

# A New Bronx Tale: Gateway Center and Modern Urban Redevelopment

by

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Photographs by the author unless otherwise noted

## Introduction

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1945, West Haven, a small manufacturing district in the Morrisania section of the Bronx, New York hummed as one of this city's bustling industrial centers. After WWII, West Haven boundaries were marked by the Bronx Men's House of Detention and Yankee Stadium at its north edge, industrial and commuter railroad yards at its eastern and southern rims, and the Major Deegan Expressway and Harlem River at its western edge. And by the mid-1950s this once thriving industrial center formed the western edge of one of the poorest sections of New York City; a section that would languish in blighted obscurity for almost 60 years.

Promoting West Haven as a rehabilitation project held little interest for city planners until 2006 when a major redevelopment initiative, led by the development company, Related Companies, and the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, supported by private investment, public dollars and a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), forged a public/private partnership to meet the challenges of site placement, environmental deterioration and social stigma to revive the markets selling Caribbean and African foods housed in shabby buildings on the water's edge of West Haven. Today, this project - Gateway Center at the Bronx Terminal Market (Gateway) - defines a glistening entrance to the South Bronx at its western shore, across the revamped 145<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge and renovated Major Deegan Expressway.

The odyssey of this community from industrial hub to blighted core to renaissance retail center is today's Bronx Tale of contemporary urban development driven by entrepreneurial enlightened self-interest combined with the City's commitment

to rebuild the much maligned South Bronx, the community of my childhood, by applying sustainable construction principles to create an ecologically successful land use model for integrated retail infrastructure and open space.

## Community History: The Past Links to the Present

West Haven's 19<sup>th</sup> century infrastructure of factories, stores, train lines, brick houses and public buildings reflected



Figure 1. West Haven, The Bronx, New York, 1893. Showing River and Gerard Avenues prior to the landfill completion, the construction of Exterior Street. There is no definition of Exterior Street or Cromwell Avenue. Lots shaded in yellow are industrial buildings (Source: Bromley, G.W. and Bromley W.S. 1893).

working- and middle-class German immigrant values through the richness of industry, networked transportation, presence of civil authority, and diversity of recreation. This early industrial area remained partially submerged beneath the Harlem River at its western edge, as shown in a partial district ward map drawn in 1893 (Figure 1), until the completion of the 149<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge in 1910, which necessitated the Cromwell Creek landfill project at the West Haven shoreline. By 1916, the landfill project was completed, joining the Manhattan Valley to the Bronx at the 149<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge (Figure 2). This landfill also defined the articulation of Exterior Street (renamed Gateway Center Boulevard in 2009), River Avenue and Cromwell Avenue, the original access roads within the old Bronx Terminal Market (Figure 3). Later, the bridge was renamed the 145<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge after the relocation of its Manhattan-side on-ramp, on the street that had become one of upper Manhattan's major access routes.

The bridge construction and landfill increased West Haven's land area, and

triggered the industrial development that stimulated economic growth in the surrounding communities of Mott Haven, the Morrisania Hub - the intersection of East 149<sup>th</sup> Street, Third Avenue and Westchester Avenue and the Macombs Dam and Mill north of West Haven. In 1926, another landfill project increased the land area south of East 149<sup>th</sup> Street and enabled the expansion of the Lehigh Valley Railroad Bronx Terminal around the bridge and along the shoreline.

The density of early industrial lot distribution appears in Figure 1, shown by the cluster of factories and warehouses, shaded in yellow, located east of Gerard Avenue, along Walton Avenue and along East 146<sup>th</sup> and East 149<sup>th</sup> Streets. This manufacturing presence, which extended beyond the boundaries of today's redeveloped project, included the Panorama Studios at East 149<sup>th</sup> Street and Gerard Avenue, the Mannello Mandolin Factory, the Krakauer & Kroeger and Estey Piano Companies; the Pillsbury Flour Mill Company at East 149<sup>th</sup> and Exterior Streets; and the Janes and Kirtland Iron Works.

