

Learning Places Fall 2017
SITE REPORT #2



Image: Sponge Park along Gowanus Canal on Bond street--This shows the city efforts to control water overflow from the canal.

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Introduction

Prior to the tour I thought I wasn't going to learn much about Gowanus area because we already toured the area and talked with Alexiou Joseph. We've learned the history of the Gowanus canal and then actually visited it, to get an idea of how it floods and just build our own perspective of the area. So personally I felt prepared for the Gowanus Conservancy tour. Yet at the same time I did felt tour was going to be focused more on the environmental structure of the canal that we have deeply look into yet.

Map

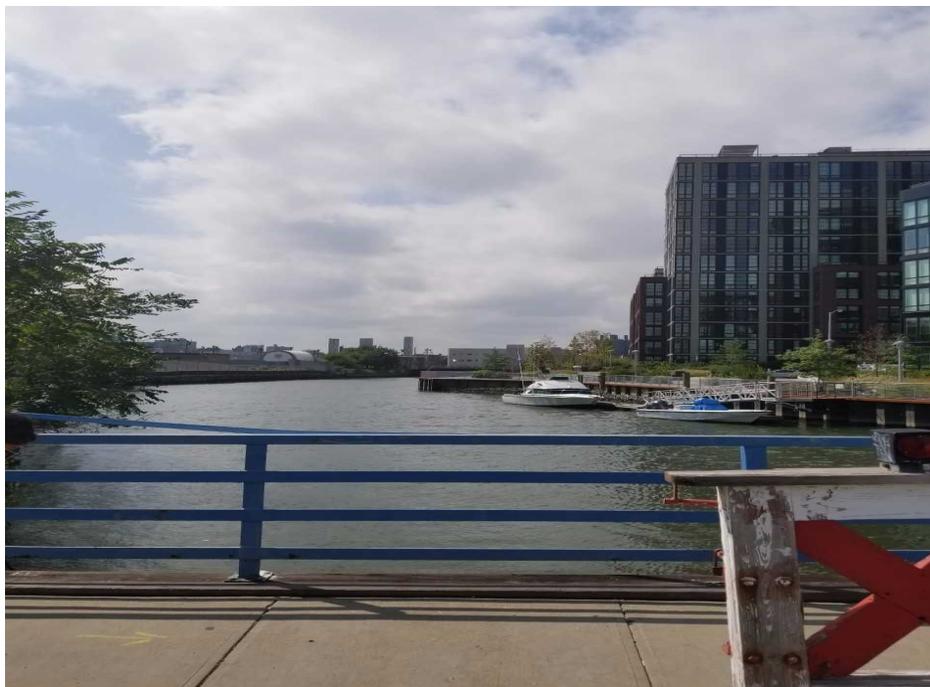
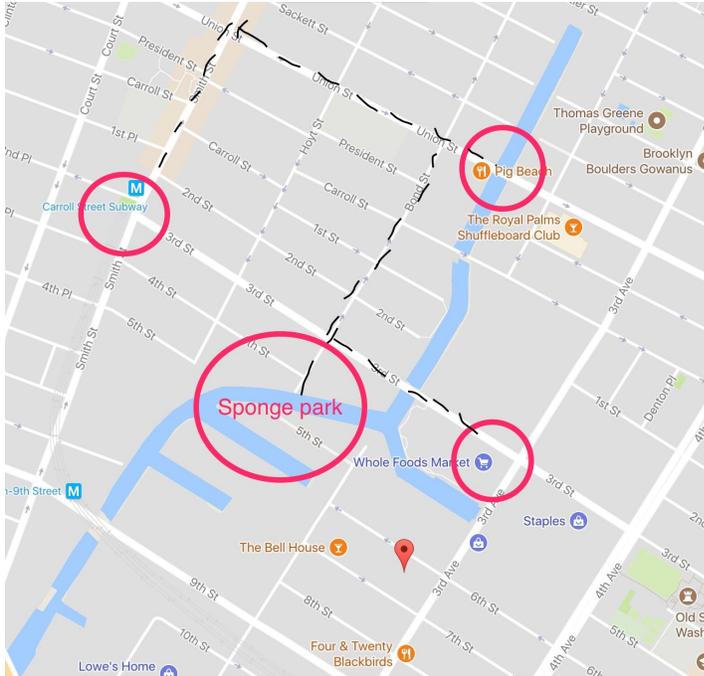


Image: Development along the Gowanus Canal-- This image shows despite the Superfund, levels of contamination, and flooding zone, development along the Gowanus canal continuous as zoning laws change.



Image: Public space along Gowanus Canal-- This image depicts how any developer that wants to build along Gowanus Canal must put 40 feet between the building and canal of “public space”.



Image: Sponge Park-- This is the city’s aid against flooding in Gowanus. This sponge park were created to absorb water that might overflow from the canal or heavy downpour going towards the canal.

