

Olmsted Medal Nominations
c/o Honors and Awards
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: Nomination of The Gowanus Canal Conservancy for The Olmsted Medal

Dear ASLA Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

The Gowanus Canal Conservancy is most deserving of your consideration for the Olmsted Medal. Through their programs and initiatives, the Gowanus Canal Conservancy has fostered a community driven focus on environmental awareness, education and stewardship in central Brooklyn and beyond. They are an inspiration for neighborhood residents, schools and students, landscape architects and city agencies. They are a model for grass roots organizations that are making a huge impact for communities and the environment and inspiring youth to be ecological leaders.

Background

The Gowanus Canal is a 100-foot wide, 1.8-mile-long canal located in Brooklyn, New York City. The neighborhood was once a system of tidal creeks winding through a salt marsh and fed by freshwater streams. These creeks were dammed to build tidal mills, and then dredged and channelized into a one of the busiest waterways in America, bringing goods into the growing city. By the time the Gowanus Canal was complete in 1869, its banks were home to a number of industries, including manufactured gas plants, foundries, coal yards, and ship yards.

The productive industrial history of the Gowanus neighborhood left behind a legacy of industrial contamination in the Canal and on its banks. Today, there are two major forms of pollution in the Gowanus Canal: historic industrial pollution from former industrial and manufacturing activities lining the Canal and ongoing Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) from the three square mile sewershed. The primary legacy contaminant of concern is coal tar, a by-product from manufactured gas plants, but there are numerous other contaminants in the soil and sediment.

In 2010, the Gowanus Canal was designated a Federal Superfund site by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This spurred a \$500 million clean-up process to dredge an average of 10 feet of contaminated sediment from the bottom of the canal, and cap the native sediment below. Shortly after Superfund designation, the Gowanus Canal Community Advisory Group (CAG) was formed and remains the largest U.S. EPA Superfund Community Advisory Group in the nation. The CAG is made up of over 50 representatives from civic, environmental, business, and community organizations, including Gowanus Canal Conservancy, as well as individual members, from around the Gowanus Canal such as Red Hook, Gowanus, Carroll Gardens, Boerum Hill, and Park Slope.

About

Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC) is dedicated to facilitating the development of a resilient, vibrant, open space network centered on the Gowanus Canal through activating and empowering community stewardship of the Gowanus Watershed. Since 2006, they have served as the environmental steward for the neighborhood through leading grassroots volunteer projects; educating students on environmental issues; and working with agencies, elected officials, and the community to advocate for, build, and maintain innovative green infrastructure around the Gowanus Canal. Their mission is to advocate and care for ecologically sustainable parks and public spaces in the Gowanus lowlands while empowering a community of stewards.

Environmental Stewardship Initiatives

Gowanus Improvement District Formation Effort

Gowanus has and will see big investments in public space over the next few years. This includes both waterfront esplanades developed on private properties, and new public parks like the one planned for Gowanus Green. Together, these can be a cohesive and vibrant network of parks centered on the Gowanus Canal. While additional open space in the Gowanus neighborhood is critical, we also know that steady, consistent maintenance and programming is not a given in New York City. The NYC Parks Department budget perennially faces shortfalls and cuts, most recently seeing a 14% cut last fiscal year.

In order to ensure future maintenance of the public realm, guarantee that all members of the Gowanus community can enjoy emerging parks and public spaces, and reinforce a vibrant live-work neighborhood, GCC organized the formation of a Gowanus Improvement District, to ensure longtime funding and coordination for maintenance of the public realm in Gowanus. The Gowanus Improvement District Formation Effort is a community-led effort to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) in Gowanus, that would specifically focus on advocacy for and management and programming of the public realm in Gowanus. The goals of the Gowanus Improvement District focus on community-driven place-making in Gowanus that centers biodiversity, local public art, and the unique and resilient history of the surrounding neighborhood and create a resilient and sustainable future for Gowanus.

Gowanus Lowlands

The future of Gowanus is entering a critical phase with the confluence of several major long-standing efforts: the federally mandated cleanup under the Canal's Superfund status; related cleanups at the state and city levels; and probable land use changes that will cue both private development and city investment in the public realm. Through the Gowanus Lowlands Master Plan, Gowanus Canal Conservancy seeks to ensure the community has a key role in shaping a watershed that is accessible, active, and clean for all.

Developed with SCAPE Landscape Architecture, Langan Engineering, ARUP, and The New York Community Trust, Gowanus Lowlands is a master plan that envisions a network of parks and public spaces centered on the Gowanus Canal and connected it to the surrounding watershed. A vibrant system that prioritizes access for everyone, the Gowanus Lowlands shines a light on the Canal's history and beauty against a backdrop of a healthy environment and safe, connected streets. At the heart of the Gowanus Lowlands vision is a clean and thriving waterway of aquatic habitat, community activity, and bustling industry.