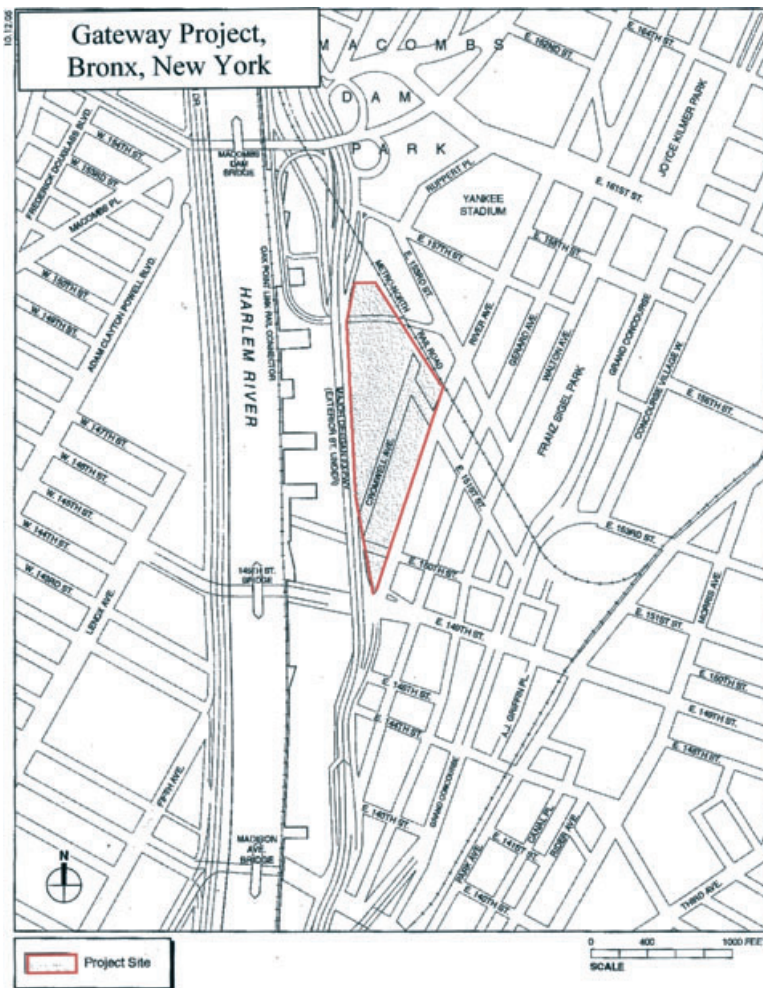
This iron works cast the framework for the first United States Capitol dome. Also included were the Ebling and Hupfel Breweries and the Piccirilli Brothers Monument Sculptors (operated from 1893 to 1945) whose sculpture gallery produced the famous "Library Lions" perched at the main entrance to the New York Public Library at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue, the pediment of the New York Stock Exchange building and the socially controversial statue "The Triumph of Civic Virtue" created in 1919 and relocated in 1941 from its prominent display in front of City Hall to obscurity in the borough of Queens (Figure 4).

Social life in early West Haven grew from establishments such as the Jacob Ruppert Beer Hall and Tavern in the nearby Morrisania Hub, open green spaces such as Cedar (today, Franz Sigel) Park and entertainment venues such as the Bronx Opera House, a popular vaudeville theater that still stands, albeit in faded condition (Figures 5, 6).

The economic and social organization produced by the industries, artist work-



Figure 2. Upper Manhattan and the South Bronx, New York in 1916. West Haven and environs (red box) sit along the Harlem River facing the Manhattan Valley. The landfill has been completed with pier definitions (Source: University of Texas, Perry Castañeda Map Collection).



**Figure 3.** Project location for the Gateway Center at Bronx Terminal Market. Building D is at East 149<sup>th</sup> Street where River Avenue merges into Exterior Street (renamed Gateway Center Boulevard in 2009). (Used by permission, AKRF, Inc.).



**Figure 4.** "Triumph of Civic Virtue" carved in West Haven at the Piccirilli Brothers Monument Works sparked feminist protest at its unveiling in 1922 because it represented the tale of virtue overcoming vice using iconography that defined virtue as male and vice as female. (Used by permission, <http://www.thatsmrguy.files.wordpress.com>).



**Figure 5.** No. 614 Courtlandt Avenue (built 1871–1872), a three-storied townhouse located nine blocks east of Gateway, was built by brewing magnate Julius Ruppert as a local tavern and social hall. Its distinct architecture including mansard roof, shown deteriorating in 2007 (left) was restored and today (right) it provides housing and commercial space.

shops and entertainment venues centered the early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial and social life of The Bronx within West Haven. This neighborhood's rural roads and paths yielded to factories, stores, private homes and apartments, creating lines on the land that combined urban street patterns with industrial, residential and institutional structures. The early concentration of industry in West Haven echoed the larger industrial presence in Queens, making West Haven "Long Island City's spiritual descendant" as described in Robert Caro's biography of the City's controversial city planner, Robert Moses (Caro: 396).

