



Gowanus Neighborhood
Art Advisory Committee
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Public Art Framework
Approved by Gowanus Neighborhood Art Advisory Committee
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Goal of the Gowanus Neighborhood Art Advisory Committee (GNAAC)

The goal is to support neighborhood stakeholders including the robust Gowanus creative community in a decision-making process related to the placement of culturally meaningful artworks on public and private properties in the Gowanus neighborhood, specifically in the recently rezoned (2021) 84-block area of Brooklyn.

GNAAC will be composed of volunteers – both local artists and other neighborhood stakeholders – who are interested in assuring that public art installed in the Gowanus neighborhood contributes to an informative and positive experience for people who live, work and visit the neighborhood now and into the future.

Culturally meaningful art can be defined in many ways. The art that will be commissioned should speak to the unique creative spirit of the neighborhood that reflects/considers both the contemporary and the historic contexts/character of the neighborhood. The art works should be exciting to see, emotionally provocative, and have affect for the local community and the general public.

Background:

The Gowanus Neighborhood Plan is a comprehensive plan that identified strategies to create more housing and local jobs. Included in the zoning changes to the 84-block area are many other policy and programmatic initiatives to advance a shared vision for an equitable, resilient and sustainable future for the neighborhood. It was passed into law by the New York City Council on November 23, 2021.

The Plan rezoned a long-time industrial neighborhood that has been a haven for a large creative community and encompassed zoning changes to an 84-block area.



Figure 1; NYC Department of City Planning; Area Map <https://www.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/gowanus/gowanus.page>

For nearly a decade, the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice (GNCJ), in collaboration with many volunteers, politicians, and stakeholders, organized to ensure that this rezoning would further fair housing, as well as environmental,

racial, and economic justice. GNCJ and the greater community had a profound impact on the process and the results include the 56 Points of Agreement (POA) with the City of New York.

For the purposes of this framework, the POA states,

The Gowanus Neighborhood Plan ... will also honor the cultural and historical heritage of the neighborhood, preserving key historic buildings, increasing opportunities for public art and historic interpretation, and investing in local institutions.

And

POA #55. Increase opportunities for public art and historic interpretation.
The City commits to exploring opportunities for incorporating public art and historic interpretation elements at key new open spaces being created at Gowanus Green and other open spaces. Specifically, the Head End CSO site's headhouse facade will be activated with interpretive graphics about the function of the CSO facility and the history of Gowanus.

A key and prominent feature of the Gowanus neighborhood is the historic Gowanus Canal. As part of the Gowanus Neighborhood Plan, the Gowanus Canal Waterfront Access Plan (WAP) established special regulations for the design of Waterfront Public Access Areas (WPAA), which developments fronting on the Canal are required to provide. The WAP includes incentives for developers to go above and beyond the basic requirements by providing amenities that reflect community priorities. To incentivize public art and historic interpretation elements in WPAA designs, a planting area reduction is available as follows:

historic interpretation elements - 20 square foot reduction
public art pieces - 100 square foot reduction

See section 139-544 of the zoning provision. (<https://zr.planning.nyc.gov/article-xiii/chapter-9/139-544>)

Several private property owners with buildings in the WPAA will take advantage of the above-noted amenities.

A Historic Context:

The history of the Gowanus neighborhood is paramount to the creation and placement of artworks. This brief on the history of this area is neither comprehensive nor complete. Please see the addendum for a list of additional resources.

The Gowanus neighborhood was once a system of tidal creeks winding through a salt marsh and fed by freshwater streams. The area was inhabited by the Canarsee band of the Lenape Native Americans who were ultimately forced to depart by the Dutch in the 17th-century.



Figure 2; Excerpt: 1776 - Bernard Ratzer's Plan of the City of New York showing the tidal creeks in Gowanus; courtesy of the NYC Public Library

Originally built in 1869 to facilitate transportation and commerce in the area, the Gowanus Canal quickly became a vital industrial hub for factories and warehouses, becoming one of the busiest and most polluted waterways in America. The neighborhood grew around the canal, with workers and their families settling in the area.