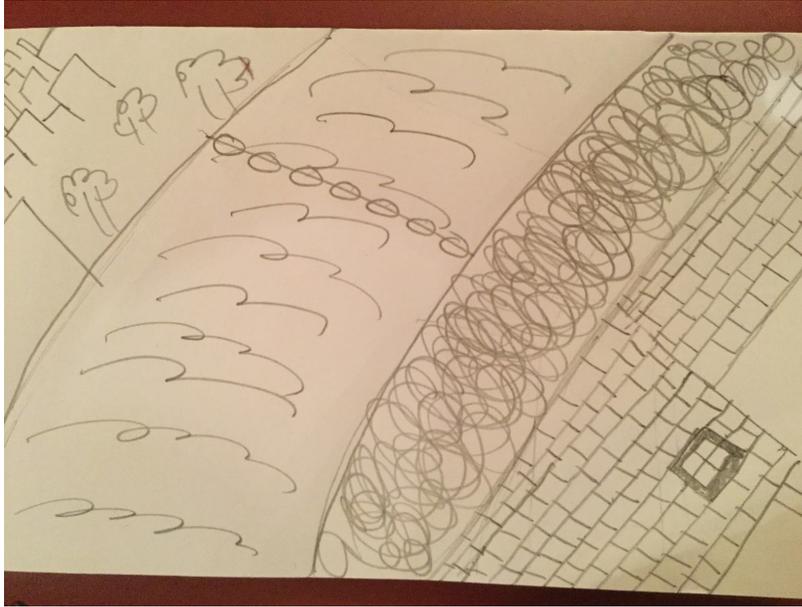


Image: Bioswale(rain

garden)-- These were also the city plan to collect rainwater from the street instead of going down the drain which could cause flooding in the canal.



Sketch: A close up drawing of a Bioswale and how it will absorb rain water in the street.



Sketch: A draw of the Gowanus Canal and seeing the close proximity of the buildings to the canal. So not only is there coal tar under the canal but under the buildings yet only the canal is being cleaned.

Analysis: After meeting Christine who conducted our tour of the Gowanus Canal I can honestly say what I thought I knew, was just the surface to what I know now. The Gowanus Conservancy is a non-profit organization that started around 2006, to work together with the city to improve the Gowanus area. I thought the tour was quite informative for example Christine informed us that the Superfund is only cleaning the coal tar only in the canal, so the coal tar that's seep underground the surrounding areas aren't their concern. That made me think about how thorough of a cleaning the Superfund would be because ignoring the coal underground could be a bigger problem later in the years because the toxins underground go up the side of the buildings. But the subject that held a lot of interest was the city's plan to reduce flooding with sponge parks.

Sponge parks are green infrastructures where certain plants are planted in a way to absorb rainwater flowing down the streets we see in the cover photo. These sponge parks not only help limit the amount of water going into the Canal but also with the sewage overflows. These sponge parks can hold about one million gallons of water. Other green infrastructures are bioswales which can be found on the sidewalks throughout the city's as we see in the last photo. Green infrastructures can also be found on rooftops and building owners can get tax exemptions. I found this really interesting because they built a sponge park in my neighborhood never knowing why it was built that particular way. Another thing the Gowanus Conservancy is trying to do is work with developers who are doing construction along the Gowanus to build sponge parks in their mandatory "public space". Yet, with all these efforts there's always issues.

Some issues the Gowanus Conservancy has to deal with is what the developers' idea of public space is. There are developers that don't want to build a sponge park even though there's a lot of

incentive for building one, it just doesn't go with their image. The Conservancy has a image for the Gowanus called the "Gowanus Lowlands" which is an integration of the Canal and of the building surrounding it. Another is the city's lack of maintenance of the green infrastructures, trash gets into these structures which can affect the amount of water being absorbed and defeats it's purpose. This is the primary reason why there are locals fore the green infrastructures and those opposed for it.

I felt that these ideas for Gowanus would be nice because it would give neighborhood a Brooklyn Bridge Park vibe. The benefits would be that more tourist would visit the area which bring more business to the area and bring more diversity to the area. Additionally, connect Gowanus more with the surrounding neighborhood as a place to visit and not go through. Some negative aspects is that once the neighborhood become more popular, the spirit of the area will change. For example, I felt the Gowanus Genius Loci was an old man smoking a cigar in a little row boat in the canal but that won't be possible if the area starts be dominate with skyscrapers and Starbucks. Also, then everything would be expensive than it already is which would be had for a artistry neighborhood to keep up with. And the ramifications would be what been happening to a lot of neighborhoods in Brooklyn that get gentrified, the old gets pushed out and the latest interest gets put in.

Keywords

- Public space
- Sponge Park
- Bioswale
- Coal Tar

Question

1. What would be the outcome of leaving the coal tar underground?
2. How can public space differ from one mind to the next?
3. Could the Superfund effect those not only with connections to the Gowanus but Brooklyn as a whole?