Gowanus Lowlands builds on years of close collaboration with the community, landowners, elected officials and agency representatives to identify priorities for the future of Gowanus. GCC is engaging the community for input to fully develop the Gowanus Lowlands Master Plan. Once complete, the plan will be implemented through collaboration with the various stakeholders involved in the policy, planning, and building stages, to bring the Gowanus Lowlands vision to life!

Lowlands Nursery - Biodiversity Grown in Gowanus

GCC is dedicated to increasing native biodiversity to create a healthier environment for all species. The Lowlands Nursery offers plants that are well-adapted to the urban conditions of Gowanus, celebrating the local ecosystem while educating and engaging the community in environmental stewardship. The Lowlands Nursery is a mission-driven, not-for-profit community nursery run by Gowanus Canal Conservancy. Their plant inventory centers on native urban-adapted plants, which they sell to individuals, civic institutions, and landscape designers. As a mission-driven nursery they support stewardship of the Gowanus lowlands by providing plant material for installations and engaging students and volunteers in direct plant care. All proceeds support Gowanus Canal Conservancy's mission-based education and stewardship programs. They offer discount programs for school and community groups to allow for more equitable access to quality native plants. GCC provides additional research, education and support through their publications and bioblitz observation reports.

Gowanus Tree Network and Street Tree Management Plan

The Gowanus Tree Network are neighbors working together to build a healthy urban forest. Tree Ambassadors enroll in free Citizen Pruner training led by Trees New York, organize tree stewardship with their neighbors, and enter the Greenest Block in Brooklyn contest. GCC currently works with 16 blocks across the Gowanus Tree Management Area, with 33 Tree Ambassadors, and have done 33 tree bed expansions and installed 75 tree guards since 2018.

In 2019, GCC expanded Gowanus Tree Network activities to include a pilot Monitoring Program led by block resident volunteers. As part of this project, they partnered with Temboo to install 6 soil moisture sensors in tree beds that track real-time data on stormwater performance and the impact of stewardship on tree health. As GCC moves towards future expansion of Gowanus Tree Network, they hope to install more sensors throughout the neighborhood, including new tree plantings that will be required for new development associated with the proposed Gowanus rezoning. If scaled-up, this type of monitoring program could support more efficient maintenance, provide data on the performance of new planting standards, and ensure long-term tree health. The pilot project was highlighted in the New York Times, check out the link below.

In partnership with TreeKit and the NYC Department of Park and Recreation, the Gowanus Street Tree Management Plan:

1. Draws on two street tree inventories completed in 2012 and 2016 to draw a clear picture of current conditions and trends for street trees in the urban forest surrounding the Gowanus Canal
2. Illustrates a vision for the future of street trees immediately surrounding the Gowanus Canal and its larger water/sewer-shed
3. Lays out concrete actions steps to be taken by Gowanus Canal Conservancy and NYC Department of Parks and Recreation for improving street trees in the area

Rain Garden Stewardship

Gowanus Canal Conservancy advocates for, builds and stewards green infrastructure (GI) in the Gowanus Watershed, a 1,700 acre area that contributes to 377 million gallons of combined sewer overflow (CSO) into the Gowanus Canal per year. Installations like the 6th Street Green Corridor, a set of 11 bioswales completed in 2014, reduce CSO while providing habitat, shade and beauty. As NYC experiences more frequent extreme weather events like Hurricanes Henri and Ida, green infrastructure is a critical tool to mitigate flooding and combined sewage overflow, among other climate change impacts.

Between 2014-2017, with support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the US Forest Service, Gowanus Canal Conservancy and partners piloted a Bioswale Stewardship Training Program to engage volunteers and students in the management and advocacy for green infrastructure in the Gowanus Watershed. This pilot resulted in a rain garden stewardship manual, *Bioswales in New York City: Understanding, Advocating, Stewarding*, a resource that we use in our education and volunteer programs.

The Rain Garden Action In Neighborhoods (RAIN) Coalition is a pilot collaboration for stewardship of City-owned rain gardens in four priority watersheds - Bronx River, Gowanus Canal, Newtown Creek and Flushing Bay. Each of these watersheds has an established stewardship organization poised to build capacity for local rain garden management, provide local green jobs and catalyze a citywide network. Since 2021 the members have tested and identified best practices for local rain garden stewardship and built capacity for local hiring. With deep community knowledge, local non-profit stewardship ensures jobs are sustainable and accessible for the communities who need them most.

