



# CONNECTING THE PARKS IN PAULUS HOOK

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## NON-PROFIT GROUP AIMS FOR MORE OPEN SPACE VIA A WORLD-CLASS PARK

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As a lover of both waterfronts and urban architecture, when I first moved to Jersey City I had the highest of hopes for a neighborhood I only knew at that point by name: Paulus Hook. Imagine my dismay when I took that first trek down Grand to while away a day with a sandwich on the Hudson, only to find nary a park down there at which to do it.

A few years later, when I first heard about a group down in Paulus Hook that was aiming to “connect the parks,” I for some reason imagined they were looking to link the neighborhood to Liberty State Park over the Morris Canal via Peninsula Park. Turns out I was quite off-base.

The aforementioned group, the Jersey City Waterfront Parks Conservancy (JCWPC), is trying to connect Paulus Hook’s open waterfront areas to create one big contiguous park. Some of the target area is already in use as a park, but most of it is not maintained. The JCWPC, which was founded last year, faces a maze of interests in trying to develop the land sitting on the southern border of the neighborhood, but has thus far made great strides, due largely to strong community support. The land, which includes Veteran’s Park, Colgate Park, Peninsula Park, the foot of Washington Street, and two small parcels of land south of Liberty Terrace, is owned in part by the city, part by the state, and part by a consortium of businessmen.

I can picture the hoped-for end result in a sort of mock-spec design in my head. A beautiful park, with open space, benches and plenty of green, nestled on the shining blue waters of the river and the canal ... in short, exactly what I was looking for on that first trip to Paulus Hook.

Matt Johnson is the JCWPC’s president and a four-year resident of Jersey City. He recently took some time to tell me about the group’s progress and challenges.



**Tell me about the conservancy's origin. I know it's relatively new, but how did it come about?** A core group has worked on this effort since early 2007, but the concept of creating the JCWPC was the result of input from a number of people in the Jersey City community. Last summer we organized a community awareness event to gauge community support for the development of a waterfront park. The response was tremendous. We collected over 600 signatures to demonstrate the support behind our efforts. After such a clear display of support we took steps to formalize our efforts. We incorporated in November and soon after filed for non-profit status. We recently received word that we were granted this status.

**Who needs to do what in order to make the dream of the group a reality? What kind of progress has been made towards this end thus far?** The JCWPC will serve as the coordinator and facilitator for the development of this waterfront park, but the park itself will be made up of land owned and controlled by city, state and private entities. As such we will need to work in a collaborative fashion bringing the interests of the community forward and working with these entities to develop the design. As an organization we are neutral with respect to the design. We want the input of the community to drive

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the creation of the conceptual master plan and from this master plan we will work with the various entities to compile a final design. Once we have a design in place and construction estimates we will be able to pursue funding the project via federal, state and private channels. To date we have received design proposals from a number of world class landscape architects and engineering firms. We have completed the first phase of our selection process and narrowed the field to five firms. We will be meeting with these firms over the coming months to narrow the field further. In parallel, we have been raising funds to pay for the conceptual master plan design. We have been very fortunate to have received tremendous support from the community as well as support from local businesses. Businesses like the Light Horse Tavern have stepped up and demonstrated their commitment to Jersey City through their generous contributions to our efforts. Without their support we would not be where we are today. This being said we still have some distance to go and we hope that other firms will follow the Light Horse Tavern's lead and help us achieve our goal of developing this wonderful park.

***Does the conservancy think this is the most pressing parks-related issue in the downtown area, and why?*** Absolutely! The protection and development of this land is critical to Jersey City! Currently it's unprotected and eroding at a rapid pace. If not addressed soon, some elements of it may not be here for future generations. With the exception of the peninsula area, the disparate parcels of land are not being maintained to any degree. They are ridden with trash, construction debris and are very unsafe for children. This land could be a tremendous jewel for our city and in its current state it looks more like a dump. Jersey City residents deserve more than this.

***What else should our readers know about the JCWPC?*** The ultimate success of developing this park land will depend largely on the support of the residents of Jersey City, so let your local city officials know you support this initiative and that they should too. We'll also be hosting several events to raise awareness and funds for this program so keep an eye out for up and coming Connect the Parks events.