

HIGH LINE COMMUNITY INPUT FORUM
A Summary

FRIENDS OF THE HIGH LINE

On Tuesday, October 28, 2003, over 400 New Yorkers from the greater High Line community gathered at the Metropolitan Pavilion, on West 19th Street, in Manhattan, to discuss design goals for the conversion of the High Line elevated rail structure to public open space.

To start, participants reviewed entries from the Designing the High Line competition and were updated on the High Line project. They then divided into groups of 10 for discussion. Each group reported its conclusions back to assembled Forum. Groups also recorded notes of their discussions. These were later collected and reviewed by Friends of the High Line (FHL).

Below, we provide a summary of principal issues and themes that emerged from the dialogue. In addition, we've quoted comments from the discussion notes that each table recorded. These give a clear, candid voice to Forum participants and communicate the sensitivity and inventiveness of community members participating in the process.

The summary and quoted comments and will inform the development of design master plan at every stage. Forum participants and public at large will be invited back on a regular basis to engage in the design process as it moves forward.

Principal Issues and Themes

The design of the High Line should represent something entirely new. Virtually every group was clear that the High Line is a unique structure deserving a unique design and identity. Opinion was essentially unanimous that this unique, "otherworldly", and/or "edgy" identity should be maintained.

The existing natural landscape and should be "preserved" in some form. While groups offered different suggestions as to how this goal should be achieved, there was strong support for the incorporation of the existing plants or "wildscape" that spontaneously took root on the High Line over the last two decades.

If "fast" uses are to be accommodated on the High Line, they must not be permitted to unduly interfere with the ability to enjoy "slow" uses. Many groups expressed a strong belief that part or all of the High Line should be reserved for uses that were described as "slow", "pastoral", or "quiet". A majority expressed a wish to forbid "fast" uses such as biking or roller-blading. The minority that wanted to accommodate these "fast" uses acknowledged that the balance between these uses would constitute a design challenge.



There should be a balance of commercial and non-commercial uses.

Most groups felt strongly that the top of the High Line should be free of overt commercialism, though this opinion was not universal. Some groups differentiated between billboards, which were viewed almost universally as negative features, and active commercial uses such as restaurants, shops, and cafes, which were seen by some as potentially offering vitality to the Line. Finally, many groups drew a distinction between commercial activities on top of the High Line (less desirable) as opposed to underneath the High Line (more desirable).

The design of the High Line should express a strong connection to the Line's industrial and rail history.

Nearly every group expressed their desire for the design to celebrate the High Line's distinctive history as a railroad, an industrial icon, and a unique piece of engineering. At the same time, many expressed that they did not want historic references to become "Disney-esque".

The High Line can be a place to "escape" the city, or it can be a place where unique programming and activities act as an "attraction" - or it can be a balanced mix of both.

Groups presented a diverse range of opinions regarding what the ultimate "draw" for the High Line should be. Some saw the High Line as an opportunity for arts, cultural, and retail activity that would attract people interested in those activities. Others saw the High Line as the draw on its own-a unique opportunity to remove oneself from the bustle of the city. The desirability of making the High Line an "escape" was voiced more often, but making it an "attraction" was also discussed in positive terms.

The design for the High Line must be dynamic, allowing for change over time.

Groups were consistent in expressing a desire for a design that allowed flexibility and change. Seasonal change was viewed positively-having different activities and/or landscape qualities featured in different seasons. Change as one moved along the length of the Line was viewed favorably. Change in art installations or other programming was viewed positively. In addition, long-term change-the overall physical design evolving over the course of many years-was viewed positively.

Access points to and from the High Line raised key opinions and/or questions:

- The access points should be design elements and attractions in and of themselves.
- Access points should relate to the surrounding neighborhood context but not necessarily mirror or imitate it.
- The number and placement of access points is an important question for further study-both from a design perspective and from a community-impact perspective. Maximizing access was generally



viewed favorably, but a minority voiced concern about the possibility of "too much" access-that it would increase traffic in the surrounding community.

- Access via adjacent buildings should be encouraged and may provide an important opportunity for the creation of unique spaces and programs.

There must be an active relationship between the High Line and the surrounding community. Nearly every group recognized the dynamic connection between the High Line and its surrounding neighborhoods. The potential positive effect of the "High Line changing the community", by creating open space, enhancing neighborhood identity, offering refuge, and spurring economic activity was commented upon positively, as was the potential for the community to "change the High Line"-by affecting design choices, access decisions, and programming. In general, an active, evolving relationship between High Line and the surrounding community, with opportunity for each to affect the other, was perceived as an important way for the High Line to have a lasting and positive role within the community and city at large.

The design of the High Line should include a variety of features unified by a singular design identity. The discussion brought forward an incredibly broad array of design ideas for the High Line. Both "simplicity" and "variety" were spoken of in positive terms. While there was not a clear consensus or majority view, there was a strong sense that the High Line should embrace a variety of design concepts unified by some bigger "design idea".

The operation of public open space on the High Line presents a number of practical concerns that are of interest to the community. Many of the groups noted that issues such as security, hours of operations, garbage, restrooms, and other "day-to-day" concerns would be at least as important as the overall design.

Quoted Comments

"The High Line should sustain or maintain its inherent qualities, specifically its edginess and mystique."

"The idea of a community garden which both establishes ownership and esthetic diversity..."

"The natural growth should be preserved as much as possible."

"Roses, peach trees, blackberries, orchards!"

"An island within an island..."

"I'd like to see the rails still used instead of torn up."

"Don't over-improve it."

"Mystique of being apart from the city, above the city, yet still in the city..."

"A place for meditation, a tranquility park, a dependably quiet place."