Education - Inspiring the Next Generation

Gowanus Blue Schools

Since 2017, GCC has partnered with Middle School (M.S.) 88, M.S. 447, Brooklyn Collaborative Studies and Thread Collective architecture/landscape architecture to develop and implement the Gowanus Blue Schools curriculum. Using digital design and model building tools, middle and high school students can propose green infrastructure designs for their school campuses that meet community needs, provide ecological benefits, and contribute to healthier waterways in New York City. Our City must be built with more resilient green infrastructure, such as green roofs, rain gardens, and rainwater harvesting systems, to mitigate climate impacts like increased precipitation, flooding and urban heat island. Green infrastructure will absorb stormwater, reducing the runoff that causes Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) to pollute the Gowanus Canal and New York Harbor. Additional resources are available on the GCC website including free At-Home urban ecology activities and resources made for K-5 students.

Students from M.S. 88, M.S. 447 and Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies in Brooklyn, NY take on a design challenge yearly with the Gowanus Canal Conservancy to develop green infrastructure design concepts for their school campuses, and then present their proposals to a panel of NYC design and sustainability professionals.

“Over several years, this program became a part of our core curriculum, and planted the seed for years of stewardship, conservation and greening. So many students developed a deeper connection to their neighborhood and the natural environment within it.” – Educator who partnered with GCC

STEM Gowanus Curriculum

The Gowanus Canal has captivated people for more than 400 years, from its salt marsh era to a polluted industrial waterway that today is undergoing revitalization. Developed in partnership with M.S. 88, M.S. 51, Public School 32 and Urban Memory

Project, the STEM Gowanus Curriculum is available as a free download for educators to engage students in grades 5-8 with the Gowanus Canal's complex urban ecology, both in school and through field studies. Place-based units include: Gowanus History & Geography, Water Quality, Watershed & Sewershed, Flora & Fauna, Soil Quality and Climate Change, using a solutions-oriented design process and project-based learning. Each unit includes Pre, Post and Field Lessons, background text, maps and worksheets. The curriculum is aligned with Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards for Science, ELA, Math and Social Studies.

Partnership and funding was provided by the NYS Environmental Protection Fund as administered by a grant from the New York State DEC Environmental Justice Community Impact grant program, AECOM, Con Edison, National Grid, The New York State Pollution Prevention Institute, PepsiCo Foundation and New York City Climate and Urban Systems Partnership (CUSP). This curriculum was included in ASLA's first **DREAM BIG with Design** event in 2021.

Urban Ecology Field Trips

Gowanus Canal Conservancy and Lowlands Nursery developed a specialized Urban Ecology field trip program to engage students with the unique ecosystem of the Gowanus. In this outdoor field trip, students will visit the Lowlands Nursery and become urban ecologists, exploring the past and present Gowanus Canal ecosystem. Students make unique observations, explore the wildlife and plants of the Canal, and become stewards for improving ecosystem health. Teachers receive pre- and post-visit materials to accompany their trip experience. All activities are aligned with New York State Learning Standards.

On this field trip, students learn to:

- Compare/contrast today's Gowanus Canal to its historic salt marsh ecosystem
- Understand how urbanization of the Canal has led to its current state
- Observe and record the plants & animals of the Gowanus Canal ecosystem
- Build a model habitat along the Canal to support biodiversity
- Go back to their school and create a micro-habitat
- Demonstrate that plants support biodiversity in cities

Green Team

The Gowanus Green Team are paid high school apprentices engaged in environmental stewardship, nursery maintenance, green infrastructure, and urban conservation work each Spring and Summer. This program aims to educate local youth, expand job opportunities, and cultivate awareness and urgency regarding the importance of environmental work in Gowanus and New York City. Green Team is an integral part of the Gowanus Canal Conservancy's growing maintenance team, providing stewardship for green spaces in Gowanus and the Lowlands Nursery.

Apprentices participate in classroom lessons, field work and training, and trips to parks and restoration areas in Gowanus and around NYC. Apprentices explore a range of environmental themes including Gowanus Canal history and ecology, stormwater management, urban forestry, environmental justice, waste management, urban design, and horticulture. Participants develop physical skills, including gardening, infrastructure maintenance, and plant identification; teamwork and communication skills; and knowledge about urban environmental issues facing our city.

Conclusion

Since 2006, the Gowanus Canal Conservancy has done a tremendous job in long term planning and advocacy for a vibrant and resilient future for the Gowanus neighborhood (and beyond) and will continue to play a pivotal role in ensuring that community benefits are realized. Future generations will experience a clean, well-maintained and ecologically diverse Gowanus Canal and surrounding watershed. GCC has inspired numerous community groups and organizations demonstrating that a small grass-roots organization can make a huge difference. The Gowanus Canal Conservancy embodies everything that the Olmsted Medal stands for - environmental leadership, vision, and stewardship. Please give them the utmost consideration of being recognized for their inspirational work and honor them with the Olmsted Medal.

