

Editor: Richard E. Mooney

NOTE TO READERS: This is the first issue of a newsletter about Governors Island that will appear periodically when developments warrant. A print version will be published quarterly and archives are available at www.rpa.org. If you do not wish to receive further editions, or have comments or questions, please notify governorsisland@rpa.org. Better, if you think of anyone who should be seeing this letter, tell us. Our aim is to spread the good word of Governors Island to folks who care, be they individual citizens, organizations or public officials.

In this edition:

June 29th Forum on the Island's future park spaces

Governors Island photo exhibit on Madison Avenue

GIPEC schedules public hearing July 29th

Getting out to the Island

Planning the Island's future

What is the Governors Island Alliance?

Ideas from the Park Planning Workshop

June 29th forum on the Island's future park spaces

The future of the parks and public spaces on the Island will be discussed at an evening forum on Tuesday, June 29, starting at 6 p.m., at the Municipal Art Society's Urban Center, 457 Madison Avenue at East 51st Street (across from the back of St. Pat's). Open to the public, it is cosponsored by RPA, the Governors Island Alliance and the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance. In addition to a report on ideas generated by the June 12 community workshop (see details below), a representative panel will discuss all the angles. Panelist are: Carter Craft of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, Tessa Huxley of the Battery Park City Parks Conservancy, Claire Weisz of Weisz + Yoes Architecture and Urban Design, Madelyn Wils of Manhattan Community Board 1 and Margie Ruddick of Margie Ruddick Landscapes. Please RSVP to ella@rpa.org.

Governors Island Photo Exhibit on Madison Avenue

On June 29, go to the Urban Center early enough for a leisurely look at a stunning photographic chronicle of a spectacular space awaiting its future. The work of photographers Lisa Kereszi and Andrew Moore, the exhibit is sponsored by the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation – GIPEC, the state-city agency in charge of the Island's development – and organized by the Public Art Fund in collaboration with the Municipal Art Society. The show is presented by Target, and will remain in place through July 8.

Initial public hearing set for July 29th by GIPEC

GIPEC (pronounced "guy-peck") has scheduled a public hearing, its first, to air ideas for the Island's development. Presentations will include proposals and perspectives from professional consultants. The hearing is set for Thursday, July 29, out on the Island. Details to come. See following item for how to get there.

Getting out to the Island

New York City's offshore treasure reopened on June 12, and will remain open all summer. The Island had more than 450 visitors on opening day, a sparkling Spring Saturday. A mile of the Esplanade that stretches down the western shore was (and will be) open to picnickers, strollers, joggers, skaters, sunbathers, Frisbee freaks et al – in other words, anyone who wanted to spend a few hours or the whole afternoon in a park like no other, an island afloat in New York Harbor. It will be open every Saturday through the summer. Guided tours of the forts and Island history by National Park Service rangers started Tuesday, June 22, and will be offered twice daily, Tuesday through Friday every week. The tours cover 1_ miles in about 1_ hours. The terrain is flat, but comfortable walking shoes are advised. Restrooms and medical aid on the Island are limited. No cars allowed. If you are patient you may find a map of parking garages in Lower Manhattan linked to www.gipec.org, but smart visitors will take one of the several subways downtown to stations near the ticket booth and the ferry. For full details see the GIPEC website <www.govisland.com> or the National Park Service site at <www.nps.gov/gois>. Heavy rain or high wind may cancel a tour. When in doubt called 212-514-8296 after 8 a.m.

WEEKDAY GUIDED TOURS are free, but there is a \$5 charge for the round trip by ferry – \$3 for children age 5 to 12, and nothing for younger children. Tickets go on sale at 8:30 in the morning at the South Street Seaport Museum ticket booth on Pier 16 at the foot of Fulton Street. National Park Service rangers meet ticket holders at the booth at 9:30 and 12:30, and walk them from there to the ferry to the Island. Each tour is limited to 40 people.

Ferry tickets for SATURDAYS ON THE ESPLANADE are sold at the same Seaport booth at the price scale. Starting at 8:30 in the morning they may be purchased to visit on the same day, or in advance any day during the same week. They may also be purchase by calling 212-748-8786 after 10 a.m., but must be picked up at the Seaport booth. Tickets for the same day may also be purchased Saturdays at the ferry terminal in the big greenish Battery Maritime building next to and just east of the Staten

Island Ferry. The ferries to Governors Island depart every hour on the hour, 10 a.m. through 3 p.m., and return every hour on the half-hour, 1:30 through 6:30. The ferry has a limit of 400 passengers, so late comers may have to wait for the next one.

