



GATEWAY

NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

JAMAICA BAY
TRANSPORTATION STUDIES



Federal Highway Administration

GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA TRANSPORTATION, ACCESS & CIRCULATION AT JAMAICA BAY UNIT

Overview

Established in 1916, the National Park Service (NPS) is known the world over for stewardship of important natural and cultural areas and for offering outstanding opportunities for people to visit and enjoy those special places. When Gateway National Recreation Area (Gateway NRA) was added to the National Park System in 1972, the action was heralded as a breakthrough in expanding the national park concept. Located in the heart of urban America, Gateway NRA brought programs to millions of Americans who might otherwise never experience a national park, many of which were poor or new immigrants.

Gateway NRA encompasses more than 26,000 acres in New York and New Jersey and attracts more than 9 million visits a year—making it the fifth most visited national park in the United States. The park is organized into three administrative units based on their geographic locations around New York City’s Outer Harbor. The Sandy Hook Unit--in Monmouth County, New Jersey--is located on the western side of the Outer Harbor; the Staten Island Unit--which stretches between Raritan Bay and the Verrazano Narrows--is positioned at the northern end of the Outer Harbor; and the Jamaica Bay Unit—located in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens—is on the eastern side of the Outer Harbor.

The Jamaica Bay Unit (Figure 1) includes most of the lands and waters south of the Belt Parkway, west of Kennedy International Airport, and east of Sheepshead Bay and is bound by the Atlantic Ocean on the south. Well known sites contained within the park include: Floyd Bennett Field, Jacob Riis Park, Fort Tilden, Canarsie Pier, Jamaica Bay, and the Breezy Point Tip. Tours and ranger-led talks about the park’s significant natural and historical features are available throughout the year. Other visitor activities include ocean swimming, nature walks, sailing, bicycling, bird watching, gardening, camping, astronomy and fishing. The park also hosts a wide range of team sports, cultural activities, and ethnic festivals.

The park’s General Management Plan (GMP), and other defining documents, prescribes means of managing and using existing facilities and resources within the park to obtain the maximum recreational and educational benefits, while continuing to protect the park’s existing resources. These opportunities are to be done in a high-quality, affordable manner that allows for innovation and experimentation in design and programming for the cultural and ethnic diversity of the region.

Recognizing that access to and circulation within the park are vital factors in the success of the Jamaica Bay Unit; the NPS will work with its partners to ensure that transportation improvements compliment proposed improvements. The unit already provides a dynamic array of unique natural, historical, and recreational opportunities for its visitors. Jamaica Bay is comprised of beaches, park area, playgrounds, sports fields, gardening plots, bicycling, trails for walking or jogging, and fishing spots to name a few. In addition to these amenities, the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge is the only refuge in the nation located within a national park, providing habitat for the extraordinary bird population, as well as a retreat for visitors. Furthermore, the unit’s cultural and historic resources, including the 20th century military installations at Fort Tilden and Floyd Bennett Field, preserve the history of the region and nation, and provide a vast array of visitor opportunities.