Sincerely,
Jennifer L. Nitzky, PLA, FASLA, ISA

Gowanus Canal



CONSERVANCY

Contact

Andrea Parker, Executive Director
Gowanus Canal Conservancy
The Old American Can Factory
248 Third Street
Brooklyn, NY 11215

Phone: 718.541.4378
gowanuscanalconservancy.org

Additional Media

Video

[Gowanus Neighborhood Walking Tour, 2020](#) YouTube

[About Gowanus Canal Conservancy, Gowanus Lowlands, 2019](#), YouTube

[Gowanus Blue Schools Design Challenge, 2018](#), Vimeo

Press

[The New York Times: Helping the Environment, One Small Sensor at a Time](#)

[Next City: 'Gowanus Canal Could Be New Model for Waterfront Planning'](#)

[Architectural Digest: 'The Future of New York's Most Polluted Waterway'](#)

[Architects Newspaper: 'Group Unveils Plans for Verdant Gowanus Canal'](#)

[Untapped Cities: 'Gowanus Lowlands Visionary Plan Released to Transform Neighborhood into Thriving Ecosystem and Community Space'](#)

[Gowanus Canal Sponge Park™ - ASLA DESIGNING OUR FUTURE: SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPES](#)

Awards

2010 ASLA Honor Award for Analysis and Planning

2011 AIA Honor Award for Regional and Urban Planning

2018 ASLA-NY Honor Award - Analysis, Planning, Research and Communications

2023 Open Plans Public Space Awards: Curbside Climate Award

Publications

<https://gowanuscanalconservancy.org/publications>

[Gowanus Ecosystems Biological Survey Report, 2021](#)

[Gowanus Field Guide: Herbaceous Plants, Trees & Shrubs, Aquatic Life and Birds, 2020](#)

[Bioswales in New York City: Understanding, Advocating, Stewarding, 2019](#), Gowanus Canal Conservancy and Trees New York

GOWANUS LOWLANDS

Gowanus Lowlands envisions a network of parks and public spaces centered on the Gowanus Canal and connecting it to the surrounding watershed. The future of the Gowanus Canal is entering a critical phase, with the confluence of the Superfund cleanup, city land use studies and climate change likely to trigger significant shifts throughout the neighborhood. The Lowlands seeks to ensure the community has a key role in shaping a watershed that is accessible, active, and clean for all who live, work and play in Gowanus. At the heart of the Gowanus Lowlands vision is a clean and thriving waterway of aquatic habitat, community activity, and bustling industry.

The canal edge will rise and fall with sloping banks, raised lookout points, and forested seating areas. Woven through this wild urban landscape will be hives of activity - performance spaces, cafes, picnic areas, boathouses, playgrounds. A system of streets, paths and bridges woven together by a coastal planting palette, site specific interpretation and industrial materials will invite people to engage with the unique history and character of the Gowanus.

An adaptive, resilient local ecosystem will take shape throughout the watershed's network of parks and forested corridors, leveraging the city's investment in green and grey infrastructure - green roofs, detention tanks, mitigation basins, bioswales and water treatment parks. A working landscape emerges, one that enhances access to the canal while improving water quality, building habitat for avian and aquatic species, and creating landscapes that can adapt to rising sea levels along the canal's banks.



PUBLIC SPACE MANAGEMENT

We provide, support and advocate for sustainable public space maintenance, while also providing and supporting culturally responsive, inclusive programming in the public realm.

GREEN SPACES



Plantings at Sponge Park include high marsh plants such as Groundseltree, Goldenrod and Saltmeadow Cordgrass

Our horticulture work includes rain gardens along streets, new gardens at our nursery site and providing plant material and support to stewards of tree beds, public housing campuses, and community gardens throughout the neighborhood. This work helps to reduce CSO and urban heat island impacts, while supporting livable and beautiful spaces for community members to enjoy.

After 11 years at the Salt Lot, in 2022 GCC moved to our temporary location at 25 9th Street to make way for CSO tank construction. We've relocated our Lowlands Nursery and host weekly open hours, rebuilt our rainwater harvesting system and installed new demonstration gardens.