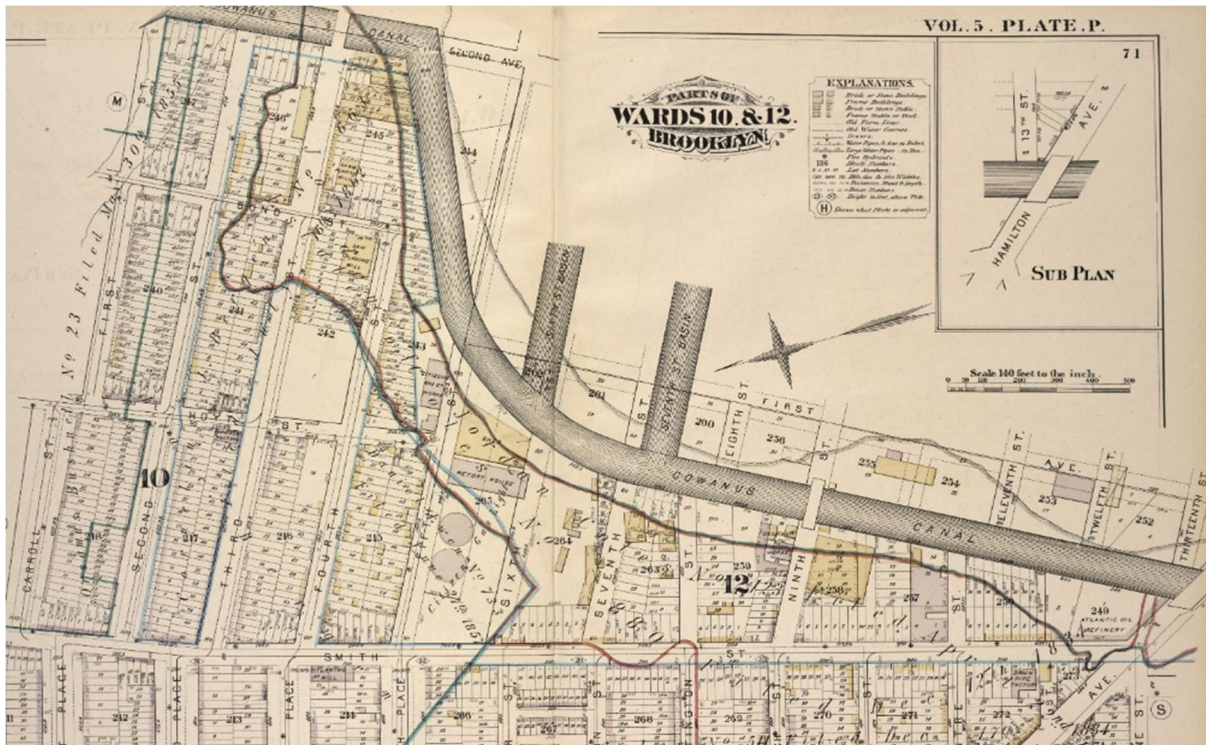


Figure 3; Excerpt: 1880; Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map; courtesy of the NYC Public Library

As New York City de-industrialized in the 1970s, and with the gentrification of neighborhoods like Soho in Manhattan and Williamsburg in Brooklyn, the Gowanus neighborhood, with its relatively inexpensive industrial and warehouse buildings, became a mecca for artists.

With the development of the American Highway system in the 1950s, the transportation of goods and materials transitioned from barge to truck, consequentially reducing the economic value of the Gowanus Canal. The canal was no longer maintained and as the factories and warehouses closed, the canal became heavily polluted from industrial waste and sewage. In 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated it a Superfund site. After lengthy studies, in November of 2020, the clean-up of the canal began.



Figure 5;
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gowanus_Canal_from_9th_Street,_Brooklyn,_New_York_City,_2014.JPG



Figure 6; Clean Up Crew; © 2023 David Kutz - All Rights Reserved

Public art has always been part of the Gowanus neighborhood. For example, Scott Siken in collaboration with Frank Shifreen and others, curated and organized in the early 1980s “The Monument” and “The Monument Redefined” projects. These are the first known public art presentations in the Gowanus neighborhood. On the opening day it is reported that over 4,000 people came to see the installations.