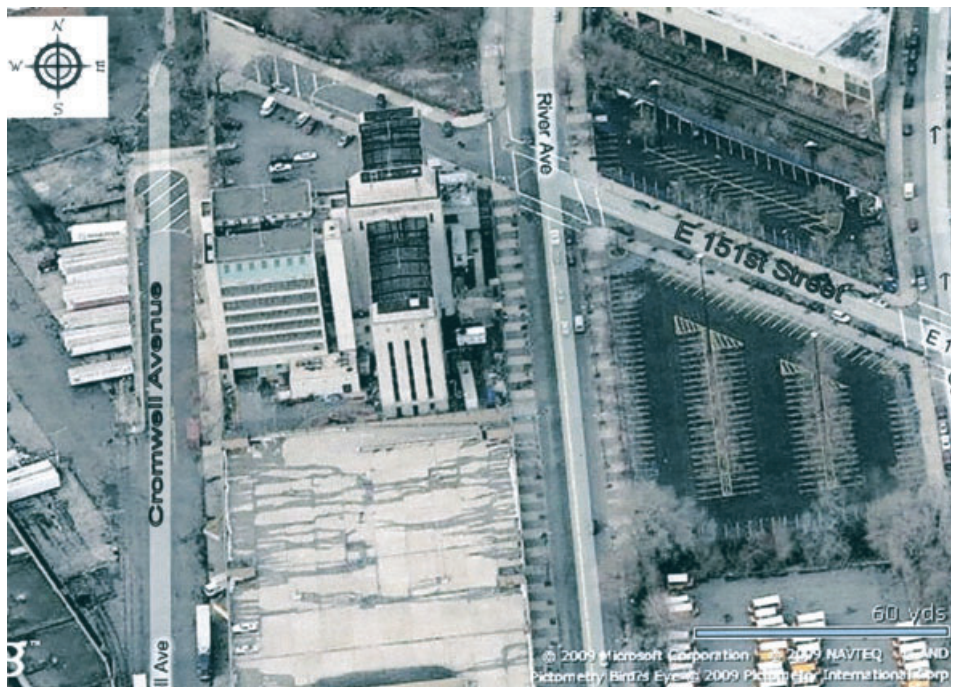
But the community's social atmosphere and commercial vitality failed to brighten its generally drab appearance. With few exceptions, West Haven's streets were dominated by unattractive and minimally adorned industrial buildings. One of these exceptions was the Bronx Men's House of Detention (BMHOD), built in 1938 and located on East 150<sup>th</sup> Street and River Avenue. This prison's location reflected contemporaneous social strategy that placed undesirable but necessary urban institutions along low-lying remote areas of emerging cities. The building's exterior design symbolized Depression Era austerity, with adornment confined to doorways and statuary on its façades. BMHOD was closed in 1963, reopening as needed until its final demolition in 2007 (Figure 7). Despite its sleek Art Moderne architecture and decorative elements, the presence of this penal institution added to the area's blighted atmosphere during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ironically, parts of BMHOD's exterior have been recycled into Gateway's exterior structure. The presence of a penal institution, buildings abandoned by departed industry and socio-economic decline presaged the blight that would plague West Haven into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even after the opening of Gateway, a recycling plant sits just south of the 145<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge, a meagerly camouflaged reminder of the low status that the City still assigns to this neighborhood.

**Project Beginnings: A Gateway to the New South Bronx**

The New York City Council, motivated by the goal of rebuilding social and economic value in West Haven and beyond to Morrisania, the Hub and Mott Haven, unanimously agreed to support the redevelopment of the former Bronx Terminal Market. The multiple construc-



*Figure 6. The Bronx Opera House (436 East 149th Street), opened in August, 1913, designed by George Keister and located a few blocks east of the Julius Ruppert Tavern. The elaborate Beaux-Arts façade contrasts sharply to the Art Moderne simplicity of original structures at Gateway and its contemporary buildings.*



*Figure 7. The Gateway Project site in 2007 during the demolition of the Bronx Men's House of Detention. The Art Moderne style of the building dominated the area making it one of West Haven's few architectural resources. Cromwell Avenue, created after the early 20<sup>th</sup> century landfill, was eliminated from the Gateway site street plan. (Used by permission, <http://www.Loopnet.com>).*

tion phases of the project, described in the City's Final Environmental Impact Statement, rebuilt commercial infrastructure,

upgraded transportation networks and increased the efficiency of movement of people and goods around the project site

and through adjacent neighborhoods. Unlike similar redevelopment projects at urban shorelines, Gateway's site was redeveloped from a condition of decades-old blight, economic abandonment and social stigma.

