

Atlantic Yards

A project of the Forest City Ratner Companies
Designed by Frank Gehry and Laurie Olin
Brooklyn, NY, USA
prepared by **Tori Halligan and Katy Saunders**



The Atlantic Yards Project is a proposed development for 22 acres in the center of Brooklyn, NY. Located next to the residential Park Slope neighborhood, the site runs roughly east along Atlantic Avenue from the oblique intersection with Flatbush Avenue. The development's presence at this intersection is significant, as Flatbush serves as a major axis, connecting the Manhattan Bridge, (and to some degree the Brooklyn Bridge, and the future development of the Brooklyn Bridge park) with Prospect Park to the southeast. The intersection of Atlantic and Flatbush is also a highly congested traffic area, due to the irregular angles and the additional intersection of 4th Avenue with Atlantic.

The site itself is a former industrial rail yard, and contains both rail lines and land owned and managed by New York's Mass Transit Authority (MTA). The buildings on the site are a mix of commercial and industrial structures; most are between 2 and 5 stories, some are vacant and others are currently in a state of disrepair. (FCRC, Atlantic Yards) The rail line was first chartered by the Long Island Railroad, and today still serves as a commuter line for Long Island.

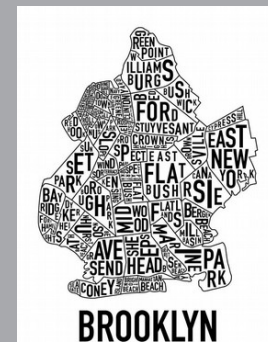
Atlantic Yards is a project of the Brooklyn-based Forest City Ratner Companies, (FCRC) a wing of Forest City Enterprises which is based in Cleveland, OH. In 2004 FCRC's Bruce Ratner obtained the New Jersey Nets a NBA basketball team, with the hope of bringing major-league sports back to Brooklyn for the first time since 1958 when the Brooklyn Dodgers left

Frank Gehry model for Atlantic Yards Development.
www.atlanticyards.com

Site and Context



Historic view of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, cir 1846.
www.whitmansbrooklyn.org



Site conditions at the LIRR
Vanderbilt Railyard



www.atlanticyards.com



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Building character sur-
rounding the Atlantic Yards
development site



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for Los Angeles. Frank Gehry serves as the main architect while Laurie Olin designed the plan for the open spaces within the site, but the two collaborated on the general layout and site design for the project. (Schuerman, 2007)

Program

At the heart of the development plans, which were first announced in 2003, is a new basketball arena, financed in large part with public funds. (CITE By 2006, FCRC had purchased most of the land parcels within the site boundary south of Pacific St., leaving the parcels to the north in the hand of the MTA. While the area serves as the anchor for the project, the complex is largely a high-density residential development. 6,430 units of market-rate, rental and low-income properties are currently planned for the project, which is slated to unfold in two phases.

- 1,730 market-rate condominiums
- 4,500 rental units
 - 50% for middle-income and low-income families
 - Target rents set at 30 % of household income
- At least 200 ownership units for low-income, moderate-income and middle-income individuals and families. (FCRC, Atlantic Yards, 2008)

A discussion of the project in the Journal Places however, suggest that the gains in affordable housing are largely offset by displacement in neighborhoods close to the project. (Oder, 2008)

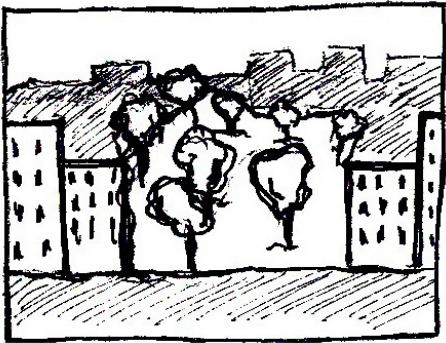
In addition to the residential buildings, the plan also includes a large commercial area (both offices and retail) and a hotel located next to the arena. Open space plans are included for both areas, but concentrated with the residential units, part of phase two. In order to meet open space requirements for the project, Gehry and Olin combined two city blocks for the residential area. This decision has drawn criticism from some, who argue that this type of design harkens back to the towers and 'superblock' housing projects of the mid-century. (Shuerman, 2007) It also presents a challenge for public access to the space, as it is largely concentrated at the center of the development.

Building quite literally on the site's railway history, the development will be built over a large public transit station, the third-largest central subway hub in New York City. The station will include serve 10 subway lines as well as the Long Island Railway commuter line.

