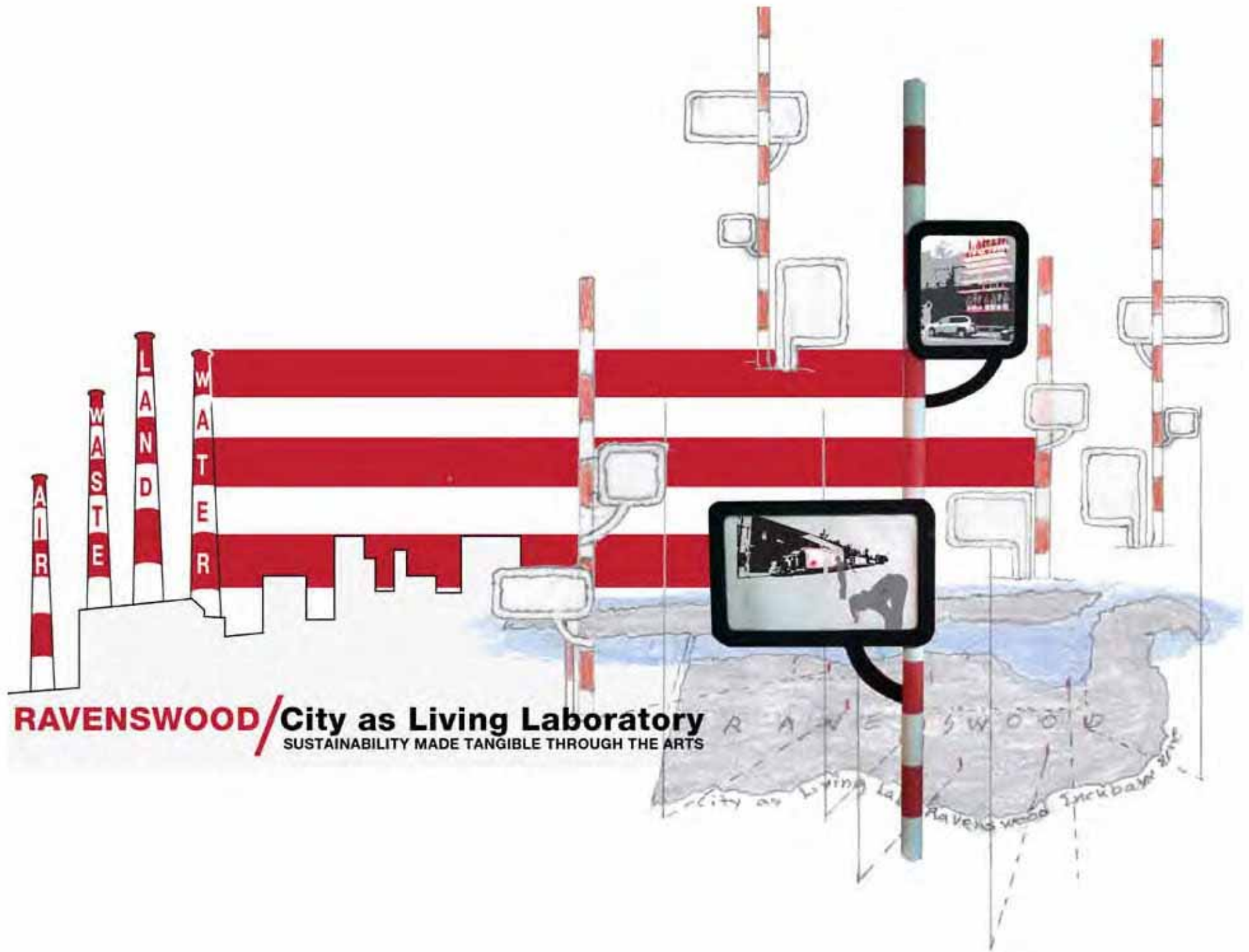


Framework for a 21st Century City
Sustainability Made Tangible Through The Arts

CITY
AS
LIVING
LABORATORY
RAVENSWOOD / CaLL
IF ONLY THE CITY COULD SPEAK

Ravenswood / CaLL: If Only The City Could Speak

Ravenswood / CaLL is an initiative to establish a district of innovation in Long Island City that supports collaborative projects between artists, scientists, and other experts addressing issues of social, economic and environmental sustainability to create a city of sustenance. **If Only The City Could Speak** is the project proposed to activate the district.





Civic Action: A Vision for Long Island City

A two-part exhibit by the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park.

Home to The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park, the Queens community where northern Long Island City and Astoria converge is a textured, mixed industrial and residential community. A resident since 1960, Isamu Noguchi was joined in the neighborhood by fellow artist and sculptor Mark di Suvero ten years later. Throughout his career, Isamu Noguchi collaborated with many architects, designers and civic thinkers on various public projects and in 1985, realized his vision of a single artist museum in Long Island City. One year later, di Suvero established neighboring Socrates Sculpture Park as an ongoing laboratory for art. More than 25 years later, the realized visions of these two renowned artists--and the spaces they transformed--have brought international attention to the area.

In response to this neighborhood, now undergoing significant change, The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park have forged an alliance through Civic Action: A Vision for Long Island City. Four artists known for their work in the public sphere were invited to form individual teams featuring an architect or planner to conceive new approaches to development in this area of Long Island City that Noguchi and di Suvero helped to shape.

//Noguchi Museum

A City of Sustenance

The city is a perpetual experiment that is—in the case of New York—poised on an estuary of tidal creeks and old streams, on suburb-born rivers that still make themselves known in one way or another. Ideas and technologies rise and fall and intermingle, like waters in the harbor, and neighborhoods and ways of living are scrapped or redefined or invented anew, as masses of people move in and out, are born and die—all adjustments of the civic equilibrium, for better or worse or both. Improvements catch on slowly or sometimes disappear, through no fault of their own.

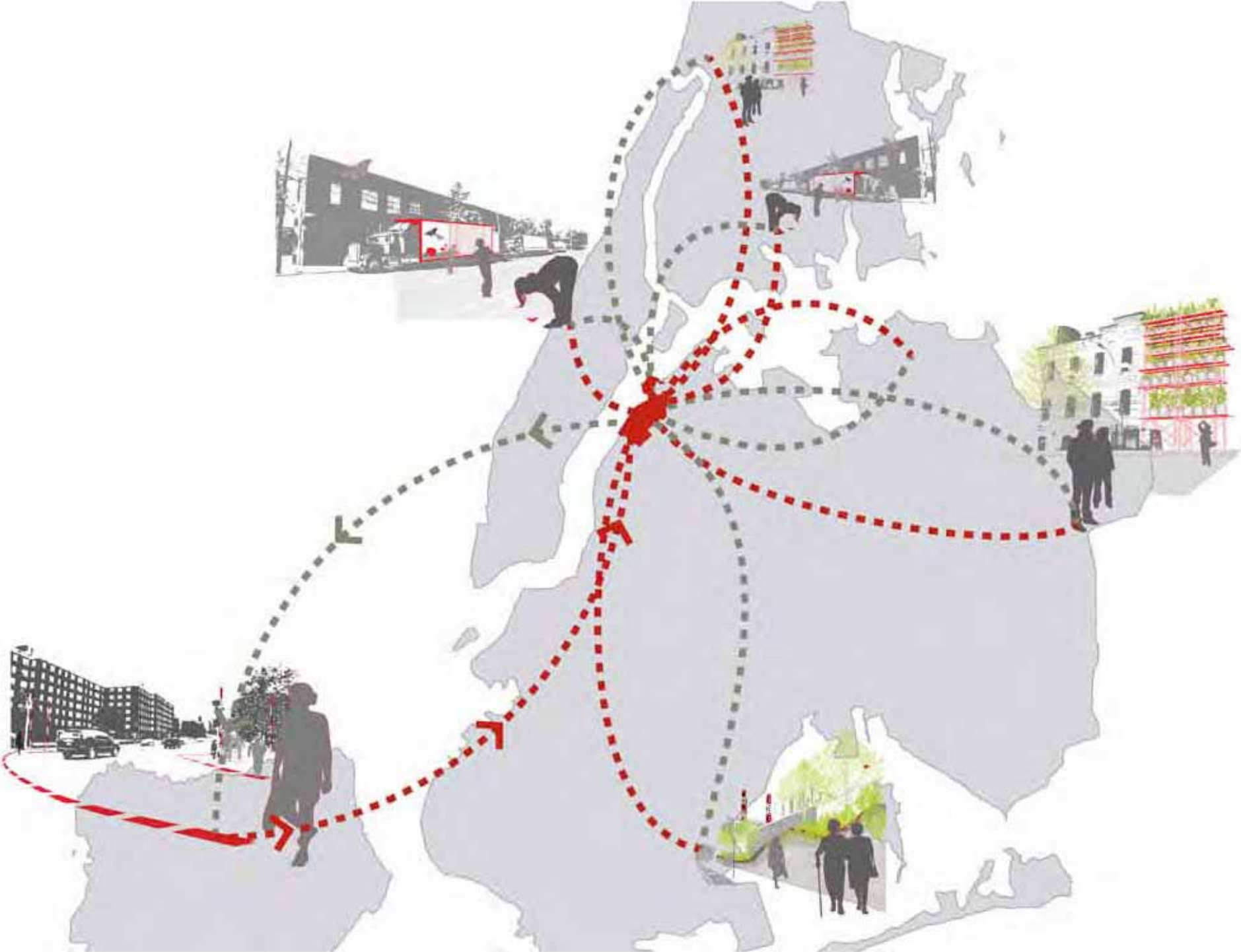
But what if one section of the city worked like a small plot on a big farm? What if one district were recognized not just for its historic nature or its subway access or its view but as a planned site of inventiveness? What if one neighborhood was a place where the creativity that marks city life was championed?

It would be an innovation district, where engineers and scientists, artists and urbanists of all stripes were invited to explore alternatives to the city's current systems, to speculate with its streets, its buildings, its infrastructure - to re-examine the way we think of the city itself. For artists to have the opportunity, for example, to repurpose the exterior of an electrical plant, to show life becoming more sustainable, with all the economic and public health considerations that sustainability entails. It would be a

place where artists went beyond filling up spaces with studios—where artists' projects would reimagine what an urban neighborhood might be, and, thus, drive change other than gentrification.

We propose such a district, and we propose it for the western coastline of Queens, at the end of an old native trail that was made into a nineteenth century toll road, in a neighborhood long known as Ravenswood and then succumbed by Long Island City, after Long Island City went from rural outpost to industrial area. As we see it, it will be a small-scale example of the City as Living Laboratory (CaLL). Ravenswood/CaLL, a district of innovation, is a new kind of art-infused urban research zone working over the buried Sunswick Creek, in the panorama-rich view of Hallet's Cove, where the East River tides mix the inspiration of the past with the potential of a transformational future that sees the city as more alive than dead, as a ecology that needs continued sustenance.

//Robert Sullivan



City as Living Laboratory

Ravenswood

City as Living Laboratory [CaLL] is a framework for connecting the arts with sustainability to help imagine and create cities that redefine how we live our lives, use our resources, communicate, educate and work. The goals are to:

- Make sustainability tangible and visible for citizens, communities and institutions
- Educate the public about environmental, social and economic sustainability
- Stimulate economic vitality in our neighborhoods and city-wide
- Address crises in our cities such as environmental degradation, neighborhood light, crumbling infrastructure, and natural disasters.

CaLL projects will seed site specific installations with interactive activities and events, setting an example that can extend to other sites over time and lead the way for other cities in the future. These activities will foster collaborations among communities, disciplines, institutions, and neighborhoods as they work together toward common sustainability goals. The CaLL framework is structured to be site specific and address inherent challenges and issues of each locale through in-depth research, establishing partnership with resident organizations and experts working locally and involving community groups.

We propose creating a City as Living Laboratory District in Long Island City - specifically in the neighborhood around the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park. Borrowing a historic name for the Long Island City area, we propose calling the project district **Ravenswood/CaLL [R/CaLL]**.

For more information on City as Living Laboratory, visit www.cityaslivinglab.org.



R/CaLL: If Only The City Could Speak

With the ever present development pressures of a fluctuating city, vibrant and long-standing communities are being challenged to adapt or propose a future of their own. The R/CaLL initiative establishes the area surrounding the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park as a district of innovation that supports collaborative projects between artists, scientists and other experts addressing issues of social, economic and environmental sustainability. This alternative development scenario builds on the precedents established by Noguchi and the museum as well as the laboratory-like nature of Socrates Sculpture Park founded by Mark di Suvero. It also recognizes the ad hoc, heterogeneous nature of the area; it's often hidden ecology, the history of manufacturing, the presence of small scale artisanal fabrication and artists.

