

Center *for an*  
Urban  
Future

# The Park Queens Deserves

**20 Ideas for Harnessing  
the Full Potential of  
Flushing Meadows Corona Park**

# Center *for an* Urban Future

**The Park Queens Deserves: 20 Ideas for Harnessing the Full Potential of Flushing Meadows Corona Park** is a publication of the Center for an Urban Future.

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Center for an Urban Future (CUF) is a leading New York City-based think tank that generates smart and sustainable public policies to reduce inequality, increase economic mobility, and grow the economy.



## **The Alliance for Flushing Meadows Corona Park**

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# The Park Queens Deserves

## 20 Ideas for Harnessing the Full Potential of Flushing Meadows Corona Park

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**1**

Make a major long-term capital commitment to FMCP that allows the park to reverse years of inadequate attention to its core infrastructure needs.

**2**

Prioritize future spending to address FMCP's persistent flooding.

**3**

Consider an 'FMCP Flood Fund' to directly capture private revenue in the park for climate resiliency and mitigation upgrades.

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**4**

Charge NYC DEP with repairing and replacing water mains and collapsed catch basins in FMCP.

**5**

Develop a 10-year strategic plan for FMCP that guides future investments and decision-making.

**6**

Develop ways to better integrate FMCP's member institutions.

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**7**

Expand Citi Bike and NYCDOT's shared e-mobility pilot to the park.

**8**

Convert more of the park's open spaces to multi-purpose fields and consider year-round usage of facilities.

**9**

Establish a signature event that brings visitors and attention to the park.

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**10**

Cover one or more of the highways surrounding the park.

**11**

Daylight Flushing Creek to connect the park to Willets Point and the waterfront.

**12**

Reduce the amount of asphalt in FMCP.

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**13**

Create dynamic new food options in the park by establishing a new vendor market filled with local food entrepreneurs.

**14**

Open a new sit-down café or restaurant outside the Queens Museum.

**15**

Explore opportunities to more fully harness Queens Theatre and its prized position in the park—perhaps by launching free outdoor performances during summer evenings.

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**16**

Create an 'Emerald Necklace' of seamless park connections in central and eastern Queens, with FMCP at the core.

**17**

Reimagine the entrances to the park, including a bridge over Flushing Creek.

**18**

Expand the NYC Ferry system to Willets Point, in exchange for pier upgrades.

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**19**

Redesign the Playground for All Children.

**20**

Make better use of the area surrounding the New York State Pavilion.



### FLUSHING MEADOWS CORONA PARK (FMCP) IS ARGUABLY

New York City's most underappreciated important park. It is the city's fourth most visited park—behind only Central Park, Bryant Park, and Prospect Park—yet Flushing Meadows has long struggled to attract even a fraction of the public and private investment as other heavily trafficked parks. Although it was a symbol of urban modernity when it was first built as part of the 1939 World's Fair, today much of the park feels dated, marred by deteriorating infrastructure, routine flooding, and faded monuments. And while it is regularly used by hundreds of thousands of Queens residents who have no other comparable public space option, it has surprisingly few green open spaces to accommodate the insatiable demand for soccer, ecua-volley, cricket, cookouts, and many other activities that today too often take place on modest stretches of grass—or dirt—between trees or adjacent to ballfields.

Despite its challenges, FMCP is teeming with opportunity. It is the beating heart of Queens—a veritable backyard for residents of several of the city's densest and most diverse communities, and a widely recognized icon of New York. On most weekends outside of the coldest winter months, the park becomes a hive of activity, with nearly every inch of green and open space used for picnics, children's birthday parties, Zumba classes, tai chi, dance rehearsals, skate sessions, and running clubs. From canoe lessons and fitness programs for older adults to salsa dancing, open air movie nights, and unique community festivals, the park draws New Yorkers who depend on its vast acreage for recreation, connection, and well-being. It is home to five cultural institutions, two lakes, two major sports arenas, a golf course, and a marina. And it welcomes more than one million visitors for the U.S. Open and tens of thousands more for the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival, Queens Day, Governors Ball, and countless graduation parties, quinceañeras, Eid celebrations, and other family gatherings.

But it could be so much more. FMCP has the potential to be one of the most dynamic urban parks in the country—and, crucially, a far more attractive and inclusive open space and recreational resource for the mostly low- and middle-income New Yorkers who use it on a regular basis. It could become a national model for equitable investment in public space—offering high-quality amenities, vibrant programming, connections among diverse neighborhoods, and safe, resilient infrastructure

that uplifts the communities it serves.

“Flushing Meadows Corona Park is the ultimate crown jewel of our borough—a confluence of countless cultures, languages and cuisines in the shadow of Queens' most historic landmarks and major sports stadiums,” says Queens Borough President Donovan Richards. “However, there are certainly plenty of upgrades and improvements that are needed throughout Flushing Meadows, as we work to cement its status as both the premiere neighborhood park for our neighbors and an international attraction for visitors from around the world.”

To realize its considerable promise, however, the park will require a new level of attention and civic focus on the future of this singular asset for Queens, bold thinking about what the park can become, and imaginative ideas not only for park programming but also for generating revenue.

Perhaps even importantly, it will need sustained public and private investment at a scale not seen in decades. Since 2012, only \$100 million in city funds has been invested in the park, with over half of that—or \$56 million, in total—going to a single project, the restoration of the New York State Pavilion, which holds little material benefit to park goers. Although federal funds for FEMA projects in the wake of Superstorm Sandy have added to the total investment, the park receives a fraction of the dollars it needs for basic upkeep. For example, it has been estimated that the sorely needed reconstruction of the Passerelle Pedestrian Bridge, which brings visitors from the Mets-Willets Point subway station to the park, and necessary upgrades to the park's water and electrical systems would cost a combined \$650 million.

But the challenges at FMCP stretch far beyond just disinvestment. The park's layout remains an artifact of the past, more fitting as a fairground than for open space uses. A series of roads and highways surround and cut directly through the park, making it less friendly to access or traverse on foot or bike. At the same time, buildings once used for the World's Fair, like the Queens Museum and Queens Theatre, don't feel well integrated with the park experience. Indeed, multiple people interviewed for this report said that the park often feels more like a collection of facilities on a campus than a magnificent public park. And it can often feel like a mission to find a functional bathroom or a bite to eat, with so few options available for park visitors.

Flushing Meadows Corona Park has the potential to be one of the most dynamic urban parks in the country—and, crucially, a far more attractive and inclusive open space and recreational resource for the mostly low- and middle-income New Yorkers who use it on a regular basis.

