



ONLINE-OFFSHORE: News from
Governors Island
Regional Plan Association /
Governors Island Alliance

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NOTE TO READERS:

This is the second edition of a periodic newsletter about Governors Island, also archived at www.rpa.org. If you do not wish to see future editions, and for comments or questions, contact governorsisland@rpa.org. Also send us names of anyone who should get the letter. We aim to inform people who care about the region and its 'new' special space.

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Public hearing Thursday, July 29

The agency responsible for the Island's future – the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation (GIPEC) – will hold a public forum on Thursday July 29 to help inform its planning process. GIPEC's public notice of the meeting says it will provide the public with the opportunity to offer ideas and comment on the possible uses for Governors Island, which may include the following: Parks & Open Space, Harbor & Environmental Centers, Educational & Not-for-Profit, Arts & Culture, Conferencing & Hospitality, Heritage Tourism & Entertainment. The public is invited to attend and participate. The only requirement is that you register via e-mail or phone by July 27. Please give your name, affiliation if any, and how to contact you.

e-mail: comments-GIPEC@empire.state.ny.us
phone: (212) 803-3113

The forum will feature presentations by and discussion with key GIPEC consultants and the National Park Service, about the Island and the current state of planning. Ferries to the Island will depart frequently beginning at 5:15 p.m. They sail from the Battery Maritime Building, which is immediately east of the Staten Island Ferry Terminal at the southern tip of Manhattan. The nearest subway stops are South Ferry on the 1 and 9, Whitehall on the R and W, and Bowling Green on the 4 and 5. The ferry ride is free for this occasion. The formal program begins at 7 p.m. From 5:30 to 6:45 participants can view panels that will be on display and/or take a short tour of the Island. GIPEC staff and consultants will be on hand to answer questions. Presentations will run from 7 to 7:45, followed by roundtable discussions where participants can voice their opinions in response to a series of questions in a workbook. A discussion of the findings of each of the roundtables

will conclude the program. Adjournment at 9:30.

The official meeting notice is posted at http://www.govisland.com/PDFs/GET_INVOLVED_new.pdf

For more information, contact GIPEC directly.

If you cannot attend the public meeting, and would like to provide comments to GIPEC you can e-mail comments-gipec@empire.state.ny.us or write to:

GIPEC
10 South Street, Battery Maritime Building, Slip 7,
New York, NY 10004

Additional information is posted at www.govisland.com.

Follow-up on June workshop

More than 100 interested New Yorkers turned out on a rainy June 29 for a follow-up meeting at the Municipal Art Society to discuss findings of the park planning workshop that the Governors Island Alliance sponsored out on the Island on a sunny Saturday, June 12. Here are highlights of the Workshop Findings Report, along with comments from a panel of specialists at the follow-up meeting. The panelists were Carter Craft, director of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, Tessa Huxley, director of the Battery Park Conservancy, Claire Weisz of Weisz + Yoes Architecture and Urban Design, Madelyn Wils, who chairs Community Board #1 and Marge Ruddick of Marge Ruddick Landscapes. Steve Whitehouse of Saratoga Associates, consultants to the Alliance and the National Park Service, served as moderator.

The workshop affirmed the extraordinary opportunity to create new public spaces on the Island. As described in the report, the emerging consensus was that a pedestrian friendly, park-like atmosphere should extend throughout the entire Island, with a diversity of arts, environmental and historic activities attractive and accessible to all New Yorkers. Accessibility requires the creation of 'gateway' arrangements – such as parking spaces – in Brooklyn and New Jersey's Liberty State Park in addition to the existing pier in lower Manhattan. The harbor and its waters should be a key element in the programming and design of the park and public spaces. Two large, flexible spaces should be established on the Island's open expanses. One would be created by expanding the existing historic glacis surrounding Fort Jay. (Glacis is French for a gently sloping approach to a fort.) The second would be established on the southern half of the Island by removing structures constructed in the 20th century for the Army and the Coast Guard. This southern expanse should feature bold new landforms – perhaps a pond or an opening in the seawall, using landfill from those excavations to relieve some of the Island's flat terrain.

The first panelist to speak was Claire Weisz who said, 'This is the park of our future, a piece of our history [and] something completely new that deals with the particularity of New York harbor.' She was followed by Madelyn Wils, who said, 'It is very hard to build an unsuccessful park'. I was mesmerized by the great lawn, a magnificent event space to bring people together.' Later she added, 'As a mother taking my kids to the Island, I was taken by the big guns; you need to integrate these artifacts.' Claire Weisz suggested establishing a naval or maritime museum on the Island. Madelyn Wils saw an opportunity to build 'an entry to the Island' in the Battery Maritime Building, where the ferries dock.

Given that the Island will have an 'educational' function, still undefined, Tessa Huxley warned that 'it is important that if CUNY goes out there they not take the ballfields when community kids want them.' Madelyn Wils had pointed out that 'you can never have enough [space for] recreation.' Marge Ruddick proposed another educational function: 'Involve students in the environmental development of the Island.'