The R/CaLL cultural trust will facilitate and administer collaborative projects, providing a permitting and approvals process that is streamlined. It will maintain relationships with city agencies to ensure ethical and quality projects while relieving the city of oversight and maintenance. R/CaLL will work with and be made up of local stakeholders, institutions and agencies.

The four artists' proposals in this exhibition, when considered as initiatives to be layered together, provide the basis to envision and establish the R/CaLL district. The intention is that incrementally, over a period of time fruitful working relationships would be established between people in the arts and other experts. The resulting projects and ideas, once tested, can in turn be taken out into the rest of the city.



**How will
it happen?**

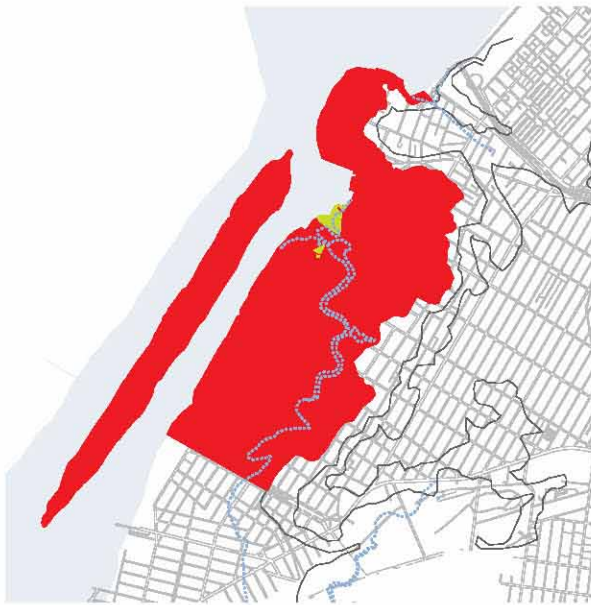


The historic natural environment and development patterns, or lack thereof, have sculpted an environment and climate distinct to the neighborhood yet applicable city-wide. Some of these critical issues can be investigated on a local level within the context of a larger network. These site specific critical issues address infrastructure, ecology, consumption, production, land, economy, energy, waste, water, air, heritage and history.

If Only The City Could Speak is the project to activate the R/CalL district. It will roll out in phases opening up the possibility of conversation between the city and its inhabitants. Each phase will manifest itself through the process of repurposing. The phases are:

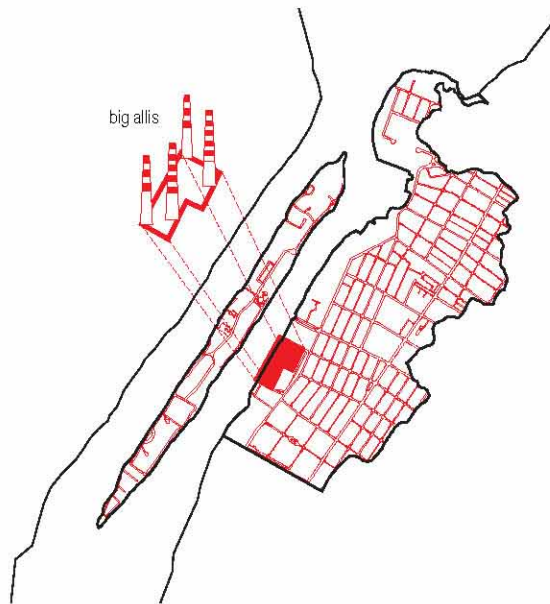
1. Activate the program /
Repurpose the stacks of Big Allis
2. Mark the territory /
Repurpose the existing verticals
3. Locate incubators studios/
Repurpose trucks, underused spaces, temporary additions
4. Aggregation of Ideas /
projects layer over time

These phased projects would jump start collaborations by multiple artists that will aggregate in the area, making it a destination for seeing and interacting with new ideas about the city. Their work may occur as programs, performances or projects that look at the transect of the city: air, rooftops, wall surfaces, streets, sidewalks and vacant lots, the waterfront and river as well as the above and below ground infrastructure.



define the district:

CaLL is a new model for neighborhood change that builds on the complexity and resilience of Ravenswood, reinventing and amplifying its existing characteristics. CaLL projects will maintain Ravenswood as a place of diversity and production rather than monoculture and consumption.



**repurpose Big Allis stacks:
make the district visible**

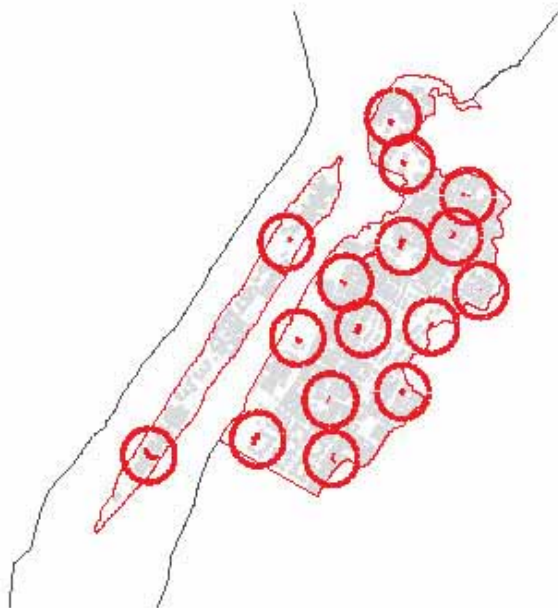
Prominent throughout New York, the Big Allis stacks, modified simply with paint and lights, become performance gauges of the city's conservation and consumption behaviors.



**repurpose existing verticals
mark the territory**

Red and white banding transforms everyday urban fixtures such as streetlights and utility poles with the visual language of the stacks, demarcating the territory of CaLL: Ravenswood.

R/CaLL: Phases



locate incubator studios:
keep it a working neighborhood

Existing spaces throughout the neighborhood are activated as work sites for collaborative teams. These spaces include: trucks, temporary additions, rooftops, underused interior spaces and garages.



install pilot projects:
make tangible new ideas

Ravenswood collaborative projects explore experimental ideas, test multiple solutions, and make long term solutions visible now. Artists add experiential impact to research and policy by directly engaging residents and visitors.



projects layer over time
create a district of innovation

People visit CaLL: Ravenswood to see imaginative speculations about the future of the city. Over time collaborative projects are located throughout the whole district, with new research and new projects continuously being developed and installed.



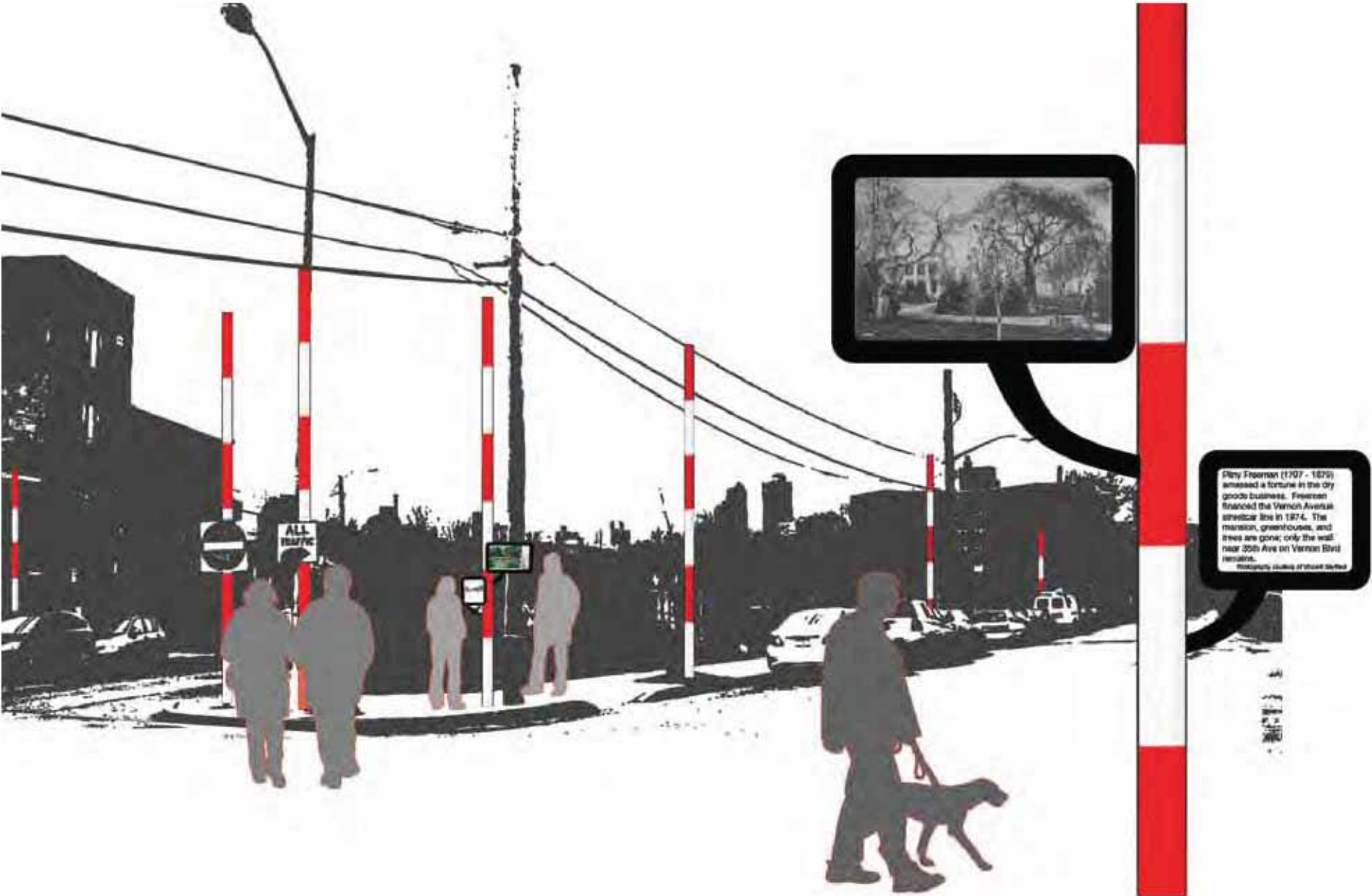
ACTIVE THE PLAN: IF ONLY THE CITY COULD SPEAK



The smoke stacks of the Big Allis power plant are one of the most visually compelling and prominent features of the Ravenswood area. How can a modest transformation repurpose and give new meaning to them?

Words, lights and gauge marks are added to the side of each stack, communicating the city's efforts to improve its efficiency and minimize its consumption. Throughout the city, a quick glance toward the stacks tell us what progress is being made and how much we can achieve.

big allis smoke stacks



Henry Freeman (1707 - 1879) amassed a fortune in the dry goods business. Freeman financed the Vernon Avenue streetcar line in 1874. The mansion, greenhouses, and trees are gone; only the wall near 35th Ave on Vernon Blvd remains.

