Inwood & Isham Parks

Restore forest health, streams, marshes and scenic views

Evoke past eras:
Native American life, Revolutionary War

Protect, reveal and interpret geological treasures:
Geological phenomena and formations, springs and natural shorelines

Explore Mannahatta:
An isolated valley, and a forest ridge overlooking the sublime expanse of the Hudson Valley and Palisades

Improve family attractions:
Nature center, accessible restrooms, community space, performance area, picnic lawns
Each “word cloud” shows the top ten concerns people mentioned. If the type is larger, it means the item has a high probability of being requested by other community members.
Concerns as reported on All Our Ideas

Adjacent community

- Enforce noise ordinance
- Improve bike/pedestrian safety
- Calm traffic and add speedbumps
- Enforce one-way streets north of Isham Park
- Enforce traffic laws at 215th and Broadway
- Improve forest ecology
- Install side street speed bumps
- Plant more flowering plants
- Dampen subway noise
- Enforce litter laws
Inwood and Isham Parks

Physical Issues

- Opportunity to expand waterfront uses
- Restroom facilities at recreation and play areas needed to enhance public enjoyment
- Control invasive plants to open scenic views
- Opportunity to reroute paths to avoid toll plaza and parking lot
- Filled shoreline and buried hydrology disrupt natural processes and storm water absorption
- Improve river access
- Basin is filling up with silt providing an opportunity for a healthy marsh

- Field alignment needs revision to control fly balls
- Control invasive trees to open scenic views
- Opportunity for more seasonal beauty and more healthy slope plantings

- Improve the street and intersections for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Improve path system signage, condition and drainage
Inwood Park

Revise the path system to highlight natural features, avoid the TBTA toll plaza and correct circulation problems.

Remove redundant paths and restore creeks and marsh areas.
Create a rustic path through the Clove.
Inwood Park

Present day map overlaid with historic features, creeks, paths, and roads
Inwood Park

Historic Features: Geological and Native American

During the Ice Age a series of bore holes were created in the rocks of Inwood Hill. These borings were created by rapidly flowing water from melting glaciers. The aggregate in the water wore down the rock into a depression which widened with the passing of time. The borings were discovered by geologists in 1931.1

The abundant natural resources of Inwood Hill attracted human settlement as far back as 1000 A.D. The site offered a fresh supply of water from the cold spring, cave shelters, an abundant supply of fish and shellfish in the Spuyten Duyvil Creek, rich soil for growing crops and a forest to supply timber for construction.2

Archeological findings imply that a permanent village named Shorakapock was established by a group known as the Week-qua-keeks along the eastern border of the park. Additionally, artifacts have been found over the entire site, many in the vicinity of the cold spring and on the hillside near the caves.3

3. Ibid, 1.
The same resources that sustained the Week-qua-keeks on Inwood Hill attracted Colonial settlers. When Henry Hudson arrived at the Spuyten Duyvil Creek in 1609, the first of many conflicts occurred between the two groups. After the Dutch purchased Manhattan Island they rapidly displaced or killed most of the Native American population. By 1715 the Week-qua-keeks had abandoned Inwood Hill. The Dutch introduced land ownership to the site in 1677 and Jan Nagel and Jan Dyckman together purchased the tract that included Inwood Hill. These two families would dominate the area for more than a century. Although no residences were built on the current park site, the two families made use of the natural resources by planting orchards, using the forested hillside for timber and harvesting from the Spuyten Duyvil.

The Revolutionary War greatly affected the Inwood Hill area. The Colonials quickly constructed a five sided earthwork named Cock Hill Fort which fell to the British in November of 1776. In need of timber and firewood for their hut camp the British and Hessian soldiers chopped down trees in the orchards and forests. Rainfall eroded the nude hill and the cultivation of crops depleted the rich soil. After the war the Nagels and Dcyckmans rebuilt their farms on the site. The destroyed forests were able to recover by the mid-1800s when the area was considered desirable for large “country” estates.

