

The Dirt

## Master Plan for Governors Island Unveiled

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Dutch Landscape architecture firm [West 8](#), working together with [Diller Scofidio + Renfro](#) and [Rogers Marvel](#), has released the master plan for [Governors Island](#), a 172-acre island off the southern tip of Manhattan. The first phase of the master plan details the roll-out of 2.2 miles of waterfront promenades and a new 40-acre park. The new design features artificially-created hills that focus attention on the park's center, as well as a "hammock grove," a grotto-like shelter, athletic fields and marshlands, writes the [The New York Times](#). The New York City government has allocated more than \$40 million in funds to the new plan, but will need to raise more than \$220 million for future phases of development. Control of the island recently [passed from New York state to the city](#), enabling Mayor Bloomberg's plans for the island to move forward.

The Governors Island master plan includes the development of a new ferry landing area and shaded lawn overlooking the Lower Manhattan skyline. According to [Fast Company](#), a man-made canyon will also create framed views of the Statue of Liberty. The entire master plan call for a network of promenades to circle the entire island, but the first phase will cover only the northern half. Walking along the promenade, visitors will get views of everything from the Statue of Liberty to Brooklyn Heights.

In the future stages of development, pathways will lead further south through sloping lawns, leading to the hammock grove. Nicolai Ouroussoff, architecture critic for [The New York Times](#), describes the area: "Scores of hammocks will be suspended in a forest of oak and birch trees. In a rendering that shows the hammocks sagging under the weight of people napping inside them, they bring to mind human-size cocoons." Also, under development is a new cafe designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro at the water's edge. "A lawn expands out onto the building's roof, where visitors will be able to climb down through a large hole into a grotto-like shelter open to the water."



The southern end of the island will feature man-made marshes and tidal basins. “A raised concrete walkway wraps around the marshes at the tip of the island, so that visitors should feel as if the edge of the land were dissolving around them. To add to the sensory experience, [Adriaan] Geuze [of West 8] plans to plant the area with strong-smelling plants, like sea asparagus and lavender.” The marshes may be designed as “green” or “soft” infrastructure, providing a natural system to accommodate sea level rises that threaten New York City. Geuze of West 8 seems very focused on climate change and incorporating adaptation schemes into his designs ([see earlier post](#)).

Ourossoff says the site’s building plans are still in flux. New York University is exploring adding dormitories and classroom space. There’s also discussion about luxury hotels or a conference center.

He also contends that while Mayor Bloomberg’s ambitious park plans are “democratic” and will benefit many New Yorkers, they also end up raising property values of buildings nearby, accelerating gentrification. “Sitting in the middle of the harbor, [Governors Island] ought to be accessible to working-class families from Staten Island and the Lower East Side of Manhattan, as well as to wealthier downtowners and Red Hook’s bourgeois bohemians. The nature of the developments that flank the park will be critical to determining whether the island feels as if it belongs to all of them, or just to those few who can afford to pay for its upkeep.”

Despite the equity issues that will need to be addressed, Ourossoff concludes that the new park, together with Michael Van Valkenburgh’s new set of parks along the Brooklyn waterfront ([see earlier post](#)), mean a “shift in the character of the city’s park system as a whole that is as revolutionary as Robert Moses’ early public works projects or Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux’s Central Park.”

[Read the article](#) and [see a slideshow of renderings of the new Governors Island](#). Also, learn more about the [upcoming changes to the Island’s governance](#) with its move from New York State to city control.

In other Governors Island news, [Ann Ha and Behrang Behin's "Living Pavilion"](#) won the City of Dreams Pavilion competition sponsored by FIGMENT, the Emerging New York Architect Committee (ENYA) of the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter (AIANY), and the Structural Engineers Association of New York (SEAoNY). The winning project will be assembled on Governors Island this spring, and will be open to the public from June 6 through October 3. "Living Pavilion is a low-tech, zero-impact structure that employs reclaimed milk crates as the framework for growing a planted green wall surface."

*Image credit: West 8; Rogers Marvel Architects; Diller Scofidio & Renfro; Mathews Nielsen; Urban Design +*