Future Plans

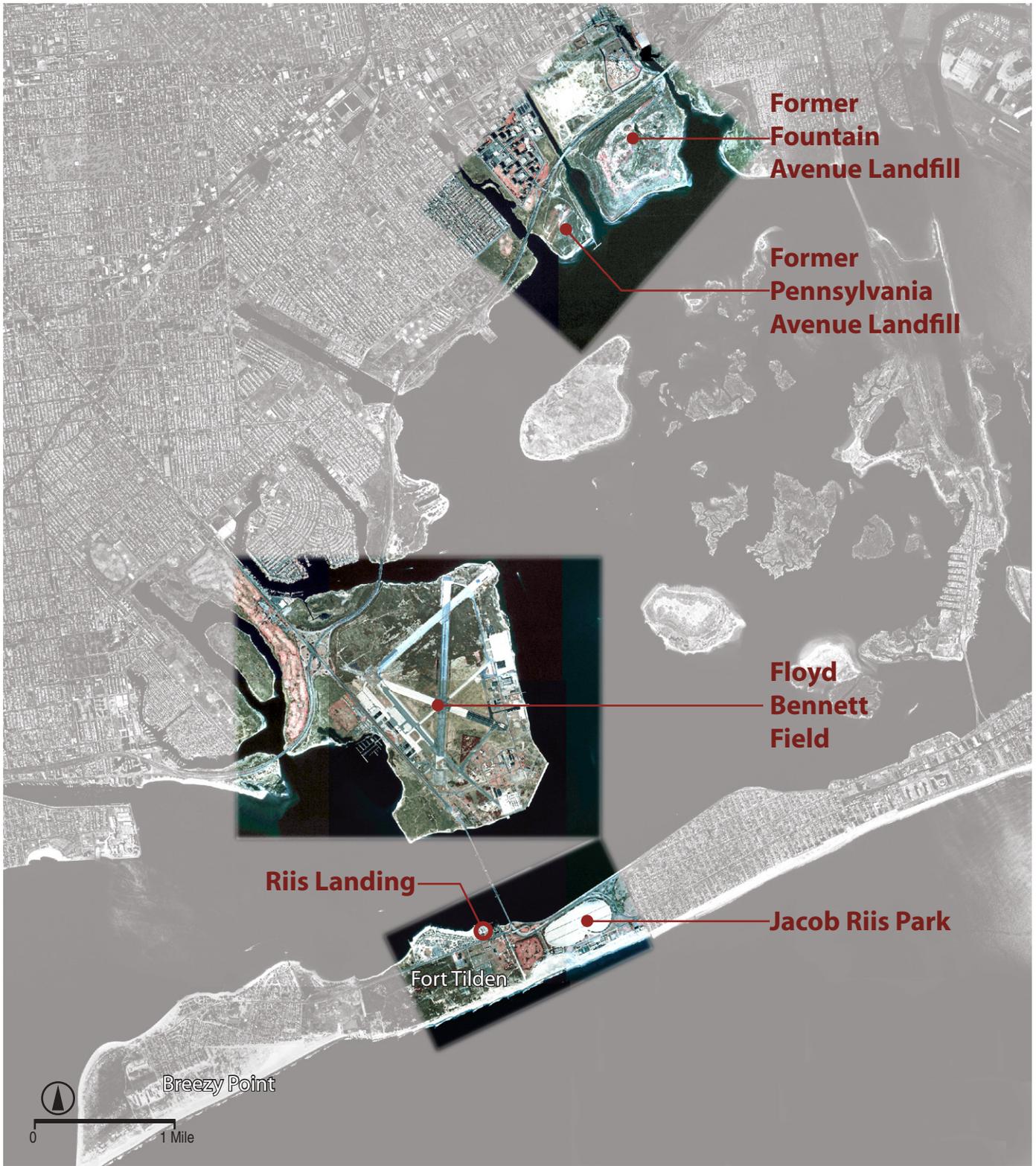
Primary objectives in development of the Jamaica Bay Unit include: appropriate use of historic resources, expanding visitor opportunities, improving operational efficiency, reducing operating costs, and enhancing the site's image as a national park. An important aspect of these objectives is that the park should complement not only the NPS but also New York City and adjacent neighborhoods. Locations where development is currently being emphasized include: Floyd Bennett Field, Jacob Riis Park, Riis Landing, Fort Tilden, and several park sites adjacent to the Belt Parkway. Opportunities for funding improvements in these areas range from federal, state, and local appropriations to investments by park partners, concessionaires and private leaseholders. In all cases, long-term development depends upon functional utility systems, safe and affordable access to the park, and a well-conceived circulation system within the park. These studies will develop alternatives for means of developing and improving circulation within the park.

One location that exemplifies this development strategy is Riis Landing, (Figure 2) the former Coast Guard Station at the south end of the Gill Hodges Memorial Bridge. Riis Landing is currently used by local residents for fishing, as a port for marine law enforcement, and as a dock for occasional ferryboat operation. The NPS plans to develop the site as a hub for regular ferryboat service to the Rockaway Peninsula and, potentially, as a center for new visitor services. Development of Riis Landing as a transportation hub complements much needed improvements at nearby Fort Tilden and Jacob Riis Park (Figure 3). Proposed studies include rehabilitation of facilities, landscape restoration, and development of new visitor activity areas. Leases, concession offerings and new partnerships are likely to be part of the implementation strategy.

Two other locations that are scheduled for new development are Floyd Bennett Field (Figure 4) and the former landfill sites at Pennsylvania Avenue and Fountain Avenue (Figure 5). Floyd Bennett Field already offers a wide array of opportunities to visitors to engage in educational, stewardship and recreational activities. A noteworthy project that will significantly increase visitation to Field is a concession initiative that will preserve four historic hangars by adaptively using them for year-round ice hockey. On the other hand, the former landfills are being capped and landscaped to create new visitor opportunities of a more passive nature.

In anticipation of these developments, the NPS is proposing several studies that would enhance transportation and circulation within the Jamaica Bay Unit of Gateway NRA. These studies are not designed to reexamine discussions or decisions on end uses at these sites, but rather focus on providing safe and efficient access and circulation. At Riis Landing, the study will focus on connections with Rockaway Point Boulevard, parking to support ferry transportation, and internal circulation. At Jacob Riis Park, the study will focus on access to the beach complex for traffic going west on Beach Channel Drive. At Floyd Bennett Field, the study will concentrate on access points off of Flatbush Avenue and on improved internal circulation between Flatbush and the bayside of the Field. Finally, at the former landfills, the study will address access from the Belt Parkway and limited internal circulation. By addressing these issues now, the NPS can ensure that traffic to, from, and within the Jamaica Bay Unit will complement development of the park without adversely impacting adjacent neighborhoods, natural resources, or significant historic resources.

All of these sites have received a great deal of public attention as a result of previous planning and development activity. Earlier projects all benefited from input provided by neighbors, partners, other agencies, visitors, elected officials and interested citizens. Now, as the NPS begins planning for new transportation enhancements in the Jamaica Bay Unit, the agency asks again for ideas and suggestions, information, and concerns upon which to build these studies.