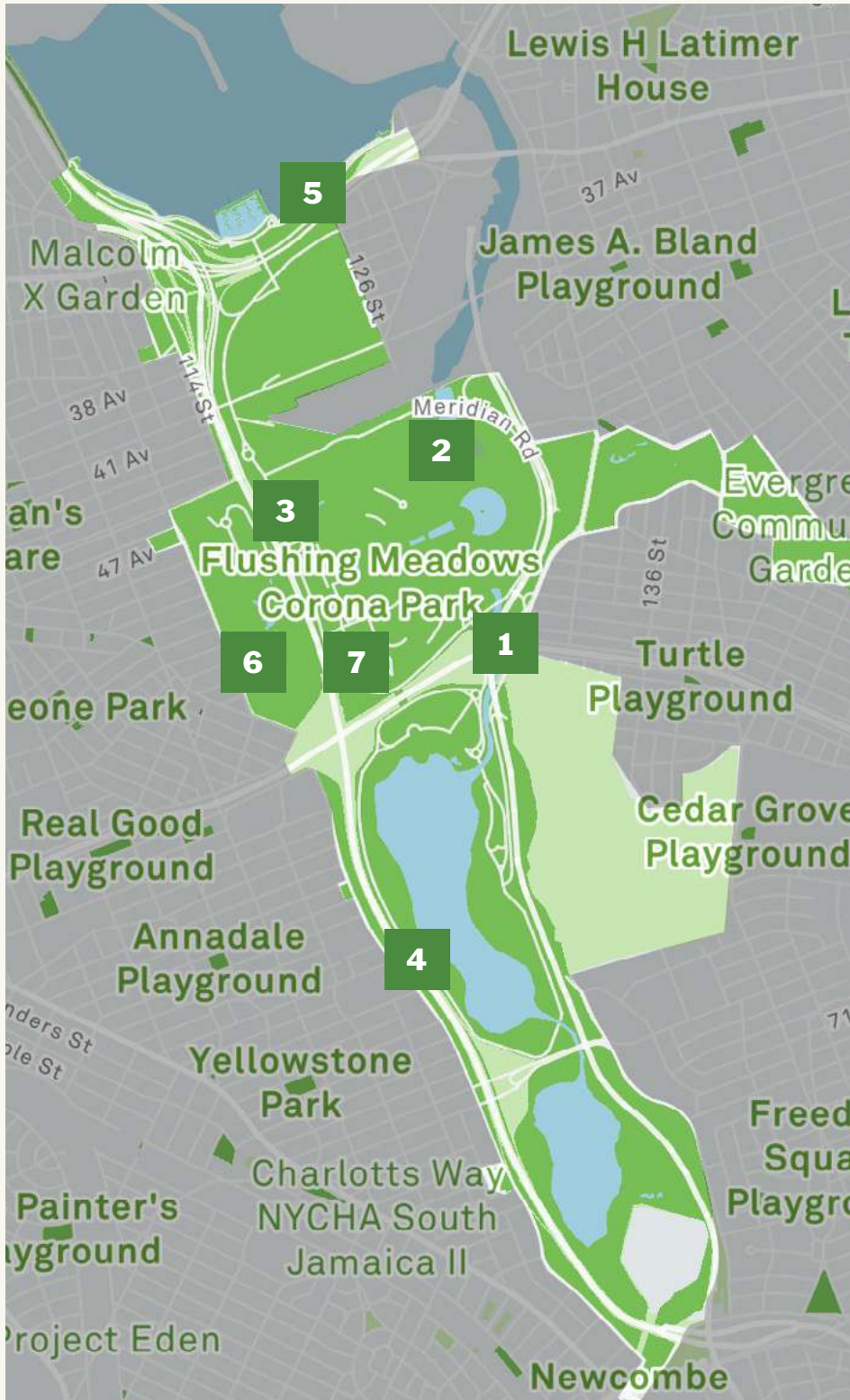


All of the opportunities and challenges for FMCP take on fresh urgency as a new soccer stadium and major redevelopment take shape at nearby Willets Point—and as policymakers weigh a proposal for a casino next to Citi Field.

This report aims to spark the conversation about what should be done. It offers 20 concrete ideas for more fully harnessing the park's enormous potential, addressing the park's biggest challenges, and making it an even better, more vibrant, and more sustainable resource for residents

across the borough and beyond. The 20 ideas were informed by more than two dozen interviews with parks and open space experts, community leaders from across Queens, regular users of the park, landscape architects, urban planners, and local policymakers—and they include both big visions for the park's future as well as smaller ideas that can be implemented in the shorter term.

# Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP) Map Key



**1**

Cover one or more of the highways surrounding the park.

**2**

Daylight Flushing Creek to connect the park to Willets Point and the waterfront.

**3**

Reduce the amount of asphalt in FMCP.

**4**

Reimagine the entrances to the park, including a bridge over Flushing Creek.

**5**

Expand the NYC Ferry system to Willets Point, in exchange for pier upgrades.

**6**

Redesign the Playground for All Children.

**7**

Make better use of the area surrounding the New York State Pavilion.



## **1. Make a major long-term capital commitment to Flushing Meadows Corona Park that allows the park to reverse years of inadequate attention to its core infrastructure needs.**

**SINCE 2012, ONLY AROUND \$100 MILLION IN CITY CAPITAL** dollars have been invested into Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP), a shockingly low amount for one of New York City's most iconic and highly visited parks, and one with hundreds of millions of dollars in unaddressed—and not yet funded—infrastructure needs. Of that sum, more than \$56.7 million has been allocated to a single project—reconstructing portions of the New York State Pavilion Observation Towers—an allocation which will not even enable those structures to return to public use. (The city recently committed \$146.2 million to the reconstruction of the Passerelle Pedestrian Bridge in its ten-year capital plan, but the funds have yet to be allocated—and that sum may not even cover the full cost of that one project.)

FMCP's enormous backlog of unmet capital needs stems from its unique origin story. The park was built on a former wetland and ash dump to host the 1939–1940 New York's World Fair and then expanded for the 1964 edition. Its core infrastructure—from disintegrating water and sewer lines to ancient electrical systems—dates back almost a century, with facilities and installations that were meant to be temporary. Since then, there has been no

meaningful effort to transform this former fairground into a full-fledged flagship park and prepare it for modern needs or usage.

Some of the city's other signature parks—including Central Park and Prospect Park—have been able to raise millions in private dollars for capital investments from their affluent users and major corporate and institutional donors. For instance, the Central Park Conservancy raised more than \$100 million in private funding to completely transform the Lasker Rink and Pool site on the Harlem Meer. Flushing Meadows lacks even a fraction of the same fundraising capacity and is almost wholly reliant on city and state funding from a patchwork of different elected officials, each one responsible for just a portion of the overall landmass. But the public capital dollars committed to FMCP have been inadequate to keep pace with its growing infrastructure needs.

It's time for city leaders to reverse the park's chronic underfunding and make a long-term commitment to upgrading the park's infrastructure.

## 2. Prioritize future spending on projects that address Flushing Meadows Corona Park's persistent flooding.

**IN ADDITION TO LAUNCHING A MAJOR NEW CAPITAL** program for Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP), city leaders and parks officials should prioritize upgrades to the park's core infrastructure—and especially to projects that address the park's near-constant flooding. Very little of the approximately \$100 million in city capital funding allocated to the park since 2012 has gone to shore up the unsexy infrastructure that is so vital to the park's everyday functioning, from electrical systems and gas lines to the park's deteriorating water mains and catch basins. That needs to change.

FMCP faces an array of complex challenges today, but none are as consequential as the flooding that regularly occurs and renders large swaths of the park unusable for days after even minor rainfall. Sited on what was once marshland, the park is deluged with water after even a slight rainfall, and its limited and aging stormwater management and drainage systems are increasingly unable to handle worsening storms.

Practically every interview for this report included a story about the park's chronic flooding. For days after most rainstorms—adding up to several months each year—giant puddles cover large sections of the path around Meadow Lake, making it difficult, if not impossible, for parkgoers to run, cycle, or walk through one of its most picturesque areas. Elsewhere, green spaces ideal for picnics and volleyball are often waterlogged for days, and one baseball diamond remains submerged for much of the season. Drainage is so poor, says John Wang, creator of the Queens Night Market, that just a tenth of an inch of rain floods its site, thus cancelling the weekend event.

“A little rain puts parts of the park, particularly near and around Meadow Lake, out of commission,” says Arthi Krishnamoorthy, senior principal at the prominent architecture studio TenBerke, who lives near the park and serves on the board of the Queens Museum, one of the park's tenant institutions. “Improved drainage and natural water management in these areas would keep

them accessible to park-users when the sun comes out again.”

As a natural catch basin for central and eastern Queens, the park has faced persistent pressure to retain water since Flushing Creek was buried during its development years ago.

Adding to the problem, the water mains underneath the park are remnants from the 1939 and 1964/65 World's Fairs, and all have thoroughly deteriorated. They break regularly, resulting in leaks throughout the park. On a recent site visit, water was gushing up through the asphalt at multiple locations in the park. Four water mains are connected to the Queens Theatre, but only one still functions. “We don't have the luxury of treating these risks as hypotheticals anymore. We've already faced real consequences from our reliance on aging infrastructure,” says Jay Rogers, the Theatre's director of operations.