5. Ibid, 3.
During the 19th Century the Inwood Hill site began to be developed as residential and institutional property. In 1814 the majority of Inwood Hill was acquired by Curtis and John Bolton who planned residential development for the property and laid out a system of roads which were partially constructed. During this period a number of large residential estates were constructed on the Hill including houses owned by R.H. Macy and Isadore Strauss. The Park area became the site of several major institutions: a “House of Rest”, the Magdalene Benevolent Society Asylum (later the Jewish Memorial Hospital) and the “House of Mercy” at the summit of the Hill. The Dyckman Library (later the Dyckman Institute) was established at the southeast corner of the park site.

Map by Reginald Pelham Bolton

Advances in transportation began to affect Inwood Hill in the mid 19th century. The Hudson River Railroad tracks were constructed along the edge of the Hudson and the Inwood Station was in operation from 1847 to 1917. The only heavy industrial site in the area was the Johnson Iron Foundry which operated from 1853 to 1923. The Harlem Ship Canal was first constructed in 1895, cutting off nearby Marble Hill from the rest of Manhattan. That same year the acquisition of Inwood Hill by the city for use as a park was first proposed but rejected by the Parks Department. Instead the area was considered for industrial development.

Map by Reginald Pelham Bolton

During the early 1900’s, Inwood Hill remained in its “natural” form including the last bit of natural waterfront in Manhattan. The City was persuaded to create a park at Inwood Hill and between 1916 and 1923 the Parks Department acquired most of the present day site. At this point the trustees of the Dyckman Institute were appointed honorary curators of about 20 acres which were designated as the “Indian Life Reservation.” This area included the cave and rock shelters, the Great Tulip Tree (the oldest living thing in Manhattan), the nearby cottage and a working pottery which reproduced Native American pots. Native American remains were first discovered on the site in 1890 and a professional archeological dig was sponsored by the Museum of the American Indian in 1919.
Inwood Park

Historic Features: Mid 20th Century Modifications

Despite strong opposition, the “West Side Improvement” plan was completed in 1937 bringing the Henry Hudson Parkway through the western portion of the park. Inwood Hill was greatly impacted by both the Parkway’s construction and its acquisition by the Parks Department. During this time a drainage system was developed along with concrete stairways, asphalt paths, playgrounds, ball fields, etc. By 1940 it had become an urban park.¹⁰

Due to human impact the shape and size of Inwood Hill Park has changed. Along the Hudson River a large area was created with fill from a subway excavation in the early 1930’s to create more park space. Also, the Harlem River Canal altered the course of the Spuyten Dvyl changing the coastline of the park along the Creek. A small peninsula which was once part of the Bronx is now a piece of Inwood Park.¹¹

Created with a Map by Egbert L. Viele, 1874

¹¹ Ibid, passim.
1892 rendering of the view of the Inwood Hill area from the Fort George area which is at the north end of the current day Highbridge Park.
Inwood Park

Restore the original hydrological systems

1874 - Viele Map showing original watercourses, overlaid with current park outlines and coastline
Inwood Park

Restore watercourses and wetlands

Existing emerging wetland
Create a naturalized shoreline at a proper elevation to establish a high marsh

Reconstruct shoreline pathway as a boardwalk

Establish a low marsh in the body of the inlet

Proposed naturalized shoreline and creek outlet

Inwood Park
Restore watercourses and wetlands

New small boat launch location
Create a
naturalized shoreline

Reconfigure shoreline and inland elevations to create a creek

Remove the steel fences, reconfigure the paths adjacent to the creek
Inwood Park

Create naturalized wet areas and rivulet in the Clove

Existing conditions: Showing flooded and washed out path in the Clove

Proposed: Showing rivulet formed by lowering soil levels and re-grading topography
Inwood Park

Establish a wilderness trail

Restore and reuse steps and paths carved into the rock, as well as the small trails constructed on the slopes in the Indian cave area of the western ridge.

Use very discrete trail markings.

Route the path past scenic, geological and hydrological features.
Inwood Park

Improve interpretation of Native American caves and the geological features

Give insight to the Native American point-of-view

Provide access to the geological features in a way that blends into the natural environment and does not cause erosion.
Inwood Park

Create a real fire ring and performance area at the Indian Caves

Use rocks and natural materials to form a ring of seating that will accommodate groups of 30 people.
Inwood Park
Re-establish the natural character of the entrance to the Clove

- Remove curbs, lamp posts, and utility structures; use discreet signage
- Reduce pavement and construct a boardwalk over the restored rivulet
- Plant a new tulip tree to replace the lost historic tree

Proposed conditions

Current conditions
Inwood Park

Improve the use and appearance of the peninsula

Remove the storage yard and containers, relocate the kayak storage building

Enhance the picnic area

Enhance the performance area

Paint the nature center a darker color

Reconfigure the restrooms to permit outside access when the center is closed

Provide a boardwalk for marsh access

Improve the roof and HVAC system
Inwood Park

Reconfigure the ball field layout and foul ball fences to protect park users and improve appearance of the adjacent areas.