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Figure 1
Gateway National Recreation Area
Jamaica Bay Transportation Studies

STUDY PROCESS

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), along with internal NPS and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance on NEPA, has created a structured process which this study must follow. During the **data collection** phase, the study team has collected, and continues to collect and compile data on existing conditions. This information has allowed the team to move to the **agency/public scoping** phase. At this time, the study team seeks to share its information on the study areas and solicit input on resource concerns and alternative development. With this information, the study team can enter into the **alternatives development** phase of the study. During this process, the study team uses the collected data and public comments to develop realistic alternatives. Agencies and the public are included in this process through updates and meetings to present alternatives and solicit input on them. Once the alternatives have been developed, an **impact analysis** is performed to determine the beneficial and adverse affects of the proposed alternatives. This information is shared with the public through and Environmental Assessment (EA) which is released for **public review** and comment. The study team anticipates the release of the EA in the fall of 2005. Upon completion of the public review period, a **decision document** is drafted and signed by the agencies that are carrying out the study, the NPS and FHWA. As long as no major impacts have been identified in the EA, a Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI) can be signed. This signature indicated that the **compliance is complete** for the study. The study team anticipates this will occur early in 2006.

Throughout the process, the NPS and FHWA will seek to involve the public in the study development. Early involvement includes an agency coordination meeting to be held on March 23, 2005 and a pair of public meetings to be held on April 6 and 7, 2005. Additional updates will be posted on the Gateway NRA web site to announce study development as well as future meetings. Scoping comments can be submitted at these meetings or at any other time. Comments should be directed to:

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Mark_Colburn@nps.gov
www.nps.gov/gate

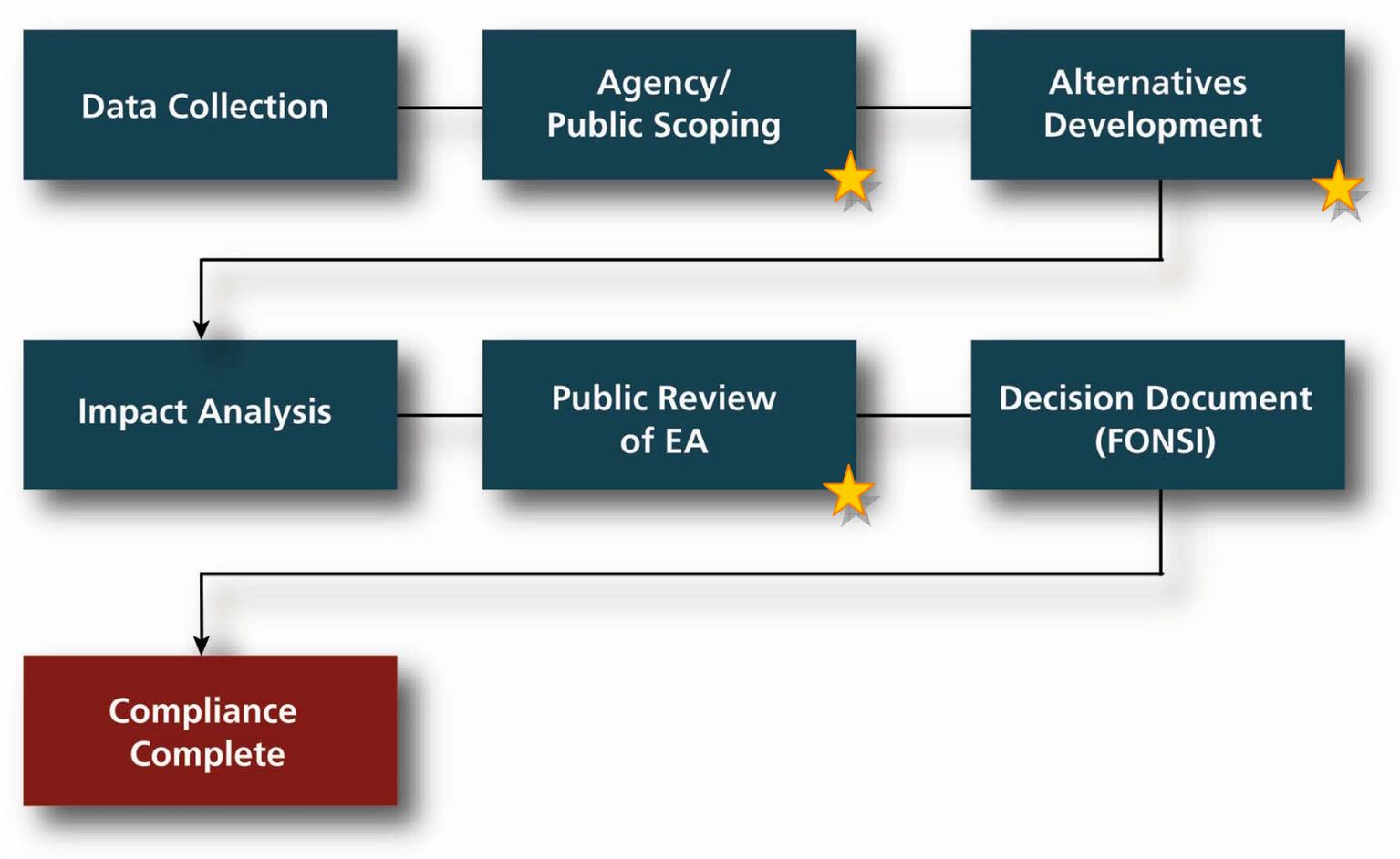
Kevin Rose
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21400 Ridgetop Circle
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Please note that names and addresses of people who comment become part of the public record. If you wish for us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations, businesses, and individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses available for public inspection in their entirety.

