

CITY COLLEGE

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There are few places where it's possible to travel as far in so short a distance as the bridge to the Rockaways. Seabirds wheel over a landscape of dunes and scrubby beach growth to an endless sand to a bright sea. Driving west to Breezy Point finds scrubland, shingling, and sand drifting under doorways, a place that could be Cape Cod. Heading east, the mood shifts repeatedly but no neighborhood is far from the influence of the double coast, Jamaica Bay and the Atlantic.

The alpha and the omega of Arverne is the beach, a New York City beach. How to design for such an environment? An extreme low-density approach—the Hamptons in town—seems wrong. A city-owned site in one of the most fabulous situations on the east coast should not be squandered on the happiness of the few. Recreational development is a possibility but the peninsula is abundantly provided with park space and the beach will remain the primary public asset.

Compatibility favors density, at least that of the indigenous attached houses. And, no proposal can be oblivious to the surrounding high-rise apartments, including many middle class and public housing units. Any scheme must mediate between these scales and populations, providing means of interaction between them bringing everyone to the shore.

Consider two schematic approaches to density at the beach: Santa Monica and Rio. The first is a low-rise, high-density, condition with complex pedestrian circulation and much localized open space, including a web of streets. The second is the single strip of high-rises along the strand, simply serviced from front or back, using the beach as its commons. In both, architecture strikes a balance between access and view.

Although Santa Monica offers ocean views in glimpses from many of its units, those away from the beachfront mainly do not have direct visual access to the sea. In such "traditional" seaside towns—from Provincetown to Carmel—the ocean is enjoyed by strolling to it, in its breezes and contiguous ecologies, in the informal and weathering character of adjoining architecture. Rio—or Chicago's Lakeshore Drive or our own Riverside Drive—is a wall of buildings lining the shore, one or two apartments deep with direct views for almost all.

This project focuses on the Santa Monica parti, tinged by the scale and irregularities of Jaffa and by historic poster images of Arverne, both in its glamorous turn-of-the-last-century incarnation and the subsequent proletarian paradise, the bungalow colonies that lasted into the sixties. It is an on-going source of amazement that this outrageously unique environment—a superb beach on a subway line within the city of New York—has not undergone such development "naturally."

This scheme proposes a continuous, dense, low-rise texture that includes extensive deployment of a new residential type. For those shy of the widespread all-at-once of a single, original, typology, think Sunnyside, Queens or pre-war Miami Beach or any fair-to-middling-sized interwar Siedlung. The plan provides 2500 apartments and complementary commercial, institutional, recreational, and other private and public uses. Imagine small hotels and convention facilities, flight-crew apartments, fish restaurants, shopfronts, and loft space for professional offices, small businesses, and artists, as well as schools and sportsfields. The mix—and the architecture that accommodates it—must be finessed to create a variety of on-site employment and to locate the necessities of daily life within an easy walk of every home.

The redevelopment of Arverne will have broad implications on the peninsula and off. We have looked extensively beyond the site and include in our proposal a suggestion for the city-owned property to the east—currently designated for recreational space, perhaps a golf course—for a Rio-type development. This is, in part, to show a possible alternative to our more detailed proposal and also to suggest that a more comprehensive look at the open space and recreational possibilities in and near the Rockaways begs questions about the need to devote all of this site to a park.

We have also compensated for this subtraction by enlarging other parks within the peninsular system and by looking at greenspace as a network, not simply as an inventory of fixed recreational assets. Surrounded by Gateway Park, Riis Park, and the long and luxurious beach—this is one of the most recreation and open-space saturated locations in the city and we propose to enhance the quality and accessibility of existing green spaces and to tie the whole together into a continuous system, permitting unimpeded pedestrian flow between all of the green areas on the peninsula. Such connections could have the effect of providing a pleasant and unifying armature for the disparate and often isolated communities of the Rockaways, of helping preserve natural diversity, and of enhancing alternatives to automobile movement.

Restructuring such flows is central and can build on such native advantages as subway access, the potential for water transport, an adequate street net, the boardwalk, and the thinness of the peninsula. We suggest three specific enhancements. First is the addition of a high-speed ferry service to both JFK and to Manhattan and Brooklyn. Second is creation of a "slo-mo" transitway, reserved for pedestrians and for small non-emitting

vehicles running at speeds of 15 mph or less. This would include a portion of the area covered by the subway viaduct and extension into the Arverne development site and surrounding neighborhoods. Finally, we propose to reorganize major east-west automotive circulation by eliminating Oceanview Boulevard as an arterial and by connecting the Shore Front Parkway to Rockaway Beach Boulevard to become Arverne's major east-west arterial.

Within the urban renewal site, through traffic would be calmed and restricted and pedestrian and other "slo-mo" opportunities enhanced. One of the charms of earlier forms of development—still visible on a few sites in Arverne and far more extensively in Breezy Point—is the still extensive network of pedestrian alleys and lanes, sandy walkways passing behind rows of houses. As represented most dramatically on Fire Island, these quiet spaces of circulation impart an Arden-like quality to their communities, a key element in establishing their fundamental beachiness.