*The Rebuilding Process: Project Scope and Community Acceptance*

The administrative and construction processes used to build Gateway – land rezoning and transfer, street closings, road rebuilding, building demolition, infrastructure renovation and new building construction – were subject to City approval via a process well known in New York as the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). Early regional patterns of transportation around the Gateway project area remained operational, despite the physical and economic deterioration experienced by this community since the end of WWII. This included the necklace of City subways alongside interstate commuter and commercial rails and roads that also transect the South Bronx (Figure 8).

With ULURP approval of the redevelopment by both the Community Board and the City in place, Gateway developers redesigned the land use profile along the Harlem River in West Haven, eliminating Cromwell Avenue, which bisected the project site. This produced a renewed and upgraded infrastructure, traffic pattern and transportation network, which surrounds Gateway today (Figure 9). As part of the transportation upgrade, the link between the CSX freight lines in West Haven and the Oak Point Rail Yard was re-established. This reconnection to New York City's largest classification yard located along the southeast Bronx shore, has partially restored West Haven's status as a major urban freight intermodal transport corridor in 2009.

Gateway opened in 2009 with over 950,000 gross square feet of retail space and more than 2,800 spaces for parking, not including the space to be added by a 250 room hotel whose completion is expected by 2014. Gateway's construction plan included the demolition of three commercial buildings and the BMHOD, the creation of shorefront parks, recreation areas, an esplanade, and the upgrade of transportation infrastructure including a new train station and a pedestrian bridge for the Metro-North suburban rail line (Figures 10, 11). This new train station at East 153<sup>rd</sup> Street provides additional pub-

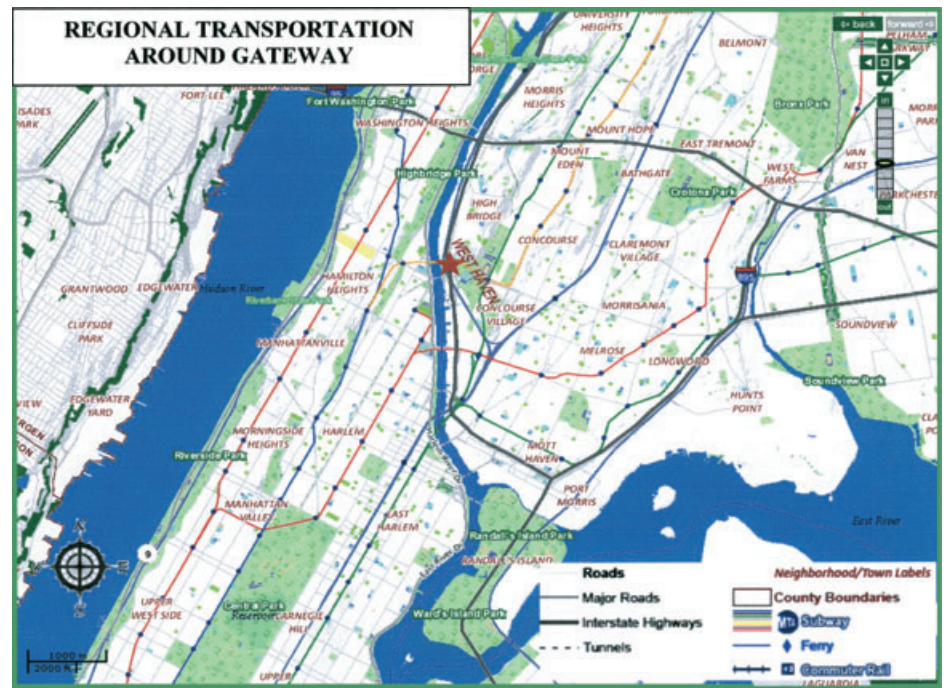


Figure 8. Regional transportation routed around Gateway. Major commuter and freight rail lines and highways that cross the South Bronx, Manhattan and Western New Jersey at the Hudson River surround the Gateway Project site. Map prepared by the author, using the Open Accessible Space Information System (OASIS).