GREEN SPACES BY THE NUMBERS



569 PLANTS
PLANTED IN
14 GOWANUS
GARDENS AND
30 TREE BEDS

NURSERY



Sowing local native seeds at the Lowlands Nursery

NURSERY BY THE NUMBERS



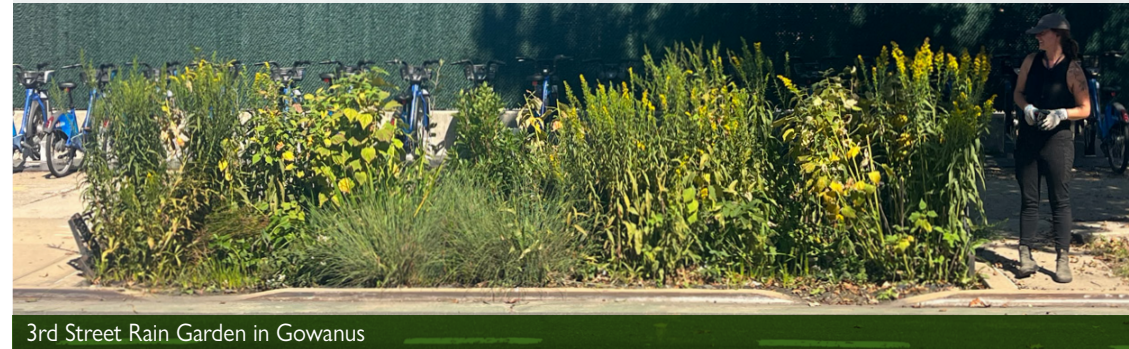
5,777 PLANTS
DISTRIBUTED

57%

OF THOSE WERE
DISCOUNTED OR DONATED

The Lowlands Nursery grows native, urban-adapted plants with a focus on local ecotypes, celebrating the local ecosystem while educating and engaging the community in environmental stewardship. Our mission-driven nursery sells to individuals, parks, civic institutions and landscape designers while providing plants for Gowanus public spaces and engaging students and volunteers directly in plant care. We expanded our open hours in 2022, allowing us to reach more people and support more biodiversity.

RAIN COALITION



3rd Street Rain Garden in Gowanus

The Rain Garden Action In Neighborhoods (RAIN) Coalition is a pilot collaboration for stewardship of City-owned rain gardens in four priority watersheds - Bronx River, Gowanus Canal, Newtown Creek and Flushing Bay. Each of these watersheds has an established stewardship organization poised to build capacity for local rain garden management, provide local green jobs and catalyze a citywide network. Since 2021 the members have tested and identified best practices for local rain garden stewardship and built capacity for local hiring. With deep community knowledge, local non-profit stewardship ensures jobs are sustainable and accessible for the communities who need them most.

VOLUNTEER STEWARDSHIP

We empower local stakeholders in stewardship of their local landscapes through ongoing, in-person stewardship events and opportunities.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS



501 TOTAL VOLUNTEERS



1,126 HOURS VOLUNTEERED



130 TREE BEDS STEWARDED



75 TREE GUARDS INSTALLED, AND 33 TREE BEDS EXPANDED

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM



Volunteers support construction and propagation at the Lowlands Nursery

Dedicated volunteers support the Lowlands Nursery with potting up, soil mixing, seed sowing, winterizing and construction projects.

In 2022, volunteers had a big hand in helping us settle into our new site at 25 9th Street, mulching the entire site, installing a fence along the water, building new gardens and reconstructing our rainwater harvesting structure with a new sturdy roof.

GOWANUS TREE NETWORK



Volunteers weed a tree bed during the first annual City of Forest tree stewardship event. Photo by Will Landis-Croft

The Gowanus Tree Network empowers neighbors to work together to build a healthy urban forest. Tree Ambassadors enrolled in free Trees New York Citizen Pruner training and organized tree stewardship on their blocks. We worked with 16 blocks across the Gowanus Tree Management Area where 33 Tree Ambassadors installed plants, watered, weeded, pruned, removed trash and applied compost and mulch in tree beds. In 2022, we hosted the first annual City of Forest tree stewardship event as part of the Forest for All Coalition and partnered with Greenspace on Fourth on tree care.

STEWARDSHIP HIGHLIGHT: CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS



Volunteers from Domain Companies help paint a fence at the Lowlands Nursery. Photo by Domain

Gowanus Canal Conservancy hosted over 300 corporate volunteers for workdays in 2022. Our Corporate Volunteer program provides a hands-on opportunity to connect with our mission and local community. Through a range of projects, from plant propagation to caring for trees and rain gardens, participants contribute a clean, resilient and biodiverse Gowanus Canal and neighborhood.

2022 CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS

DOMAIN COMPANIES
GRIMSHAW ARCHITECTS
MCKINSEY
SCAPE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
SHISEIDO

Olmsted Medal Nomination: Gowanus Canal Conservancy

GCC has inspired and engaged a growing network of community volunteers
Image Credit: Gowanus Canal Conservancy, from 2022 Annual Report

YOUTH PROGRAM

We hire, train and inspire BIPOC youth, especially those living in public housing in Gowanus and low-income neighborhoods in Brooklyn, to lead change in the environmental sector and their own communities.

GOWANUS GREEN TEAM

Through a paid apprenticeship called Gowanus Green Team, high school youth gain exposure to green careers, build workforce readiness and grow their green voices to advocate for environmental justice. Since 2017, 29 youth have completed the Green Team program. Youth learn horticulture skills in the Lowlands Nursery, rain gardens, street trees and community gardens, while training alongside public housing gardeners and other youth crews in public spaces across the city. They receive 1:1 mentoring to support their goals and program alumni continue to receive support in pursuing green careers.



