

Acquisition of Habirshaw Property Final Report

Westchester County and the City of Yonkers entered into a partnership in the late 1990's to rehabilitate and revitalize the Yonkers downtown waterfront. The Master Plan for the waterfront redevelopment identified the former Habirshaw Club property as the northern terminus of a waterfront esplanade park. Located along Alexander Street, the Habirshaw property is contiguous to the County's former Naval Militia Site. Acquisition of the 1.97 acre Habirshaw parcel (1.23 acres of land), doubled the land area of the northern park terminus, from 1.5 acres, to 2.73 acres, and added approximately 124 linear feet of waterfront to the park.

In May 1998 the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) awarded a grant for \$167,284 through its Environmental Protection Fund program to the City of Yonkers for the acquisition of two riverfront parcels at Wells Avenue and Alexander Streets in Yonkers. Due to difficulties in acquiring these two parcels, the grant was later transferred to Westchester County (per City's request) to assist in the acquisition of the Habirshaw Club Property. The OPRHP transferred the grant to the County in July of 1999 (EPF Grant 546122-TJ).

Recognizing the importance of preserving this site, Scenic Hudson, Inc joined the partnership to acquire this valuable open space. The Scenic Hudson Land Trust negotiated an option agreement to purchase the Habirshaw Club property for \$850,000. The option was assigned to the County, with Scenic Hudson providing \$682,716 in acquisition funds. In consideration for providing a portion of the acquisition funding, Scenic Hudson required the County to enter into two agreements:

- 1) A Conservation Easement which restricts development on the property and requires its use of the property as a public park and use of the building for recreational, educational and community purposes; and
- 2) A Park Development Agreement which committed the County to both make park improvements within a specified timeframe, and to provide Scenic Hudson with escrow funds equal to their purchase payment (\$672,716) as security for the park improvements.

Westchester County purchased the Habirshaw Club property from Ron Rob Realty Corporation on October 14, 1999.

Westchester County has endeavored to clean up and reconstruct the Habirshaw Park (formerly the Naval Militia and Habirshaw Club Sites). As part of an ambitious capital program, the County expended nearly two million dollars to restore the site as a park and a functioning tidal marsh wetland. The project involved clearing invasive vegetation and removal of fill from the site, including slabs of concrete, debris, and other contaminated soils. To assure clean surface conditions the site was over-excavated 24 inches deep and filled to suitable elevations with sand and an amended sand/soil mix.

The project also included restoring a tidal marsh wetland along the shoreline of the park. The quality of the new tidal area drastically improved over previous conditions, featuring a High and Low Marsh with significant brackish plant components, two small tidal pools, a tidal channel, an adjacent freshwater marsh in line with storm water drainage swales and adjacent areas planted with native grasses, forbs, shrubs and small trees. A permanent stone breakwater structure will protect the marsh from wave and current induced erosion. Existing stone rip-rap in front of an old stonewall will be reinforced. A timber footbridge was also installed as a viewing platform for the marsh.

The total cost for all the shoreline improvements, which included the tidal marsh, was estimated at \$515,234. Westchester County received a \$250,000 grant from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund, which funded a portion of this work. The County funded the remainder.

The park was also improved with sidewalks, asphalt pathways, benches, security fencing, signage, lighting and a parking lot. All of the improvements have been completed and the tidal marsh is thriving.