Queens should have its own “High Line”, called QueensWay. The most important question is: Will QueensWay benefit the surrounding communities environmentally and economically? The QueensWay project is proposed to replace an abandoned rail line stretching from Rego Park to Ozone Park. Since 1962 this 3.5 miles out of service rail line is now an eyesore on the adjacent communities. The rail line is overgrown by vegetation, used as a dumping ground and occupied by homeless people. In 2001 the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) has conducted a feasibility study to re-activate the line but cited high operational and construction costs and abandoned the plan.

Similar projects have proven to be environmentally and economically feasible, such as the High Line in Manhattan and the 606 in Chicago. I would like to see the area revitalize, create new park land, improve environmental conditions and improve quality of life. A feasibility study is being conducted by the Trust of Public Land and various plans are being drawn on how the land can be transformed. While there’s significant support for the project to be built, the Queens Public Transit Committee (QPTC) would like to see the abandoned rail line reactivated. “Hurricane Sandy’s devastating impact on the MTA’s infrastructure is a great motivator for the old rail line to be reactivated”, in order to provide much needed transportation alternative for communities from Far Rockaway to Rego Park.

Three major questions are being emphasized on the project: Where? Why? How?

QueensWay will stretch from Rego Park; pass through Forest Hills, Richmond Hill, Woodhaven and end in Ozone Park. QueensWay will bring ethnic diversity; promote a better green environment and economic development. QueensWay will become an ecological system by absorbing storm water, reduce flooding, implement community gardens and remove unhealthy vegetation. Ecologically the area will be transformed to improve storm water management and prevent erosion and runoff into adjacent properties. Revitalizing the area will bring a much needed biodiversity and prevent damage to the surrounding environment. QueensWay will bring a much needed economic stimulus to the surrounding communities. An estimated $120 million will be injected into the project thus providing temporary and permanent jobs. Surrounding businesses will benefit from the influx or visitors, with an estimated annual $2.2 million in new spending from dining to retail from small mom and pop shops. New businesses and developments will result from the success QueenWay will bring to the communities. Working with Community Boards, Friends of the QueensWay and various city and state agencies to design, develop and maintain the project. A combination of city, state and federal funding, and private contributions will make QueensWay a reality. Governor Cuomo has pledged $467,000 grand for a “fesibility study” and TPL has raised over one million.

 QueensWay project runs through my Forest Hills neighborhood and I pass the old rail line on a daily basis. I was able to see the degradation and overflown vegetation that has taken over the area. The section I was able to observe, the overpass above Fleet St, was filled with garbage, broken glass, old car tires, down trees, rusted rail lines and black construction bags filled with unknown materials. There were signs of old make shift homeless huts with old mattresses. Seeing this first hand made me realize the importance of QueensWay to Forest Hills and all other communities. Redeveloping this site will revitalize the area, bring a sense of community and provide a multipurpose park to future generations.

 Making QueensWay a reality will benefit the surrounding communities from Rego Park to Ozone Park. Queens’s population is growing and as a result there will be a continuous influx of visitors from young to old. The current plan calls for a 6 phase development of QueensWay. These phases combined will provide: walk and bike paths, recreational facilities, event spaces, playgrounds, multi-functioning sport areas, community gardening and the redevelopment of the Atlantic Avenue Long Island Rail Road station into a cultural facility. Environmentally, QueensWay, will reduce flooding, absorb run-off rain water, introduce better self-sustained vegetation, implement community gardening and implement new energy, such as solar panels and mini wind turbines, to provide green energy for the various facilities throughout the development. QueensWay will provide a much needed economic infusion for the local businesses and potentially bring in new residential and commercial developments, gentrifying the areas.

 Manhattan has the High Line, Brooklyn has the Brooklyn Navy Yard and Queens should have QueensWay. Seeing the site with my own eyes has made me realize the significance of more green spaces in Queens. Redeveloping the old rail line into a multi-purpose development will benefit the surrounding communities environmentally and economically. It is better to redevelop the area so communities could benefit from an influx of business and tourism, than leave it as is for the benefit of a few home owners, objecting the development because it passes near their back yards.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Irina Vinnitskaya, (January 8, 2013) “High-Line inspired park proposed in Queens” Arch Daily

<http://www.archdaily.com/315458/high-line-inspired-park-proposed-in-queens/>

Vinnitskaya’s article in ArchDaily.com gives an insight on the advantages of having QueenWay built; transforming the 3.5 miles of old rail road system into a vibrant multipurpose park. She quotes “economic stimulus” for the surrounding communities by attracting and retaining business and cites Manhattan’s High Line success as a blue-print for QueensWay. Multiple plans are being considered and with the community’s input and High Line as an example the future of Queensway is promising.

The author provides insight for an alternative to the QueensWay project; the re-activation of MTA’s old system. Hurricane Sandy’s devastating impact on the MTA’s infrastructure is a great motivator for the old rail line to be reactivated serving several communities stretching from Rego Park to Far Rockaway.

2. Barbara Porada, (September 1, 2013) “High Line-Inspired Park Could Be Coming To Queens”, Huffington Post

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/07/high-line-park-queens_n_3852803.html>

The author introduces architectural firms, WXY and Dlandstudio, will be conducting a feasibility study and planning for the 3.5 mile QueensWay project. The firms combined experience and Manhattan’s successful High Line will enable to QueensWay project to come a reality. Achieving a favorable outcome both firms plan to have intense community engagement through workshops, discussions during street fairs, dialogues with community groups, survey of residents and open forums. Their final report will reflect the local resident’s and communities’ views and be a blue-print for creating QueensWay.