Planning the Island's future

As a part of New York City, and specifically Manhattan, Governors Island belongs to New York State. It fills 172 acres – one-fifth the size of Central Park – in New York Harbor, one-half mile south of the Battery and just across Buttermilk Channel from Red Hook in Brooklyn. The federal government returned it to New York last year with a deed that stipulates no gambling, no permanent residential development, and at least 40 acres of public parkland.

GIPEC manages most of the Island – all but the two historic forts, which comprise a 22-acre National Monument under the National Park Service. GIPEC is a subsidiary of the Empire State Development Corporation.

GIPEC's chairman is Randy A. Daniels, Secretary of State. The vice chairman is Daniel L. Doctoroff, Deputy Mayor of New York City for Economic Development and Rebuilding. Membership on the board is half-and-half city and state appointees. James Lima heads the small full-time staff. Peter Fleischer is Chief Operating Officer. They work in offices on the Island, as does Linda Neal, Superintendent of the National Monument.

GIPEC aims to produce a master plan by the fall of 2005. Its early focus has necessarily been on Island maintenance and organization; now the search begins for sources of revenue to support the Island. Planning is in four parts, of which the parks-and-recreation part was the focus of a June workshop conducted by RPA and the Governors Island Alliance. The other three parts are higher education and research, a hotel and conference center, and arts and culture, which could include an outdoor sculpture space as well as performing arts.

Until New York regained control last year the Island had been a military base, off-limits to the public for more than two centuries. Its two forts – Fort Jay and Castle Williams – were constructed after the Revolutionary War to protect the new nation against any British attempt to return. The Island was an Army base through World War II and a Coast Guard base for the final three decades.

The Island structures need constant care. The whole place is pounded by wind and water in the cold months every year.

While the General Services Administration continued maintenance of the historic buildings in the recent eight years when the Island sat empty, the un-historic Coast Guard housing on the southern half of the Island was mothballed and left to the weather. Some or all of those buildings will be razed; there is much work to be done on those that are retained. The Alliance is working on all levels of government – federal, state and local – to raise needed funding for this work and for ongoing operations, with notable help from Congressman Jerrold Nadler (the Island is in his district), our two senators, the governor, the may and key members of the legislature and the City Council.

What is the Governors Island Alliance?

The Governors Island Alliance is a voluntary association of civic, environmental and preservation-focused organizations and individuals working to ensure the public's interest is served in the future of this precious piece of the city. Founded and staffed by the Regional Plan Association, the Alliance first campaigned for the Island's return to its rightful owners – the people of New York – when the Coast Guard left in 1996.

Robert Pirani, Director of Environmental Programs at RPA, heads the work of the Alliance. Albert Butzel, President of Friends of the Hudson River Park, and Robert Yaro, President of RPA, serve as co-chairs. Participants in the Alliance include representatives of Manhattan Community Board Number 1, Municipal Art Society, Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, American Institute of Architects/New York Chapter, National Trust for Historic Preservation, New Yorkers for Parks, Brooklyn Bridge Park Coalition, New York League of Conservation Voters, Preservation League of New York State, Women's City Club of New York, and Floating the Apple. You get the picture. This cause has many backers. To join send your info to governorsisland@rpa.org. For more information go to www.rpa.org/govisland.html.

The Park Planning Workshop

Some 150 representatives of community groups and professional experts in land use, design, environment and other fields met on the Island on June 12 to brainstorm ideas for future development. In the morning they walked and busied around the Island to familiarize themselves with what

they would be talking about in the afternoon. After a sandwich lunch they split to a dozen tables staffed with professionally ground discussion leaders. The assignment was to describe what the Island should be 20 years from now, and how you might spend a day there. Architects armed with felt markers drew colorful maps of the ideas on sketch paper at each table.

Here are just a few of the ideas that poured forth: Clear away all buildings on the 90 acres south of the historic northern half, and leave the central space open. Create an outdoor amphitheater – maybe two, a big one for performances, a small one for weddings and other affairs. Create performance spaces in both forts. Break the seawall at the southern end to create a natural salt water waterfront. Dig a pond in the open space; fill it with fresh well water pumped in by a wind farm. Reshape the flat landscape with landforms built with excavated fill. Provide for swimming. Create a formal garden. Locate fields for baseball and other sports on the periphery. Provide access to the island by ferries from all directions, with tie-ups for private boating as well. Dock space for fishing.

Ideas for activities inside the surviving structures included: An artists-in-residence program using the historic houses once occupied by Army and Coast Guard officers and their families. Upscale bed-and-breakfasts. A research center for environmental or ecological issues or oceanography. Annexes of New York City museums. A building devoted to the Coast Guard and Army personnel for whom the Island was home. Thoughts of a theme park or historical reenactments were roundly nixed.