"Environmentally renewable solar power, wind power for lighting, an oasis for the whole country."

"Like a charm bracelet on Manhattan."

"Protect the High Line from noise."

"A classroom-a lesson for public use."

"It does not have to be one design or one designer."

"Preserve the advantages of its height. Preserve the views."

"It can become a destination. It should have a draw for residents to come and enjoy."

"There should be a historic trace of what the High Line was."

"A disco train or nightclub/bar running along the tracks."

"No bikes or rollerblades. They have the West Side Highway. It should be for walkers."

"Experience it through height and speed."

"Leave it wild and untamed."

"It is important to have a constant stream of people around for safety and maintenance."

"Connect the High Line to a greater transportation greenway."

"Incorporate the history of New York, the ecology of Manhattan."

"Have continuity, but also well-designed points."

"We would like to encourage the connection from the High Line to commercial buildings."

"How do you control other development in a way that respects the High Line as public space?"

"Graffiti is okay."

"It should enhance the enjoyment of getting from here to there."

"No blandest common denominator."

"Farm? Dome? Maze?"

"There should be a sense of connection to the street, a High Line sense of continuity."

"An area of serenity that incorporates water."

"Social events tied to the seasons: High Line arts festival to attract tourists, jazz or music festivals."

"Connect it to the Hudson River Park."

"No twenty-block flea market."

"Cell notion: dividing it into private gardens."

"Every 200 feet a new swatch, a new change in the program... like a railroad shows..."

"There is a common fear of perpetrators if there are too many access points."

"Keep Disney out of it. No 42nd Street, no 5th Avenue."

"Bicycle path underneath the High Line (there might not be enough room on top)."

"Make it visually and intellectually engaging and emotionally engaging to get people to want to go there."

"Would the thrill wear off? The High Line should be kinetic and active, something changeable which evolves."

"The biggest problem is maintaining a rich balance-tension between the dualities of the sacred and the profane."

"A democratic park, not elitist."

"Accidental but wild nature, the intersection of man-made and natural."

"Support the diversity of park styles within the High Line."

"Slow, not fast..."

"Escape from the city, away from the pressure of the street."

"Lighting like the Empire State Building."



"A pedestrian street that is fully-integrated into the neighborhood - a 3-D street that has a mystique and an other-worldly-ness."

"A place that is both a destination and a connector, that is green, has no advertisements, is calm, meditative and contemplative and is FOR New Yorkers."

"Lots of light makes it safe. A lighting source with very little power should be used."

"How does the High Line relate to the arts community?"

"Lighting that doesn't look like a @!#\$*&!! suburban parking lot."

"Meandering..."

"Like the chapels of a cathedral, small spaces can offer distinct experiences without removing continuity or sacrificing uninterrupted passage. Contemplative but always a part of daily life."

"Why would you go back? Because it would offer a unique experience not available in other parks. You are above the city and walking between buildings... no other park offers this experience."

"The uses and functions should be allowed to form organically."

"Keep the design simple so that multiple uses and be integrated into the High Line over time (less is more)."

"We would like it if it was not called a 'park' - just 'The High Line'."

"The High Line and the neighborhood will mutually change each other."

"Hanging out over the stretch of the High Line, each little space has a different feel."

"Some transportation should be on the High Line, small-scale electric carts, low-speed personal transport."

"Not manicured. Keep partial state of decay, to look real."

"It should be part of the fabric of everyday life."

"The design should grow and build on market forces."

"The High Line should be something that is visited, a destination."

"People should experience the linear aspect, there should be different experiences as you travel."

"It should have a museum aspect."

"Architecturally articulate. The dynamic duality of destination versus journey."

"Bring businesses-cafes, shops, etc.-both below and above. Being below you've already entered the High Line...there is no clear definition of where it ends. Shops and stores are dual-level and need to provide access up and down."

"Flexible, adaptable space which connects to surrounding buildings and activities through nodes."

"Like PS1, invite young architects and artists to design installations seasonally, have public art displays."

"Rough and soft at the same time, wilder. The way you move through it changes the perception. Certain parts are more intimate. It already has a lot of variety going on it."

"It should be line an urban hike... there is no need of other entertainment."

"We need a design that respects the wildness."

"It should be an escape from the 'city'."

"Use the openings/entrances to buildings to expand the sense of space on a long, narrow strip."

"Entrances and access points that are unique, reflective of the neighborhoods, and public art pieces in and of themselves."

"Make it vital and viable: commerce plus art plus integration of the communities."

"Enjoy active as well as passive recreational space."

"Playgrounds and places for children are important."

"The design should be new, innovative, unique, unlike other park designs in the city and the world."

"Slowness as a foil to Hudson River Park speed."

"No singular experience across its length."

"Use it as a public forum."

"There should be two types of connections. Public access via stairways and access from private property."

"An elevated pedestrian avenue..."



"Driving the FDR is exciting because you are almost driving through buildings. It would be the same with walking the High Line."

"It should be a place to eat, sit, and have a drink."

"Escape to a wild ribbon of green with seamless access points that are places unto themselves."

"Avoid the pull to make the space too many things for too many audiences."

"Preserve/create a unique, removed wild escape from urban chaos, a national park in the city."

"Preserve the High Line as an industrial icon."

"A multi-purpose environment that uses the frequent access points to the High Line from the surrounding community."

"Make a natural fence from plants and water."

"Preserve the sense of solitude."

"Respect the past, leave some of the derelict archaeological ruins."

"Walking and sitting, period."

"Nodes. Local interests, diverse public use, variety of art/architecture designs, well-paced points of access."

"Community-based, organic, and heterogeneous planning."