Despite the recurring flooding issues, there has never been a meaningful city or state effort to upgrade the park's inadequate and overstressed water and drainage systems. Very little of the \$100 million invested in FMCP since 2012 has helped address these critical challenges. The partial reconstruction of the New York State Pavilion Observation Towers for more than \$56.7 million stands out as a particularly unwise use of the city's limited capital resources, given the park's extensive unmet needs. The city has also allocated tens of millions to reconstruct the Olmstead Center, the headquarters of NYC Parks' capital division, which serves an important function for the agency but is not an investment in the park that directly benefits parkgoers.

The cost of fixing the park's plumbing issues is likely \$80 to \$100 million, while developing comprehensive fixes to its drainage issues would be hundreds of millions of dollars more. Other signature parks, like Central Park and Brooklyn Bridge Park, have forged public-private partnerships to pay for these core infrastructure costs. For example, in the late 1990s, Central Park's Great Lawn received a \$71.5 million public-private investment



to install a 31,000-foot underground drainage and irrigation system. But FMCP has yet to secure similar support: it isn't surrounded by wealthy neighbors who can help fundraise for renovations. Meanwhile, even the modest concession revenue generated in the park goes back to the city's General Fund.

It's long overdue for city leaders to address the park's persistent flooding problem. The next mayoral administration should provide at least \$150 million in new funding—perhaps with private sector companies

that are headquartered in or do significant business in Queens raising an additional \$20 million to \$50 million—so that the park can put a serious dent in this problem through the development of modern drainage infrastructure, including bioswales, permeable pathways, daylighted streams, retention basins, cisterns, and restored wetlands.

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### 3. Consider a 'Flushing Meadows Corona Park Flood Fund' to directly capture private revenue in the park for climate resiliency and mitigation upgrades.

**IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING SIGNIFICANT NEW CAPITAL** funding for Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP), city leaders should explore innovative ways to harness the park's immense value to help meet its growing needs. A new 'FMCP Flood Fund,' which would act as an investment trust for the park, could allow it to tap into a number of different revenue streams to pay for a complete modernization.

Alan Van Capelle, the executive director of the Friends of the High Line who grew up visiting the park, says the most immediate place to start is major live events held there. "If you rent out the space or have dedicated spaces for concerts, you should make money off of that," he says. The agreement between the City of New York and The High Line, he notes, denotes how often the sections of the park can be rented out for private use. One event alone, he says, has the potential to earn hundreds of thousands of dollars that the park gets to keep for maintenance and upkeep.

But while FMCP has benefited from occasional contributions from operators who earn revenue in the park, it lacks the same ability to harness direct, recurring funding from revenue-generating events. As it stands, no dollars return to FMCP from the ground leases for the USTA Tennis Center and Citi Field, even though park staff is often in charge of cleanup before and after events enjoyed by over a million attendees each year.

The organizers behind Governors Ball committed to a \$1 donation per ticket sale, which raised almost \$100,000 for the Alliance for Flushing Meadows Corona Park in 2024. But that was done voluntarily, since the permit fee, which is over \$1 million, went back to the city's General Fund. "It just frustrated me so much that the park sees nothing from our event, even though we wouldn't be here without it," says Tom Russell, the organizer of the festival.

A new 'FMCP Flood Fund' should be established through an agreement between the City of New York and the Alliance for Flushing Meadows Corona Park, with the goal of allocating a portion of ground lease payments from Citi Field, the USTA Tennis Center, and the forthcoming soccer stadium in Willets Point—as well as permit fees from major events—directly back into the park's upkeep. This should include revenue generated by the potential siting of a casino in the area, namely through live events held there.

Once the Fund is established, officials could get creative: in interviews, park stakeholders suggested ideas like camping "under the stars," races and competitions, and paid tours of World's Fair attractions. A modest portion of sales from major events held in the park—and from private institutions within the park, like the Queens Museum, Queens Theatre, and Terrace on the Park, a catering hall on park premises—could return to



the Fund. To offset their impact on flooding, buildings and parking lot operators on or near the park could be subject to a “stormwater fee” that, in return, pays for the construction and maintenance of bioswales, green medians, and other green infrastructure.

“It’s not just one influx of money,” says Matt Grunbaum, an associate at Field Operations, a leading landscape architecture and urban design firm that is currently studying an area adjacent to the park. “You need multiple streams for the level of maintenance and operations the park truly needs.” A trust for repairs, Grunbaum says, could help the city leverage other available dollars, too, including state and federal grants and philanthropic matching programs.

For a park system as vast and varied as FMCP, Sanjukta Sen, an associate partner at Field Operations who has led design teams for major urban parks projects

both in the city and nationwide, suggested that funding strategies to fund flood mitigation efforts could consider segmenting the park into smaller parcels to streamline both public and private fundraising. “You want to identify 18 or 20 projects that can be phased, so you can understand which ones the state’s Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), or the city’s Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) could help pay for,” Sen says. “It ends up becoming this Venn diagram of different sources. You could really lean into a community development fund, or some more diverse forms of city, state and federal funding.”

“It’s not just one influx of money. You need multiple streams for the level of maintenance and operations the park truly needs.

**MATT GRUNBAUM**

Associate, Field Operations

## 4. Charge NYC DEP with repairing and replacing water mains and collapsed catch basins in Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP).

**WHEN A WATER MAIN BURSTS IN DOWNTOWN FLUSHING** or along Roosevelt Avenue in Corona, or most anywhere else across the five boroughs, the city's Department of Environment Protection is responsible for fixing the problem. DEP has the staff, the resources, and the expertise to address those often-complicated water infrastructure challenges. But when those same issues come up inside of the boundaries of FMCP, DEP essentially throws up its arms and says, "that's your problem."

Not surprisingly, however, NYC Parks does not have sufficient teams, resources, or expertise to undertake this work. The small team of NYC Parks staff working at FMCP are focused on their core mission: to steward the park and provide basic day-to-day maintenance. So, when there is a need to replace a water main, repair a collapsed catch basin, or simply deal with a leaky hydrant, the park typically needs to hire a contractor to do the work, a process that can lead to lengthy delays and too often runs into the challenge of insufficient maintenance or capital funding.

Although DEP has similar policies regarding other areas of parkland, FMCP feels it more acutely than most because of its extensive aging underground infrastructure, water-saturated location, and limited resources. Indeed, there are currently several spots in the park where water is constantly bubbling up through the pavement because of broken or leaky water mains.

It's time for the mayor to direct DEP to take more

responsibility for the water system that runs through FMCP. DEP's annual budget (\$1.7 billion) is nearly three times that of the entire NYC Parks budget. It's also in the interest of New Yorkers. Doing so will not only save the park the cost and headache of trying to coordinate this complex work, but also, it will go a long way to ensuring that parks amenities, like water fountains and public restrooms are working properly and help the park mitigate flooding.

The park experiences similar turf issues with other agencies, namely the city Department of Transportation (NYCDOT). For example, there are several roadways that operate in the park. But when potholes emerge or the roads wear down to the point where they need resurfacing, the park staff is expected to do it themselves—despite lacking the expertise or resources of NYCDOT.

Fortunately, there have been signs of renewed collaboration. Cloudburst, a new initiative between NYCDEP and NYC Parks, is converting the parking lot adjacent to New York Hall of Science (NYSCI) into an absorbent floodscape. The Adams administration also smartly created the Office of the Public Realm to help wade through agency silos.

But to effect lasting change, more must be done by the mayor to reassign relevant infrastructure responsibilities within Flushing Meadows Corona Park to better-resourced sister agencies including NYCDEP and NYCDOT.



## 5. Develop a 10-year strategic plan for Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP) that guides future investments and decision-making.

**IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO SEIZE ON THE MANY** opportunities facing FMCP and address its longstanding challenges without a strategic plan for park's future. A well-structured strategic plan would provide an aspirational yet achievable vision that helps establish what the park's future priorities should be. As such, it would help guide decisions about the investments and projects the park should—and should not—be undertaking.