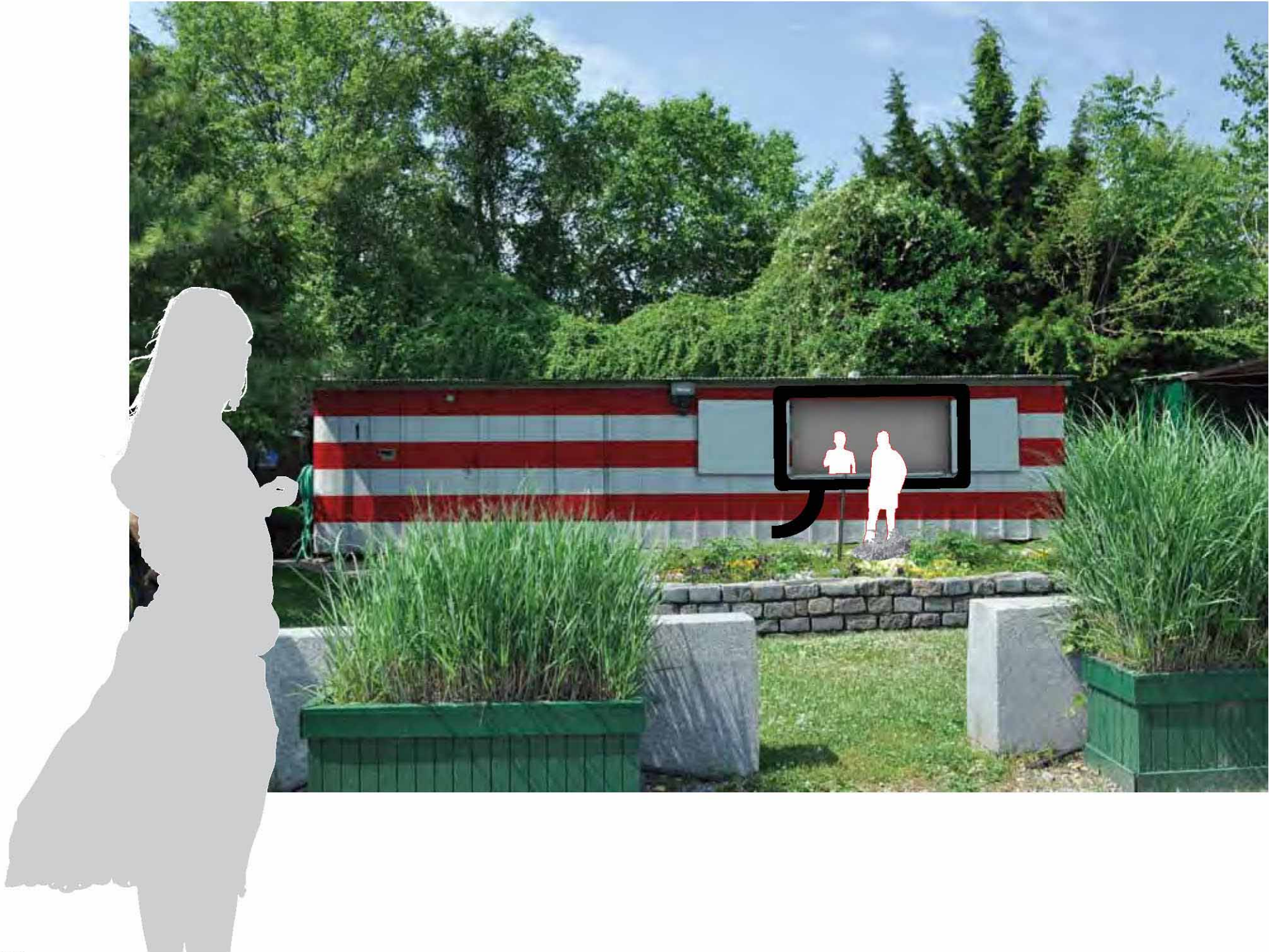
IF ONLY THE CITY COULD SPEAK



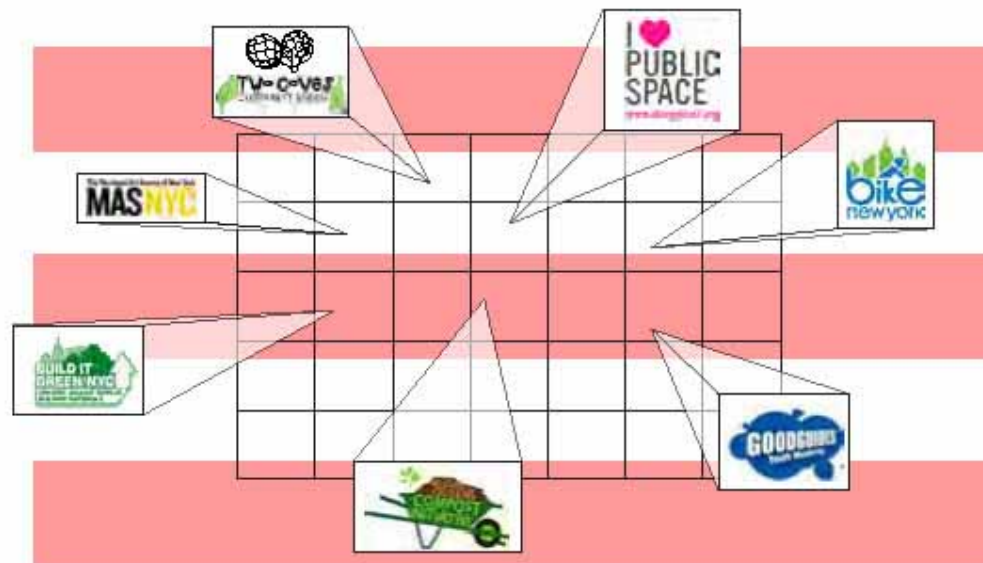
Critical supports for urban infrastructure - telephone and electrical poles, lamp and street sign posts, and pier supports - dot the neighborhood, but are almost invisible. How might these overlooked elements reinforce the neighborhood's new identity as well as acknowledge the systems that support city life?

Using the red and white banding of the Big Allis stacks, the verticals in Ravenswood identify the territory of the new CaLL district. These common elements have 'speech bubbles' attached to them, giving visitors and residents alike new insight into the history, ecology, infrastructure, and possible futures of the area. Dispersed throughout, lines of verticals link the subway station to the district, or delineate the former path of Sunswick Creek.

vertical elements



IF ONLY THE CITY COULD SPEAK



Painted red and white, the shipping container at Socrates Sculpture Park becomes a public forum that allows visitors and neighborhood residents to engage in the kind of collaborative exchange that characterizes City as Living Laboratory and Civic Action. Over the course of the exhibition CaLLabs will be held regularly. These curated dialogues between residents, visitors, artists, local experts, and impassioned amateurs will be structured by the four Civic Action artists.

Each of these CaLLabs will enlarge upon existing events at the Park, drawing on the expertise of both specialists and amateurs. Each lab will be framed to explore a distinct perspective on the neighborhood and can create an archive of research and ideas focusing on innovative strategies for the area.

community container



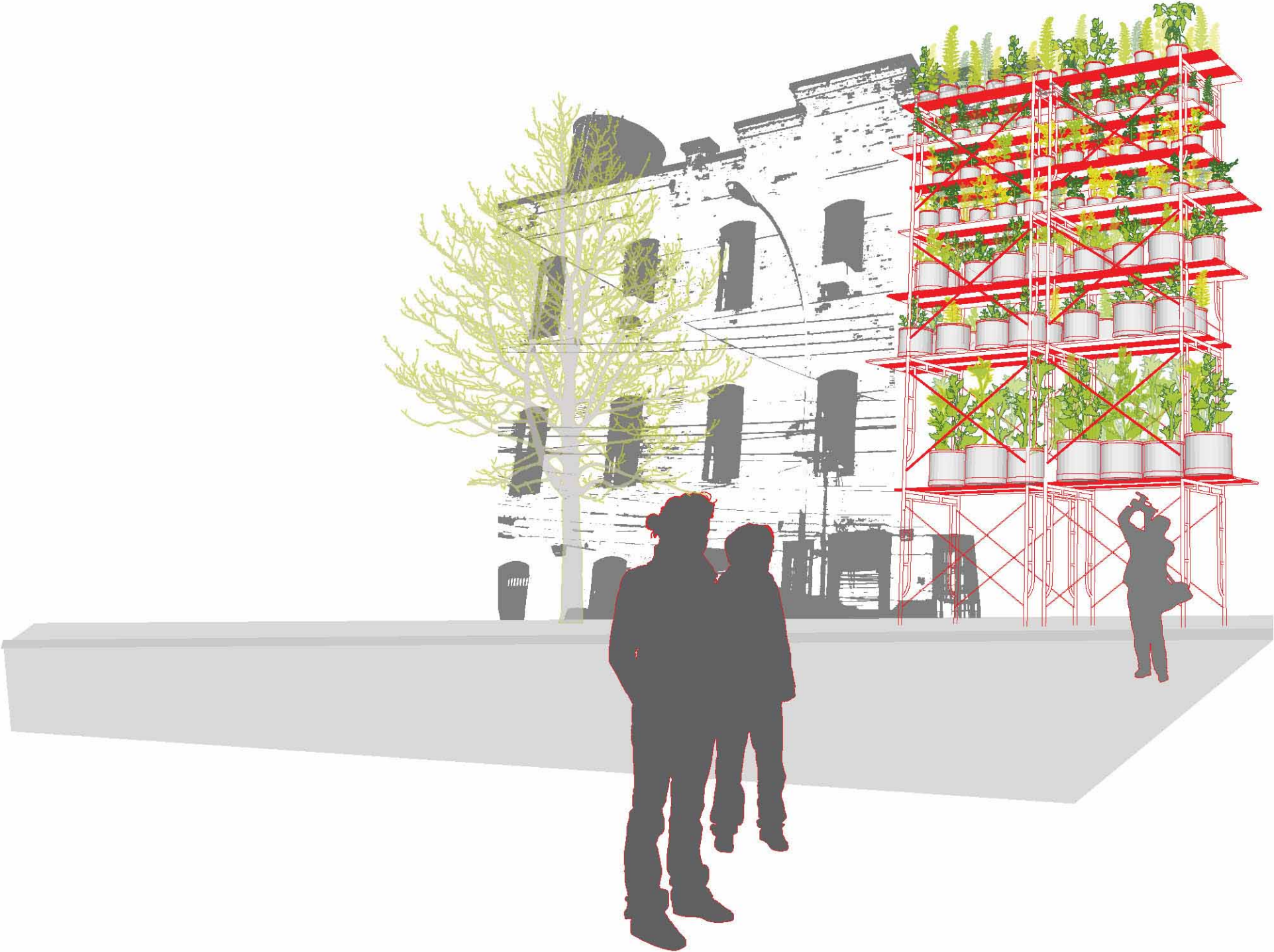
IF ONLY THE CITY COULD SPEAK



The parked truck is a ubiquitous feature of the Ravenswood landscape. Major truck routes run along Vernon Boulevard and Broadway, and many businesses value the neighborhood's location for its prime access to both Manhattan and regional transit networks. Trucks are an integral part of the commercial vitality of the neighborhood, but can be both a visual nuisance and major contributor to poor air quality. Often left idling in front of the Noguchi Museum entrance, how could the trucks be transformed into a positive presence?

The function of the trailer truck is reimagined by repurposing a familiar element into a flexible, mobile studio for CaLL collaborations. Whether using the typical container as is, or retrofitting it to meet the artists' and scientists' needs, the mobility of the truck studio allows for new ideas to be distributed throughout the city. Prototypes and methodologies can be showcased in the container, or the trailer can be opened up to become a mobile performance space in other neighborhoods.

truck incubators



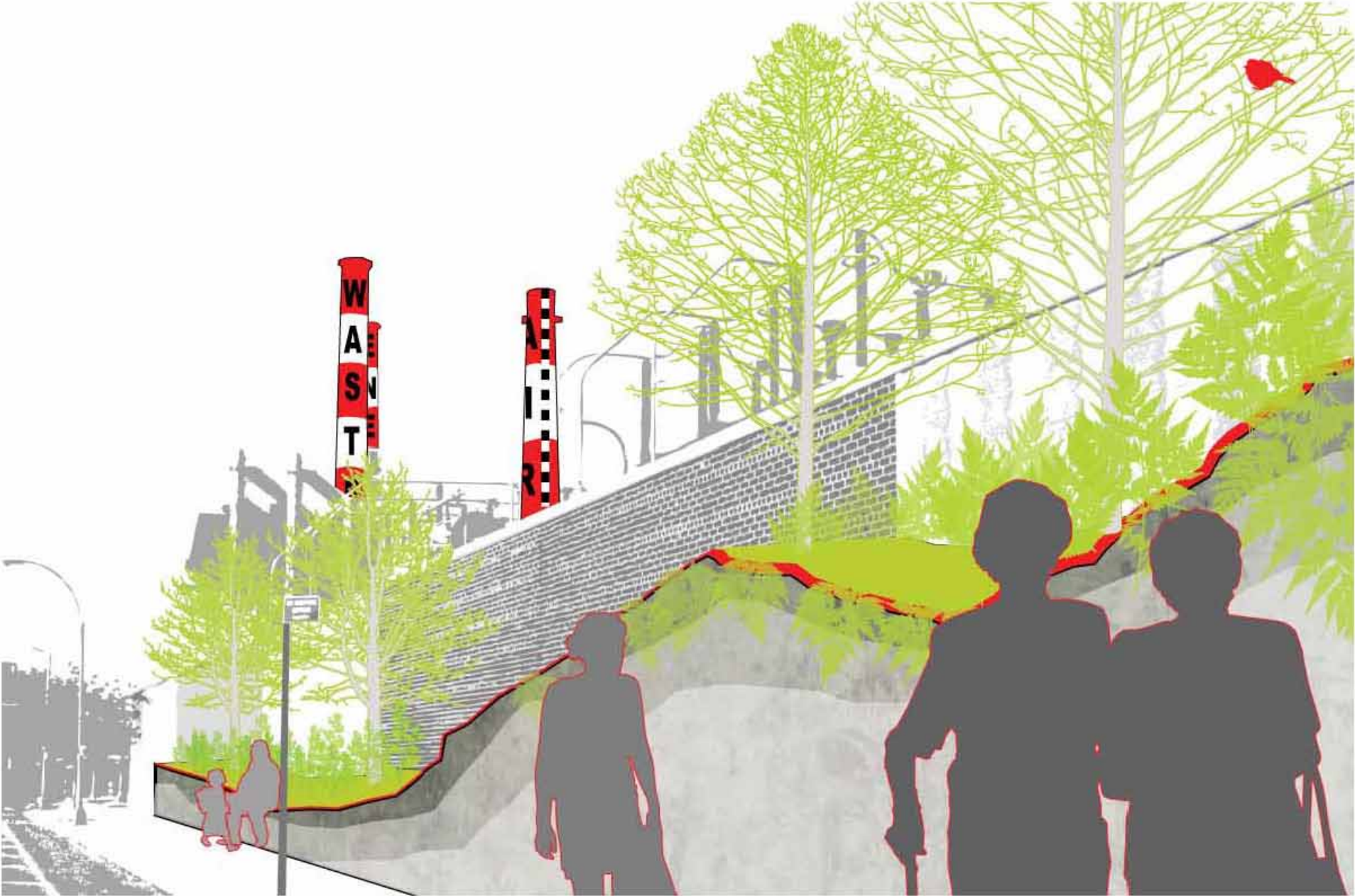
IF ONLY THE CITY COULD SPEAK



Simple to erect, inexpensive, and readily available, scaffolding is a common urban material that lends itself well to multiple unexpected uses.