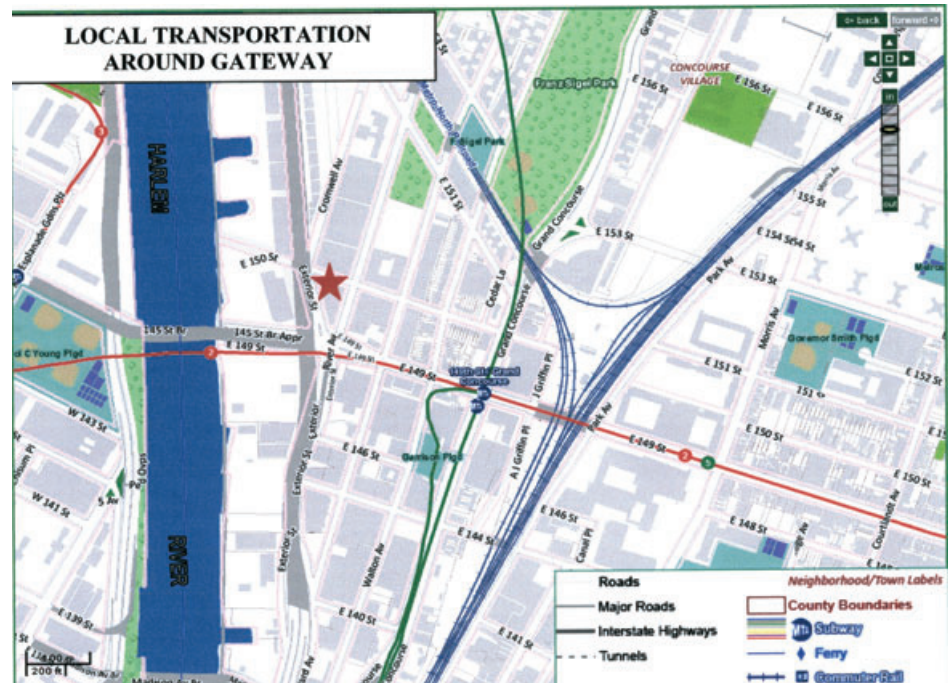


Figure 9. Local transportation routes around Gateway. Major commuter rail lines and City subway routes (The Bronx and Upper Manhattan) are positioned around the Gateway Project site providing easy access via public transportation. The Major Deegan Expressway lies along Exterior Street, east of Gateway (Map by the author).

lic transportation access to Yankee Stadium and reduces car volume during peak use game times. The original Yankee Stadium was demolished and reconstructed as a Gateway background project

next to the new transportation and pedestrian access infrastructures resulting in added revenue from the new parking spaces adjacent to the "House That Ruth Built."

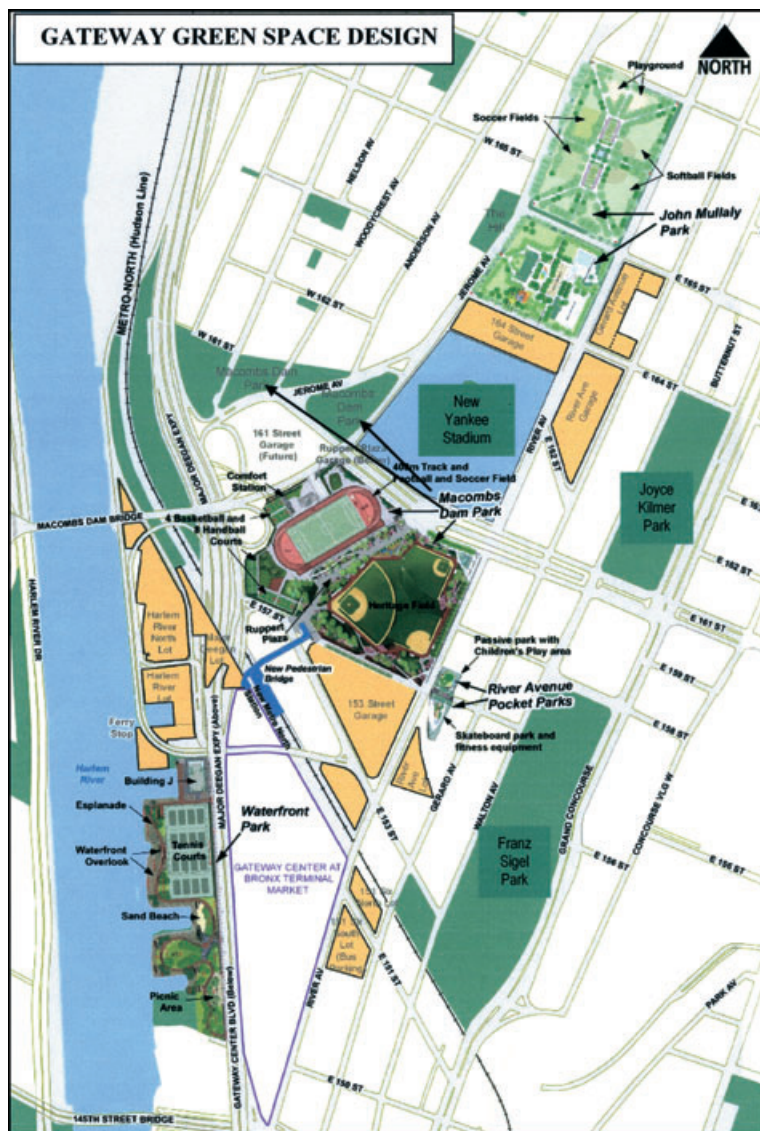


Figure 10. Gateway and adjacent open space projects including the New Yankee Stadium. Parks, and landscaped recreation areas are visible alongside increased parking space and the new commuter rail stop and pedestrian bridge at 153<sup>rd</sup> Street (blue shaded area). Note: this map is not drawn to scale (Used by permission, Yankee Stadium Park Redevelopment Program).