Gowanus street tree pruning



Lowlands Nursery plant care

GREEN TEAM BY THE NUMBERS



11 GREEN TEAM APPRENTICES



95 HOURS OF FIELD WORK



32 HOURS OF CAREER EXPLORATION



800 PLANTS PROPAGATED BY YOUTH APPRENTICES

2022 GREEN TEAM ACTIVITIES



The 2022 Green Team after helping remove phragmites from Prospect Park Lake

In 2022, Green Team Apprentices worked closely with the Stewardship Team at GCC's Lowlands Nursery and 6th Street rain gardens to increase their horticultural knowledge, learn native trees and plants and remove litter from green spaces in Gowanus. The cohort explored other public spaces on field trips to Prospect Park, Red Hook Farms, East NY Farms, Hilltop Hanover Farm and Nursery, Newtown Creek and Hudson River Park. To prepare for post-high school pathways, Apprentices attended a career panel hosted by Hudson River Park to hear experiences of BIPOC green professionals, created professional emails and resumes and toured Brooklyn College. The summer ended with the youth earning their Citizen Pruner license through Trees New York.

GREEN TEAM HIGHLIGHT: PUBLIC HOUSING GARDENING



Sprucing up a Gowanus Houses garden plot

Green Team expanded their community-based environmental stewardship work at Gowanus Houses in 2022. Working closely with Gowanus Houses residents to revitalize the garden plots at 244 Bond Street and 423 Baltic Street, apprentices saw first-hand the benefits of conservation work at the community level. Apprentices applied their horticulture knowledge through hands-on work and learned from community members about both the impacts of environmental injustices, and the solutions that both residents and Gowanus Canal Conservancy continue to put in place.

K-12 EDUCATION

We equip K-12 students with place-based science, ecology and design skills and knowledge so that they can be advocates and stewards for the local environment.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS BY THE NUMBERS



1,060 K-12 STUDENTS ENGAGED IN PROGRAMS

83%

OF STUDENTS FROM ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AREA SCHOOLS



427 STUDENTS ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY SCIENCE



300 STUDENTS REVITALIZED TWO SCHOOLYARDS WITH NATIVE PLANTS

GOWANUS BLUE SCHOOLS



Students planting native plants in their schoolyards to take a step toward greener and more resilient campuses

Through Gowanus Blue Schools, 1,300 students from M.S. 88, M.S. 447 and Brooklyn Collaborative Studies High School engaged in green infrastructure design and advocacy for their school campuses. During a five year partnership, the students created digital and physical models of green infrastructure and received feedback from professionals in the field. In front of an expert jury, the students presented their final projects featuring green roofs, rain gardens and permeable turf to absorb stormwater and reduce urban heat islands, while providing outdoor learning and recreation space.

Olmsted Medal Nomination: Gowanus Canal Conservancy

COMMUNITY SCIENCE



Students collect and measure water quality data

Through hands-on activities, students learn what it means to be a community scientist and improve waterway health. In 2022, 333 students conducted water quality testing and analyzed enterococcus data, which is an indicator of how much combined sewer overflow (CSO) was discharged after a rainstorm and added their results to a public database. Students also learn how community-based solutions for clean water, such as green infrastructure, can reduce CSO that pollutes our waterways.

COMMUNITY SCIENCE HIGHLIGHT: MUSSEL HABITAT

The Atlantic ribbed mussel is important for water filtration in the Canal, but their habitat is being displaced by new steel bulkheads required by the Superfund cleanup. In the 2021-22 school year, we began a pilot with the Gowanus Dredgers and Brooklyn Collaborative Studies High School to test constructed habitats.

94 students learned about the issue and designed their own mussel habitats. In spring 2022 their modules, molded from concrete, were suspended from steel bulkheads at the edge of the Lowlands Nursery. Students recorded data on marine life species beginning to inhabit the modules, including blue crabs and mummichog.

In future years, students will improve designs and contribute data, with the goal of recruiting mussels for long term mussel habitat restoration in the Canal.



Constructed mussel habitat

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Re: Nomination of The Gowanus Canal Conservancy for The Olmsted Medal

Dear ASLA Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

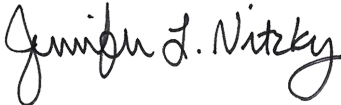
It is with great admiration and honor that I nominate the Gowanus Canal Conservancy for the prestigious Olmsted Medal.

Since 2006, The Gowanus Canal Conservancy has demonstrated consistent and effective environmental leadership, vision, and stewardship that has activated an entire community and inspired so many others. The work that they are doing is also making a huge impact on the health of a large waterway in the most dense urban city in America. Their mission to "advocate and care for ecologically sustainable parks and public spaces in the Gowanus lowlands while empowering a community of stewards" also aligns with ASLA's Climate Action Plan.