For updated information on the study, please visit the project web site at:

http://www.epl.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/gateway_studies/

The NEPA Process



 Opportunities for Public Involvement

RIIS LANDING

Riis Landing is located on the south side of Rockaway Inlet, adjacent to Rockaway Point Boulevard. The site consists of the former Rockaway Coast Guard Station and—to the west--the old park maintenance yard that was originally part of Fort Tilden. In recent years, the NPS has improved the boat basin and developed a 100-car parking lot in the maintenance yard. This work was the first step in plans to develop the site as a terminal for regular ferry service between Rockaway and Manhattan or to develop water-based transportation connections with other NPS locations around New York Harbor. Studies have suggested that any potential ferry operation would probably use 149-passenger boats. Related uses under consideration for the site include public restrooms, a visitor contact station, a bed and breakfast, operational support for marine law enforcement, support for marine research, continued maintenance operations, and administrative areas for NPS staff and their partners.

Riis Landing is not large enough to accommodate vehicular parking for all regular ferry passengers, nor does the site have enough room to support parking for all of the expected future uses. Furthermore, there is currently no means of closing the site to recreational users while allowing it to remain open to NPS staff or other business users. Any development package would require improved street access, clear internal circulation, and additional off-site parking. Accordingly, the proposed study will consider a number of options for each of these concerns. For example, off-site parking might be addressed by seasonal use of existing lots in Fort Tilden, use of a portion of the Jacob Riis parking lot, or building entirely new lots within Fort Tilden. While some of these lots may provide the necessary capacity, they are also too distant from the ferry terminal to be desirable for pedestrians, whether commuters or park visitors. In order to bring a sufficiently sized shuttle or bus onto the site, access and circulation within the site must be improved. This could include creating a one-way circuit through the site and providing a safe area for pick-up and drop-off of passengers, while still sustaining a minimum amount of parking. In spite of increased traffic, security measures must be maintained over the adjacent boat basin to ensure that unauthorized personnel do not enter the area. The study will seek to identify the most effective and reasonable means of accomplishing these objectives.

Planning Issues

Access and Parking – The Riis Landing site is relatively small and can only support a limited amount of parking. Based on current and proposed use of the site, as well as surrounding land uses, it is not realistic to expect that all necessary parking can be accommodated within the site. Therefore, alternative parking locations must be identified along with means of transporting ferry passengers between these parking areas and the dock.

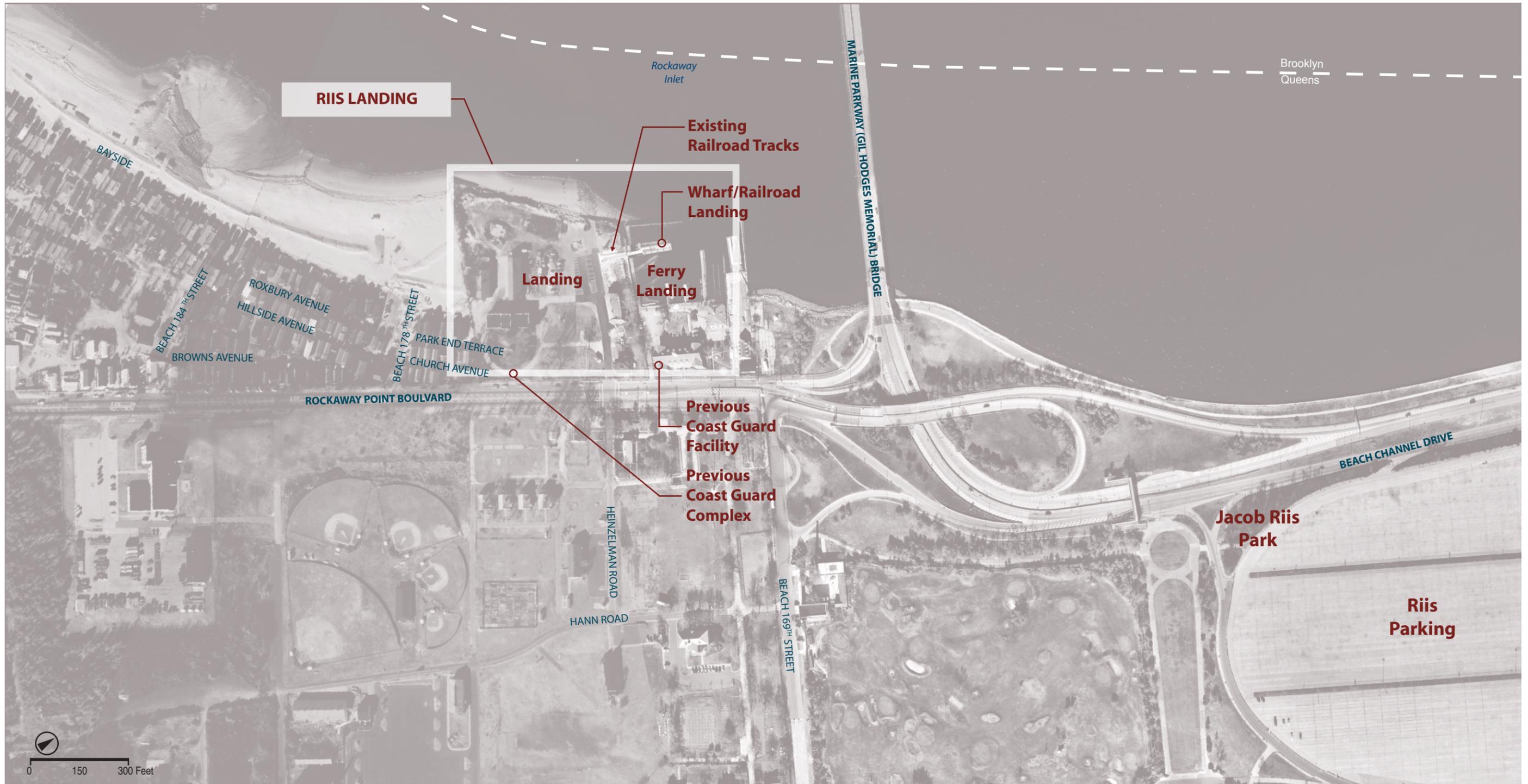
Historic Resources – The site includes remnants of military facilities associated with Fort Tilden as well as a historic Coast Guard complex that may be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Changes to the site will require consultation with the New York State Historic Preservation Office in accordance with laws, regulations and policy effecting cultural resources.