The scaffold structure become a vertical garden and weed wall, easily installed along side existing buildings. The scaffold structure is stocked with plant specimens curated from local abandoned lots; the garden re-frames these resilient species as worthy of study, assessment, and appreciations. Wild urban plants, typically dismissed as weeds, are increasingly being recognized as contributing important ecological value to cities. They are extremely well adapted to conditions that are often inhospitable to other plants, and many have historically been used for culinary or medicinal purposes. Familiar scaffolding serves as an armature for simple water collection systems: gathering rainwater from the adjacent building's roof, gutters bring water to the plants and then down to a small rainwater garden at the ground.

scaffolding



IF ONLY THE CITY COULD SPEAK



With vast warehouse walls, roll-up garage doors, and construction fences, many local streets feel desolate, with almost no public space. Aside from cryptic signs and a rare glimpse inside, there is little to indicate what happens behind these walls. The exceptions are material warehouses that use their exteriors to present their products, and grocery stores that create colorful, eye-catching displays of stacked food. Given these local precedents, how can they inspire to activate the stretches of unadorned walls?

One way to repurpose these spaces is to create slices of park; these modest interventions both demonstrate micro-ecosystems, and create spaces for people to stop and sit.



IF ONLY THE CITY COULD SPEAK



How can underutilized lots become socially and ecologically rich spaces that contribute to the overall health of the neighborhood? A variety of incentives and creative ownership structure could be tested, allowing businesses to aggregate their parking, thus freeing up some lots for others uses, or encouraging alternative programming when the lot is not used.

Costco's parking lot has waterfront access and a great view; could it become a nocturnal public space; what kind of ecological strategies could be installed to actually improve the East River's health? Underdeveloped lots could also be utilized as temporary tree and plant nurseries, locations for solar collectors, or developed as areas to encourage more diverse habitats.



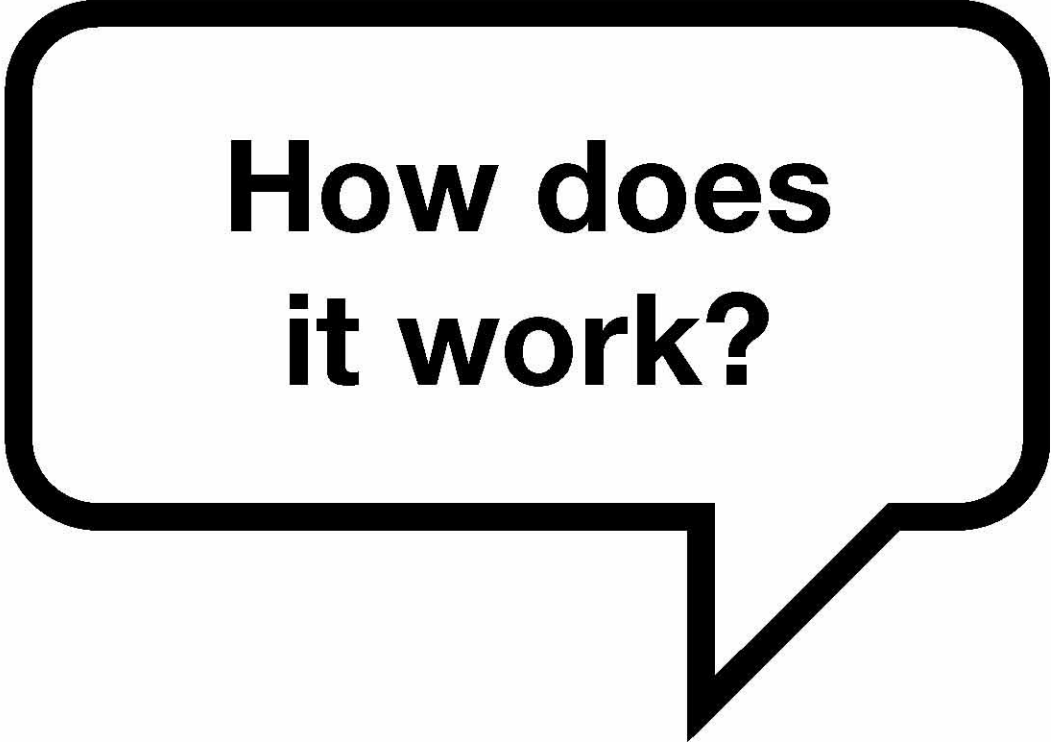
IF ONLY THE CITY COULD SPEAK



Can the area's historic ecology be revealed to illustrate the neighborhood's evolution and development patterns that have shaped spaces today? Can the hidden ecology help understand the impact of policy on our environment?

The ecological amenity of the now submerged Sunswick Creek emptying into the East River provided the perfect condition for manufacturing to grow in Ravenswood. Sunswick Creek served as the life line for Indians to plant medicinal herbs and perform shamanistic rituals. As the area expanded at a rapid pace, Sunswick Creek took up the role that public infrastructure could not and thus changing its image and use to a negative one. With Manhattan growing exponentially, Hallett's Cove role as production and supply also grew, driving the demand for developable land and infilling Sunswick Creek.

sunswick creek



**How does
it work?**

how it works: the process

CaLL Cultural Trust

At the annual "speed dating" event, artists and other experts meet, identify critical issues to be addressed, and create new partnerships across disciplinary and institutional lines.

Teams develop proposals that explore those critical issues in relation to the district's social, ecological, and economic environment.

CaLL reviews proposals and works with collaborative teams to develop viable projects.

CaLL Ravenswood works with city agencies on a project by project basis to get approvals and, when necessary, permission to supersede regulatory obstacles that hinder experimentation and innovation - expanding the city's current use of pilot projects to test ideas.



Successful collaborative projects build upon existing civic and scientific institutional efforts and resources; proposals are developed in conjunction with local organizations, residents, and businesses.

CaLL provides working studio space for teams in the neighborhood, to support collaboration and strengthen community relationships.

Teams are encouraged to use local fabricators and workers to continue the beneficial symbiotic relationship between the arts and manufacturing developed by Noguchi and di Suvero.

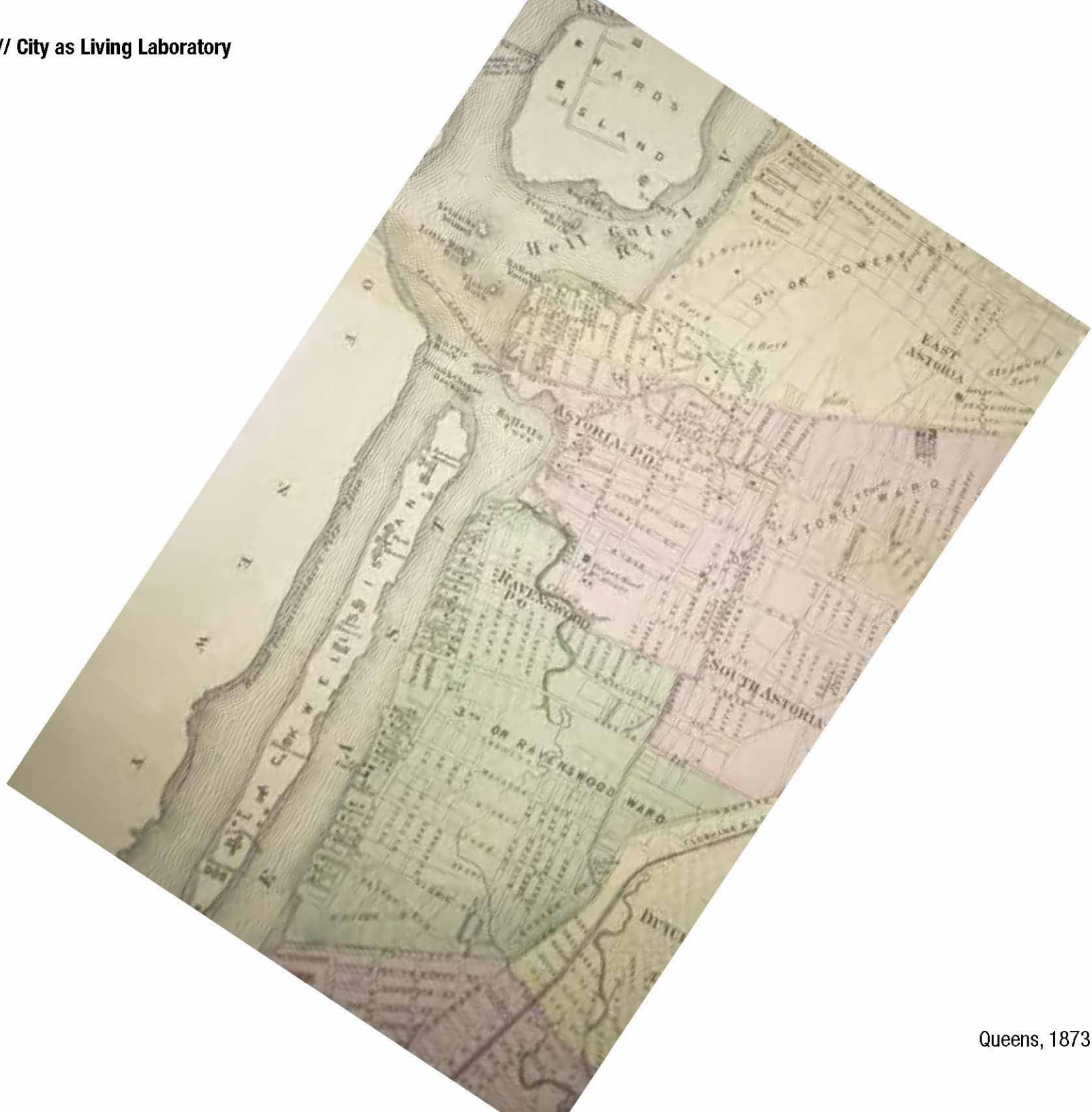
Projects include an ongoing assessment and evaluation; new projects can build on the precedents of earlier innovations. With appropriate research and review, new ideas will be recommended to the relevant city agencies.



The R/CaLL Cultural Trust will oversee the roll out of each project. It will facilitate and administer collaborative projects, providing a permitting and approvals process that is streamlined. It will maintain relationships with city agencies to ensure ethical and quality projects while relieving the city of oversight and maintenance. R/CaLL will work with and be made up of local stakeholders, institutions, community organizations and agencies.