I had long known about the Conservancy's work to clean up the Gowanus Canal and learned more about their stewardship activities at an ASLA-NY Open Studio they hosted. In 2018, I had the incredible pleasure of serving on the jury for their Blue Schools Design Challenge where middle school students from three schools were to create a design for the playgrounds, open spaces, rooftops, sidewalks and walls of their school, maximizing stormwater management while addressing the needs of the school community. I was so excited to see the creative ideas the students came up with and witness just how much they understand about stormwater and green infrastructure! I am confident that through hands-on experiences with the Gowanus Canal Conservancy, these students will pursue careers, like landscape architecture, that will help change the world!

It is impressive to see the amount of work this small conservancy is able to accomplish - but it is also evident that the power of community-centered organizations that enlist the expertise of landscape architects, urban planners and engineers, can have immense impact on the environment. GCC's work contributes greatly to landscape architecture with projects that improve quality of life for urban residents and increase healthy habitat to promote biodiversity. Their visionary approach in environmental sustainability, grassroots community leadership and dedication to providing consistent and effective environmental stewardship makes it clear that they are very much deserving of your selection as the Olmsted Medal recipient.

Sincerely,



Jennifer L. Nitzky, PLA, FASLA, ISA
Design Principal
Studio HIP Landscape Architecture PLLC
studiohip.nyc
jnitzky@gmail.com
c: 312-371-8990

SCAPE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE DPC
277 BROADWAY NINTH FLOOR NEW YORK NY 10007
T 212 462 2628 SCAPESTUDIO.COM

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Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: Endorsement of the Gowanus Canal Conservancy for the Olmsted Medal

To the Executive Committee:

I am thrilled to offer my support for the Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC) to be awarded the 2024 Olmsted Medal. As design principal and partner at SCAPE, I have had the opportunity to work closely with the GCC on the Gowanus Lowlands, a community-based vision for a restored public realm and open space network centered around the Gowanus Canal. Through our work together and from witnessing their impact over the past 18 years, it is clear that the GCC holds an unwavering commitment to the health of the Gowanus watershed, its unique post-industrial landscape, and its surrounding community.

Since its conception in 2006, the GCC has grown to meet the challenges of the day. As a smaller organization, they rallied volunteers and coordinated educational campaigns to build awareness around the community's environment challenges. Today, the GCC has grown its reach, uniting developers, city planners, and agency stakeholders around a bold positive vision for the canal and its community. Though they have grown in sophistication as an organization, they remain true to their do-it-yourself roots—at Lowlands Nursery, the GCC grows native local plants from seed that are well-adapted to the conditions of the canal. From large-scale planning to small-scale site interventions, the GCC stays true to its mission.

To reach its goals, the GCC is skilled at building strategic alliances. They hold a truly intersectional approach to their work, acting as a bridge between social advocacy groups and environmental groups—two lines of work that are inextricably linked—to make sure that the work happening along the canal benefits as many constituents as possible. They also embrace the methodology of landscape architecture and incorporate its unique synthesis of technical and conceptual skills in all of their projects. Often, a NIMBY attitude pervades environmental discourse; individuals or organizations resist new development in the fear of environmental degradation. The GCC has had the vision and courage to engage with new projects along the canal, recognizing the importance of community organizing to bring about positive change. They are committed to holding the city accountable to rezoning commitments, ensuring that 18 acres of promised public spaces are built and that new

SCAPE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE DPC

development does not increase pollution into the canal. They have also successfully advocated for job creation and implemented green jobs training, ensuring that their work benefits the local economy. The GCC has demonstrated that with advocacy and involvement, their vision of environmental protection and stewardship along the canal can remain at the forefront of projects at all scales.

Personally, the GCC was an important organization that shaped my development as a New York City landscape architect. It continues to be a landing pad for creative and environmentally minded young professionals to connect and make meaningful change. My first interactions with the GCC were as a volunteer, helping with floating garden installations and salt marsh plantings, and building informal relationships with a budding network of design professionals. Later in my career, as design principal at SCAPE, I worked with the GCC as a pro-bono and traditional client on the Gowanus Lowlands, collaborating to develop an implementable vision for canal-side public space. Today, SCAPE is working with many landowners along the canal, helping execute the GCC's vision for a public and ecologically rich watershed. We are proud to have our first public esplanade along the canal open in February 2024. Constructed by a developer on private land, it connects the public to the GCC's nursery at the base of the Smith and 9th Street bridge. Their advocacy extends beyond the built product into the realm of stewardship and maintenance—the GCC is working to develop a parks improvement district for the canal to sustainably fund the maintenance and programming of Gowanus public space. None of this work would have been possible without the tenacity and strategic approach brought by the GCC.

The work that the GCC does is essential and transformative. They are leading the way in demonstrating successful models of stewardship, community engagement, and long-term planning. I enthusiastically support their nomination for the Olmsted Medal.