Safety – Plans for additional vehicles and people to enter and circulate through the site must consider access points and circulation schemes that will minimize adverse impacts to traffic on Rockaway Point Boulevard or toward the Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge, Roxbury, the Breezy Point Co-op or Fort Tilden.

Security – In addition to these safety concerns, the site will continue to support water-based law enforcement activities in the future. Law-enforcement boats are currently stored in the boat basin that is secured with a metal gate and fence. Future development must recognize the need for law enforcement officers to have access to the site, and to keep their boats and equipment separate from the public.

Concession Operations & Leasing – A number of visitor services within the Jamaica Bay Unit are operated through concession contracts. Newly legislated authorities also give the park a leasing option. Since some of the proposed functions at Riis Landing could be handled as either a concession or a lease, plans for transportation enhancement of the site should incorporate considerations that will support either of development strategy.

Regional Transportation –Because the Jamaica Bay Unit is situated on the perimeter of the New York metropolitan area, it is subject to the potential of both high traffic volumes and mass transportation. At the same time, the park is surrounded by open space and relatively low-density development that is highly valued by residents and visitors alike. As Gateway NRA strives to be a good neighbor, this study will not only seek to improve access and circulation within the park, but within the surrounding community as well.



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Riis Landing



Figure 2
Gateway Sites : Jamaica Bay Unit
Riis Landing

JACOB RIIS PARK

Another location included in the study is Jacob Riis Park. This historic oceanside park has a great history dating back to the 1930s when it was designed to handle vast numbers of visitors many of whom used the adjacent 9,000 car parking lot. The surrounding road network was also designed in the 1930s and has had relatively few changes to its overall layout over the years. One of the assumptions made by planners 75 years ago is that all westbound traffic to Jacob Riis Park should access the site by way of Rockaway Beach Boulevard—a route that cuts through a number of established residential neighborhoods. In order to accommodate more visitors from Queens and Long Island without disruption of these neighborhoods, the NPS is seeking a way for westbound traffic to access Jacob Riis Park off of Beach Channel Drive.

Planning Issues

Historic Resources – Jacob Riis Park is a 220-acre historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Based on the age of the surrounding road network, its connection to the development of the park, and its association with legendary parks commissioner Robert Moses, much of the roadway around Jacob Riis Park may also be eligible for listing on the National Register. Therefore, proposals for modification to the circulation pattern outside of or within the park should be consistent with the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation and should include consultation with the New York State Historic Preservation Office in accordance with laws, regulations and policy effecting cultural resources.

Local Neighborhoods – As an urban park, much of Gateway NRA is immediately adjacent to developed property controlled by private interests or other government agencies. In the case of Jacob Riis Park, the Neponsit neighborhood is located directly to the east of the park and westbound traffic heading toward Jacob Riis Park must pass through this neighborhood. The proposed study will seek a way to reduce traffic through this community by using a less intrusive roadway that follows an alignment along the northern edge of the neighborhood.

Local Transportation –Because the Jacob Riis Park is situated on the Rockaway Peninsula between the two arterial roads that service this area, it is subject to high traffic volumes. At the same time, the park is accessible by city owned and operated bus service and (potentially) a new ferry service. While this study is closely associated with efforts to increase park visitation, all options must seek to minimize impacts on local traffic patterns and to support increased use of public transit.