**Why in Long
Island City?**

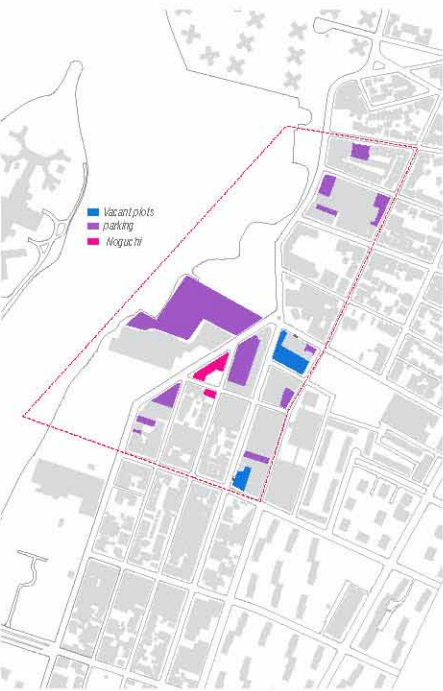


Due to its ecological history, proximity to the city, degree of connectivity with transportation and pattern of development, this portion of Long Island City is conducive for innovative ideas and projects to be developed, implemented on a small scale that is beneficial to residents, and then exported to the city at large.

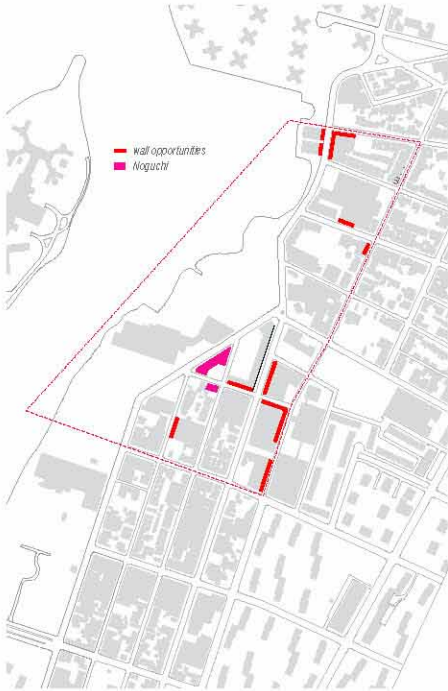
This area of Long Island City, or Hallet's Cove as it was originally known, was initially developed due to its ecological amenity of Sunswick Creek that enabled manufacturing. Initially, Native American Indians used the now submerged Sunswick Creek and surrounding wetlands as the life line for cultivating food and medicinal herbs. In the 1850's, with the ever expanding population and need to grow food nearby, the tidal mill was put in at the mouth of the creek and therefore changing the pattern of growth to farmland and cultivation. By the 1890's the wetlands and creek were picking up the slack that the waste removal infrastructure could not handle due to the population growth and expansion. In the 1920's the creek was covered to make way for housing and manufacturing.



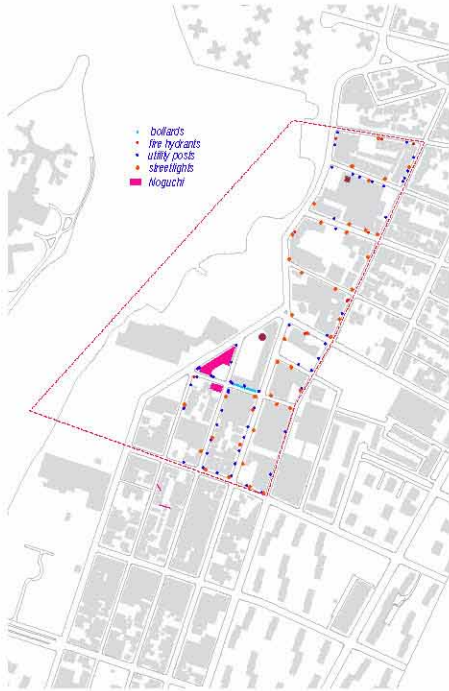
Today, Hallet's Cove is an area of diversity and complexity. Architecturally, the diversity in building stock creates a density not common to areas close to Manhattan. Culturally, residents live concurrently alongside and within manufacturing and distribution businesses; there are shotgun houses next to decorative stone distributors and cabinet makers; artist, artisans, craftsmen, and musicians produce pieces of their trade. There also exists an established institutional network of education and the arts through the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park which have been active in the neighborhood for decades.



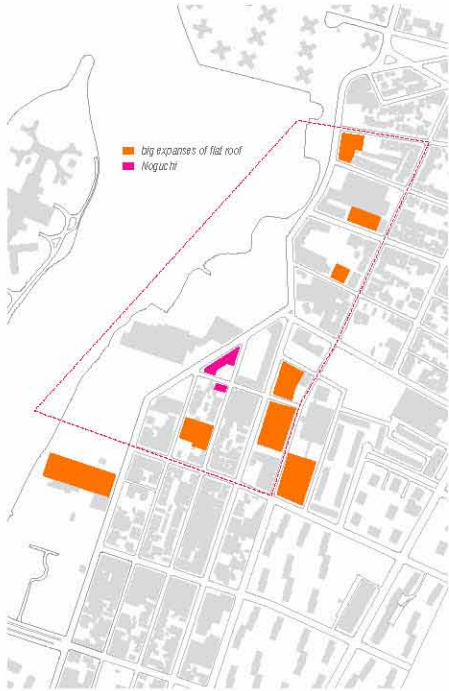
Underutilized lots



Expansive Walls



Verticals



Expansive Flat Roofs



Outline of buried Sunswick Creek and surround wetlands.

The large expanses of blank walls and roofs from manufacturing buildings, ubiquitous vertical poles that support electrical and telecommunication lines to residents and businesses above ground, and abundance of trucks and side street parking due to distribution companies all provide opportunities to create points of communication or interventions.

These mapping exercises help to reveal the abundance of opportunities that exist the R/CaLL district.

can food production transform unproductive public spaces in housing projects?

how can water quality at stormwater outfall locations be monitored and communicated in real time?

how can the benefits of modest improvements to existing residential be communicated to the community at large?

how can bioswales be more compelling urban design tools? how can they be assessed and maintained?

can unused residential space be used as temporary artists studios?

how can products be distributed throughout the city without relying on trucks/ fossil fuels?

how can stalled or dormant development sites be used as temporary research zones?

where did the rainwater go before there was extensive development?

how can blank walls be activated to give residents and visitors information about local production?

what happens when sewer infrastructure is no longer hidden?

can existing delivery patterns be linked to improved access to local cultural institutions?

can the parking lot at costco be a benefit to the community - both during store hours and after?

how can the edge of the river be altered to minimize flooding/ articulate flooding patterns?

what does a park that prioritizes bug and bird habitat look like?

how can the effects of soil remediation be made visible?

what is an ecological alternative to grass? [and artificial turf isn't an answer]

can the effects of soil remediation be made visible?

how can invisible improvements to underground water pipe be made legible?

can more inventive structures for play be constructed?

can intensive tree planting help lower asthma rates?

can community stewardship become a source of job creation?

can we decentralize our power production and rethink the waterfront?

can an archaeology of trash force a redefinition of disposable?



The historic natural environment and development patterns, or lack thereof, have sculpted an environment and climate distinct to the neighborhood yet applicable city-wide. Some of these critical issues can be investigated on a local level within the context of a larger network. These site specific critical issues address infrastructure, ecology, consumption, production, land, economy, energy, waste, water, air, heritage and history.



**Who is
involved?**



Ravenswood/CaLL will develop a support structure with existing institutions, organizations, businesses, and local stakeholders already operating in the area.

Potential partners:

Cultural Institutions:

- The Noguchi Museum
- Socrates Sculpture Park
- PS1
- Museum of the Moving Image
- Exit Art
- Alliance for the Arts
- Dancing in the Streets
- Art for Change
- Space Time C.C.

Local Businesses

- Silvercup Studios
- Kaufman Astoria Studios
- Tomcat Catering
- ConEdison
- Eyebeam Atelier
- Brooklyn Grange
- Plaxall, Inc.

Educational Institutions

- PS 76, 78, 83, 112
- Long Island City High School
- Pratt Institute / Pratt Center
- Parsons

City Agencies

- Department of Transportation
- Department of Environmental Protection
- New York City Housing Authority
- Department of City Planning
- Queens Borough Presidents Office
- NYC Department of Parks and Recreation

Community Groups

- Long Island City Community Boat House
- Community Board 1
- Community Board 2
- Two Coves Community Garden
- Western Queens Compost Initiative

Local NGOs

- Center for Urban Pedagogy
- Design Trust for Public Space
- Greater Astoria Historical Society
- Recycle A Bicycle
- Bike New York
- The Elmezzi Foundation
- Green Shores
- Brooklyn Grange Farm
- Build it Green! NYC
- Place + Displaced, Fractured Atlas
- Goodwill Industries of Greater NY



**Tracing Sunswick Creek /
Reflecting Forward**





Sunswick Creek / Reflecting Forward is an pioneer project for Ravenswood / CaLL. Building from the ideas put forth at the Noguchi Museum, this installation focus on the historic and now submerged, Sunswick Creek. By tracing the path of the creek though the neighborhood, patrons will learn about Ravenswood's history and influence in New York City. From its origin, at Sixteen Oaks Grove Park, to its mouth in Socrates Sculpture Park, Sunswick Creek was a substantial life line for the community. Although covered over, the imprint of the stream has persisted to the present. Today its forgotten banks are the sites of small businesses – a testament to its legacy as an incubator for entrepreneurship. This project challenges citizens to imagine a future Ravenswood that is reflective of its natural resiliency and responsive to the land and its people.





Tracing Sunswick Creek / Reflecting Forward
installation at Socrates Sculpture Park. Red and
white striped poles and convex mirrors embedded
into the landscape mark the former creek bed from
the mouth at Socrates Sculpture Parks' shore line.



From the farms and orchards in the 1850s, fast forward to 1986, when some artists looked at an illegal dump and saw a beautiful place. Like it or not, a dump is human activity, signs of life, and in 1986, when more artists were moving into a place that was quiet in some ways, though still fertile, active, and busy, the dump that sat on Sunswick Creek's mouth became a park.

Socrates Sculpture Park was an abandoned riverside landfill and illegal dump site until 1986 when a coalition of artist and community members, under the leadership of Mark di Suvero, transformed it into an open studio and exhibition space for artists and neighborhood park for local residents.

Photo Courtesy of Socrates Sculpture Park



Just in from the East River, people came to live at the Ravenswood Houses in 1951, the public housing in the heart of the little valley of Sunswick Creek: 30 buildings and 40 acres, twice the acreage of the White House. Larger businesses move away in the 1950s, and small businesses set up in the Sunswick Creek's once marshy interior. Artists set up studios, like Isamu Noguchi, in the early 1960s, near the edge of what once was the old mill pond.

In the late 1960's, Isamu Noguchi purchases a 1920s factory building across the street from his studio to use as a studio warehouse. This is the building that will later become The Noguchi Museum and Gardens.

Photo Courtesy of The Noguchi Museum



When the bridge to an expanding Manhattan opens, in 1909, the marshland in Ravenswood already valuable as an estuary, becomes suddenly valuable as real estate property. What remains of the creek itself, a watery run along Twenty-first Avenue, is filled in with ash and municipal waste by 1910, as roads are paved, sewer lines laid.

Queensboro Bridge construction seen from Queens Plaza [Bridge Plaza]
in 1907





Opposite Page:
Tracing Sunswick Creek / Reflecting Forward
 installation at Sixteen Oaks Grove Park in
 Ravenswood. Sixteen Oaks Grove Park is located in
 proximity to the origin of Sunswick Creek.

This page:
 (left) The sixteen large Oak trees were banded in
 breathable mesh to define the space. The speech
 bubbles contained walking tour information as well
 as information on the native grasses planted in the
 wooden planter-cart.



