.

Q: Will solar technology be used for lighting?
(See below)

Q: Do you have plans to maximize or ensure the highest possible degree of energy efficiency for the project? Will you make use of renewable energy technology?

A: Since its inception, the High Line has been envisioned as a “green” project, and its construction represents a great opportunity to use ecologically-responsible and energy-efficient technology. The design team is committed to the use of green materials, techniques and power sources, and is currently exploring a range of options. Possibilities for the Line’s lighting, elevators and pumps include renewable energy technology such as solar power.