3. Domenick Rafter, (October 25, 2012) “Queens high line faces Woodhaven opposition”, Queens Chronicle

<http://www.qchron.com/editions/south/queens-high-line-faces-woodhaven-opposition/article_aa628cc8-baee-500d-bb70-7bb3a82e3522.html>

The article discusses the 6 sections QueensWay has been divided into addressing and implementing various residents’ concerns addressed in past workshops. Each section comes with its own unique features from a simple walk and bike path to additional baseball fields, recreational facilities, an event space, playgrounds, neighborhood gardening, the creation of a natural tree barrier providing privacy for the surrounding homes and ensure adequate security by implementing security cameras.

The article also discusses concerns by some property owners, whose homes are adjacent to the proposed project, for the continuous maintenance cost once the project is finalized.

4. The Trust for Public Land, (March 13, 2013) “Request for Proposal for Design, Planning and Engineering Consulting Services for The Trust for Public Land”, The Trust for Public Land

<https://www.tpl.org/our-work/parks-for-people/queensway-project>

The Trust for Public Land website gives in-depth information about the proposed QueensWay project. With the help of surrounding communities, members of the City Council and NY State elected officials various ideas have been incorporated into the design of QueensWay. Three major questions are being emphasized on the project: Where? Why? How?

Where: from Rego Park, Forest Hills, Richmond Hill, Woodhaven and Ozone Park.

Why: Celebrate ethnic diversity, promote a better green environment and promote economic development

How: Working with Community Boards, Friends of the QueensWay and various city and state agencies to design and develop the QueensWay.

5. Friends of The QuensWay, (April 7, 2015) “Plan Overview”, Friends of The QueensWay

<http://thequeensway.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/The-QueensWay-Plan.pdf>

This brochure provided by Friends of The QueensWay provides information on 6 important segments QueensWay will be beneficial to the surrounding communities. Friends of The QueensWay are in favor for the project to succeed and are committed to inform the public of the benefits QueensWay will bring. This project will benefit near and far communities, schools and attract tourism. QueensWay will be become an ecological system by absorbing storm water, reduce flooding and create gardens. Safety and comfort will be provided to the homes adjacent to the planned project, such as gated entrances, closed circuit monitoring, NYC Parks Police Enforcement Patrol and implementing new lighting along the pathways. A combination of culture and economic development will enrich the surrounding communities. A combination of City, State and Federal funding will be required for the completion and continuous care of QueensWay.

6. Ewa Kern-Jedrychowska, (October 15, 2014) “MAP: Check Out Attractions Along the Proposed QueensWay”, DNAinfo

<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20141015/forest-hills/map-check-out-attractions-along-proposed-queensway>

Kern-Jedrychowska has written numerous articles throughout the years on QueensWay project and she continues to provide updates on the current stages the project is going through. Her article introduces the various ideas QueensWay will implement recreational centers, cultural facilities, bike and pedestrian paths. A preliminary $120 million will be the cost to build the 6 phase QueensWay. The multi-function sports space can be used for theater events and movies screenings. Renovating the abandoned Atlantic Avenue Long Island Rail Road station as a cultural facility is being integrated into QueensWay proposal. A designated portion of the park will be assigned for food concessions and picnic area. The area near people’s homes will be transformed into pedestrian and bike paths to provide a more secure and private environment for the current residents.

7. The Editorial Board, (December 26, 2014) “A Green Line Through Queens”, The New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/27/opinion/a-green-line-through-queens.html?_r=0>

This article provides information of the two ideas being considered: QueensWay or reviving the rail line. Queensway has gained momentum and is being considered more over the rail line. The current Mayor envisions more green spaces for NYC while considering implementing various additional transportation alternatives such as additional bus services. The Far Rockaway communities are left with few options and long commutes. While the MTA does not have the money to reactivate the rail line an alternative should be implemented along with the creation of QueensWay. The article leans toward supporting the QueensWay, but remains hopeful the much needs transportation for surrounding communities will be considered as well.

8. Max Rivlin-Nadler, (October 15, 2014) “The “Queens High Line” Is A Bad Idea”, Gothamist

<http://gothamist.com/2014/10/15/queens_high_line_nope.php>

Rivlin-Nadler’s article provides an in-depth look at the opposing factors for QueensWay to be built. He cites an overwhelming cost of above $200 million; continuous opposition from communities and local officials; NIMBY’s do not want to see any development being done; desire for reactivating the rail line to better serve the growing population; lack of funding. Forest Park is a great example how QueensWay will not achieve a similar popularity the High Line in Manhattan has. Investing in transit options for the surrounding communities is a better option than a park that will be rarely used. This article provides information on how the abandoned rail road should be reactivated to benefit the growing communities not just now but into the future.

9. Mihai Iuruc, (March 21, 2015) Field observation.

I did my field observation of the abandoned rail line in my neighborhood, Forest Hills. The section I choose is an overpass, over Fleet St, between Alderton St and Groton St. Adjacent to this section are multiple single family houses with their backyards facing the elevated abandoned rail and the Forest Hills Youth Activities Field, which has over 3 baseball fields. From the street view the overpass is over grown with vegetation. I was able to enter this section through a broken fence and I went up a steep hill to have a better view of the rail line. There was very limited view of the adjacent properties due to the thick vegetation. However the old rail line was still visible and full of garbage, from black bags, to cans, bottles, bins, tires and much more. There were signs of old make shift homeless huts with old mattresses. This exact section is called “The Clearing” and is part of 6 separate sections the QueensWay will be transformed. This section will contain the following: an ADA Accessible Ramp from Fleet St, 3 Bio swales, Landscape Bleachers, Multi-purpose seating, Recreational Lawn, Adventure Playground, Restrooms and a combination of pedestrian and bike lanes.