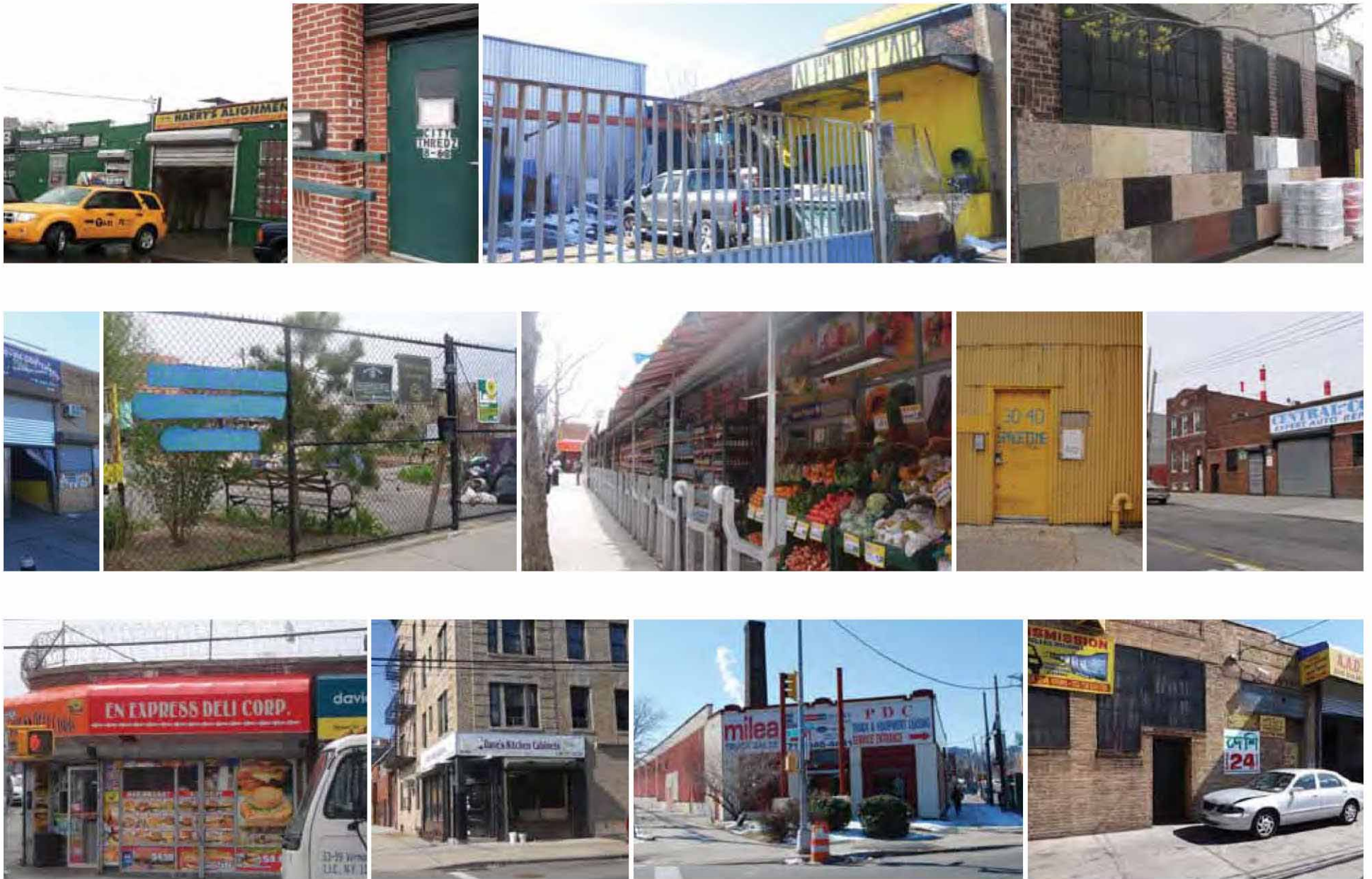


Sunswick Creek is not gone. It is also not buried over, though earth has been shifted and its streambed surely filled in. If Sunswick is referred to at all it is often referred to as diverted—diverted, specifically, into sewers. This is a fate commonly described for streams in modern city, and it is true in one sense; the water that would have run through the creek after a rain is now going to wind up down in the sewer lines. It is also true that often the oldest sewer lines run along the paths of old creeks. But to say that Sunswick is gone, or buried over, or just in a sewer is not correct, because Sunswick still exists. You can see the creek, first of all, the barest outlines of the old water-relevant elevations. You can just make out where a stream would have been, given the slightly higher land along its what would have been its edges. The city is an instrument of change, of destruction, of getting things built, of getting things finished, but the essential geology of the city is difficult to erase or completely ignored. While you may not see the creek *per se*, what you will see is still a perfect creek site.

Because the proof that the creek is still there—that it remains an actual force on the ground—is not in the past. It is in the present. Take an old map that shows where the creek was and think about the way we have long thought of land. High ground is traditionally valuable, with views, with the purity of air, with great and wide prospects. On the other hand, for centuries Americans have considered lowlands a waste. Native Americans may have used marshlands

as seasonal stops, the places where food was abundant, in the form of shellfish and crustaceans, as well as myriad fish species meandering through the New York estuary that are, for the most part, still in New York Harbor today. But Dutch settlers in New York and New Jersey and their relations or imitators all along the coast, sought to dyke and dry marshes, to fill them in completely. This was a mistake, as we see in the clear sight of retrospect, and it is important to remember that East coast salt marsh is one of the most biologically productive ecologies in the world, producing as much as ten times the biological material produced in a forest or a farm. When Sunswick Creek was being transformed, particular individuals may have enjoyed the marsh mallows, or noted the peacefulness or even the birds, but as a community—for centuries and even up to a few years ago—we saw disease-infested waste.

So back to the creek, and the path it takes today. Look what's at the mouth: a dump which would only recently be reclaimed (in another way) as a park, a place for humans to meander. Move upstream, and there where the stream would have spread out, the city built public housing. A private developer did not build luxury housing on this once swampy land (though noted please that at the time these houses were built, in the middle of the 20th Century, our idea of what was public was more expanse and generous, and these were built as homes to be valued, rather than discounted). Now, head up the stream more and see that where there



were once likely fields and sedges and brackish water grasses—the kind of plants that come in and out from season to season, and thrive in tune with not just seasonal but tidal variations—there are small business, as in very small business, as in the kinds of places that are a starting point for immigrant businesspeople.

Along Sunswick Creek today are food vendor cart storage units, and taxi repair shops, signs denoting business hours in all the languages of Queens, which are nearly all the languages of the world. At what would have been a meadow close to the top of the creek there is a bus stop, the bus to Rikers Island, or to downtown Brooklyn, depending on which way you go. And then there is a power station, the kind of utility that typically requires a large plot of ground that is not desired by private development. When you see a power station in New York, when you see a power plant, you see the still active power of a creek, still charging, still causing a human dynamism, even if it is less noticed than a giant new skyscraper.

What we see mostly along Sunswick Creek, in other words, are pockets of human experiments, with new businesses striving to take root, with workers looking for growth, the economic kind, but growth. At this level, it should be noted, growth seems less monolithic—everyone gets coffee at the same diners—than at the level of, say, corporate finance. Small businesses inspire small businesses and lay the groundwork for more.

At some point around 1900, Ravenswood

was an outskirt, a meadow land, as opposed to an industrial district, but slowly it filled with businesses that were sited on the outskirts to a place of street-lined industry. A view of the succession of businesses might be glimpsed today, while standing on what are now the Sanitation Department's garages, and looking north across what eventually—when the creek was damned in the 1800s—became a mill pond, then south through the marsh grasses and the village of Newtown. See the canning factory that was washed away by economic tides, and as Astoria develops and grows, see the marshy land of Sunswick Creek take its time, the pond receding, the creek slowly disappearing, former marsh being filled in, by garages, small buildings, along the newly laid out streets. When the bridge to an expanding Manhattan opens, in 1909, the marshland in Ravenswood becomes even more valuable. What remains of the creek itself, a watery run along Twenty-first Avenue, was filled in with ash and municipal waste by 1910, as roads are paved, sewer lines laid. The water-filled creek lost value, an example of how a place can be commandeered, in the same way that an old streambed can be filled with construction fill or ashes and other things from dumps.

All around New York City and American cities in general, we see the same kind of thriving economic activity in places that—can it be a coincidence?—were once creeks or at the very least creek-fed marshy land—in Willets Point, along the banks of Newtown Creek, on what is now the Gowanus Canal, and

the area of Queens that is still sometimes referred to as Flatbush Bay. Can we call these places estuarine? That word comes from the Latin *aestus*, meaning boiling or undulating or swelling, like the tides in the sea. Can there be such a thing as estuarine economics? Places where crafts and ideas and human activity naturally comes in waves?

We can perhaps say that these places all have an estuarine aesthetic, and often time artists are drawn to where there is industrial space and old factories. Like biological life of myriad kinds, artists are drawn to estuaries. So Isamu Noguchi came to Ravenswood in the early 60s. Then, the old dump at the mouth of Sunswick was reclaimed for park in 1986, by community members, including Mark di Suvero. Artists sense light, space, opportunity—they have a sense of landscape and geography similar to that of the food cart vendors. Oftentimes, in the succession of development in New York and else where in the country, a punishing development follows the appearance of artists, so that eventually that the food vendors and the artist must leave—cheap lunch and real beauty and ingenious repair replaced by a desire for more of the ubiquitous retail environment, for entertainment over use. In a sense work is paved over. The streams of arts and craft that we need to survive on a human level are filled in by entertainment entities, by less local real estate concerns, by buildings that are in tune less with local tides and more with the global economy's floodtide.



And yet if the stream were acknowledged, if it were considered alive rather than buried, maybe its watershed would remain charged for humans and for the economy. The closer you look at the ecology of the creek and the neighborhood the more you see that the human ecology and the natural ecology are one in the same; there is no difference. So that now—like bubbles from an ancient frog-burrowed streambed, or, perhaps like sulfurous belches from the contaminated bottom of the nearby English Kills—questions arise when pondering the history and continuing power of Sunswick Creek. Could it be continue as a flourishing and diverse manufacturing center which has historically adapted to shifts in the economy? Could its vitality be managed and encouraged rather than replaced? What kinds of innovative manufacturing make sense for the 21st century? How can manufacturers work together to improve their business models, and their relationship to the Sunswick creek watershed? Can it be a laboratory for the un-divertable connection between human health and welfare and the welfare of the ecology?

What if Ravenswood were an area where innovation was grown, like oysters or salt marsh hay? Could artists work like the brackish water of the tides, to churn and nourish the area, to propagate innovation in an urban neighborhood—to drive an intensely local change. Is the watershed of the still-there Sunswick the place to found the City as Living Laboratory (CaLL), where the RAVENSWOOD/CaLL would be the

first district of innovation, an art-infused urban research zone in the panorama-rich view of the recovered Hallet's Cove? In this place, where the East River tides mix with the inspiration of the past, can we grow a new civic future, one that builds on the vibrancy of the existing city, rather than transplanting or even developing something else entirely that may not grow. The ecology of the RAVENSWOOD/CaLL grows from the comingling of humans, working with and in their natural environment, which is the city.