Land Ownership – Although the NPS owns much of the land surrounding Jacob Riis Park, it does not own the roads or associated right of ways. Therefore, any alternatives that propose physical changes to the surrounding road network will require coordination with the New York City Department of Transportation and other interested parties.



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Riis Park



Figure 3

Gateway Sites : Jamaica Bay Unit
Riis Parking

FLOYD BENNETT FIELD

Floyd Bennett Field is located on Flatbush Avenue just south of the Belt Parkway. The Field was the city's first municipal airport and later functioned as an important Naval Air Station during World War II. This nationally significant heritage is clearly visible in the runways, airplane hangars and control tower building that make up the core of the Field's historic district. The site is currently home to a wide variety of NPS activities, as well as the New York City Department of Sanitation, the New York City Board of Education, the New York City Police Department, and the U.S Armed Services Reserve Center (Marine Corps).

The Field contains a number of areas that are managed primarily for their value as wildlife habitat. Visitors can enjoy a variety of recreational, educational and cultural activities that complement the historic and natural value of Floyd Bennett Field. The site currently hosts camping, bird watching, flying of radio-controlled model airplanes, gardening, nature hikes, environmental education programs, airplane restoration, bicycling, jogging, fishing, and astronomy. All of these activities bring a large influx of regular visitors to the park. At the north end of Hangar Row, hangars 3 and 4 are currently being developed as a sports complex featuring ice hockey and other sports that will operate on a year-round basis, with hours of operation extending passed those of the NPS sites.

Although there have historically been several entrances to this large site, only the south entrance is currently open. Because visitors, park staff and park tenants all use this one entrance, the Field is subject to periods of high traffic volume which detracts from its primary purpose, creates functional conflicts and results in potentially unsafe conditions for visitors and wildlife. In an effort to separate visitor use from other traffic and to accommodate increased park use due to the new sports complex, one of the transportation studies will explore ways to improve access to and circulation within Floyd Bennett Field while reinforcing its function as a national park.

Planning Issues

Regional Transportation – Floyd Bennett Field is situated along Flatbush Avenue, a major transportation artery connecting Brooklyn with the Rockaway Peninsula. Congestion and other traffic problems already occur on Flatbush and every effort must be made to minimize the impact of increased park use on circulation outside the park.

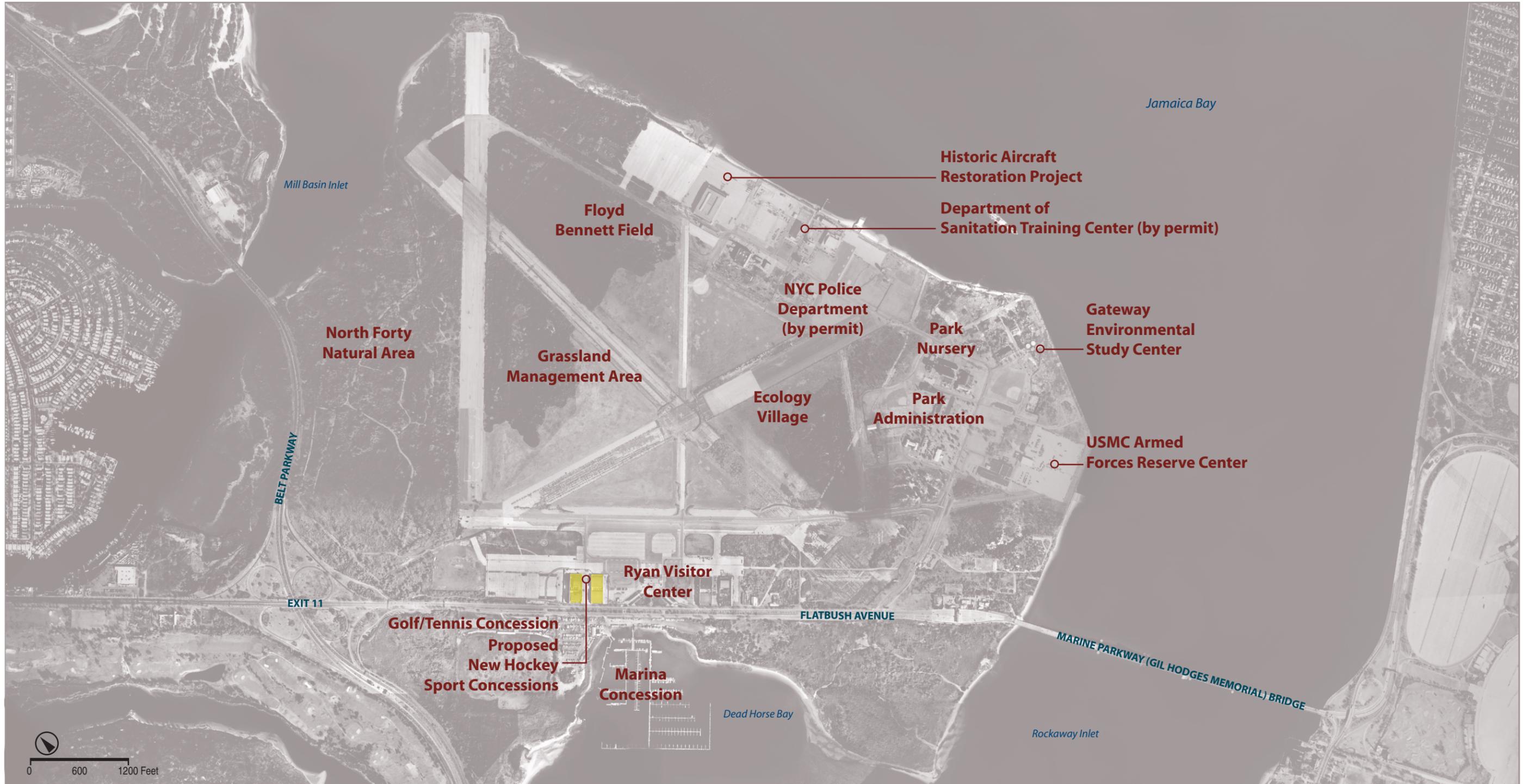
Safety– A numbers of safety concerns already exist at the intersection of Flatbush Avenue and the south entrance to Floyd Bennett Field. Once on site, additional safety issues exist as park visitors encounter traffic associated with other site users. This has been particularly problematic in the southeast quadrant of the Field where vehicles from the Armed Services Reserve Center (Marine Corps) and the New York City Police Department must pass through an area devoted primarily to educational purposes.

