REBUILD BY DESIGN

GOOD OLD LOWER EAST SIDE GOLES
Keeping People in their Homes + Community

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) FOR COMMUNITY-BASED EAST RIVER PARK STEWARDSHIP STUDY

With the realities we face from climate change, the creation of new resilient infrastructure is a challenge that governments on all levels will have to address. As cities turn to parks and coastal green space for building resilience and protection against rising seas, heat waves, flooding and other climate impacts, smart green design will become critical and more complex. Generating models for creating long-term stewardship structures to enhance initial government capital investments, and support new design and programming, will be essential in keeping these spaces functional while maintaining their long-term resilience value.

To address its resilience challenges, New York City is reconstructing the 64 Acre, 1.5 mile long East River Park to become a 21st century resilient park along the East River waterfront. The East Side Coastal Resiliency Project (ESCR) is the first phase of BIG U concept plan as designed for the Rebuild by Design Hurricane Sandy Design Competition. ESCR was imagined as a result of the Rebuild by Design Hurricane Sandy Competition and intensive community collaboration. This resilient park -- the first of its kind in NYC -- is planned to protect more than 130,000 vulnerable residents from future storm surge. The existing East River Park will be enhanced for everyday enjoyment with passive and active programming, and will act as a protector in times of extreme storm surge or long-term sea level rise by using a multi-purpose berm infrastructure designed to withstand storm-surge and sea-level rise impacts.

The maintenance of parks is a challenge in New York City, just as in many other cities around the world. To address shortages in funding and opportunities for enhancements, New York City has a history of employing the "Conservancy" model, which typically takes the form of a non-profit institution that contracts with the NYC Parks Department to operate certain parks and open spaces. This formula has led to beloved new recreational spaces such as Brooklyn Bridge Park, Governors Island, Hudson River Park, and the Highline, and sustains older spaces, such as Central Park, Bryant Park, the Battery, and the Bronx Zoo, through capture of revenue, and through fundraising of private and philanthropic donations to maintain the parks. While effective in maintaining quality open space, these models, often in practice and as perceived by local communities, have removed accountability and responsibilities from government, promoting exclusivity in uses, and containing amenities that may lack affordability to adjacent communities.

In places like the Lower East Side where community stewardship of neighborhood gardens is strong, East River Park has the potential to become a framework where local groups, schools, sports leagues, and tenant associations could be enabled to care for and maintain the future of East River Park. While the new park integrates flood protection infrastructure, a key aspect of its design is strengthening accessibility to the waterfront. The new accessible waterfront will provide increased access to improved public open space such as sports fields, passive lawn areas, and alternative recreational programs.

Rebuild By Design is requesting proposals to explore and ultimately recommend potential stewardship models with funding mechanisms that could enhance the long-term operating budget while addressing issues of equity. While this research is focused on what specific structure may enhance ESCR in NYC, the findings could be used to inform future Rebuild by Design work in local, national, or international contexts.

BACKGROUND:

Some of the most destructive flooding and iconic imagery of Hurricane Sandy impacts occurred in the Lower East Side. This community is particularly vulnerable to flooding and also contains some of the most affordable housing in Manhattan. There are approximately 29,500 public housing units within the 617 acre flood zone. Within this flood zone, over 80,000 of the 130,000 residents are low-income, elderly or disabled.

In June 2013, the Rebuild by Design Hurricane Sandy Competition coupled innovation and global expertise with community insight to develop implementable solutions to the region's most complex needs. The multi-stage competition guided participants through in-depth research, cross-sector, cross-professional collaboration, and iterative design. Participants collaborated with community and local government stakeholders to ensure each stage of the competition was based on the best knowledge and talent and final proposals would be realistic and replicable.

The BIG U was developed as a result of extensive community participation, and recognized with an award of $335M in Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds for the first phase of the project. ESCR, the first phase of the BIG U, is currently being implemented by The City of New York and expected to break ground in Spring 2019. This phase is mostly contained in East River Park, with an additional portion through Murphy's Brother's, Stuyvesant Cove, and Asser Levy Parks to the north.

ESCR will protect the communities of the Lower East Side from future storm surge and sea level rise while enhancing waterfront connectivity, open space, and ecology. ESCR demonstrates how cities can incorporate flood defenses into city lands and parks while enhancing the recreational and ecological benefits provided by these spaces. Berms and flood walls will be integrated into parks and right-of-ways demonstrating ways to build flood protections in dense urban environments where site constraints require creative design approaches. Once constructed, the new park will demonstrate how communities can develop resilience approaches that both reduce risks during extreme storm events and provide everyday benefits to residents seeking recreation, access to the water, natural amenities, and places to socialize.

Today, East River Park has the opportunity to explore a community-based stewardship model by partnering local organizations and businesses with city agencies as a collective effort to care for and maintain New York City's first resilient park. Because of the intense community collaboration during and after the competition, it is important that the proposed stewardship model is community oriented.

PURPOSE OF STUDY:

The study will help identify and understand precedent structures that depart from the typical "Conservancy" model, that would address equity in the park and recommend funding mechanisms for long-term maintenance and operations. The recommended model shall be community oriented

and avoid or mitigate externalities that can arise from non-governmental stewardship models such as gentrification, privatization of park resources and amenities that lack affordability. The findings of this study could become a model of how to steward future parks, realizing long-term success of resilience projects in our city and others around the world.

Scan and Recommendation: It is expected that the chosen partner/consultant will find this information by undertaking a scan of existing park stewardship/conservancy structures nationwide, understanding a) the pros and cons and tradeoffs for each b) the balance between the parks being a regional amenity vs a local amenity c) permitting priorities. The consultant may offer a recommendation of one or more structures that could be used to inform a stewardship model for this space. A successful recommended structure for this model would focus on enhancing the community who currently live adjacent to the park while also addressing some of the criticisms that exist for prevalent conservancy models.
Resource Approach: Provide potential resourcing strategies for community-driven park stewardship specific to East River Park (i.e. in-park revenue generation, public and philanthropic grant opportunities, local volunteer capacity).
Local Capacity Assessment: Provide an assessment of potential local capacity in the areas adjacent to East River Park to drive this initiative, and/or a roadmap for potential next steps.

DESCRIPTION OF DELIVERABLES:

Deliverable should include a written report containing:

- An assessment of current East River Park Stewardship initiatives.
- Survey of precedents for stewardship models (i.e. local, national, international).
- An analysis of each model as they relate to the goals of this project.
- A recommendation of one or more stewardship structures that could work for ESCR.
- Identification of potential partnerships and their local capacity for stewardship. Community Boards, Community Based Organizations and Housing associations should be part of the consideration.
- Identification of potential funding sources for operations and maintenance that keep equity at the forefront.
- Identification of next steps to create the recommended structure(s).
- A presentation synopsizing the research and highlighting key findings.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS:

A 3-5 page proposal identifying your approach to this research and qualifications with a budget not to exceed $8,000 including expenses.

Please submit on or before August 9, 2018 to info@rebuildbydesign.org Please write "ESCR Stewardship" in the subject line of the email.

SELECTION:

Rebuild by Design staff will review and examine all proposals received. The top selections will be interviewed via video conference. The selected organization will be notified by the end of August. The project is expected take ~8 weeks. The final report is due on or before November 15.