

Learning Places Fall 2017

## **SITE REPORT #2**

Gowanus Conservancy Tour



Union Street Bridge facing north on the Gowanus Canal

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### **INTRODUCTION AND PRE-VISIT REFLECTIONS**

The pre reflections come from the previous visit. I saw a mixed use of art studios, fabricating studios, industrial warehouses, a toxic canal, governmental dredging, construction, cement factory, new residential developments. A neighborhood in the middle of gentrification.

### **SITE DOCUMENTATION**

Unfortunately I forgot my phone at home that trip, so I took more notes, the following notations are what I can share.

Our guide allowed us to understand that the toxic contributions to the canal started in 1860 when it was a busy 3 boat wide canal of an industrial waterway. By World War I, Gowanus Canal was actually the busiest industrial and commercial canal in the United States. The toxic waterfront companies and the continuous contribution through the overflow of the sewage that drains into the canal and polluted the water into a 10 foot toxic coal tar layer that need to be removed to restore the ecology. We see with the conservancy that today there are more local efforts to defend against a future flood of the canal.

- (1) Flushing tunnel: this tunnel allowed the water to flow from Buttermilk channel. The flush that creates bubbles are the oxygen generated to increase the oxygen in the most stagnant part of the canal.

- (2) Sponge Parks: 1,800ft park integrates stormwater and waterfront public space, where plants absorb the water and filter it before it falls into the canal.
- (3) Green infrastructure: Curbside rain inlets that soak about 2.500 gallons of water that flow downwards into the canal.
- (4) We met at Union Street on the Canal, from there we walked south, along the canal. The we



Topics our Guide covered:

1. Pollutants in the water are sewage and coal tar
2. DEP is in charge of the maintenance of water quality
3. sponge park can obtain 1million gallons of water
4. Importance of green infrastructure
5. Rain gardens are side curb inlets
6. a spot zone was allowed for a Bond street residential Building
7. Water front is equitable
8. Waterfront access Plan
9. Gowanus Low Land Plan
10. Green watershed
11. Sewersheds
12. wet weather
13. dry weather
14. Combined sewer overflow (CSO)
15. Flushing Tunnel
16. Wastewater pumping station
17. Sewage tanks

**ANALYSIS:**

Due to the Gowanus land topology, the water drains down into the canal. Since the canal can no longer withstand current storm waters and sewage outputs this the land and buildings needs to capture the stormwater before it hits the canal. Many 100-500 year predictions are published regarding sea level rise so since we have the data do we have enough green infrastructure to maintain the increasing levels?

#### **KEYWORDS/ VOCABULARY**

1. Coal Tar
2. Black Mayonnaise
3. Sponge Park
4. Eminent Domain
5. Spot Zone

#### **QUESTIONS for FURTHER RESEARCH**

1. What is the environmental process to disintegrate the black mayonnaise?
2. How does sanitary violation outweigh(daily accumulation of garbage) flood mitigation(rare occasion of flood) for a sponge park
3. Spot zones seem like a special privilege... what constitutes such privilege?