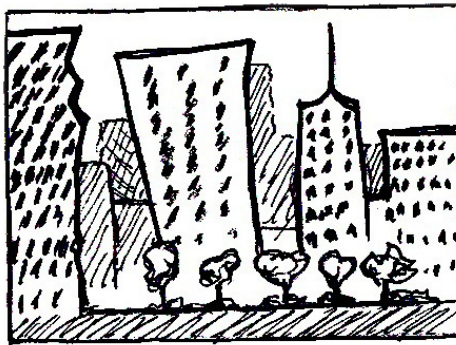


Atlantic Yards Site Plan
www.atlanticyards.com

Public Open Space in the City



City Beautiful parks, such as Prospect Park in Brooklyn, integrate large areas of open space into residential neighborhoods



Integrating smaller open-spaces into residential developments is a common pattern in the larger, denser cities of the 21st century.

*How sustainable is each model? What is gained?
What is lost? How public are these spaces?*

Planning Process

With an estimated cost of \$4.2, Atlantic Yards is largest project planned by a single developer in the history of New York City. In addition to FCRC, the project has been endorsed and supported by many influential New York officials, particularly the MTA, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz. Their support of the project is based on the need for economic revitalization for the Downtown Brooklyn area, as well as a need for dense, affordable housing in the New York area. A study published by the Empire State Development Corporation, a New York state agency, asserted that the project would generate \$1.4 billion in tax revenues, but significantly, the report did not factor the cost of affordable housing subsidies the project would receive from the city and state. (Confessore, 2006)

Gehry and Olin's original design, though controversial from the start, were originally celebrated by many influential critics, including the New York Time writer Nicolai Ouroussoff. As the designs revisions responded to funding gaps and controversy surrounding the project, however, many critics, including Ouroussoff, have begun to question the resiliency of the design intent in the face of so many changes. (Ouroussoff, 2008) The choreography of residential and commercial buildings around the arena, a central element of the original designs, has proved to be vulnerable to funding cuts. (Bagli, 2008) In May 2008, a study done by the Municipal Art Society of New York brought attention to current plans, which illustrate a stark arena flanked by a single building, and surrounded by vast swaths of parking lot/construction staging areas that could remain for over a decade. (Kuntzman, 2008, Municipal Art Society, 2008)

Numerous layers of controversy have plagued the project since its inception in 2003. The affordable housing program has been a challenge due to the limited availability of public funding for the project, which ultimately led to design changes and delays. Even more contentious has been the skirting of certain permitting and design review processes. Where as such projects would normally have to pass through the New York City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), Atlantic Yards virtually granted a 'pass' by the Empire State Development Corporation. This allowed FCRC to use eminent domain to acquire property for the project. (Odor, 2008) This approach was highly controversial, and resulted in a federal law suit which delayed. (Odor, 2008,

Atlantic Yards

Critical renderings:

Arena design per Gehry's intent...



Municipal Art Society
<http://atlanticlots.com/>

2008 FCRC plans based on current funding



Municipal Art Society
<http://atlanticlots.com/>



Jonathan Cohn
<http://brooklynviews.blogspot.com>

Community Resistance to the Atlantic Yards Development



Develop - Don't Destroy Brooklyn
http://dddb.net/php/latestnews_ArchiveDate.php

Confessore, May 2006) An additional lawsuit over the environmental review process was filed in the NY state court, but both suits were ultimately won by FCRC.

Public resistance to the project has also been a key issue throughout the course of the project. A NY Times article published in 2006 interviewed residents in several Brooklyn neighborhoods to get their opinions of the project. The results were mixed. While some residents were excited by the promises of more affordable housing and a dense urban development, others were very nervous about the scale of the project. (Blyer, 2006) FCRC's employment of eminent domain and sleek marketing tactics have further alienated local residents. (Letham, 2006) The main point of contention, however, is largely rooted within the scale of the design itself, and its ill-fit with the low-rise, residential quality of the surrounding neighborhoods. (Letham, 2006, Confessore, May 2006, Cohn, 2006) Countless community organizations, media outlets and urban design groups have rallied against the project, calling for more transparency and commitment to public involvement in the design process.



Inspiration and Design Ideology

When designing for the Open space of Atlantic Yards Laurie Olin was inspired by the Geology, topography and the history of the land. Olin is considered by many to be the heir to Frederick Law Olmsted's legacy. Olmsted also gave the regional geology and natural habitats great emphasis within his designs as is seen in Prospect Park. Olmsted utilized the pre-existing glacier-formed kettle ponds and lowland outwash plains in his design of the watercourse. He also found inspiration from the vernacular landscape; from the pastoral to the

“This was all done to give the urban dweller a “sub-conscious” experience of nature within the city as Olmsted believed it was possible and necessary to provide such nourishment for the general public in the overwhelming urban environments of his time.”



forested ravines and would implanting these scenes within an urban context. “This was all done to give the urban dweller a “sub-conscious” experience of nature within the city as Olmsted believed it was possible and necessary to provide such nourishment for the general public in the overwhelming urban environments of his time.”

