

History of the Weehawken Waterfront Park and Recreation Center

For many years the Weehawken Waterfront served as the site for industrial production and shipping facilities. It served the community in producing jobs for local residents and economic activity. But with the close of World War II, industry and shipping began to migrate away from the cities to areas that could afford expansion and land growth at a cheaper cost than the cities of the Hudson River could provide. And like its sister cities of Jersey City, Hoboken and West New York, the waterfront slowly decayed into an abandoned, desolate and unproductive area off limits to residents. The waterfront no longer provided jobs or industry and its decaying and dangerous infrastructure prohibited people from any attempt at waterside recreational uses or any type of open space.

However in the early 1990's, the Mayor and Township Council decided to stop the decay of this once valuable resource. Through a series of measures adopted by the Township Council and the Planning Board, a master plan was developed to turn the waterfront into a modern residential, office and commercial site that would again provide jobs and homes for township residents. And most importantly, for the first time in town history, to open up the waterfront for recreational usage and open public space. . The components of a park facility were included in the final version of the master plan adopted for the waterfront.

Based upon the master plan, the Roseland Property Company proposed the residential and commercial development of the northern portion of the Weehawken Hudson River Waterfront. Known as the Port Imperial South Development, this project would encompass the construction of residential units, a four star hotel, office buildings, parking facilities and retail space. Through many public hearings on the proposed development, the Township, as a condition of its approval, required Roseland Property Company at its own cost, to provide a substantial waterfront park facility for the residents of Weehawken.

The Mayor created a Waterfront Parks Committee composed of elected officials, appointed officials and members of the public to further study the issue and report back to the Township Council and Planning Board. The Committee was aided in their study by the New York landscape architectural firm of Mathews Neilson and the world-wide engineering firm of Wilbur Smith. This Committee held many hearings, including "open houses" on weekends for the public to help craft the type of park and park facilities desired by the residents.

Through a lengthy series of public meetings, residents were asked for their comments and recommendations on how the township should redevelop the waterfront park. The Committee proposed a waterfront facility to be built in two phases. The first phase which is to be opened on September 25, 2007 has over 10.5 acres of waterfront access and recreation for the residents of Weehawken. Built as an active recreation site the park includes two baseball fields, a soccer/football field, a running track, tennis courts, a golf putting green, fitness equipment, an amphitheater for public performances, 2 tot lots and many other amenities. The second phase, currently under design will contain a municipal swimming pool, a hockey/skating rink, a canoe and kayak launch, as well other facilities.

These new waterfront park facilities along with the linear park and walkways already under development by Roseland connecting the residential buildings to the new hotel, office building and ferry terminal will add nearly 23 acres of parkland, doubling the amount of public open space in Weehawken today. As a result of this new open space and parkland development, the Township, for the first time in its history will exceed the nationally recommended levels of open space for a community of our size.