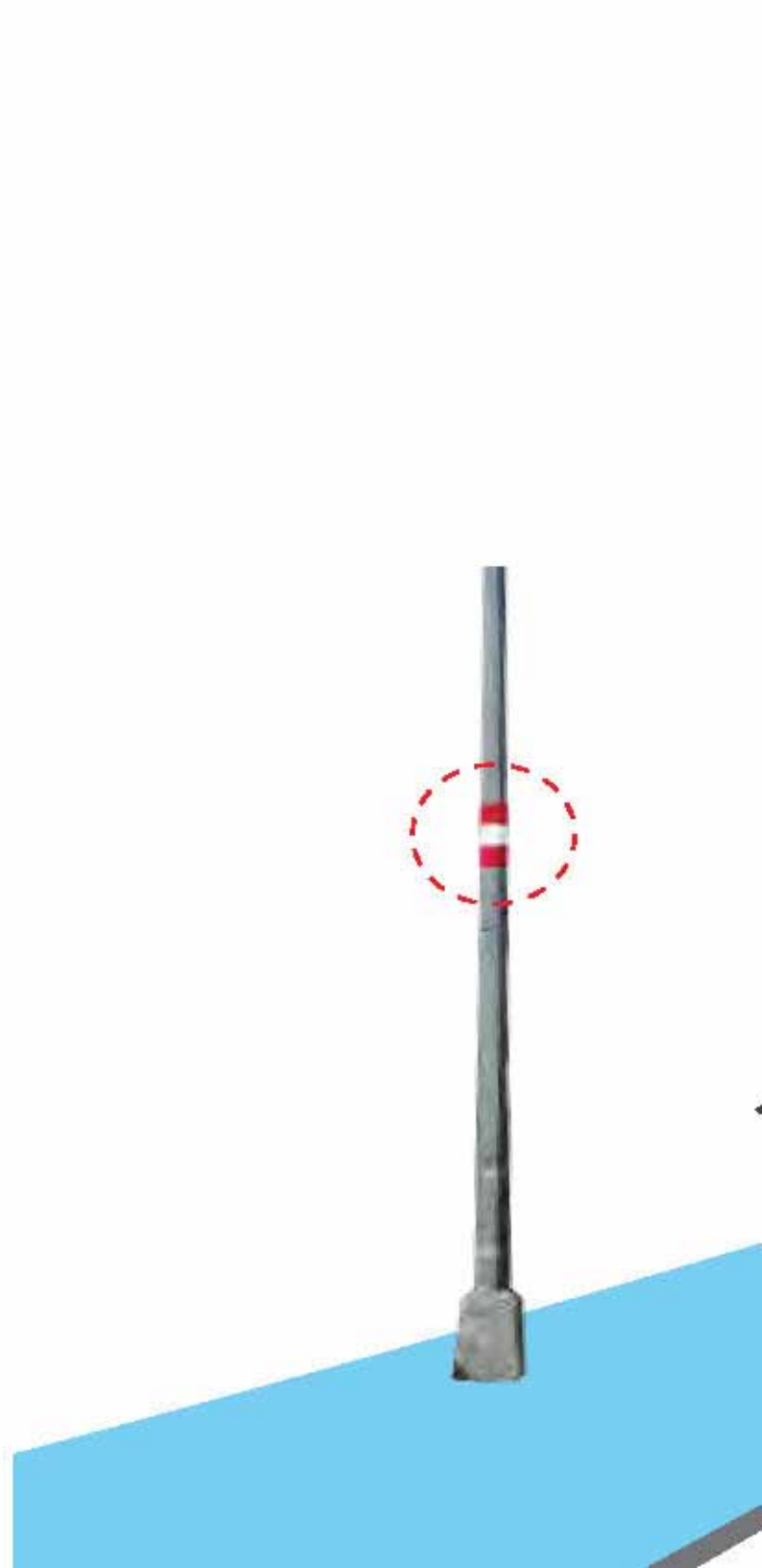
Today, the still lowland of Ravenswood is peppered with the small businesses that live off the even smaller ones, and, thus, recharge the neighborhood and in turn the city, like herring running out from the old Sunswick into the larger harbor, and then the Atlantic. Ravenswood is a place where taxi cab drivers stop—for a new transmission, a paint job, for a four-in-the-morning repair. Likewise, street vendors bring their aluminum carts each night to Sunswick's former source. As the invisible creek bed curls to an end beneath scrap metal yards and parking lots and basement-less building supply companies, a power station transforms voltage for use locally. Hear the quiet hum in sight of the red-and-white smokestacks of Big Allis, standing like trees in a small but well-known forest.

Walking to the path of Sunswick Creek, touring the slightly serpentine course through the neighborhood and ending up at last at the old creek's source, a person wandering the area today might see builders being

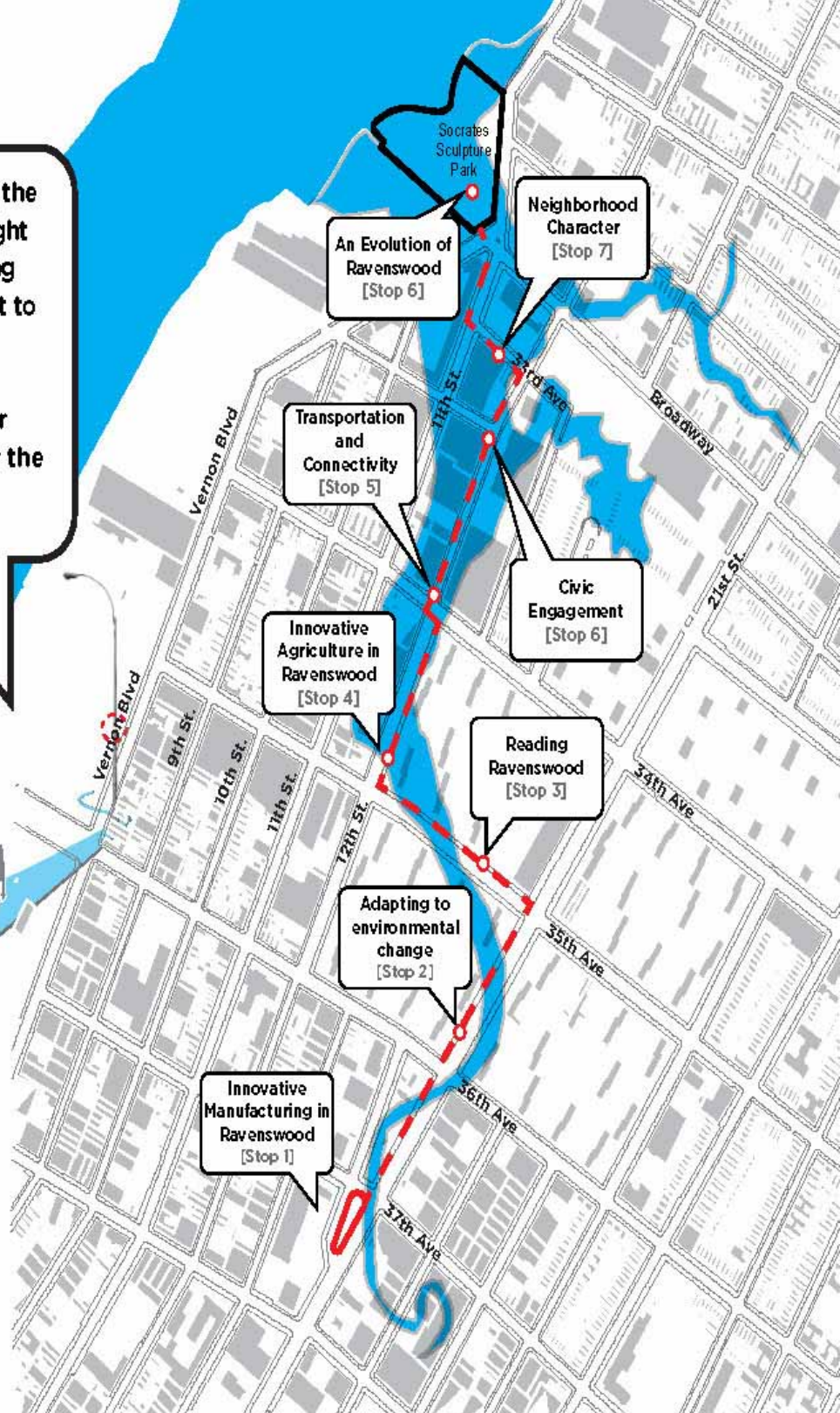
supplied, drivers nodding their heads over recently repaired engines, and, at one point, up on the ridge, two men of Greek heritage, working hard to repair a boat, parked on the edge of an invisible stream.



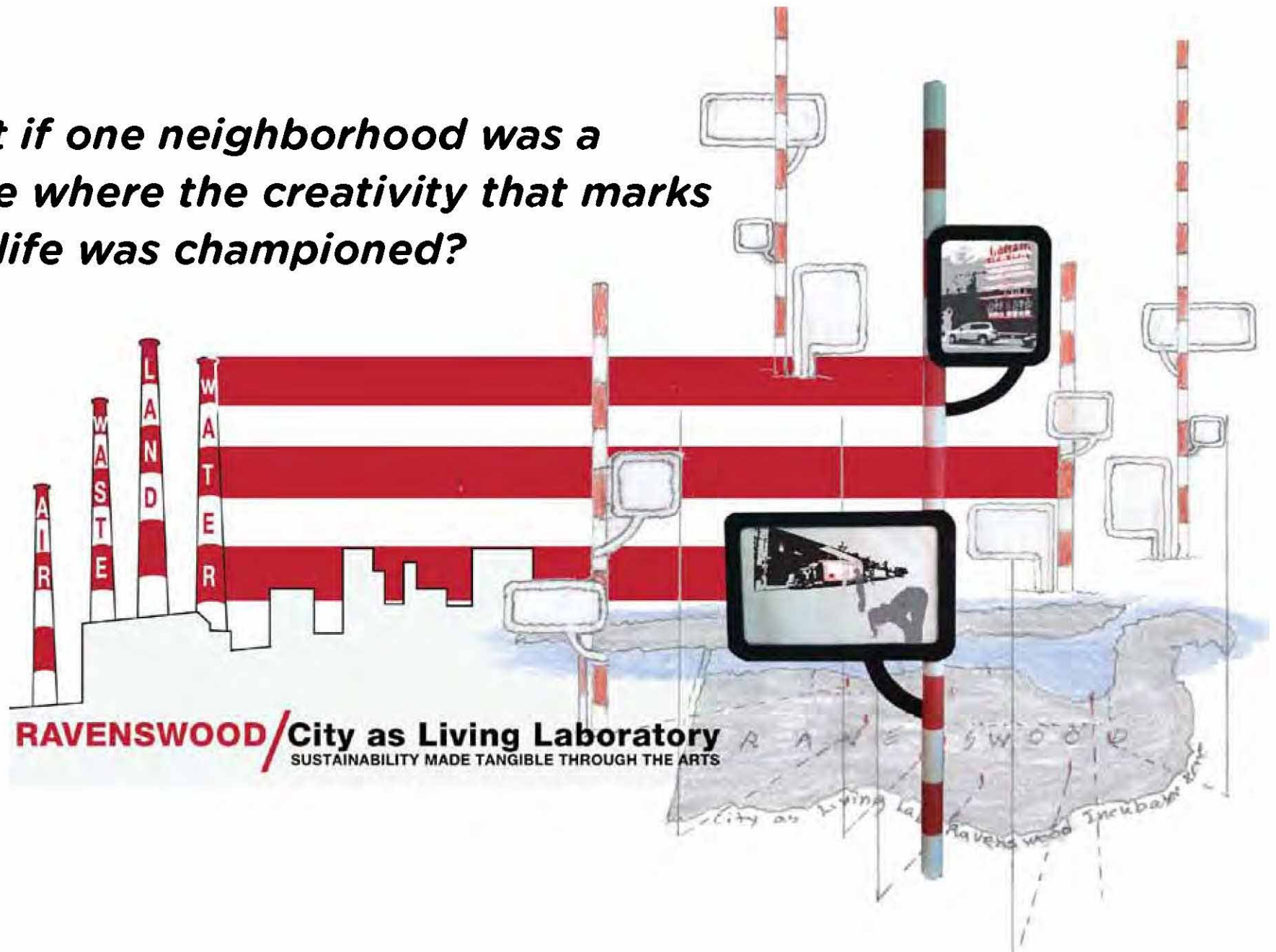
**Take a tour of
Sunswick Creek**



Tour the creek in Ravenswood. Follow the red and white stripe trail markers on light poles through the neighborhood. Along the way you'll find speech bubbles next to the light poles that indicate when you should call in to hear the story of Ravenswood unfold and also leave your comment. Dial 212.457.9029 and enter the designated stop number.



what if one neighborhood was a place where the creativity that marks city life was championed?