Security –Two resident tenants--the New York City Police Department and an Armed Services Reserve Center (Marine Corps)—both require higher levels of security than the rest of the Field. New access routes or circulation proposals should be identified that would allow these agencies to safely reach their destinations without disruption of the park. Additional security concerns exist around the new sports complex at the north end of Hangar Row. This complex is expected to operate nearly 24 hours a day, 7

days a week, while the rest of the Field is closed to most other public use. The proposed study should seek to find ways to provide access to the complex without opening the remainder of the Field.

Historic Resources – Floyd Bennett Field’s connections to early commercial aviation and U.S. military operations during WW-II, have led to its listing as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. Portions of the site are so unique, that they are currently being considered for National Landmark status. Proposals for modification to the circulation pattern outside of or within the park should be consistent with the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation and should include consultation with the New York State Historic Preservation Office in accordance with laws, regulations and policy effecting cultural resources.

Natural Resources – Although the Jamaica Bay Unit is located in a heavily urbanized area, the park contains large tracts that have been set aside primarily for their value as natural areas. For example, within Floyd Bennett Field, the NPS has identified the areas between the runways as a Grassland Management Area and the “North 40” as an upland marine habitat. These natural areas are important for both native and migratory species. The proposed study should seek to avoid adverse impacts to these areas.



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Floyd Bennett Field



Figure 4

Gateway Sites : Jamaica Bay Unit
Floyd Bennett Field

FORMER PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE AND FOUNTAIN AVENUE LANDFILLS

The former landfills at Pennsylvania and Fountain Avenues are located on the south side of the Belt Parkway, within the jurisdictional boundary established for Gateway National Recreation Area. Plans for the two sites include extensive plantings with native species as well as development of hiking trails, observation stations, a fishing pier, educational facilities, and passive recreation areas. This approach will allow the NPS to use more of the land within its boundary for visitor uses, while creating new natural habitats and a protective buffer for Jamaica Bay. An agreement with New York City and New York State allowed for transfer of the sites to the NPS as park lands once closure of the landfills is completed.

Before the two sites can be opened, the NPS must develop safe and efficient access to the two areas. The Pennsylvania Avenue Landfill site is relatively easy to access by automobile, as the Belt Parkway overpass already leads to the site. The Fountain Avenue Landfill site, however, is not as easily reached and will require use of local roads and underpasses accessed on the north side of the parkway. Once access to the former landfills has been addressed, the proposed study will describe internal vehicle circulation, parking, and the location of a visitor contact station—all of which must be placed over stable areas on the perimeter or the former landfill operation or between the cells of capped refuse. Pedestrian and bicycle access are important considerations, as a multi-use path already provides easy access to the sites from nearby residential communities.

Access to these sites must be designed in such a way that the sites can be secured when they are not open to visitation. Since the cap on both landfills must not be compromised, public access to the sites will be restricted to times when NPS personnel are on site. Therefore, both sites must be able to be gated and fenced to allow full closure. When the sites are open, the entranceway must incorporate a way to deter off-road vehicles and bicycles from leaving the paved portions of the circulation system. As is the case in the other proposed projects, the local and regional roads that will be utilized in this study are not NPS property, and the NPS and FHWA will work with their partners and other interested parties to develop the best alternative for this study.

Planning Issues

Local Transportation – The former landfills sit along the south side of the Belt Parkway, an important element in connecting Long Island to Brooklyn, Queens, and the rest of New York City. At present, access to the sites would have to be made by way of local roads that already support traffic to the Gateway shopping mall and adjacent residential communities. The proposed study must recognize the existing transportation network and seek to incorporate public access to the new sites without adversely impacting existing traffic flow.