Sincerely,

Gena Wirth, ASLA

Design Principal and Partner, SCAPE Landscape Architecture DPC



Trees New York

plant preserve protect

Dear Members of the ASLA Awards Committee,

All of us at Trees New York enthusiastically support the nomination of the Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC) for the ALSA Olmsted Medal.

For over ten years, Trees New York has partnered with GCC and has seen firsthand their commitment to realizing their mission to advocate and care for ecologically sustainable parks and public spaces in the Gowanus lowlands while empowering a community of stewards. Through a series of innovative projects and programs, they have made dramatic improvements to the Gowanus neighborhood.

They led the way in designing and installing bioswales and rain gardens, growing and planting native plants that enhance our urban environment, supporting biodiversity and essential pollinators, and expanding their local tree canopy through tree planting and maintenance projects.

With their commitment to community stewardship and engagement, we partnered with them to train their volunteers as Citizen Pruners so that neighborhood residents can provide short- and long-term tree maintenance. They returned the favor by working with our summer interns and providing them with lessons on environmental justice, horticulture, and stormwater management.

I especially appreciate their commitment to equity and engaging all community members. GCC recognizes that with the improvements and cleanup of the Gowanus Canal along with the zoning changes in the neighborhood, all residents must benefit from the improvement of the neighborhood. The Gowanus Canal Conservancy is committed to the stewardship of their urban environment and improving the quality of life for the residents of Gowans.

Thank you for considering this nomination.

Sincerely,

Nelson Villarrubia
Executive Director

Trees New York
100 Gold Street, Suite 3100
New York, NY 10038
www.treesny.org
(718) 701-4463

KEN SMITH WORKSHOP

450 WEST 31st STREET_FIFTH FLOOR_NEW YORK NY 10001_212.791.3595_www.kensmithworkshop.com

TO: ASLA awards committee

FROM: Ken Smith, FASLA

RE: ASLA Olmsted Medal, Gowanus Canal Conservancy

It's my pleasure to support the nomination of the Gowanus Canal Conservancy for ASLA Olmsted Medal. The Gowanus Canal district of New York City, once one of the most environmentally degraded areas in the city, has in recent years been going through the process of remediation and redevelopment; a partnership of federal, state, and city agencies; developers and non-profit community interest groups like the Gowanus Canal Conservancy.

The conservancy's stewardship programs include advocacy for sustainable open spaces and green infrastructure. Their community-based work has been instrumental in the overall effort to clean up the canal and redevelop the district to the highest ecological and inclusive standards.

Thank you for considering my recommendation.





909 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022 | T: (212) 686-0010 F: (212) 532-8528 | nycommunitytrust.org

Olmsted Medal Nominations
c/o Honors and Awards
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: Awarding the Gowanus Canal Conservancy the 2024 Olmsted Medal

Dear Members of the Executive Committee,

I am delighted to endorse the Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC) for the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Olmsted Medal. As someone who has both trained as a landscape architect and led landscape designers and construction managers working throughout the five boroughs of New York City, I am especially appreciative of the transformative impact of the GCC's work. Their outstanding dedication to environmental stewardship and community revitalization merits this recognition.

The GCC has been a pivotal force in revitalizing the highly polluted Gowanus Canal, addressing decades of industrial pollution and environmental degradation. Since its founding in 2006, the GCC has been a driving force in efforts to once again make this historic waterway a benefit rather than a burden to surrounding communities. Through their support for community-based participatory planning and advocacy, the organization has helped catalyze and shape hundreds of millions of dollars of public and private investment that will transform the area over the next decade.

Their impressive track record includes developing Gowanus Lowlands Master Plan that features innovative green infrastructure projects such as the 2nd Street Sponge Park and nearly a dozen curbside rain gardens. This Trust-supported Master Plan influenced city, state, and federal agency decisions, community engagement activities, technical assistance, and wetlands restoration projects during the ongoing effort to revitalize the canal. The plan envisions a network of parks and public spaces that would help reconnect the Gowanus Canal to the surrounding watershed and highlight the Canal's rich history and beauty. At the heart of this vision is a restored waterway of healthy aquatic habitat, vibrant community access, and bustling economic activity.

In 2023, The Trust made a new grant to the GCC to support community-driven ecological restoration and sustainable development efforts. Collaborating with community and environmental organizations, GCC is ensuring that canal cleanup and neighborhood revitalization projects reflect community priorities and incorporate as many green infrastructure features as possible.

For their leadership and community empowerment efforts, GCC is an extremely worthy candidate for the ASLA Olmsted Medal. On behalf of our entire team at The New York Community Trust, including Arturo Garcia-Costas, our Senior Program Officer for the Environment, I enthusiastically recommend the Gowanus Canal Conservancy for this honor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy Freitag', written in a cursive style.

Amy Freitag
President
The New York Community Trust