This redevelopment – initiated by Related Companies’ purchase of the site – did not proceed successfully to deadline without expressions of community concern. In one of the more controversial actions taken by the City to complete this project, Gateway was declared a ‘General Large Scale District’ in order to permit rezoning for greater parking capacity to accommodate the projected increases in local traffic. To abate the adverse affects created by this civil easement, public/private partnership projects were created to develop open spaces along the waterfront at Gateway’s western edge.

Relocation of vendors from the project site raised questions of social equity, even in this area so overwhelmingly affected by

urban blight. Commercial tenants received relocation assistance from the Economic Development Corporation, clearing 65,000 square feet of space by 2006. While the cleared project area had no residential units, community concerns focused on the possibility that the growth of Gateway’s upgraded retail properties might trigger prohibitive increases in surrounding neighborhoods’ residential rents and property values, as those neighborhoods become more desirable. Gateway’s isolation from adjacent communities and current laws that strictly regulate market-driven housing cost increases militate against residential displacement in its adjacent communities (Figure 12). And, according to municipal economic analyses,

the impact of redevelopment in West Haven upon the continuing economic viability of nearby commercial areas such as Third Avenue is expected to be minimal.

Community members also expressed concerns regarding their perceived exclusion from the planning process by redevelopers and City officials. In 2006, following discussions involving all concerned community members including local Bronx agencies, clergy, politicians and private citizens who channeled their concerns through Bronx Overall EDC, a consensus was reached endorsing the redevelopment of West Haven. And, a comprehensive CBA was adopted by the developer, Related Companies and the Bronx Overall EDC, the community representative. This agreement outlined the project planning process for inclusive hiring at the site to give economic opportunity to local residents during all phases of construction and afterward.

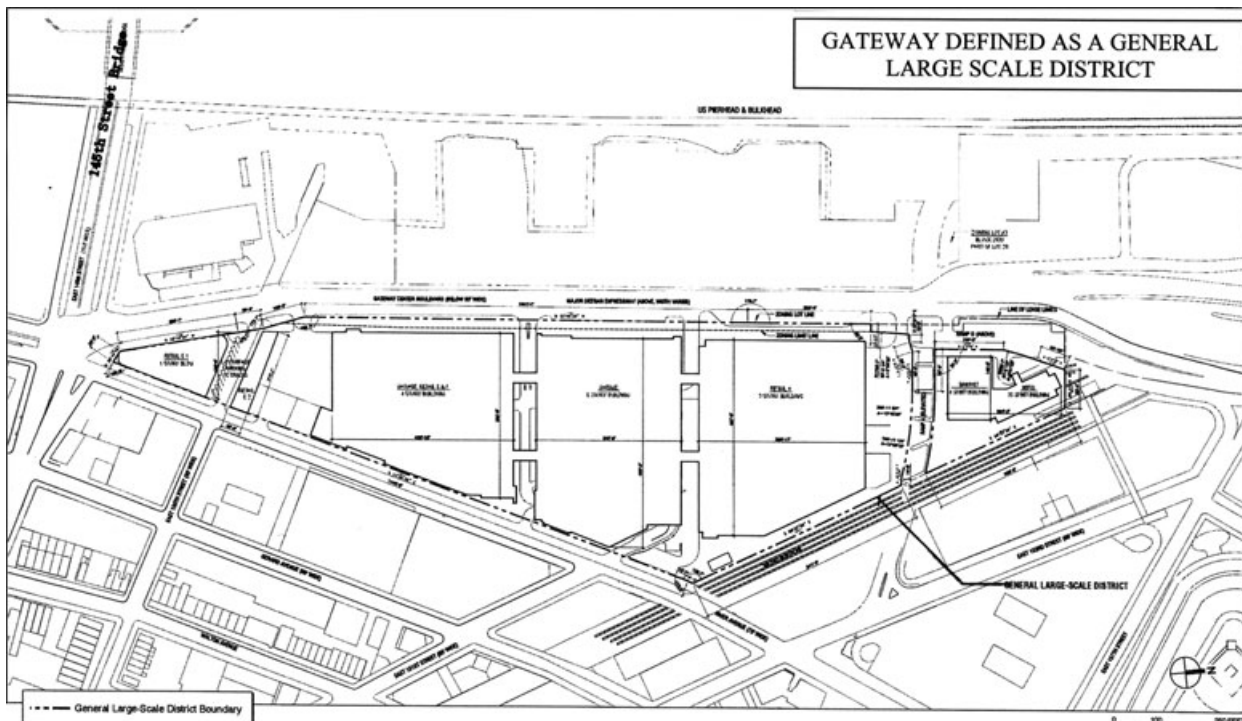
#### *Using Modern Design and Process to Preserve Older Neighborhood Character*