The *sine qua non* of beach culture is, obviously, the beach. Every effort must be expended to enhance its quality, accessibility, and extent. This begins with recognizing its fragility. Already, portions of the peninsula have been set aside to conserve endangered species of birds and plants and the same attitude must be applied both to the dunescape on the seaside and to the wetlands along the bay. Development—whatever its architecture—must accommodate existing species and ecologies and enlarge their habitats.

No amount of sensitive native landscaping, however, can obfuscate the fact that the addition of 2500 housing units will dramatically alter the ecology of this site and many others. This plan suggests a number of strategies of mitigation. Rainwater and flooding are managed by limiting hardscape, capturing water for domestic use, and providing sites at all scales for its percola-



SHOP AND SYSTEMARCHITECTS SEAFRONT

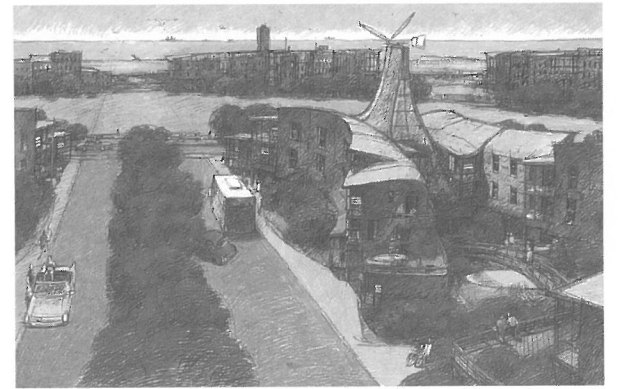
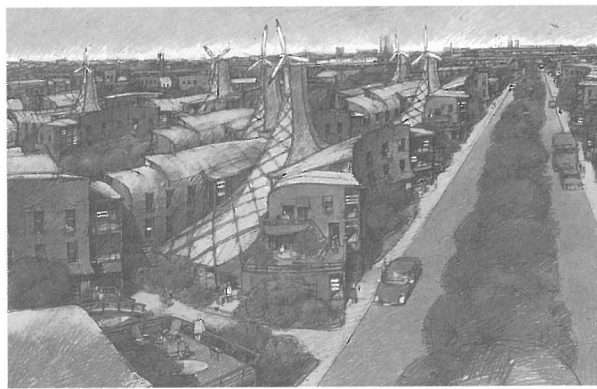
This project uses a performative relationship between housing and the urban landscape rather than a picturesque composition of form. The shortcoming of "new urbanism" models such as Seaside or Celebration, Florida, reside in the fact that they rely on prescribed rules that reject the notion of inclusion and urban community. Their reliance on the image of Main Street America rather than the forces, ideas, and technologies that inspired the authentic original exposes their corrupt ideology as culturally vapid nostalgia machines whose sole aim is to sell a time and place that never existed to an unsuspecting public. One precedent we are interested in is the brilliant play between private and communal landscapes in the Sunnyside Gardens housing in Queens. The ability of the project to allow green pathways to link streets, houses, and gardens through a medium density urban environment provides a housing model that has consistently facilitated the



tion. The prototypical housing unit is itself designed around "green-machine" technology to convert black water to gray as well as with green roofs and miniature wetlands.

Site-derived energy for heating and cooling and for electrical generation is also exploited. The central bio-remediation greenhouses function as energy stores in the winter and as chimneys in the summer. And, their southern orientation permits the installation of integral photovoltaics and each "green room" is topped by a windmill generator, taking advantage of the strong breezes from the sea. Finally, a focus on pedestrianism, public transit, and mixed use is designed to reduce the energy expended on circulation both within and to and from the site.

At the end, though, it all comes back to the beach. In their heyday, the Rockaways were the site of spectacular entertainment, extravagant architecture, and the social and physical intoxications of the beach. This project hopes to recapture some of this through its relaxed, dense, and accessible architecture, by extensive beachfront commercial activity and circulation, and by a mix of uses—including restaurants, hotels, shops, and sports—that will add layers of pleasure to the site and conduce architectures that are again responsive to the ineffable atmosphere of a place where the sense of holiday lives everyday.



development of a sense of community for over seventy years. Through each economic cycle, Sunnyside Gardens retains its intense urban environment. Sea Ranch, California, provides a model for us in the way it uses a set of systems that respond to both the ocean and the individual projects within a performance-based framework. The desire is to create a system of evolving parameters that transpose the urban terrain and natural terrain into a cohesive experience: one that is both environmentally sound and urbanistically dynamic. We call it SeaFront.

HOUSING

The proposed housing varies from two to five stories tall with a roof datum that consistently falls between 50'-0" and 55'-0", or even with eye level from the train. The roofscape acts as both a gray water collection cistern as well as an outdoor terraced recreation zone for the occupants. In opposition to a "stepped" massing where the housing heights descend as they move clos-

er to the beach, the roof and trestle datum is maintained by elevating the ground floor of the housing: the closer the units are to the beach, the higher the first floor is elevated above the dunes. The roofscape creates synthetic landscape overhead while the beach folds into the urban landscape below.

ROADS

Two types of roads provide access to the housing. There are "ring roads" that edge the project and "slasher" roads that are perpendicular to the beach. Both roads are set lower than the dunes and include accessory parking spaces along their length. Therefore the automobile is fully deployed in the project yet it does not interfere with the smooth folding of the landscape into the urban environment.