Given FMCP's limited budget, parks administrators will always need to make difficult decisions about where to invest, what projects to prioritize, and how to allocate staff. With a strategic plan, those decisions will be made with more clarity and intention—and a more specific rationale that can be shared with the park's stakeholders and visitors. It will help park staff say no to potential projects that don't align with their strategic priorities and yes to those that do.

While the area has undertaken elements of a strategic plan in the past—including a community-focused effort spearheaded by the Queens Museum

and the Parks Department in 2014, a signage plan, and a climate-resiliency plan—there is no current, full-scale, comprehensive strategic plan for the entire park developed with strong backing from City Hall. This new plan should incorporate elements of the proposals that have come before, while including specific infrastructure needs, revenue-generating mechanisms, funding commitments, interagency collaboration, and a vision for the future of the park's diverse landscapes, facilities, opportunities, and challenges.

“That was the first thing I did when I got to the Central Park Conservancy,” says Betsy Smith, the conservancy's president and CEO. “We created a strategic plan for use of park and care of park. That was 6 years ago. It has really helped us focus. It was aspirational for us. It drove the decisions we've made. It gives you a vision and gets people excited.”

## 6. Develop ways to better integrate Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP)'s member institutions.

**IN INTERVIEWS FOR THIS REPORT, PARKS AND OPEN** space experts across the city raised one theme again and again: FMCP, more than any other park in New York City, often feels less like a cohesive park and more like a collection of separate facilities—a campus of disconnected buildings and attractions.

Although the park's member institutions contribute greatly to its vibrancy and appeal, we repeatedly heard that their sheer number—and the lack of integration between them—can undermine the park's role as a unified, accessible space for the communities that rely on it most.

The park is home to a remarkable range of institutions: Queens Museum, Queens Theatre, Queens Zoo, the New York Hall of Science, Terrace on the Park, World's Fair Marina, the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, Flushing Meadows Pitch & Putt, the Flushing Meadows Corona Park Aquatic Center, the Al Oerter Recreation Center, and Citi Field. Connecting all these assets into a more cohesive whole is no small task.

One critical need is to develop and implement cohesive wayfinding system, lighting, and maps that make it easier for visitors to navigate the park—a long-overdue investment that is actually funded but has been mired in

the bureaucratic process. Others suggested designing new “connective tissue” within the park: landscaped gathering spaces, shaded seating areas, or amenity-filled picnic zones that draw people between major destinations and encourage them to linger in the park itself, not just travel from one building to the next.

A strategic plan could also include a focus on aligning programming across institutions—whether through coordinated festivals, joint ticketing initiatives, or shared public events—to reinforce the idea of FMCP as a unified cultural and recreational destination. Similarly, rethinking the park's digital footprint, with a central platform or app that ties together events, services, and wayfinding tools across facilities, could help knit the park together in the public's imagination.

Most of all, FMCP needs a vision that puts the park at the center—not as a backdrop to other destinations, but as the connective foundation that provides context to them all. One option worth considering is dedicated electric tram service, with stops in front of key institutions and attractions and potentially direct connections to Corona and Flushing subway stations.

## 7. Expand Citi Bike and NYCDOT's shared e-mobility pilot to the park.

**IF ANY PLACE IN NEW YORK IS TAILOR-MADE FOR BIKE-SHARE** (or scooter-share), it is Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP). That's because most of the park's entrances are hundreds of yards or further from the park's primary destinations. For example, from the Mets-Willets Point subway station—the place where a majority of those who don't drive to the park arrive—it is a 15-minute walk to the Unisphere and a 28-minute walk to the snack stand on northern edge of Meadow Lake, according to Google Maps.

Similarly, it is a 20-minute walk from the New York Hall of Science to the Fountain of the Planets. And for those entering the park on Jewel Avenue, at the south end of Meadow Lake, it is a 39-minute stroll to the Unisphere. It takes even longer to reach the park from more densely populated sections of the surrounding neighborhoods, including downtown Flushing and Corona.

Citi Bike, the city's hugely popular bike-share system, is widely used in many of the city's other major parks—



We are tucked inside the park, and expanding options for how patrons get to the theater would certainly benefit our community members.

**TARYN SACARAMONE**

Executive Direction, Queens Theatre

including Central Park (which has 20 docking stations surrounding the park), Prospect Park (which has 5 docking stations on the park's perimeter), and Van Cortlandt Park. But it is still not an option in Flushing Meadows Corona Park. There are only three docks along 111th Street, at the park's western edge.

Changing this and bringing bike-share or scooter-share to Flushing Meadows Corona Park would greatly improve mobility options in the park. It also has the potential to boost attendance at some of the park's institutions, including the Queens Museum and Queens Theatre. "We are tucked inside the park, and expanding options for how patrons get to the theater would certainly benefit our community members," says Taryn Sacramone, the executive director of the Queens Theatre. Sally Tallant, the president and executive director of the Queens Museum, adds, "Citi Bikes in the park would definitely help."

There have been previous calls to bring bike-share to Flushing Meadows Corona Park. In 2008, NYC Parks published a 'strategic framework plan' to usher Flushing Meadows Corona Park into the 21st century.<sup>1</sup> One proposal pushed for a little-known idea then called bike-share, with systems emerging in cities like London and Paris. The park, the study said, is ideal for cycling, with flat inclines and wide boulevards, and its vastness offers abundant space for stations. (In fact, a study on the park after the 1964 World's Fair floated what would have been the first-ever bike lane in a city park. It never came to fruition.)

In 2013, the city launched Citi Bike, which has amassed over 125,000 regular rides and expanded to four of the five boroughs.<sup>2</sup> But over ten years later, that system still does not extend through the park. The city should work with Lyft, which owns Citi Bike, to quickly change this and make its bikes available on all corners of the park.

In the last few years, the system has arrived at the park's doorsteps, with Citi Bike now available at the entrances in Corona, and in front of Citi Field. The city also recently announced that the next phase of expansion will bring stations further down the park's western edge.<sup>3</sup> But still, there are no stations located within the park, or towards Forest Hills or Flushing. Docks should be installed on major thoroughfares and at key access points, like transit stops, major destinations, and entrances, so users can traverse the park and visit other areas.

Another mode has also recently arrived east of the park: the city's shared e-scooter pilot, where residents can access dockless vehicles at on-street 'parking' locations using their smartphones. Within a few months, the program's three providers—Veo, Bird, and Lime—saw almost half a million rides the first six months of service, in 'transit desert' neighborhoods like Murray Hill and Jamaica.<sup>4</sup> (The pilot in the east Bronx has been equally successful.) But its boundaries stop at the entrance to Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

In addition to Citi Bike, NYCDOT should expand its shared e-scooter program to cover the park. The geo-corralled 'spots' and renewed commitments to maintenance from the providers will help to ensure that the vehicles are not sprawled carelessly along streets and sidewalks—a common criticism. The city should also consider amending its rules for these vehicles on park roads; otherwise, riders will be technically unable to utilize the park's expanding greenway system.

Together with Citi Bike, these micro-mobility 'networks' promote short trips at low cost, allowing users to explore further reaches without a car. As the city's 2008 plan showed, Flushing Meadows Corona Park is ideal to traverse on two wheels. The city should make it easy to do so.



## 8. Convert more of the park's open spaces to multi-purpose fields and consider year-round usage of facilities.

**AT ITS CORE, FLUSHING MEADOWS CORONA PARK** (FMCP), in 2025, is a park for recreation. Every day, many thousands of park goers come to play soccer, volleyball, cricket, and many other sports. Many others swim or skate in the Flushing Meadows Corona Park Aquatic Center & Ice Rink, play tennis at the USTA tennis courts, or play golf at the pitch and putt course. Play is, perhaps, the primary purpose of the park today—a testament to how the grounds have evolved over time to meet more modern and cultural demands.

But the park struggles to adapt and maintain its landscape and age-old infrastructure to the ways visitors are using it today. A recent site visit witnessed more than a dozen impromptu volleyball games taking place—not on specially designated volleyball courts but on small patches of grass and dirt, often wedged between trees or in a bit of open space next to a restroom. Similar scenes play out regularly in other sports, with pickup soccer games and cricket matches taking place on dirt patches between turf fields or in the outfields of two adjacent baseball fields.

There simply aren't enough spaces to meet today's demand for play. At the same time, there are some spaces in the park—such as the two baseball fields at the southern end of Meadow Lake—that are rarely used today.

City leaders should fund a reimagining—and overhaul—of the park's existing open spaces to more closely reflect how residents are using them, and work to convert them to multi-purpose fields that can be enjoyed by all.

First, the city, along with the Alliance for Flushing Meadows Corona Park, should lead a robust community engagement effort to more accurately pinpoint how exactly residents of neighboring communities (particularly Corona, Jackson Heights and Flushing) are using the park, and what could be added that either builds upon what's already happening—like Ecua-volley,<sup>5</sup> for example—or fills a gap that doesn't currently exist to accommodate them. That outreach could also help answer a key question for the park: are the existing

structures being utilized to the greatest extent possible? These answers will help determine what investments the park should make next.

The mayor should direct additional capital dollars to support a targeted conversion of paved roads and pathways and some existing fields and open spaces to multi-sport courts and other more flexible terrain types, which would allow parkgoers with different cultures and interests to enjoy the same space in numerous ways. This reinvention of existing space would better prepare Flushing Meadows Corona Park to accommodating the growing and evolving needs of its users and lessen maintenance costs in the future.

“This is really about turning it from the leftover World's Fair infrastructure to an actual functioning park,” says Andrew Hollweck, a former deputy commissioner at the Department for Design and Construction. (Hollweck also serves as a board member on the Alliance for Flushing Meadows Corona Park.) “This huge open space was built for another time and purpose. There are way too many roads for cars, and infrastructure that just doesn't physically work anymore or serves no purpose for park users. You get rid of a lot of the asphalt, and all of those big unnecessary paths to nowhere would disappear and be replaced by expanded sports fields.”

## 9. Establish a signature event that brings visitors and attention to the park

### FLUSHING MEADOWS CORONA PARK (FMCP) ATTRACTS

thousands of visitors when it hosts the hugely popular Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival. But there are opportunities to create other annual events that would bring new visitors and attention to the park—and perhaps even generate a small amount of revenue for the park through ticket sales and temporary concessions.

Like the Dragon Boat Festival, FMCP should aim for an event that is uniquely Queens and appeals to local communities that already make significant use of the park. Park administrators should seek input from parks users, athletic and recreation organizations that regularly use the park, and community leaders. While it probably makes the most sense for the new annual event to take place in one of the park's open areas, it may also be worth considering partnering with one or more of the park's member institutions and making use of their auditoriums or other spaces.

A few initial ideas include:

- A “Best of the Boroughs” cricket tournament, featuring amateur cricket teams from each of the five boroughs (including those who regularly use FMCP).
- A Best in the Park BBQ competition, in which amateur grillers would compete against one another for the title of best park barbeque, with the competition judged by local chefs and restaurateurs.
- A weekend-long Volleyball or Ecua-volley tournament, capitalizing on the phenomenal popularity of this sport in FMCP.

An event held in the summer of 2025 harkens to what's possible. For the first time in years, “Queens Day,” as it's called, revived a fair held at FMCP decades ago, where the park's cultural institutions worked with NYC Parks to put on an entire day's worth of free programming.



## 10. Cover one or more of the highways surrounding the park.

**FLUSHING MEADOWS CORONA PARK (FMCP)** borders five neighborhoods that are home to hundreds of thousands of residents: Flushing, Corona, Rego Park, Forest Hills, and Kew Gardens Hills. But it can maddeningly be difficult for residents of these communities to access the park because of its challenging location, wedged between four highways. This web of highways—the Grand Central Parkway, Van Wyck Expressway, Long Island Expressway, and Whitestone Expressway—essentially walls off the park from its surrounding communities and forces anyone on foot or bike to traverse a series of unpleasant and often dangerous overpasses, underpasses, and bridges just to enter the park. Indeed, several of the people we interviewed for this report pointed out that the park feels disconnected from its closest neighbors.

The highways also cut off different parts of the park from one another. The Long Island Expressway essentially divides the park in two, albeit with a (steep) pedestrian bridge connecting them. The Grand Central Parkway bisects the main portions of the park from the Queens Zoo, New York Hall of Science, and the World's Fair Marina.

One way to bridge this divide is by covering one or more of these highways adjacent to the park, creating green space—and potentially even some new affordable housing—that seamlessly connects the park to adjacent communities.

“It is a great park, but it has a sewer of cars going around it,” says Claire Weisz, a founding partner of WXY, a leading design firm. “What it needs is for the highways around it to be covered, and those highways then will connect neighborhoods. There’s absolutely no reason we

can’t do what Houston and Dallas did. In some cases, that will add more parkland, and in others, that will add more affordable housing.”

As Weisz mentions, capping highways is nothing new. Cities like Boston and Dallas have undertaken similar projects. There has also been a growing movement within New York City to rethink this age-old infrastructure: the city is now studying the feasibility of capping the Cross-Bronx Expressway and considering new projects underneath the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway.

But at its core, capping the Long Island Expressway or other highways adjacent to the park presents a generational chance to rethink how the park works for all users. Since the LIE thoroughfare is below-grade—park users cross a bridge over it to access the southern half of the park—the road could be decked over rather than buried, to be consistent with the altitude of the rest of the park, providing green space and a seamless landscape. With housing, the city could deploy value-capture mechanisms, where windfalls from developments could become a recurring source of revenue.

Van Capelle pointed to Brooklyn Bridge Park as inspiration. “They built mixed-use housing and commercial buildings that now support the full operations of that park,” says Van Capelle. “Flushing Meadows Corona Park has an enormous footprint. If you had dedicated housing, it could kick off money to maintain the rest of the park, which is a smart idea. We are in the middle of a housing crisis, and there’s an opportunity there, which deserves to be explored.”



What it needs is for the highways around it to be covered, and those highways then will connect neighborhoods.

**CLARE WEISZ**  
Architect



## 11. Daylight Flushing Creek to connect the park to Willets Point and the waterfront.

**IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S NOVEL, "THE GREAT GATSBY,"** the characters drive through what's known as the "Valley of the Ashes," a site where Flushing Creek was dredged and then converted into a dumping ground for ash and waste. The next decade, the ash dump was cleared out by Robert Moses for the 1939-40 World's Fair, creating what we know today as the boat basin, lakes, and parkland in the eastern end of Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP).

But that reconfiguration, while providing signature sites, has proved problematic. Converting what was once natural marshland to lawns and asphalt—or 'green' surfaces to impermeable surfaces—amplified flooding. It also severed the park from the waterfront along Willets Point and further north, at Flushing Bay. Furthermore, the Fountain of the Planets, a World's Fair structure that sits in the body of water where the Creek once flowed but has suffered from years of disinvestment, adds little to the park experience today.

The time is now to change that. City leaders and park administrators should work to 'daylight' Flushing Creek, restoring the waterway that once traversed the area to its original form.

Bringing Flushing Creek back online would come with a multitude of benefits. First, it would help alleviate flooding issues, allowing water to take a natural course through the park instead of bursting through its seams. It would also help link the park to the coming waterfront development at Willets Point, creating a brand-new pedestrian and cyclist path from north to south. Restoring the Creek would also dramatically improve the park experience with a new natural amenity accessible to all park visitors, creating immense new opportunities for recreation and leisure.

It's a bold proposal that demands vision, says Nans Voron, a senior director at SCAPE Studio, a landscape architecture and urban design firm specializing in 'nature-based solutions.' Because it would alter a significant part of the park into something else entirely. "Maybe we shouldn't actually manage the water the way it's been historically managed and instead of combating it, we should start embracing and welcome stormwater into the site," explains Voron. "A series of wetlands could restore native species habitats that once thrived there, provide new recreational opportunities, and support educational programming."

The transformation of the eastern portion of the park would ensure that Flushing Meadows Corona Park could remain sustainable for years to come and reduce flooding in other parts of the park to the benefit of parkgoers. Daylighting the creek would require either relocation of the Fountain of the Planets or an effort to redirect the creek around the Fountain—perhaps coupled with a plan to convert the Fountain into usable open space.

There is growing precedent for this kind of work. In the Bronx, work is underway to 'daylight' Tibbetts Brook, a body of water, which flows from Yonkers, that was submerged in the 1800s, transporting wastewater through underground pipes.<sup>6</sup> However, on particularly rainy days, sewage tips over into municipal waterways, in what's known as a Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO). The \$133 million restoration will bring Tibbetts Brook back above ground and remove it from the sewer system, adding 'green infrastructure' and park space to Van Cortlandt Park.



## 12. Reduce the amount of asphalt in Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP).

### **PARKGOERS, OPEN SPACE EXPERTS AND OTHER SOURCES**

interviewed for this report agree: there is far too much asphalt in FMCP. Large stretches of wide roadway, especially in the area just north of the Long Island Expressway, see little use from parkgoers today. Many of these avenues are in poor condition and lack visual appeal, contributing little to the overall park experience.

This is clearly a remnant of the World's Fair, which created streets with names like "Avenue of the States," "Avenue of Asia," "Avenue of Africa," and "Avenue of Peace." But in a park where people regularly make use of tiny stretches of grass and dirt for picnics or volleyball, all this asphalt takes up space that could otherwise be filled with grass and recreational uses.

At the same time, there are too many parts of the park that are used for parking. It's important to note that many Queens residents who come to the park do so by car; there should be places where these New Yorkers

can park to access FMCP. As such, it makes sense to have parking lots on either side of Queens Museum and by the Queens Zoo and New York Hall of Science. But park administrators should rethink parking around the Queens Theatre and New York State Pavilion, both of which are in the heart of park—places where it seems counterproductive to use limited space for parking.

Park leaders should also explore opportunities to reduce some of the many parking spaces underneath the Van Wyck Expressway (east of the Fountain of the Planets). This is a golden opportunity to create more of a green pathway from FMCP to the Queens Botanical Garden.

As one parks expert we interviewed told us: "Parking lots should not be part of the park."

Part of developing a strategic plan for FMCP should include park leaders actively exploring ways to convert some of its asphalt into green spaces.

## 13. Create dynamic new food options in park by establishing a new vendor market filled with local food entrepreneurs.

### **FOR A PARK OF ITS SIZE, FLUSHING MEADOWS**

Corona Park (FMCP) has surprisingly few places to eat. The park boasts two banquet halls on its periphery—Terrace on the Park and the World's Fair Marina Restaurant & Banquet—but neither are designed for casual parkgoers. There is also a small snack bar on the edge of Meadow Lake and a handful of hot dog vendors with NYC Parks permits. Additionally, the Queens Night Market brings its popular rotation of food and beverage options to the lot behind New York Hall of Science on select weekends during warmer months. But food and drink options are strikingly limited, a problem since concessions can greatly enhance the parks experience, especially in a park like FMCP where so many of those

using it stay for a large chunk of the day and would enjoy opportunities for refreshments.

Fortunately for these parkgoers, vendors from Corona, Flushing, and beyond are helping to fill the void. Every day, they set up shop and sell regional delicacies, like pupusas from El Salvador and Honduras or tortas and cemitas from Mexico. By all indications, those using the park have embraced these informal food options.

But while the vendors have been a huge plus for a park otherwise lacking food and beverage options, there have been some challenges. Park officials say the vendors often leave behind piles of trash and patches of oil and gas when they pack up at the end of the day. Without places to connect to electric outlets, some vendors

struggle to refrigerate meats or require generators, which can be loud and polluting. And because many vendors are unpermitted, their food operations go uninspected by the Health Department.

There is an opportunity to build on and formalize the park's community of informal food vendors—and address challenges—in ways that benefit park users and entrepreneurs alike. The city should designate a 'market zone' in the park where vendors would be legally permitted to sell their wares, obtain access to physical infrastructure, like electricity, waste and recycling bins, and restrooms, and connect to municipal resources, like ID NYC, legal assistance, and food stamps.

Creating a more formalized vendor market in the park would not only fill a need; it could also become a major attraction for the park, bringing in foodies and other visitors not dissimilar to how Shake Shack has brought people to Madison Square Park—and how the Queens Night Market has attracted thousands of people who wouldn't otherwise visit the park. All the while, it would expand opportunities for entrepreneurs from the communities where most park users live.

Quilian Riano, the dean of Pratt's School of Architecture, says that the city can take inspiration from cities like Medellín, Colombia. "The city [Medellín] didn't try to get rid of it; instead, it actually just provided places where vendors could be a part of something more." Similarly, in Portland, Oregon, vacant parking lots were converted into 'pods' for food trucks, with public seating and cooking facilities.

Vending in city parks is illegal without a permit granted from NYC Parks. But the permits cost money and time to obtain, and without English proficiency or documentation, many street vendors are afraid of asking for institutional support out of fear of retribution from authorities. (There have been several crackdowns of vendors in parks in recent years.<sup>7</sup>) But this wave of new vendors should be seen as an opportunity, not a threat.

Just up the block, Corona Plaza serves as this dynamic model of formalizing a shared space while providing representation and amenities. When he was executive director of Queens Museum, Tom Finkelpearl watched firsthand as the community organized to make it work for everyone. "It was a very well-used, beloved community resource for folks in that neighborhood," he says. "These are the people that use Flushing Meadows Corona Park. This is their park. And they developed this thing they had a big say in."

But it's evident, Finkelpearl added, that there needs to be more spaces like it. New 'market zones' in Flushing Meadows Corona Park offer the city a chance to expand the park's concessions with diverse new options reflective of who lives there. It could also provide an opportunity to test out ongoing pilots around vendor electrification and battery swapping. This would not only enhance the park experience but also offer a safe space to the newest New Yorkers eager to make a living.

Creating a more formalized vendor market in the park would not only fill a need; it could also become a major attraction for the park, bringing in foodies and other visitors not dissimilar to how Shake Shack has brought people to Madison Square Park—and how the Queens Night Market has attracted thousands of people who wouldn't otherwise visit the park.



## 14. Open a new full-service café or restaurant outside the Queens Museum.

**WHILE THE STARTING POINT FOR EXPANDING FOOD** concessions in Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP) should be with the mostly immigrant vendors who are already a hit with parkgoers, park administrators should not stop there. They should actively explore opportunities to create a new full-service café or restaurant outside of Queens Museum, in the shadow of the park's most important icon: the Unisphere.

Most of New York City's major parks have a hallmark concession to draw visitors and provide options for people who like the idea of a sit-down eating or drinking experience as part of their day in the park—and, importantly, offer public amenities, like restrooms, Wi-Fi, and seating. Central Park has several, including Le Pain Quotidien, the Loeb Boathouse, the café at the Central Park Zoo, and the famous Tavern on the Green. Brooklyn Bridge Park has Fornino and Oddfellows Ice Cream Co. The Rockaways has its boardwalk eateries, like Caracas and Rippers. Brooklyn's McCarren Park has Parkhouse, and Staten Island's Clove Lake has Stone House.

It's time that Flushing Meadows Corona Park joins their ranks. A notable eatery would attract a steady stream of foot traffic and attention to Queens' signature park. It would also help close the deficit in bathroom access and provide park goers a free place to sit indoors, which can be

difficult to find outside of the major cultural institutions. (Most require a ticket.) It helps, too, that park goers could easily grab a bite or drink, enhancing the experience for regular or special event visitors alike.

Creating a restaurant or café abutting the Queens Museum would make a lot of sense, since it could both serve and attract museumgoers and appeal to some of the many visitors to the Unisphere. It would also be a welcome addition to the families expected at the coming Suna Children's Museum, which is set to be completed in 2027.

For years, the Queens Museum has explored the possibility of hosting a café outside their premises. But museum staff say they've been hampered by the paperwork and upfront cost required by the city—a constant criticism<sup>8</sup> of business opportunities within parks.

Park administrators need not exclusively focus on that site. They should partner with NYC Parks and the city's Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) to put out an RFEI (Request for Expressions of Interest) that would seek ideas from restaurateurs, café operators, and other food entrepreneurs—and then work with member institutions (like the Queens Museum) and community leaders to sort through the ideas for sit-down restaurants and cafes that come in.

The city should actively explore opportunities to create a new full-service café or restaurant outside of Queens Museum, in the shadow of the park's most important icon: the Unisphere.

## 15. Explore opportunities to more fully harness Queens Theatre and its prized position in the park—perhaps by launching free outdoor performances during summer evenings.

**THE QUEENS THEATRE IS IN THE GEOGRAPHIC CENTER** of the park. But it is open just a fraction of the time the park itself is open. As of July 1, 2025, for example, the Theatre listed a total of two performances for July and August, one of which is in daytime hours.

Given its prized position in the park, park administrators and borough leaders should partner with architects, public space experts, theatre leaders, and community members to brainstorm ways to more fully harness this asset.

One idea is to bring the works of the Queens Theatre—and potentially other cultural institutions that are in the park—out into the public commons, with free accessible programming that introduces creative works to a wider swath of New Yorkers, with the park as its stage.

Queens is long overdue for its own version of ‘Shakespeare in the Park.’ A flagship summer series of free, world-class performing arts events at Flushing Meadows Corona Park (FMCP) would bring the kind of cultural programming often concentrated in Manhattan to the heart of the outer boroughs—elevating Queens as a destination for arts excellence while expanding access for the borough’s diverse, largely immigrant communities.

With Queens Theatre as a core partner, the series could showcase the institution in an entirely new light—highlighting its diverse talent and broadening its appeal to funders and audiences alike. It would also help cement Queens Theatre as a major player in New York City’s performing arts landscape. The Theatre, which has long pushed for outdoor programming, cannot do it alone. Its staff struggles to maintain decades-old infrastructure, let alone expand beyond its borders.

In recent years, NYC Parks has partnered with other organizations to bring more cultural programming to parks. In Queens, the agency is working with Queens College to hire CUNY students to put on arts and dance performances. The Jazz Trail concert series, which began in 2023, is also introducing free jazz performances to

outdoor public spaces, in the home borough of greats like Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald.

With sustained support, the city could leverage a storied arts center to create a major new cultural event series that Queens residents want and deserve.

Similarly, Sally Tallant, president and executive director of the Queens Museum, has long envisioned a larger free outdoor arts event, with all the cultural institutions involved. Like ‘The Gates’ in Central Park, or Celebrate Brooklyn in Prospect Park, a major arts and cultural exhibit could heighten the visibility of the park and offer residents something entirely new.

“It’s not just what happens within the physical barriers of our institutions,” says Tallant. “It’s how do you incorporate community and cultural organizations into the park and reconnect communities. What can be done to do that socially, culturally, emotionally as much as just sort of physically.”

There may be other ways to activate the Queens Theatre—and other cultural facilities in the park—during times when they are closed to the public. One possibility is to follow the lead of Central Park, which has converted the Harlem Meer Center, formerly known as the Lasker Rink, into multi-purpose usage. The old pool, located at the park’s northern edge, was open for four months, the skating rink for two months.

“These single-use facilities were empty for much of the year. We’re trying to find ways of having multi-use facilities,” says Smith of the Central Park Conservancy. “With its new configuration, we’re putting a platform with a turf field on top, so it can be open all summer long. We want to make it a destination year-round, like Sheep’s Meadow.”

Though it may be more difficult to activate a small-box theater when it isn’t being used than it was convert a skating rink, park leaders and borough officials would be wise to consider ways to more fully harness the Theatre and the prime space it takes up in the park.

## 16. Create an ‘Emerald Necklace’ of seamless park connections in central and eastern Queens, with Flushing Meadows Corona Park at the core.

**WHILE THIS REPORT IS FOCUSED ON FLUSHING** Meadows Corona Park (FMCP), Queens’ signature green space doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It’s the start of a network of parks through the eastern end of the borough that stretch all the way to the edges of Nassau County.

But while there are seamless and appealing connections between many of these green spaces—from the Queens Botanical Garden to Kissena Corridor Park, Kissena Park, Cunningham Park, and finally Alley Pond Park—Flushing Meadows Corona Park breaks the chain. Although FMCP is in throwing distance from the Botanical Garden, it feels anything but connected. The Van Wyck Express Overpass and the highly trafficked College Point Boulevard divide Flushing Meadows from the garden, not only making it difficult for pedestrians to get there but almost totally obscuring that the garden is literally across the street.

Although there are overpasses and underpasses that connect Flushing Meadows Corona Park to nearby destinations like the Queens Botanical Garden and Kissena Corridor Park, many are dreary, poorly maintained, or built at steep inclines that make walking or biking difficult—and render them completely inaccessible for New Yorkers with disabilities. That’s assuming they’re even open or can be found at all. Wayfinding within the park is minimal, and signage for the Brooklyn–Queens Greenway—a bike and pedestrian route that enters the park from Brooklyn—is barely legible or navigable. Meanwhile, the pedestrian bridge linking the park to the Queens Botanical Garden has been closed for years due to disrepair. Park users attempting to reach nearby green spaces must also navigate high-traffic corridors like College Point Boulevard and the service roads of the Grand Central Parkway.

Research has long shown that better connected parks and open spaces boost usage, promote healthier lives, and reduce crime.<sup>9</sup> With that in mind, city leaders should launch a new effort to upgrade the physical structures

linking Flushing Meadows Corona Park to surrounding parks for a continuous stream of green space, taking inspiration from Boston’s “Emerald Necklace”, a 1,100 acre series of connected green spaces, including Boston Common, the Public Garden, and several other parks and an arboretum.

“At present, the overpasses from the surrounding residential neighborhoods are merely utilitarian and plainly unfriendly. There is an opportunity to better connect these communities to the park by designing these overpasses as green spaces themselves,” said Arthi Krishnamoorthy of TenBerke Architects. “If we could improve the connections into the park, we could shorten that feeling of distance, so you feel like the park is reaching out into the neighborhoods.”

Individuals we interviewed for this report suggested directly connecting the western side of Flushing Meadows Corona Park, near the Al Oerter Recreation Center and Lawrence Playground, to the pedestrian and cycling corridors due east, in Kissena Corridor Park and beyond. In addition, ‘green streets’ between parks and playgrounds in Corona to Flushing Meadows Corona Park would weave together a more coherent network of open spaces for residents to traverse and enjoy.

Quilian Riano, dean of Pratt’s School of Architecture, has brought classes to the area to study how to improve access. “The number one thing we heard from people over the years is the lack of connection of Flushing Meadows Corona Park to the communities it serves,” he said. “Especially in North Corona, one of the areas of the city with the least amount of public space. We were always thinking about how the park could have larger connections into the neighborhoods, so the park can be thought of as more than just being the physical park, but this expanded connector that brings more attention to the park itself.”

## 17. Reimagine the entrances to the park, including a bridge over Flushing Creek.

**FLUSHING MEADOWS CORONA PARK (FMCP)** has surprisingly few formal entrances for a nearly 900-acre parcel of land. One familiar entry point is via the Passerelle Pedestrian Bridge from the Mets-Willets Point subway station. There are also sparse entrances in Corona, Forest Hills, and Kew Gardens Hills. It's also possible to navigate from College Point Boulevard, in Flushing, which involves walking underneath the Van Wyck overpass. It's not uncommon to find DIY entrances where a fence was torn or a 'desire path' was created, by park goers fed up with figuring it out.

This is partially by design: access was limited to control crowds for the New York World's Fair. But times have changed. If the park is going to be truly accessible to all, it'll need more points to connect communities who are shut out from this valued green space in their own backyard. The city should get to work implementing new entrances that help to extend the park's borders, rather than make it feel caged in.

There are a few places it could start. The navigation from Flushing is difficult; there is only one way for the nearly 200,000 residents of Flushing to enter the park by foot, and it entails crossing the busy College Point Boulevard, sidling past the Al Oerter Recreation Center, and then traversing a parking lot underneath the Van Wyck Expressway, which lacks formal walkways. These

obstacles make a difference: notably, there are fewer residents from Flushing enjoying the park.

"It's really hard to get to," says Tom Grech, the president of the Queens Chamber of Commerce and a regular user of the park. "You could go further up Main Street, near Queens Botanical Garden, but that's far from downtown Flushing. It's the largest, most condensed Chinatown in America; it needs some space to breathe."

The city should consider building a footbridge over Flushing Creek, at the end of Roosevelt Avenue, to directly connect Flushing to the park. This would make for a seamless entryway to one of the city's busiest commercial corridors. It could also be paired with the proposed daylighting of Flushing Creek earlier in this report, and link to the coming waterfront development at Willets Point.

Another location to consider is the area near Terrace on the Park, a wedding venue within the park that originally doubled as a heliport for the 1964 New York World's Fair. The current parking lot spans about four avenues in Corona, forcing residents there to walk north or south to enter the park. Decking or burying the parking lot, which is sparsely populated, could offer the space needed to build an entirely new entrance for Corona residents.

If the park is going to be truly accessible to all, it'll need more points to connect communities who are shut out from this valued green space in their own backyard.



## 18. Expand the NYC Ferry system to Willets Point, in exchange for pier upgrades.

### FLUSHING MEADOWS CORONA PARK (FMCP) ATTRACTS

large numbers of residents from across Queens. But there are untapped opportunities to welcome more New Yorkers from other parts of the city—and visitors staying at hotels in Manhattan, Long Island City, and Brooklyn. City leaders can do this by extending NYC Ferry’s Astoria line to Flushing Bay and Willets Point. Such an expansion would not only create an interesting new way to get to the park; it would also provide important new transit options for eastern Queens residents.

“We need greater connectivity to the park,” said Tina Lee, the co-chair of the Flushing Business Improvement District. “With all these projects going on—the Willets Point development, the potential Metropolitan Park—connecting the park to the waterfront is more important than ever. We focus on getting Flushing Bay cleaned up and bringing the ferry to the waterfront.”

Elected officials and business leaders in Eastern Queens have long called for better transit access to the growing neighborhoods they represent. A new soccer stadium and housing development in Willets Point, a newly renovated LaGuardia Airport, and the coming Queens Waterfront Greenway will only heighten demand for access. And new greenways along Flushing Creek, which could carry visitors deeper into the park

if daylighting moves forward, could provide seamless access from a new ferry terminal.

A new ferry terminal could also help complement and enhance a significant new capital project underway now to reconstruct the pavilion structures at the World’s Fair Marina. Expanding ferry service could further benefit the marina through the renovation of existing piers, which have outlived their natural lifespans. In 2024, Pier 1 was closed by NYC Parks due to deteriorating conditions, and boats have since been moved to Pier 3.<sup>10</sup> (Pier 2 refers to a historic pier that no longer exists.) An overhaul could allow the piers to better accommodate ferry boats, future commercial activity, and regular users, like the growing community of ‘dragon boaters’ who use Flushing Bay for practice.

“Pier 1 is really dilapidated,” said Rebecca Pryor, the executive director of Guardians of Flushing Bay, who advocates for active recreational use in the Bay. “In November 2024, the pier failed its safety inspection and is now condemned. Dragon boaters—who serve as the eyes and ears of Flushing Bay—are launching their boats from temporary shipping containers near the public boat launch. There are a lot of constraints with the set up; it’s not at all ideal.”

Expanding ferry service could further benefit the marina through the renovation of existing piers, which have outlived their natural lifespans.

## 19. Redesign the Playground for All Children.

**FLUSHING MEADOWS CORONA PARK (FMCP)** has had its share of notable firsts. With the New York World's Fair in both 1939 and 1964, it was arguably the first major urban park designed specifically around a major exposition, converting swaths of marshland into fairground and lawn. Its structures also became a temporary home for the United Nations before the organization's home was complete, on Manhattan's East Side. And, in 1984, it opened America's first-ever playground designed with both disabled and non-disabled kids in mind: the Playground for All Children.

The Playground for All Children was a monumental achievement that demonstrated how design that is inclusive of people with disabilities can benefit all users. Its opening set a national standard for all-play equipment and playgrounds, which became mainstream over time, both in New York City and around the world. It has amenities for children using crutches and walkers, who are deaf and blind, and who seek both active and passive play. Today, it hosts an array of programming catering to children of all ages and abilities.

But the Playground hasn't been renovated since a \$3.9 million makeover in 2002. In the meantime, society's knowledge and awareness of children's needs have only grown. The city should fund a long overdue modernization and re-imagining of this pioneering infrastructure, so that Flushing Meadows Corona Park once again finds itself at the forefront of park design.

Today, the Playground for All Children is well-used but showing its age. Like other playgrounds, NYC Parks offers maintenance to ensure that the equipment is still functional, yet materials are worn, the colors on the mats and metal bars faded. The playground itself operates from April to November; it remains closed during winter months.

"The Playground for All Children was a very wonderful idea," said Krishnamoorthy of TenBerke Architects. "It had broad vision and broad ambition. What a welcome project it would be to redesign it today with all that we know about designing inclusive spaces for all children. It would be so meaningful for people from all five boroughs to come to the park to enjoy a working model that inspires curiosity and joy amongst our youngest."

A full-scale renovation would allow NYC Parks to update this historic play area to accommodate new trends in research around neurodiversity and inclusive design, as well as meet the department's heightened modern standards for playgrounds, with stormwater infrastructure, low-maintenance fixes, and open and accessible design elements. It would give a fresh new look to a playground that set an example decades ago and offer the children of Queens and beyond an inspiring and dignified place to play.



The Playground for All Children was a very wonderful idea...What a welcome project it would be to redesign it today with all that we know about designing inclusive spaces.

**ARTHI KRISHNAMOORTHY**

Senior Principal, TenBerke Architects

## 20. Make better use of the area surrounding the New York State Pavilion.

**THE NEW YORKERS WHO FLOCK TO FLUSHING** Meadows Corona Park (FMCP) seemingly use every square inch of the park, whether for picnics and grilling or sports like Ecuavolley, soccer, and cricket. But there are a handful of spaces in the park that are underused, often because they are poorly designed or just not inviting. One area of opportunity is the space surrounding the New York State Pavilion.

Although it is a short walk away from the Unisphere, and not far from several well-used soccer fields, the area surrounding the Pavilion is one of the sleepest and least interesting parts of the park. Much of it is asphalt and

is sometimes used for parking for visitors to Queens Theatre. Yet it does not appear to be officially designated for parking, nor should it be.

By working with a landscape architect, FMCP staff should strive to re-activate this quadrant of the park. It need not be a costly renovation or capital project. Instead, park leaders should take a page from how former NYCDOT Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan created dozens of new plazas at low cost by using ‘tactical’ materials like paint, planters, and lawn chairs.



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Page 3, Flushing Meadows Corona Park [map]. (2024). *NYC Parks*. Retrieved from <https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/flushing-meadows-corona-park>

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