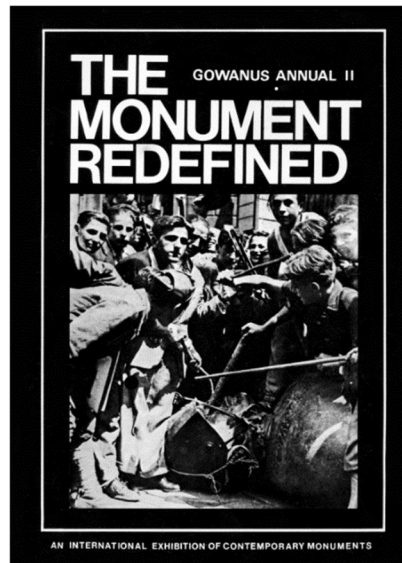


Figure 4; <https://www.sikenart.com/the-monument-redefined>

Today, with its rich history and diverse community, the Gowanus neighborhood offers a unique blend of old-world charm and modern-day innovation. Gowanus has seen a new life as a true live, work, and play destination. The zoning changes included in the Gowanus Neighborhood Plan will bring significant development to the area that will see the creation of new commercial spaces, cultural venues, and thousands of apartments. These developments contribute to the energy and vitality of Gowanus, attracting a diverse mix of residents, artists, and entrepreneurs.

Gowanus is already home to many galleries, studios, and performance spaces, showcasing the work of local artists and creatives. This creative community adds to the vibrancy and excitement of the neighborhood, making it a truly unique and inspiring place to experience.

As the beating heart of Gowanus, the canal will be reimagined with waterfront parks and pedestrian paths. Ongoing cleanup efforts aim to restore the ecology of this long-neglected waterway, allowing native plant and animal species to thrive once again.

Several waterfront property owners have committed to installing engaging public art in the publicly accessible but privately owned open spaces being constructed along the canal.

The commissioned artwork can provide dynamic points of interest that also celebrate Gowanus's storied past and herald its promising future.

Gowanus Neighborhood Art Advisory Committee (GNAAC):

Arts Gowanus, a nonprofit organization working to support, promote, and advocate for local artists and a sustainable arts community in Brooklyn, will lead the formation of the GNAAC. GNAAC will be facilitated by Arts Gowanus and in the first GNAAC meeting, its members will decide if electing a chair or co-chairs to help manage future meetings or its mission is required.

The GNAAC will be composed of a group of approximately 20 volunteers, no less than 50% of which will be artists who live or work in the Gowanus neighborhood. Arts Gowanus will invite artists and other stakeholders to initially form GNAAC.

GNACC will communicate with the Gowanus Oversight Taskforce (GOTF) and specifically with its public infrastructure committee to meet GNAAC's oversight role.

An invitation to join GNAAC will be distributed in the fourth quarter of 2023. Meetings of the GNAAC will be held on an ad-hoc basis with the intent that the first meeting will be held in the first quarter of 2024. The first meeting will be organized via Zoom/Google Meet. The GNAAC will then determine how future meetings will be organized.

The other potential participants may include, with no more than one representative from each of the following community organizations:

- Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC)
- Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC)
- Forth on Fourth Avenue (FOFA)
- Gowanus NYCHA tenant leadership
- Artichoke Dance Company
- Old Stone House (OSH)
- Interested members of the Gowanus Community on an ad hoc basis.

Owners of Gowanus waterfront lots whose WPAA plans have been Certified by the Chair of the Department of City Planning and are planning to incorporate public art onto their property may also provide a representative to the committee.

Public Art on Public Land:

The City of New York has a robust methodology for placing public art on public land. This methodology includes the potential access to the New York City 1% for art program, curation by the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA), reviewed and approved by Public Design Commission (PDC) and must include robust long-term maintenance requirements.

Per POA item #55, as outlined earlier, the City has committed to exploring opportunities for public art at the Gowanus Green site, the Head End CSO site's headhouse façade, and other open spaces.

An initial agenda item for the GNAAC will be to determine how it should be best engaged as a community working group to review, comment, and recommend public art in the aforementioned City methodology for the curation and placement of art in the Gowanus neighborhood.