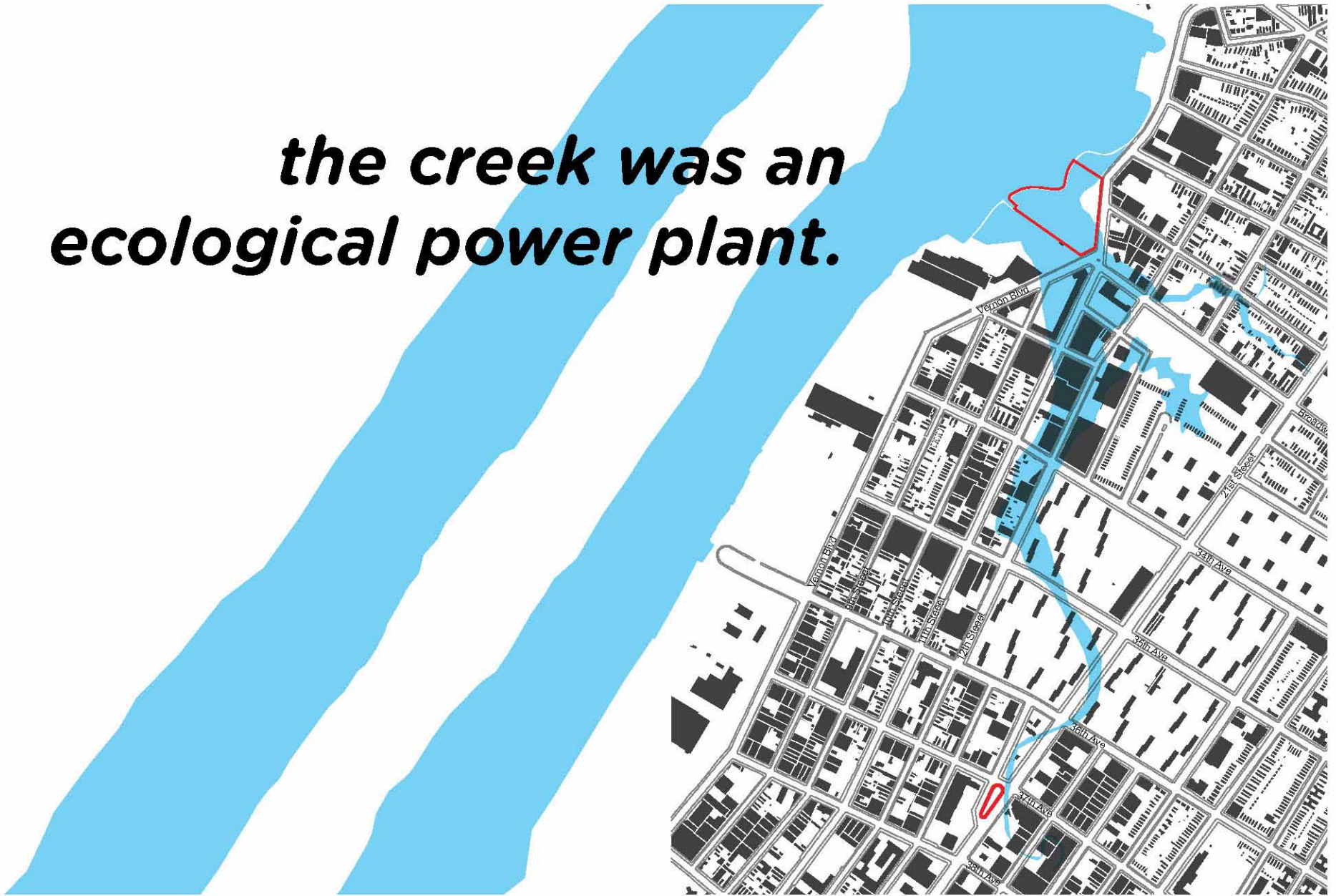


In the park at 37th Avenue and 21st Street, imagine being very near the source of the creek, the place where the creek was, from time to time, out of reach of the tide, a park encircled by 16 oak trees. Use panoramic vision, think wide screen, in order to see bowl of flat land, bounded on the north and east by the ridge along 27th Street, and on the south and west by the East River. Recall that near the oaks a carpet factory was opened, in 1845, by two brothers, Alvin and S.S. Higgins, from Maine, fueled with immigrant workers, running from the Irish famine. Just west on the ridge at 24th Street, Naples-born Franco Scalamandre and Flora Baranzelli, his wife, manufactured silks in their factory for the presidents, starting with John F. Kennedy, until 2004.

Ravenswood has a history of a flourishing and diverse manufacturing center which has helped it to adapt to shifts in the economy. What kinds of innovative manufacturing make sense for the 21st century? How can manufacturers work together to improve their business models, and their relationship to the neighborhood? Press pound to tell us your thoughts.

STOP 1
37th Ave and 21st St.

***the creek was an
ecological power plant.***



Consider the richness of the alluvial soil beneath the roads that are now here around the oaks. Consider what, as a result, would grow. Imagine butterflies and birds in the sedges and reeds that grew where now stands Placella Park, named for Anthony Leo Placella, a Long Island City-born soldier, who died days before the end of the World War I. In the 19th Century, a person could walk beyond the cold stream-tickled source of the Sunswick, via an old footpath, to the English Kills, just south of the bridge to Manhattan. Along the way, a creek traveler could imagine rainwater recharged by the creek side soils, or maybe the production of the nutrients vital to nourishing the New York Harbor's fish—the creek was an ecological power plant.

For a long time, the natural systems of the creek adapted to shifts in the environment. Press pound to tell us what changes you think would help Ravenswood adapt to the changing environment and climate?

STOP 2
21st St. between 36th Ave and 37th Ave.



Imagine standing on what are now the Sanitation Department's garages, and looking north across a mill pond, then south through the marsh grasses and the village of Newtown. See the canning factory that was washed away by economic tides, and as Astoria develops and grows, see the marshy land of Sunswick Creek take its time, the pond receding, the creek slowly disappearing, former marsh being filled in, by garages, small buildings, along the newly laid out streets. When the bridge to an expanding Manhattan opens, in 1909, the marshland in Ravenswood becomes suddenly valuable as real estate. What remains of the creek itself, a watery run along Twenty-first Avenue, is filled in with ash and municipal waste by 1910, as roads are paved, sewer lines laid.

There are many ways that we can read a city's history, through its architecture, its streets or through the plants that grow there. Press pound to describe how you can show the layers of history in your neighborhood?

STOP 3

35th Ave between 12th St. and 21st St.



Just in from the East River, people came to live in the Ravenswood Houses, the public housing in the heart of the little valley of Sunswick Creek: 31 buildings and 40 acres, twice the acreage of the White House. In 1951, when the complex was created, it was Italian- and Jewish Americans who migrated in, and, slowly, more and more African-American residents. A couple moving in in 1951 paid \$38 a month in rent, went roller skating at the gymnasium at the Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood settlement house, and ate dinner with neighbors, white and black. Said Frances Smith, a resident at the time: “We visited one another, we were each other’s godparents. We would sit outside on the benches for hours and could leave our doors wide open.” Drugs moved in in the 1970s, but people stayed. At a recent fair at the settlement house, there was soul food, as well as foods from Mexico and Bangladesh. The settlement house is like the rich soil of the old creek: safe ground for older growth, a place to encourage new plantings, a future-for-the city niche, cultivated locally.

Innovative agriculture is a part of Ravenswood history. Press pound to tell us in what ways you think food production can help transform open spaces within public complexes?

STOP 4

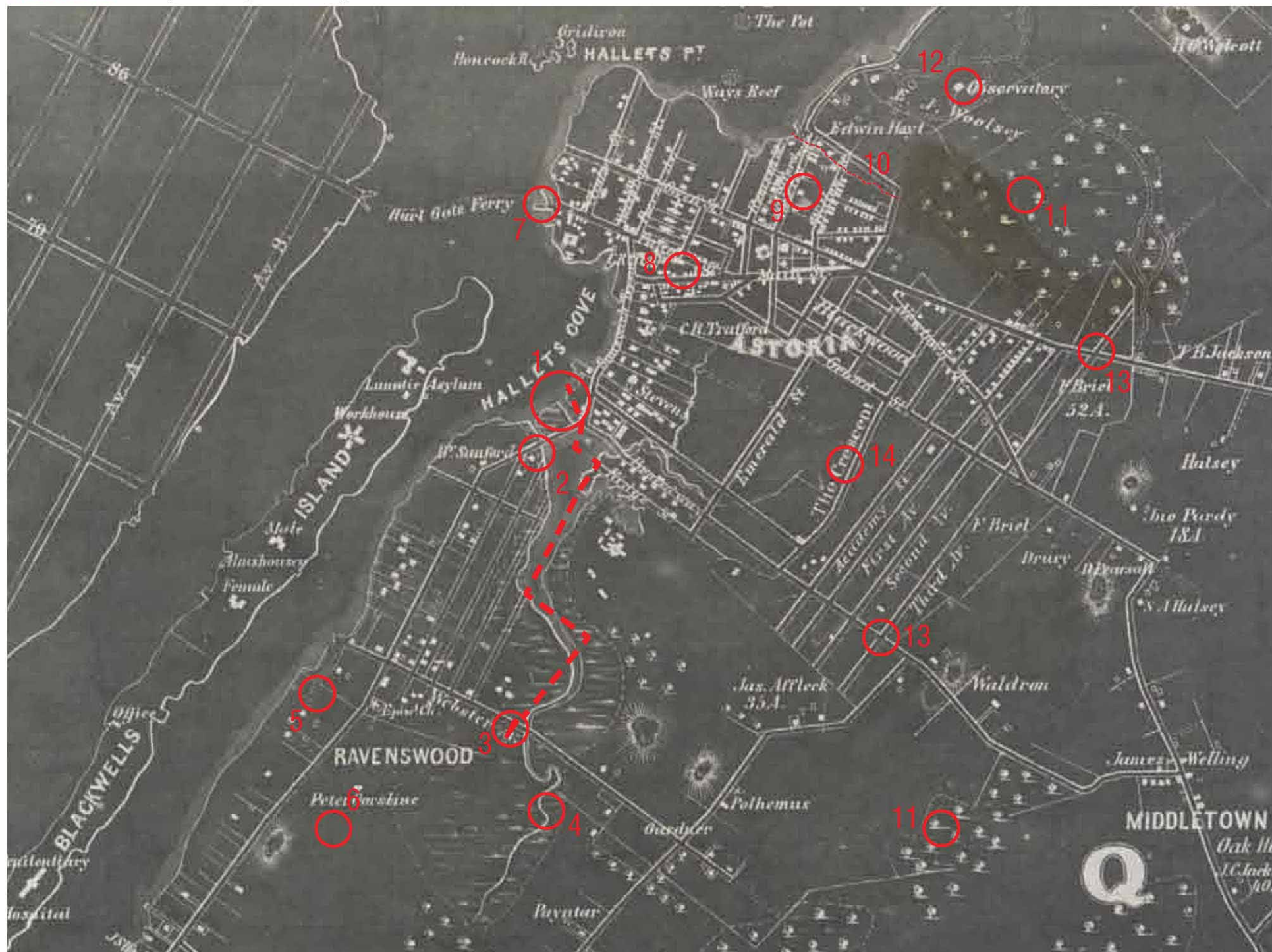
12th St. between 35th Ave and 34th Ave.



Rather than work backwards to when Sunswick Creek was likely free of humans, rather than imagine a time when centuries of glaciers were moving away from the harbor, work forward in your mind, past Leni-Lenapes who are digging for roots and herbs for medicine, as their ancestors had, most likely in the banks of the creek. Think past the colonial ferry to Manhattan that started in 1774, leaving from near the mouth of Sunswick Creek. Think of when Hallet's Cove was the sight of a battlement for the War of 1812. See the suburb's fine houses just prior to the Civil War. The Horticulturalist writes, "Ravenswood is one of the most elegant of the suburbs of New York..." See a munitions factory explode, in 1853, the death of dozens of workers—immigrant children, Irish living in Astoria. See the mansions slowly close up, some converted into to summer hotels, about which the Newtown Register says: "Such is change, such is life." See boat clubs near Hallet's Cover open near the turn of the Nineteenth century, then by the 1940s begin to close and, very recently, open again.

In 1883 the Steinway and Hunters Point Railway ran a ferry from Ravenswood to Manhattan. Press pound to tell us what other modes of transportation would benefit or thrive in Ravenswood.

STOP 5
12th St. and 34th Ave.



See larger businesses move away in the 1950s, and small businesses set up in the Sunswick Creek's once marshy interior. See artists set up studios, like Isamu Noguchi, in the early 1960s, near the edge of what once was the old mill pond. Fast forward to 1986, when some artists looked at an illegal dump and saw a beautiful place. Like it or not, a dump is human activity, signs of life, and in 1986, with more artists were moving into a place that was quiet in some ways, though still fertile, active, and busy, the dump that sat on Sunswick Creek's mouth became a park.

Are you a member of a local community group or civic organization? If so, press pound to tell us which ones and what impact you hope to have on your neighborhood.

- 1 Socrates Sculpture Park
- 2 Noguchi Museum
- 3 16 Oaks Park / Placella Park
- 4 Scalamandre silk factory
- 5 Big Allis power plant
- 6 Jacob Riis Settlement House
- 7 Hurl Gate Ferry
- 8 Two Coves Community Garden
- 9 Astoria mansions
- 10 Linden brook
- 11 Orchards
- 12 Observatory
- 13 Subway stop
- 14 Crescent Street



Walk backwards now, upstream, away from the East River, and back up a creek that is invisible, except for its shadows, and it's still-present shape, we see perhaps that the creek was damned, in 1679, to make a mill pond, an idea brought here from Holland. We see the pond, clear at first, then as industry surrounding it increased, a stink. On the edges are fields of flowers, nurseries, graperies, greenhouses, an experimental orchard—all supplying the city markets until the 20th Century. We see Irish laborers, in the wave of immigration that began in the 1840, in a factory on the fields of meadows that ran up to the ridge along today's Crescent Street in Astoria—climb the ridge today! Look down on the lost marshes!

How would you describe the Ravenswood section of Long Island City to someone who has never been here? Press pound to describe the character of Ravenswood as you experience it.

STOP 7

33rd Ave between 11th St. and 12th St.

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