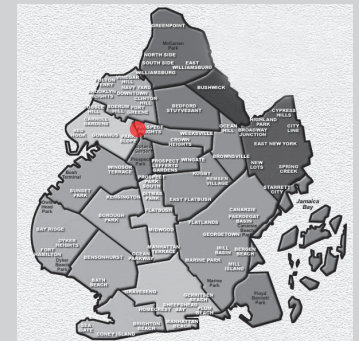
In combination with the Wisconsin Glacier dumping piles of glacial debris from the north, (which are manifested as hills throughout the borough) and leaving marshes and wetlands once the glacier retreated at the end of the Pleistocene; are elements often overlooked from a laymen’s point of view; sub-consciously characterizing and give spirit to the topography and natural habitat of Brooklyn.

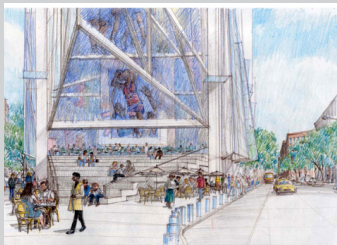
These two qualities fed back into Olin’s Atlantic Yards open space plan. Olin pulled water back into the site, saving and restoring, reconstructing a little piece of the marsh, cutting a lake from a hill and then reconstructing the hill as a means of preserving the geological footprint. In doing so he exposes the geological history to the passerby’s, “The real underneath of Brooklyn”.

Gehry’s inspiration was to pay close attention to the space between the buildings and the “synergy” that is created as a result. He was drawn to the character of the neighboring communities, the different facades and details that make for a highly engaging sensorial experience; the idiosyncratic elements that add dimension and interest at a human scale.

Atlantic Yards: Knitting together Four Distinct Neighborhoods

There are 4 neighborhoods that surround Atlantic Yards with different characterizations both in scale and demographically. Just north of the site is Fort Green and Northeast Clinton Hill; Downtown Brooklyn and Brooklyn Heights lies west, and Boerum Hill to the south. Most of the neighborhoods are characterized by many nineteenth century brick townhouses and brownstones. Once divided into boroughs, they were home to upwardly mobile immigrants that





helped to give identity and culture to the various areas.

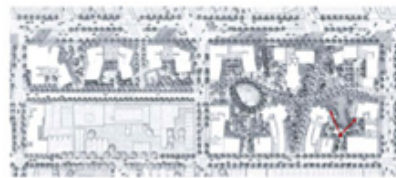
Laurie Olin's open space plan helps to link these neighborhoods together with streets on axis with public green space within the complex, in addition to visual connections and points of interest. The 8-acre open space plan includes areas to play basketball and bocce, to stroll or sit, including water features relating to the geology, promenades and open lawns. Many of the planted areas are planned to include indigenous trees and vegetation. Some have a distinct character like the willow walk, giving authenticity to the grounds, in a context that is closely linked to the pre-existing landscape within Brooklyn.

Gehry designed the main blocks east of the arena in adherence to the street grid and in alignment to a central courtyard. The program of the buildings is lower level retail while upper levels are mixed use residential office space with interspersed public space. The towers range between 40 and 60 stories tall, quite out of scale with the 2-4 story brownstones in the neighboring areas.

His design for the Barclay arena is considered by many to be revolutionary. "Mr. Gehry's great invention was to conceal it behind a dense array of commercial and residential towers." Gehry designed a relationship of solid to void, from outside the busy streetscape to within the excitement of the arena. The arena is framed on the east and south by three smaller residential towers, with "playful forms like unevenly stacked children's blocks." The 66 Story Ms. Brooklyn "clad in cascading sheets of glass" serves as an anchor point and also a gateway from the subway below and into the stadium.

There is a definite possibility that development will be abandoned due to lack of financing and support. Forest City Ratner has considering going ahead with the 18,000 seat Basketball stadium and delaying construction of the 4 towers that are meant to surround it. Gehry conceived of the design as an ensemble of buildings not as a collection of independent structures. In postponing the towers it will expose the stadium becoming "a piece of urban blight at a crucial crossroads of the city's physical history". There is a shared fear that Atlantic yards will become another instance of "powerful economic interests trampling on the rights of a deeply rooted middle class community." New York has a long line of master planning gone awry, including Battery Park City, The Metro Technical Center and Donald Trump's Riverside South, which lack authenticity and conversely achieve a homogeneous and a monotonous architectural and planning development. However there are also projects such as the 20th century 22 block development of Rockefeller Center that was a successful attempt of planning at a mass scale.

“During a Nets game, pedestrians strolling along Flatbush Avenue would be able to catch glimpses of anguished fans inside; when the arena was empty, its dark, gaping void could have the haunting effect of the ruins of a Roman coliseum.” Nicolai Ouroussoff (NY Times)



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