As the meeting ended the RPA's Rob Pirani, who chaired the meeting, observed that 'none of this is going to happen without a lot of people making a lot of noise,' and Madelyn Wils added, 'There will be a lot of master plans before this finally gets done.'

Read the Workshop Report at www.rpa.org/pdf/Glfindingsreport0604.pdf

There is also an online copy of the Briefing Book prepared for the June 12 workshop at www.rpa.org/pdf/Gibriefing-book0604.pdf.

Renting the Island for special events

The Island's long-term uses are still being designed, but it is open for short-term use by anyone who wants to stage a special event in this Very Special Place.

Pnina Michelson, GIPEC's vice president for special events is reachable at (212) 480-4850. She offers a tour if you might be interested. The letter she has sent to prospects describes the Island in deservedly glowing terms as a 'tranquil historic setting with ancient trees, rolling hills and extraordinary architecture spanning three centuries' – and, of course, spectacular views. 'With a large range of indoor and outdoor venues,' she says, 'this 172-acre island lends itself to a wide variety of special events.'

Here are highlights from her informative brochure:

Admiral's Quarters

The Admiral's Quarters, built in 1840, is a federal-style manor house which served as the Army and Coast Guard commanders' quarters, surrounded by trees, gardens and a row of Victorian houses for officers. It is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a New York City Landmark. In 1988, the house was used for President Reagan's summit with Soviet President Gorbachev. It can handle 150 for cocktails, 80 for dinner.

Esplanade Tent

A tent can be located at the most prominent location on the Esplanade, near the ferry landing, on a two-acre site across the harbor from the financial capital of the world, with unparalleled views of Manhattan, Brooklyn Heights, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Accommodates 700 for cocktails and dinner.

Great Lawn

A 14-acre lawn with spectacular views of the Manhattan skyline. Perfect for picnics and other types of events of all sizes.

Sports

Sporting facilities on the Great Lawn include two softball fields, one soccer field, five basketball hoops, four tennis courts, and two volleyball courts.

Tours

An added attraction to any event is a tour of its 90-acre

historic district. Learn about the rich history of the Admiral's Quarters, Fort Jay, Castle Williams and the Governors' House, the home of the Dutch and English Governors of New York as a colony (and thus the Island's name). The two forts – Jay and Williams – are a National Monument under the direction of the National Park Service.

Visiting the Island: Schedule and how to get there

A mile of the Esplanade that stretches down the western shore is open every Saturday through the summer for picnickers, strollers, joggers, sunbathers et al – in other words, anyone who wants to spend a few hours or the whole afternoon in a park like no other, an island afloat in New York Harbor. National Park Service rangers give short tours of the two forts. Longer guided tours of the forts and the historic district are offered twice daily during the week. They cover 1½ miles in about 1½ hours. The terrain is flat, but comfortable shoes are advised. Restrooms and medical aid on the Island are limited.

There is no charge for visiting the Island, but there is a charge for the ferry. Tickets are sold at the South Street Seaport ticket booth on the pier at the Seaport – \$5 roundtrip for adults, \$3 for children age 5 to 12, and free for the little ones.

Saturdays: Tickets may be reserved in advance by calling (212) 748-8786. They must be picked up at the Seaport ticket booth. The ferry leaves every hour on the hour from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and returns every hour on the half hour until 6:30 p.m. The tours of the forts are first come, first served. Bring lunch if you're hungry.

Weekday tours: The ferry departs at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, for these tours. Purchase tickets at the Seaport ticket booth at least one-half hour in advance, to allow time to walk to the ferry. There are no ticket sales at the ferry, and there are no advance reservations.

There is a map of parking garages in Lower Manhattan linked to www.gipec.org, but smart visitors will take the subway. For the Seaport, subway stops are Fulton Street on the 2, 3, 4 and 5, or the A and C; Cortlandt Street on the R and W on the 1 and 9. Walk west to the Seaport. For the ferry the nearest subway stops are South Ferry on the 1 and 9, Whitehall on the R and W, and Bowling Green on the 4 and 5. Walk south to the ferry.

Feedback: We Get Letters

Two readers noted with displeasure that the first issue of this letter made no mention of bicycling as something to do on the island when the Esplanade is open to visitors on Saturdays. We agree that it would be fun, but we had to tell those readers that bikes are not permitted yet. Their e-mail spurred us to get the official list of what is and isn't allowed.

Prohibited are: biking, skateboarding, Rollerblading, tossing Frisbees, flying kites and playing ball. Also cooking, fishing and swimming in the harbor. Do not enter areas that are fenced off or feed the wildlife, and please put litter in the receptacles located along the way.

The following items are not permitted on the Island at all: pets, cars, alcohol, controlled substances, weapons and explosives.