Gateway represents a contemporary design model for space planning, relocation, land use and environmental upgrade within the urban setting. Today’s retail presence at Gateway contrasts sharply with the historic merchant city model depicted by geographer Mona Domosh who described a primitive urban mercantile model, characterized by “conflicting elitist interests” that eventually translated into a pattern of widely distributed, mixed-use zoned districts and borough-wide commercial building placement that defined New York as America’s 19<sup>th</sup> century economic center (Domosh: 272-275). Later the same zoning features that were so appealing to early 20<sup>th</sup> century developers precipitated the decline of many of New York City’s older neighborhoods. In contrast to the older mercantile city model, Gateway’s placement and its contemporary design reflect a retail construction plan that centers big box stores at urban neighborhood edges to draw shoppers, stimulate economic growth in adjacent communities through employment opportunities, and provide retail space for local merchants and entrepreneurs.

Contemporary administrative policies and infrastructure resources shaped land use, development and construction at Gateway. Modern approaches used to coordinate the construction process with civil policy included several elements. The



*Figure 11. Early construction at Gateway, September 21, 2007. The original Yankee Stadium (rear left) is still standing and the Bronx Men's House of Detention has been completely demolished. The elevated blue roadway is the Major Deegan Expressway adjacent to Gateway. Today the parking lot pictured in the foreground is used for outdoor events.*



*Figure 12. The boundary lines of the Gateway Project General Large Scale District. This designation permitted building of major parking spaces to accommodate increased commercial and recreation-related traffic into the area. (Used by permission, AKRE, Inc.).*



**Figure 13:** Mill Pond Park, looking northeast across Exterior Street (renamed Gateway Center Boulevard in 2009) and the elevated Major Deegan Expressway at Gateway. The large white bubble covers tennis courts. This park was built on the original 1900 landfill used for rail freight yards.

first element was the integration of green building design with public/private partnerships in order to select sites and create open spaces (Figures 13, 14). Next, was the employment of contemporary water management methods that involved the use of permits issued under the State Pollution Discharge Elimination System. This was done to control storm water runoff during construction at Gateway along with follow-up review management by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Finally, the plan called for the employment of inter-government land transfer rather than the arbitrary land seizure and compensation process of eminent domain. In addition, the hotel scheduled for completion by 2014 will require no additional re-zoning action because the zoning waivers required at Gateway also apply to construction at the hotel. This effective integration of policy administration with resource use has the potential to ensure the project's future success as a local and city-wide commercial and recreational venue. Gateway is also the second largest

project in the Northeast U.S. to receive Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver certification. Its commitment to conservation even includes ATMs that do not generate paper receipts.

While most buildings original to the project site symbolized urban industrial history, they lacked the aesthetic appeal required to qualify them for redevelopment. Therefore, in order to salvage and restore the few significant examples of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century architecture, timely intervention was imperative. Originally, the BMHOD and the front-facing New York Produce building (Building D) were scheduled for total demolition. This would have depleted the site of most of its historic architectural resources. This plan was modified to recycle decorative elements from the BMHOD and to preserve Building D with its Art Moderne design. The Power House Building, the last remaining architectural resource at Gateway, delivered power to the area's mills and refrigeration warehouses (Figures 15, 16, 17). Its historic design was restored

and converted to office space with sustainable building features added to its original design.

#### *Project Amenities and Environmental Impact*

Land use at Gateway was designed to convert the site's use from urban industrial to retail integrated with parking, public transportation, recreation and open space access that simultaneously builds community capacity and sustains adjacent ecology.