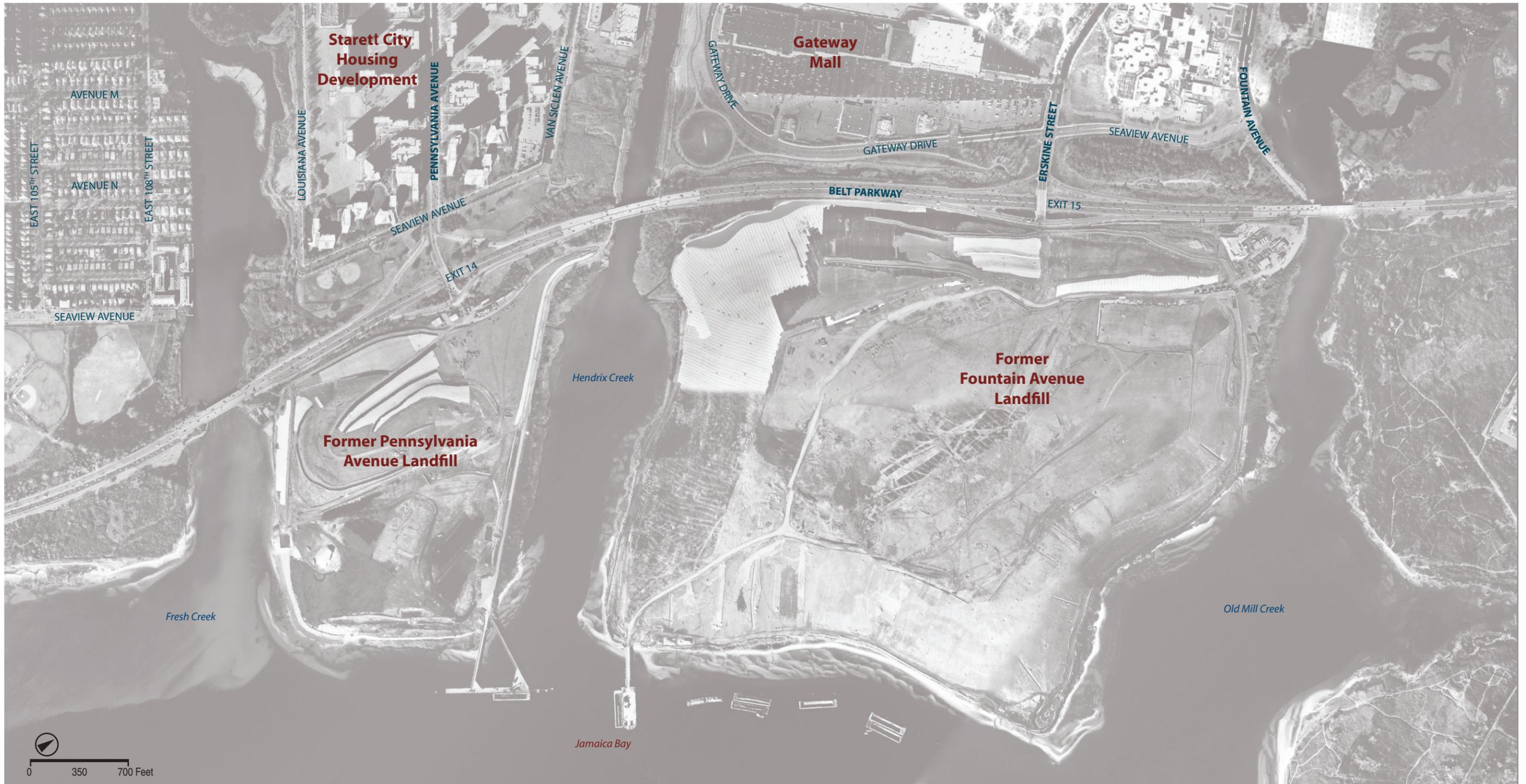
Safety – Visitation to both sites is expected to be moderate. Access will be by foot, bicycle and private automobile and come from the surrounding neighborhoods as well as the rest of the city. The proposed study must find ways of internalizing this traffic within the site without creating hazards to visitors or others traveling through the area.

Security – Although the landfills are capped and landscaped, there is still a possibility that the integrity of the cap could be compromised. For this reason, the site will be developed for passive recreational activities and educational programs. The proposed study area is limited to the stable, previously disturbed

areas that are not part of the capped former landfills. However, proposed alternatives should consider physical means of barring off-road vehicles, mountain bicycles, or other equipment from the site. Alternatives should also design means of completely restricting access to the sites during off hours. The two landfills are currently fenced; however creation of new access points will require additional security.

Site Planning – While much of the area included in the landfill boundary was used for waste disposal, a small portion of each site was left for administrative uses. These areas have been left out of the capping process and can support more development. Therefore, the development of entranceways, parking, and visitor contact facilities must be designed to fit in this area.

Interagency Coordination – As is the case at the other sites, the surrounding area and roadways are not owned by the NPS. This is especially true at the former landfill sites where the two sites are abutted by a New York City right of way. Careful coordination will be required to successfully develop these studies.



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Former Landfill Sites



Figure 5
Gateway Sites : Jamaica Bay Unit
Fountain Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue Former Landfills