Reconfigure the fields to decrease fly ball hazards to park users.

Construct new fences closer to field foul lines to provide a more effective barrier and to make paths feel less constricted.

Reconstruct similar fences near the dog run.
Inwood Park

This is a map of the plant communities prepared by the Natural Resources Group to guide restoration decisions. It considers cover type, canopy species, understory types and species and soil conditions.

Continue to remove invasive trees and vines

The red and purple areas require attention or they will spread aggressively

Plant Communities

- Other Entitation Units
- Native Closed Forest
- Invasive Closed Forest
- Invasive Vineland
- Sensitive Habitat Area
Inwood Park

Restore scenic views

Example of overgrown condition with obscured view

Historic view of the Hudson
Community Concerns as reported on All Our Ideas

Each “word cloud” shows the top ten concerns people mentioned. If the type is larger, it means the item has a high probability of being requested by other community members.
Isham Park

Physical Issues

Field alignment needs revision to control fly balls

Control invasive trees to open scenic views

Opportunity for more seasonal beauty and more healthy slope plantings

Basin is filling up with silt providing an opportunity for a healthy marsh

No shoreline walkway
Isham Park

Concept Plan

- Add public restrooms accessible from exterior
- Restore seawall and improve scenic quality of peninsula
- Remove containers
- Decrease parking
- Remove fences
- Remove boat storage building
- Create picnic area
- Create public access to floating dock and create small boat storage
- Explore potential as future green space
- Improve beauty of garden perimeter
- Provide water fountain and irrigation
- Restore walls, paths and stairs
- Expand flowering shrub planting
- Manage all slopes as landscapes with scenic beauty
- Open view to Cloisters
- Open view to Hudson River
- New entrance path
- Reconfigure fence and field alignment
- Improve bike lane
- Create small-boat launch and boat house
- Pursue shoreline path continuation to Inwood Park
Isham Park

Restore critical historic views and scenic beauty

Historic view from the Isham hill toward Inwood park and the Hudson River
Isham Park

Restore critical historic views and scenic beauty

Prune and thin healthy trees to improve sculptural beauty and sightlines

Relocate newly planted street trees that will grow too tall for the location

Only plant shorter trees in the view corridor

Relocate lampposts and signs that interfere with the view

Existing conditions
Isham Park

Improve safety and beauty of “Isham Family Path” and park slopes

Remove dead trees, prune and thin healthy trees to improve sculptural beauty and sightlines; plant understory trees and shrubs to enhance habitat

Remove tall shrubs that enclose the pathway

Plant groundcover near paths, plant lower flowering shrubs and airy multistem understory trees down the slope to add scenic beauty

Design short range views from the memorial benches

Establish a zone of 2 foot-candle warm colored lighting to make the path more attractive to pedestrians in the evening
Isham Park

Improve the appearance of the Park Terrace East circle

Replace the cobra head street lights with historic street lights, use discreet ground or fence mounted signage

Improve the circle plantings

Employ chemical graffiti removal rather than painting the stone
Isham Park
Integrate Bruce’s Garden into the park landscape

Plant low growing flowering shrubs and airy multistem trees on the park side of the fence

Evaluate removing the fence and connecting the garden to the park like “Strawberry Fields” in Central Park

Provide water for irrigation
Isham Park

Remove Mulberry trees damaging the stairs, and restore the stairs

Remove mulberry trees damaging stairs

Restore the stairs

Plant low growing flowering shrubs and trees

Provide water for irrigation

Demap the street that was never constructed
Isham Park

Use standard dark color for all painted concrete surfaces

Existing white painted wall

Decrease the dominance of painted surfaces in the landscape by making them darker

Proposed granite gray painted wall

Plant ivy on the wall to naturalize it and discourage graffiti