Initially, public waterfront space totaling two acres was developed along the shoreline parallel to Gateway Center Boulevard to accommodate the expected 6,500 daytime visitors and employees at Gateway. Eventually, open space at the site was expanded to nearly 12 acres along Gateway's western shore. This expansion exceeded acceptable passive open space ratio requirements for workers and residents, enabling Gateway to responsibly accommodate long-term and short term future growth as permanent retail and



*Figure 14. Mill Pond Park looking southwest across the Harlem River to Manhattan. The 145<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge can be seen in the background. The CSX/Oak Point Link tracks run parallel to the park, along the shore.*



*Figure 15. The Power House Building in Mill Pond Park with surrounding landscaped green space, located west of Gateway along Gateway Center Boulevard. Originally built as a food refrigeration warehouse, it now houses space for offices and public events.*

temporary entertainment venues are sited at this project.

Gateway's impact on local ecology has been minimal. Infrastructure and open spaces at the project site are positioned to avoid shadows from the Major Deegan Expressway overhang. Highway shadows cover paved areas and avoid vegetation. Given the limited types of wildlife at the site (urban rodents, pigeons and other birds indigenous to the wider city), Gateway's construction is not expected to harm this wildlife or the natural lands adjacent to this project. The adjacent tidal wetland disturbance that occurred during construction added landscaped open space that supports local wildlife and ecology.

#### *Adjacent Projects and Future Development*

In 2006, before the start of Gateway's construction, the adjacent 145<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge, a rim-bearing (steel central girder with ball-bearing movement) swing bridge with stone masonry bridge piers and



**Figure 16.** Recycling Structure: the Bronx Men's House of Detention. The original visitor's entrance doorway with its sentinel eagle (Top Left) photographed by David S. Alea. The doorway has been recycled at Gateway. Today, the door (Top, Right) covers one of Gateway's power panels. The eagle and doorway (below) provide outdoor seating.



**Figure 17.** Building D looking north along River Avenue. The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Art Moderne façade was successfully restored and the structure was integrated with contemporary architecture of Gateway to its rear (Above). Modern fixtures attached to the front of Building D (metal awning and camera) continue the integration of old and new design styles (Below).

electricity-powered movement, was reconstructed (Figure 18). Begun in 1895 and completed in 1910 as part of the project to create a navigable waterway to connect the East, Harlem and Hudson Rivers and the neighborhood of Harlem with industries in the South Bronx, this latest reconstruction replaced the entire swing bridge and included a seismic retrofit. Besides the bridge refurbishment, sections of the Major Deegan Expressway were rebuilt including the narrowing of road shoulders and the additions of a new access ramp, traffic islands, signals and signage adjacent to Gateway. Now, car, truck and pedestrian traffic flows with greater safety from the bridge and the Deegan to streets adjacent to Gateway (Figure 19). And, as a result of these street and road improvements, increased foot traffic is expected at Gateway from event attendees at nearby Yankee Stadium.



Present estimates are for an increase by 6,715 person trips for non-Yankee Stadium game days (peak); for Saturday

**Figure 18.** The 145<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge, looking west toward Manhattan with its recently installed replacement center swing span. Original stone work and bridge posts have been preserved. The north fence of the Bronx Recycling Center is visible (left) adjacent to the bridge.



*Figure 19. River Avenue and Gateway Center Boulevard merge at the foot of the 145<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge (Left) with new pedestrian crossing islands, sidewalk curb cuts and signage designed to control the flow of traffic and facilitate pedestrian movement along streets adjacent to Gateway. A new exit ramp from the Major Deegan Expressway (Right) controls the flow of trucks along roadways leading to Gateway.*



*Figure 20. The Gateway Project surrounded by the Major Deegan Expressway (center), the E. 153<sup>rd</sup> Street road extension and adjacent to Metro North train lines (far left). Retail buildings at Gateway are linked by pedestrian bridges, to permit building access unimpeded by auto traffic. Parks and open space line Gateway's shore and green roof technology used at the Power House Building (Far Left) is visible (Used by permission, New York City Dept. of Parks and Recreation).*

events, an increase of 7,380 person trips (mid-day pre-game peak); and an increase of 5,631 person trips (afternoon post-game

peak). This non-game traffic increase projected for 2014 and later, is not expected to adversely affect traffic flow around West

Haven, largely because it will concentrate at Gateway's remote shorefront location (Figure 20).

## Conclusions: Lessons Learned from a New Bronx Tale

For over 50 years the rehabilitation of West Haven and its adjacent communities was stalled by perceptions that this community was economically, architecturally and socially unsalvageable. The use of strategic cooperative development expanded local economic capacity within one of New York City's most blighted areas. After concerns over local community inclusion and equity in the planning process were aired, a CBA was executed that outlined the operational transparency and accountability needed to guarantee this project's success. Today, Gateway generates revenue within an environment of general community support and ecological sustainability - affirming New York City's commitment to rebuild its much maligned older core.

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