The following lists the public space investments within the Gowanus Neighborhood Plan that could host public art.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

- Head End Tank – Nevins Street between Degraw and Butler Streets
- Owls Head Facility (Mid Canal Tank) – 10 2nd Ave bordering the Gowanus Canal at the end of 2nd Av
- 1st St Turning Basin – extending from the east side of the Gowanus Canal opposite 1st Street

Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR)

- Thomas Greene Park – encircled by Nevins, Douglass, Degraw Streets and 3rd Avenue (The park receives robust support from “Friends of Thomas Green Park’, a community group that we expect will be involved at this site)
- Bond Street End – bordering 4th Street and the Gowanus Canal
- Gowanus Green – park land as part of a large public/private housing development at the corner of Smith and 5th Streets
- Transit Plaza (9th St) - 4th Avenue and 9th Street (an MTA property)

Public Art on Private Land:

Those listed below are private property owners and their development firms with properties in the Waterfront Public Access Areas (WPAA) that have either requested or have the right to request public art as a zoning incentive from the DCP.

| Property Owner | Developer | DCP | Street Address |
|---|---|------------|---------------------------------|
| Smith Street Owner LLC | All Year Management | Parcel 17 | 459 Smith Street |
| 420 Carroll LLC | Domain Companies | Parcel 8a | 420 Carroll Street |
| Eponymous Gowanus, LLC | Midwood Management Corp | Parcel 1 | 198 Douglas Street |
| Bayside Gowanus Owner LLC | Property Markets Group | Parcel 2 | 267 Bond Street |
| Bayside Gowanus Owner LLC | Property Markets Group | Parcel 3 | 487 Sackett Street |
| Gowanus 300 Nevins Street LLC | Tavros/Charney | Parcel 5 | 300 Nevins Street |
| President Union LLC | Rabsky Group | Parcel 6b | 313-331 Bond Street |
| 2201 Union LLC & Grassi Union Street LLC | Tankhouse | Parcel 6a | 450 Union Street |
| | | | |
| 155 Third Street, LLC No public art incentive defined to the DCP | Monadnock | Parcel 12a | 155 Third Street |
| Gowanus Green (public/private property) No public art incentive defined to the DCP | Fifth Avenue Committee, Hudson, Bluestone, Jonathan Rose | Parcel 17 | Corner of Smith & Fifth Streets |

Those private property owners who have opted into section 139-544 of the zoning provision are obligated to place public art on the properties. The owners will underwrite the curation, fabrication, installation, and maintenance of that

artwork and the public art installed must be approved by the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation.

As the Gowanus Neighborhood Plan was passed by the City Council, Arts Gowanus entered into a community benefits agreement (CBA) for affordable artist studio spaces with 11 property owners. As construction is completed, over 25,000 SF of low-cost artist studio space (approximately 100 artist studios) including a 2,000 SF community art center to be operated by Arts Gowanus will be provided. Instead of displacing the creative community, as so many developments have done before, the Gowanus Neighborhood Plan will solidify Gowanus as the cultural capital of Brooklyn, focused on community engagement, affordability, equity and sustainability that creates a vibrant and exciting experience for residents and visitors alike.

Arts Gowanus is currently engaged in ongoing discussions with the owners who are signatories of the CBA with the intent of facilitating an open call process to curate and identify works of art for placement on their properties.

GNAAC will be provided with the opportunity to propose, comment, and review the Arts Gowanus Open Call, the owner's selected works and the installation plans.

Addendum

Additional Historic Resources

History:

- <https://ny.curbed.com/2015/10/15/9911224/the-fascinating-murky-history-of-brooklyns-gowanus-canal>
- https://gowanuscanalconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/191219_Draft-Gowanus-Lowlands-Master-Plan.pdf
- <http://projects.nyujournalism.org/undercurrents/the-past>/<https://scienceline.org/2007/09/env-phillips-gowanus/>"<https://scienceline.org/2007/09/env-phillips-gowanus/>
- <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/sites/default/files/documents/brooklyn-collection/connections/Native%20Americans%20PP.pdf>"<https://www.bklynlibrary.org/sites/default/files/documents/brooklyn-collection/connections/Native%20Americans%20PP.pdf>
- <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/gowanus-brooklyn-curious-canal-book>"<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/gowanus-brooklyn-curious-canal-book>
- <https://scienceline.org/2007/09/env-phillips-gowanus/>

Monument Show – First Public Art Exhibition in Gowanus:

- <https://www.artforum.com/events/monumental-show-228014/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gowanus_Memorial_Artyard
- <https://pardonmeforasking.blogspot.com/2007/10/once-upon-time-on-shores-of-gowan-us.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/03/arts/gallery-view-drawing-a-bead-on-public-monuments.html?searchResultPosition=8>

Bibliography:

- ALEXIOU, J. (2020). Gowanus: Brooklyn's Curious Canal. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS.