Rethinking the Bronx’s ‘Soundview Slums’: The Intersecting Histories of Large-Scale Waterfront Redevelopment and Community-Scaled Planning in an Era of Urban Renewal

Kara M. Schlichting
CUNY Queens College
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Abstract
In the 1910s, the bungalow colony Harding Park developed on marshy Clason Point. Through the 1930s–1950s, Robert Moses sought to modernize this East Bronx waterfront through the Parks Department and the Committee on Slum Clearance. While localism and special legislative treatment enabled Harding Park’s preservation as a co-op in 1981, the abandonment of master planning left neighboring Soundview Park unfinished. The entwined histories of recreation and residency on Clason Point reveal the beneficial and detrimental effects of both urban renewal and community development, while also demonstrating the complicated relationship between localism and largescale planning in postwar New York City.

Keywords
urban parks, infrastructure, neighborhoods, places, waterfronts, citizen participation, planning eras/approaches, postwar planning, urban renewal, landscape architecture, planning practice, North America, regions

Since the 1920s, chicken coops, broken-down vehicles, dirt roads, and salty air characterized life on the marshy peninsula of the East Bronx’s Clason Point. When visitors stumbled upon the 20-acre bungalow colony of Harding Park, they noted its “rustic living,” reminiscent of “a fisherman’s cove on the New England shore.”1 Margaret Callan, who spent her childhood in the East Bronx in the 1940s-1950s, recalled its waterfront “was like God’s country. There were very few homes around and it was under developed.”2 Known as the Soundview Peninsula for its panoramic views of Manhattan from the confluence of the Bronx and East Rivers, this point has a rich history of waterfront recreation and residency.

Through the first half of the twentieth century, Clason Point remained a liminal space, an undeveloped landscape located inside the municipal boundaries of New York City. Bypassed by industrial development, the point developed as a summer resort community, isolated from public transportation and the major shopping and entertainment centers of Manhattan and the Bronx.3 At Harding Park (originally Higgs Beach), and other camps in the borough, Irish, Italian, and
Northern European renters gradually converted camps into permanent homes following World War I (WWI). Yet in the 1930s, Harding Park’s history diverged from that of similar camps due to municipal planners’ attempts at redevelopment. In the process residents struggled to secure legal and zoning property protections to keep their homes affordable and to preserve their blue-collar, owner-built community despite urban renewal plans.

Robert Moses attempted to use two municipal agencies to redevelop Clason Point’s Bronx River waterfront at midcentury—the Parks Department and the Committee on Slum Clearance (CSC). Moses used both powerful agencies to rebuild the waterfront via public and cooperative housing projects, parks, and parkways. The Parks Department purchased the first Soundview Park parcel just north of Harding Park in 1937; following seventy years of sporadic landfill and design proposals, the department acquired the last of the park’s eventual 205 acres in 2002 (Figure 1). In the 1950s, at the height of his slum clearance powers, Moses expanded the scope of his work, proposing an urban renewal plan for Soundview and Harding Park.

This article examines three episodes in the history of Clason Point’s waterfront as a space of recreation and residency in the twentieth century. This history is framed chronologically around the intersecting histories of Soundview Park and the Harding Park. First, it examines the process by which Harding Park’s two dominant characteristics emerged in the 1920s-1930s: its owner-built homes and extraordinary property system that combined ground-leases with private home ownership. The second episode looks at how Harding Park and municipal park planning became entwined under Moses between 1937 and 1959. While Moses successfully established Soundview Park he tried, but failed, to raze Harding Park and further modernize the waterfront. The final episode examines how the failure of large-scale plans led to disinvestment in both the park and bungalows post-1959. Harding Park and Soundview witnessed the rise and fall of
During this era of destruction, their fortunes diverged. Maintaining Harding Park’s owner-built tradition and advocating for neighborhood-based planning, residents and officials preserved the community. By the 1980s these shifts engendered reinvestment and a unique real estate solution—the creation of a neighborhood cooperative. Soundview, however, suffered disinvestment and environmental degradation without large-scale investments and plans.

Harding Park’s history could contribute to the history of working-class fights against urban renewal in general and Robert Moses in particular. This is the classic and powerful, but ultimately simplistic, narrative of Title I fights in New York City. The post-Title I history of Clason Point reveals that parks, municipal utilities, and the environment suffered when localism and vernacular development replaced large-scale plans and investments. To an extent, the turn to localism contributed to the isolation and lack of capital that characterized the urban crisis. Joining the history of the bungalow community and park also forces a reconsideration of park construction, particularly in low-income and underserved neighborhoods, as an unmitigated good. Rather than inherently oppositional, master-planning and vernacular development could align, producing benefits for Clason Point as well as its most severe disadvantages.

**From Summer Camps to Harding Park**

Although they often lacked time and money, at the turn of the twentieth century working-class New Yorkers sought out nature retreats and amusement parks. The “summer playground district of the great metropolitan zone” emerged across Long Island and the Bronx and the Hudson River Valley, and the New Jersey coast. On the south shore of Brooklyn, Coney Island became the nation’s first amusement park and harbinger of mass commercial culture. Flushing
Bay in northern Queens and Clason Point also featured popular, if lesser known, amusement parks, while summer camps dotted Jamaica Bay, the Rockaways, and the East Bronx.

The dancing pavilions, restaurants, and amusements of Clason Point Amusement Park and Kane’s Amusement Park first attracted vacationers to the area. In addition to these resorts, summer campers enjoyed breathtaking panoramic waterfront views, direct water access for bathing, boating, and clamming, and campgrounds. Even after 1895 when the city annexed the territory east of the Bronx River, including Clason Point, the area remained undeveloped compared to the urbanization of Manhattan and the central Bronx. As one Brooklyn native recalled, “my mother sent me [to Clason Point] on vacation,” remarking “[t]his was considered the country.” In 1910, parkland, agricultural use, and open marsh comprised three-fourths of the borough’s territory. “Long Island and Westchester got all the suburban buildings,” a resident once explained, but “they bypassed this area.”

To cater to Clason Point’s summer visitors Thomas Higgs opened a campground, Higgs Beach—the future Harding Park—adjacent to the amusement park district. Tent colonies were popular working-class leisure destinations in the late-1800s and early-twentieth century from Martha’s Vineyard, across New England and New York, and along the Jersey shore. Working fathers often remained in the city during the week, joining their wives and children alongshore for the weekend to enjoy camp life. At Higgs Beach campers began converting tents into permanent homes during the housing shortage of WWI. For example in 1917, the Waring family moved permanently to their camp from their apartment in the central Bronx as a matter of economy. When money was available, the family replaced its canvas walls with second-hand wood and eventually insulated it as a year-round home. Higgs Beach offered families cheap housing due to its unique land leasing system of ground-leases: families owned their homes but
paid ground rent for the land. Both the Warings and Millers winterized bungalows on rented plots. For example, when Bessie Miller and her husband Charles moved to Higgs Beach around 1909, they paid a monthly ground lease of five dollars month. Property taxes reflected the land’s value, not a building’s worth, making homes affordable. Reasonable costs and the reprieve from the density of other city neighborhoods made the community, renamed Harding Park in 1924 in honor of the recently deceased president, successful. One resident described the community: “there was nobody that you could consider rich: some firemen, laborers.” Harding Park offered blue-collar New Yorkers the rare opportunity of single-family home ownership.

The bungalow community of Harding Park ultimately proved to be far more resilient than the amusement parks that had spawned it. Throughout the 1920s attendance at Clason Point Amusement Park declined, and numerous attractions were shuttered after a 1922 freak wind storm wrecked concessions, destroyed the 100-foot-tall Ferris wheel, and killed half a dozen people. Only a few arcade games, the pool, and pier remained at the end of the decade. In the same years that Clason Point’s amusements lost their appeal, coastal pollution accelerated the region’s decline as a recreation destination. Vivian Cavilla, a young girl from the Fordham section of the Bronx, recalled that by the 1920s the East River waterfront was “filthy.” Fewer vacationers visited, but bungalow residents maintained a distinctive year-round residential neighborhood. In 1937, Works Progress Administration (WPA) surveyors deemed the East Bronx, including Clason Point, a “‘family’ neighborhood, with many children, a good health record and a population that is quite small for the area and nowhere densely crowded.” Open space covered approximately forty percent of the East Bronx, accounting for more than double the space occupied by homes and nine times more than business and industry combined. The area featured a remarkably low population density of only 24 persons per acre. Residents
benefited from “a more open development than has been possible in most parts of New York” and enjoyed “many of the amenities of suburban” and rural-esque living.\(^{21}\)

While Harding Park remained largely unknown and isolated from the rest of the Bronx, from time to time the community’s unique lifestyle and distinctive built environment inspired interest.\(^{22}\) The streetscape and land-use of the East Bronx differed markedly from the rest of the city. In 1937 the WPA had approvingly noted that in places like Clason Point, street patterns offered “a refreshing contrast with most other parts of New York… [streets] still run directly to destinations without much regard for the ordered right-angled patterns of built-up New York…there is hope the East Bronx may escape much of the monotony and the positive disadvantages of rigid patterns.”\(^{23}\) Such an observation was particularly true in Harding Park. Higgs ignored or was unaware of official street plans. He laid out camp lots measuring from 25x40 feet to 30x60 feet. Bungalows and tents stood just twenty feet apart.\(^{24}\) The resulting street plan produced a narrower, alley-like street and more compact neighborhood than would have developed under the city’s official plan.\(^{25}\) The community’s meandering dirt roads remained largely unnamed and did not even appear on official maps until well after WWII.\(^{26}\)

Blue-collar suburbs often lacked the basic infrastructure of paved streets, sewers, or water systems.\(^{27}\) The lack of municipal oversight of minority and working-class suburbs differentiated such neighborhoods from the planned, developer-built suburbs of the middle class and developed visually distinctive streetscapes.

Observers invariably commented on Harding Park’s openness and unplanned streetscape as well as the area’s rural ambiance, distinctive streetscape, and tight-knit community. Arching trees, picket fences around tiny homes, and fruit trees produced “[t]he village’s unusual country-life-within-the-city” aesthetic.\(^{28}\) One reporter waxed poetic that in Harding Park “‘villagers’
hang wash in their backyards, pick apples and peaches in their gardens and exchange gossip over fences.”

Locals bolstered this characterization. Bessie Miller, who had lived in a bungalow for 40 years by 1949, told a reporter “I like this small town fine,” as she hung her wash out in her yard overlooking the East River. Kenneth Waring, age thirteen, and William Pajer, age eleven, explained that they spent their summers swimming, visiting the general store, and foraging for ripe apples that “happen to drop off the trees.”

Lilian Herzog, a resident for 28 years by 1952, appreciated Harding Park as a special place to raise children. “It’s a paradise for the kids—no climbing of stairs, no crowded streets.” Harding Park brought the best of rural and suburban living in a beautiful coastal setting together inside city limits: paradise, indeed.

Harding Park’s rural streetscape and family focus inspired praise in residents and journalists alike, but there was a downside to the community’s low density and owner-built character. The WPA also observed that “so large an undeveloped area in a city the size of New York is unusual in the extreme. It constitutes both a great opportunity and serious dangers.”

The City’s Park Commissioner, Robert Moses, saw the same opportunity and dangers of underdeveloped Clason Point and self-built Harding Park. With the power to effect large-scale intervention through park planning, Moses looked to modernize Harding Park and its waterfront.

**Robert Moses’s Redevelopment Proposals for the Clason Point Waterfront**

Robert Moses wielded unparalleled power over the built environment of New York City and Greater New York for over forty years. Beginning in 1934 with his appointment as Commissioner of Parks, Moses began reshaping New York City via the Parks Department. In subsequent years he quickly expanded his reach via roads, bridges, and slum clearance programs. By 1935, Moses helmed the Triborough Bridge Authority, the Parks Department, the Long
Island State Parks Commission, and the State Council of Parks concurrently.\(^\text{34}\) In the 1950s Moses also ran the CSC. As a result, he became the post powerful non-elected official in New York’s City’s history.\(^\text{35}\) During the thirties Moses was stunningly successful in amassing federal relief funds to supplement state and city moneys: more than 80 percent of the first $19 million Works Progress Administration funds spent nationwide went to New York. With nearly limitless power and extraordinary funding, Moses fundamentally reshaped the city’s parks.\(^\text{36}\)

In the 1930s, Moses embarked on an aggressive program of waterfront landfill and park building as an essential part of his long-range waterfront redevelopment program. The parks commissioner declared that the city’s waterfront had, “through past neglect, indifference, stupidity, corporate and individual selfishness and planless and feeble government,” been allowed to “degenerate.” Moses believed that the city’s waterfront was “infused with a paramount and inalienable public interest” in need of guardianship and development for public recreation.\(^\text{37}\) Moses tirelessly advocated for coastal redevelopment and park facilities in the outer boroughs, from Orchard Beach in the East Bronx to the Rockways and Jamaica Bay on southern Long Island.\(^\text{38}\) Like Clason Point, these places had attracted recreationalists with their open beaches, boardwalks, bungalows, houseboats, and fishing shacks since the late-1800s.\(^\text{39}\) Moses endeavored to systematically replace coastal bungalows with large public parks. He first proposed a Clason Point park in 1930 as part of the Metropolitan Conference on Parks, but the advisory committee had no effect on the city’s park program.\(^\text{40}\) But as park commissioner Moses successfully oversaw the purchase of ninety-three acres of land north of Harding Park in 1937. Through the rest of the century the department slowly acquired additional parcels.\(^\text{41}\)

To build Soundview Park, the Parks Department would have to complete substantial landmaking, since most of the area Moses identified as the future park was tidal marsh and open
water. Moses pointed to the celebrated work at the future Flushing Meadows Park, where 1,200 acres of marshland were being filled for the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair. Fair construction epitomized emerging trends of coastal land reclamation and arterial and park planning that characterized Moses’s large-scale reshaping of the city in the 1930s. Moses asked the Board of Estimate to approve a similar program at Soundview. In the fall of 1938 he contracted with the Department of Sanitation and applied to the Board of Estimate for funds to move landfill operations from the Rikers Island dump to Soundview’s marshes. Moses described Soundview in unattractive terms as “barren salt marsh” threaded with creeks and artificial drainage ditches and “an irregular and muddy shore line.” Landfill, he promised, would improve this waterfront. By December 29, 1941, the Parks Department had built over 6,000 linear feet of earth, bulkheads, and steel sheeting, which it backfilled with more than 50,000 cubic yards of earth, ash, and garbage to form a new graded waterfront (Figure 2). Moses optimistically proclaimed Soundview landmaking and facility construction would be complete following by 1943. Moses continued his plan to extend Soundview Park and the Parks Department built a series of bulkheads that formed two lagoons adjacent to Harding Park. The bulkhead was built, in Moses’s words, in preparation for “a long range park program.” Moses had begun filling these lands well before plans were finalized; the lagoons did not appear on the official Soundview record map until December 1969. When they did appear, it was only as a note that the proposed park extension had not been adopted. Although Moses never publically admitted to working ahead of authorization at Soundview, such actions reflect his determination to complete a large manmade park on Clason Point’s waterfront. But Moses’s New Deal park building ground to a near halt with the nation’s involvement in WWII.

Despite Moses’s efforts, Soundview Park remained unfinished. By the 1950s, trash, cars,
and junk machinery littered the shores.\textsuperscript{50} As a result of the use of Sanitation Department landfill, insects and smells from rotting garbage bothered Harding Park residents. Rats were so numerous around the trash fill that neighborhood boys took to shooting the vermin in their free time.\textsuperscript{51} Locals challenged the idea that parks were an inherent “common good” during Soundview’s construction.\textsuperscript{52} One resident later accused Moses of “ruin[ing] every beach in Harding Park;” another pointed to the manmade lagoons as “making a mess of out the whole thing [the waterfront]…and that was the end of our beach.”\textsuperscript{53} When surveyors arrived on the scene, local children like Helena Orchuizzo hit Parks Department vehicles with tomatoes, displaying their displeasure at landfill “improvements.”\textsuperscript{54} Moses earned his reputation for dismissing locals who questioned his plans. In both public and private statements Moses brushed aside complaints over using garbage fill to make land, citing the greater good that residents would receive from the completed park.\textsuperscript{55} To realize his park plans Moses, like many of his planning contemporaries, frequently overrode local interests and devalued the work of individuals who challenged his ideas.\textsuperscript{56} Historian Robert Fishman contends that planning history traditionally replicated this perspective that official planning was an inherent “common good” and one of the progressive forces of modern society. Harding Park residents’ responses to Soundview provide a counterweight to Moses’s vision of park planning as an inexorably positive, modernizing force.\textsuperscript{57}

While Moses lacked both community support and funds at Soundview, he remained determined to redevelop western Clason Point. In the 1950s Moses made two more attempts to redevelop the waterfront, both of which plans depended on the dislocation of Harding Park.\textsuperscript{58} In 1953 Moses, in his role as city construction coordinator, backed a union-sponsored $20 million project to build 2,000 apartments in thirteen buildings. Moses had been named to this position 1946 by Mayor William O'Dwyer. It gave him authority over public construction projects in
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New York City.⁵⁹ The sponsoring unions hoped to receive a partial tax exemption for the project under the 1949 Federal Housing Act.⁶⁰ Peter Kokiadas, chairman of Harding Park’s tenant association, declared the proposal was based on the misapprehension that the neighborhood was a “shacktown.” The New York World-Telegram picked up the story, running a two-part exposé of what it deemed an inappropriate land grab attempt. Kokiadas took a reporter for a neighborhood tour and inside his own bungalow’s three bedrooms and modern kitchen. “‘Do you call this a shack?’” he challenged. “‘Sure I did all the work myself, but I spent almost $6,000 on materials alone. And my house isn’t exceptional here.’”⁶¹ Kokiadas’s tenant association organized by close to 250 residents to protest at the Board of Estimate hearing on the proposal.⁶² Arthur W. Kheel, senator from the 25th Bronx district, represented Harding Park residents against the sponsoring unions’ lawyer. On January 16th the Board of Estimate denied the union cooperative’s application for a tax exemption and effectively blocked the project. Residents had successfully defended their turf, but the win would prove short-lived.

Moses had again failed to redevelop Soundview, but he did not give up. Three years later in 1956 he initiated a third attempt in his role as head of the New York City’s urban renewal authority, the CSC.⁶³ Moses often manipulated his multiple appointments to initiate large-scale government redevelopment programs in New York City in the era. To forward his redevelopment plan for Clason Point’s waterfront, Moses proposed an urban renewal project to raze Harding Park, which he termed the “Soundview Slums,” and build new residential towers.

In the 1950s New York City, and Moses, ran the largest and most advanced Title I program in the country.⁶⁴ Mayor O’Dwyer appointed Moses to the city’s powerful CSC in December 1948 in anticipation of the Title I act of the 1949 National Housing Law, which allocated federal funds for slum clearance and private redevelopment. Title I funded urban
renewal by permitting cities to acquire properties deemed slums or blighted, soon-to-be slums, and resell them at a marked down price to middle-income housing developers. Moses enthusiastically mobilized Title I across the city. In April 1956, the CSC issued a press release on the proposed 39-acre Soundview site (Figure 3). Like all Title I projects, the federal government would cover two-thirds of the costs, $1.5 million, while municipal government paid the remaining third, $750,000. While publicizing the Soundview Title I project, Moses worked behind the scenes to secure sponsors to buy the site and build new housing, lobbying pension funds and unions of the Building and Construction Trade Council. In October 1957, he urged the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency to authorize the planning contracts. Moses emphasized to administrator Albert M. Cole “[o]ne of the projects in particular—Soundview—is a worthwhile union cooperative project.” He also solicited his fellow CSC member William S. Lebwohl, “what can be done now to speed up Soundview?” Moses impatiently waited for federal funding to forward his modernization plan for Clason Point.

The federal government finally authorized $110,000 for preliminary planning in March 1958 and the CSC set to work on the Soundview Title I project. It issued a glossy illustrated brochure on March 16, 1959. An official definition of what constituted a slum did not exist in New York City after WWII. Moses consistently tweaked his working definition throughout the 1950s to encompass everything from brownstone row homes with rental apartments to crowded tenement apartment buildings to Harding Park bungalows. The Soundview Slums Title I plan proposed a ninety-two-acre site, half of which was tidal marsh, and included Harding Park (Figure 4). The CSC defined the bungalows as “evidence of blight” and declared the neighborhood obsolete, a hodge-podge of “poorly constructed” “temporary…shacks and cottages.” The committee classified all 276 residential buildings on the proposed project site as
sub-standard. All but one home lacked a certificate of occupancy and qualified as temporary structures. Every family in the community was eligible for either state, federal or city-subsidized public housing. The Soundview plan exemplified the fusing of avant-garde modernism with progressive housing reform that characterized New York City’s Title I projects. The new towers, covering no more than 16% of the site, would be situated in a park setting to capitalize on the point’s vistas (Figure 5).

Moses approached Title I as a means to finish Soundview Park. In June, Moses solicited the city’s Board of Health for water quality tests in the lagoons and along the riprap bulkheads built by the Parks Department off Harding Park. Unsurprisingly, the investigation revealed heavy pollution, and Moses promptly released the reports to the press to build public support for redevelopment. “The elimination of the sewage pouring into the waters from the present substandard area,” he explained, “must wait for vesting of title in the adjacent Soundview House middle income cooperative.” He declared the report showed “the kind of water at Soundview the local children are bathing in, and is another evidence of the desirability of the Soundview Title I Housing Project.” Moses used the degraded quality of the waterfront, a problem that the Parks Department had in fact aggravated, to forward his urban renewal plan.

Public response to the Soundview Title I proposal reflected divergent outlooks on the social and economic worth of Harding Park. The New York Telegram, which had earlier in the decade stood behind residents who championed Harding Park as a neat, if owner-built, village, condemned the plan. A headline questioned “This Is a Slum?,” accompanying photos of neat homes and yards (Figure 6). Proponents of large-scale urban renewal exhibited little sympathy for bungalow tenants. As Bronx real estate investor Charles Rubinstein rationalized, “[e]very tenant knows that he has only a 30-day agreement. He signed a month-to-month contract, no
lease. He took the risk of putting a bungalow on land which he did not own and was subject to notice of removal at any time.”81 The CSC saw the site as ideal for Title I work.

The relatively low density of the area that had contributed to Harding Park’s unique residential atmosphere became a liability in the era of urban renewal. In private correspondence Moses emphasized the ease with which the committee would be able to buy out and relocate residents.82 Harding Park’s ground leases were also an asset to slum clearance officials and a liability for bungalow owners. The committee would not “owe bungalow owners for their homes, just the property owner.”83 Of the communities 261 families, 230 owned their homes but paid ground leases.84 The commissioner declared the site “cheap,” since prices reflected the worth of just the lots, not the homes atop them.85 And when it came to replacing working-class resort communities with large-scale parks and housing, Moses was used to getting his way, as was the case in the Rockaways, a working-class resort destination with over 7,000 bungalows by the 1930s. By 1945, Moses’s Parks Department had built large public beaches in place of a number of commercial venders and bungalows. Two 1950s Title I projects further modernized the peninsula. Moses expected similar results on Clason Point.86

As Moses courted Title I sponsors and collected evidence to support his Clason Point plan, two Republican congressmen accused the committee of political favoritism and unscrupulous tactics in the Soundview Title I project.87 A front-page controversy unfolded June 18th-22nd of 1959. The news broke that Bronx Democratic Party leaders could potentially gain a windfall in federal funds by selling Harding Park to the city under Title I.88 Moses’s inclusion of park work in a Title I plan was also deemed an underhanded scheme to get the federal government to pay for two-thirds of park costs. Finally, city officials pointed to potential conflict of interest on the part of SCS members. As president of the Federation Bank and Trust
Company, Thomas J. Shanahan, vice chairman of the committee, decided whether prospective
developers were qualified to sponsor Title I projects while also authorizing bank loans to
sponsors. On June 22, Moses issued two press releases fighting these charges. He accused The
New York Times of misrepresenting the history of the Soundview proposal and denied any
wrongdoings in the land’s appraisal and conflicts of interest on the part of committee members.

Moses fought a losing battle against the bad press surrounding the Soundview Title I.
Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr. reported to the HHFA that the Board of Estimate would not
continue with Soundview until the controversy was resolved. In response federal administrators
froze the project’s funding. On June 20th, the New York Telegram published a photograph of
an impromptu dance party in Harding Park when news of the freeze broke: couples danced,
children played, and happy residents congratulated one another. Moses had faced criticism for
other Title I projects such as Gramercy Park and the Pratt Institute, but Soundview was the last
straw. Due to the controversy Moses was forced to resign his position on the CSC. Eventually
an independent appraisal of the Soundview project exonerated the committee of any wrongdoing
and the project was reauthorized, but it never regained momentum.

In 1959 Clason Point remained an in-between place. Its anachronistic bungalows still
evoked an idyllic village life and its parkland remained unfinished. The future of this waterfront
in terms of parks investment remained uncertain; whether or not Harding Park bungalows would
continue to avoid the wrecking ball also remained to be seen. While owners had expressed
concern in 1953 that they might be bought out by a developer, the community did not follow up
by organizing to purchase their plots, which remained in the administration of a bank and a real
estate concern. A resident later recalled “[w]e gave [Moses] a good fight and we won, thank
God,” a reflection that held true for the events of 1953, but not of 1959, when resident protests
played a minimum role. Harding Park survived Title I demolition not because of any significant local activism but rather because of corruption charges and bureaucratic pitfalls. In the following decades, the lack of Title I and Parks Department funds meant that Clason Point development would not be funded on a large-scale, governmental level. While bungalow residents struggled with maintenance, the return to local-level planning secured protections for the bungalow landscape. But local park advocates struggled to secure funding post-Moses.

**Housing and Parks Post-Moses**

Following the collapse of the Soundview Slums Title I project, large scale-investment evaporated from western Clason Point and master planning ground to a halt. The 1960s and 1970s marked a reorientation in planning approaches that eschewed top-down, large-scale plans like Title I across New York City. Because of this shift, city planners came to value Harding Park’s village lifestyle as a useful frame to understand urban community vitality. Stunning depopulation and destruction marked the infamous decline of the South Bronx in the 1960s and 1970s, a symptom of the fiscal crisis and decay of postwar American cities. In this period the South Bronx lost nearly two-thirds of its population and half its housing stock, accelerating the pattern of abandonment. As part of an effort to prevent abandonment, planners and policymakers adopted the village ideal as a model of a healthy neighborhood, emphasizing the entwined goals of maintaining community life and investment in housing stock. Yet even as city agencies worked with locals to prevent the arrival on Clason Point of the “arson, abandonment, and blight” of the South Bronx, public spaces like Soundview Park and its surrounding waterfront deteriorated, saddling locals with social and environmental ills.

In the 1940s, Moses confidently cited the greater good that residents would benefit from
when Soundview was complete. Landfill operations ended mid-century, but the park remained unfinished. To an extent, the city’s failure to finish the park was predictable. In the thirties Moses overbuilt the municipal park system: federal relief funds were temporary, and the park commissioner was aware that the city lacked the necessary funds to maintain the park system that he so greatly expanded. Unfinished Soundview brought environmental as well as social hardships to Clason Point, the unintended consequences of what had been a successful fight against plans imposed on the community by master planners. Bronxite Lon Wilson visited Soundview as a high school student in the 1970s. “[I]t wasn’t too good of a time…didn’t have much lighting. There wasn’t much activities. Just green and dark. And not safe. Unless you travel with a pack.” Lucy Aponte visited the Clason Point waterfront as a child on fishing trips in the 1950s-1970s. “[W]e passed through this area, this very wooded, area, which was, is now Soundview Park,” she recalled. “[I]t was not some place you wanted to go into because it was considered dangerous.” In 2014 Aponte told a Parks Department representative about neighbors who had lived near Soundview “40 years and had never gone inside…When they were raising their children, they used to go to Connecticut. To take their kids to the park.”

Pollution and a lack of park maintenance compounded the problems at Soundview. In the mid-seventies, the CPC admitted that “the acres of marshland, the low-density of development, the incomplete streets and sewer system, and problems of litter and cars on undeveloped parkland, give parts of Soundview an unfinished—and in some respects, neglected—air.” Moses’s landmaking had been the first blow against the ecological health of this waterfront. An Army Corps of Engineers survey later determined that the park’s intertidal ecosystem had experienced “extreme aquatic ecosystem habitat degradation due to coastal filling and shore hardening.” Illegal dumping compounded the degradation caused by landfill. In 1979 the
head of the nonprofit Bronx River Restoration Project blamed extensive dumping as killing off vegetation that mitigated riverbank erosion.\footnote{106} In 1987 a visitor concluded Soundview was “just one stage in the ecological succession process above” a dump.\footnote{107} Junked cars marred the vista of Manhattan’s skyline from Harding Park. Low tide exposed the trash filling the Soundview Lagoons.\footnote{108} For decades resident Elbin Mena urged the city to clean up the waterfront without success. “It was garbage galore,” he said. “I once attached a big rope onto my jeep and yanked this large, eyesore of a car right out of the water myself.”\footnote{109} Park use remained light despite the neighborhood’s sizable residential population: Soundview was not an appealing place to visit.\footnote{110} Early in the 1980s the local Community Board had captured the neighborhood’s frustration. “For nearly 50 years there have been local community groups who have attempted to have Soundview Park developed. Two generations have gone through a series of flip-flops from the municipal government….Promises had been made in many instances by the government to commit city resources…only to be rescinded for one reason or another.”\footnote{111} Without large-scale funding, the majority of mapped parkland remained undeveloped, and residents still waited for the day when the park would prove a benefit to the neighborhood.\footnote{112}

While Soundview suffered from neglect in the post-Moses era, Harding Park followed a different course. Residents, the local Community Board, the state Supreme Court, and multiple city agencies, from the Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development to the City Planning Commission (CPC), labored to mitigate decay on Clason Point. In the 1960s the courts and municipal officials reconsidered the value of the unique ground-lease/ownership combination of Harding Park.\footnote{113} In the process, state Supreme Court Justice J. Murphy observed, the neighborhood became “the subject of considerable litigation and special legislative treatment.”\footnote{114} In 1961 residents took their landlord, Federated Homes, to court to secure rent
control under the state Emergency Housing Rent Control Law of 1946 and lost. Under appeal, however, the court noted “there appears to be no good reason for not including ground leases or rents within the rent control laws,” but concluded “that is a question for the legislature, in its wisdom, to determine.” The state legislature answered this call for action by immediately enacting Chapter 21 of the Laws of 1962, which included ground leases in the definition of a “housing accommodation.” The state Supreme Court concluded that if decontrolled, landlords would be able to exact unreasonable or unjust rents that might force a tenant to sell his or her home. The court ruled that homeowners were entitled to special protection via rent control to safeguard the investments that Harding Park bungalows represented. This ruling validated Harding Park’s owner-built bungalows as a valuable vernacular architecture, reversing Moses’s assessment of the Soundview Slums the decade earlier. This change marked a new approach to municipal planning of and intervention in Harding Park’s built environment.

In the following decade, the CPC passed zoning laws and inaugurated a new planning approach at the neighborhood scale that extended even greater protections to Harding Park. In 1975 the CPC unveiled “mini-plans” to replace the little-used master plan drawn up in the 1960s. “With a city the size of New York,” CPC chairman John E. Zuccotti announced, “there is clearly a need for more attention to local needs and desires.” The first three mini-plans focused on the Bronx, including a plan for the Soundview area, designed to remove incentives that might spur developers to buy out the bungalows. Harding Park resident Evelyn Oriol supported the initiative. “We keep hearing that somebody wants to buy us out so they can build apartments on this land. If the [mini]plan will stop that, it’s fantastic.” In 1975 the CPC rezoned Harding Park, limiting construction to residential row houses and small apartment
buildings. The city’s planners argued rezoning was necessary to encourage the “social stability so important to maintaining this community” and thus prevent abandonment.\textsuperscript{124}

The CPC’s 1970s work helped preserve Harding Park’s unique built environment and championed the community values associated with it. Clason Point’s local community board agreed that “small privately owned homes” were “the backbone of [the] community” and worth protecting.\textsuperscript{125} Harding Park successfully maintained its tradition of vernacular city-building but the effects on the community’s built and natural environment were not altogether positive. In terms of individual priorities, residents lacked incentives for upkeep of their bungalows. On a municipal level, the downside of avoiding large-scale redevelopment programs like Title I was that Harding Park never witnessed substantial reinvestment in its housing stock, remaining isolated from city services and capital.

In the 1950s locals had balked at the designation of Harding Park as a “slum,” and in the 1970s planners came to see value in the community. Yet the community’s owner-built tradition contributed to disrepair problems. Decades of isolation from public works left infrastructure and utilities conventionally maintained by municipal departments in disrepair. Streets that had been privately built in the 1910s-1920s suffered from poor paving and inadequate drainage, since they lacked uniform grading to facilitate rainwater runoff.\textsuperscript{126} The community’s flood plain location exacerbated drainage issues. Sewers added to the problem. The community’s privately-owned sewers dated back to the summer camp era. Into the 1970s some lateral sewers remained unconnected because streets remained unimproved.\textsuperscript{127} The old clay pipes, as narrow as two inches, often broke.\textsuperscript{128} Untreated sewage flowed into the East River. Thirty-two private sewers emptied into the lagoon from O’Brien Avenue south to White Plains Road alone.\textsuperscript{129}
A lack of home owner security contributed to housing problems in Harding Park. In her history of the Los Angeles suburb of South Gate, Becky Nicolaides argues that homeownership provided economic security in a market society that failed to provide a social safety net for the working-class. While owner-building, semi-rural streetscape, and suburban aspirations characterized both South Gate and Harding Park’s early years, due to the latter’s unique ground lease and homeownership system, residents did not establish security through land ownership. Lifelong resident Arthur Seifert pointed to the longtime threat of “being pushed out” by rising rents or developers as the reason that older residents “put very little effort into maintaining their homes because they had no guarantee that this money would be well spent.” Helena Orchuizzo, whose family arrived in the early 1900s, agreed. “I think…people were afraid to put money into their homes because they never knew if somebody was going to come in and try to move them out. Basically the community stayed the same for years and years and years.”

Bungalow residents recognized inadequate home upkeep was an endemic problem. The arrival of a new demographic willing to invest in the housing stock mitigated some of this decay. George Rodriguez was part a wave of Hispanic immigrants, particularly Puerto Ricans, who began migrating to Harding Park in the 1960s for its inexpensive homes and ambiance suggestive, in the words of early arrival Pepe Mena, of “the poor fishing villages of Puerto Rico.” In 1981, Rodriguez bought a bungalow for $900. The structure was so dilapidated his feet fell straight through the floor. Just as the chance to build a home lured the neighborhood’s first year-round residents, on evenings and weekends Rodriguez was able to rebuild the home. “I spent little by little on my credit card,” he explained, “and I did it.” Yet renovation often occurred without construction certificates. “We don’t ask the building department,” explained Mena; “We just take a hammer and saw and start working.” In 1978,
the city acquired Harding Park as an in rem property due to tax default, and the legal problems engendered by this practice crystallized. The bungalows lacked certificates of occupancy and did not meet minimum building code standards, a usual requirement for the certificate. Without these certificates, residents were homeowners without any legal rights.\textsuperscript{137} According to William B. Eimicke, deputy commissioner for property management at HPD, “[w]ithout the certificate… They could not get insurance or even [legally] transfer a deed. It’s all very complex.”\textsuperscript{138}

As Harding Park’s new owner, the city attempted to settle the unique legal questions of the community’s ground-lease/home-ownership tradition. The city proposed turning the community into a co-operative housing project by selling the territory to residents collectively.\textsuperscript{139} As Eimicke told a reporter, Harding Park was “[c]learly…not the typical in-rem property,” or foreclosed property, “which is generally an old law tenement. These are working-class people who have lived in their own homes.”\textsuperscript{140} In the fall of 1981 the city offered to sell the land for $1 million.\textsuperscript{141} During sale negotiations, the city raised monthly ground rents from $25 to $75 and residents initiated a rent strike. The city reduced its asking price to $700,000, an average of $3,100 a parcel, but when residents rejected even this lower price, Mayor Ed Koch threatened strikers with eviction unless they accepted the offer. Residents approved the deal.\textsuperscript{142}

In September 1982 Mayor Koch and various city officials gathered in Harding Park for a ceremonial ownership transfer. In exchange for a symbolic $700,000 check, the mayor delivered the deed to the Homeowners Association of Harding Park.\textsuperscript{143} This home-ownership scheme was unique, since cooperatives were generally limited to apartment buildings and middle- and upper-income communities. The city grandfathered the bungalows for certificates of occupancy, declaring that since they predated building codes they could not be expected to meet contemporary building regulations.\textsuperscript{144} Harding Park residents successfully challenged official
interpretations of slum housing, a central tenet of urban renewal, and eventually secured extraordinary protection for their community’s unique housing stock. City Council President Carol Bellamy declared “[b]y private citizens and public officials working together, Harding Park residents today realize one of the fundamental American dreams—uncontested ownership of their homes and a real piece of their community.” Locals agreed with Bellamy’s analysis of class and opportunity. Resident May Bellingham, former president of the Harding Park Association, declared “[t]his is a poor man’s paradise.”

The city’s post-1959 turn to localism—via neighborhood-based planning, property protections afforded by zoning laws and the courts, and co-operative land ownership—made Harding Park’s preservation possible. Ground leases and owner-building proved to be an economic benefit to working class renters in search of suburban living for nearly fifty years. Moses’s Soundview Title I failure was a boon for Harding Park. But his coincident failure to finish Soundview Park was not exactly a victory for locals. The coastal degradation along the Soundview Lagoons and Soundview Park underscored that as the city moved away from the top-down modernist planning approach Moses favored, Harding Park suffered from isolation, infrastructure problems, unsafe public spaces, ecological degradation and a lack of capital, all of which the city’s 1970s economic crisis compounded.

Conclusion

The “new” suburban history has largely dispelled the ahistorical stereotype of suburbanization as a postwar, white, and middle-class phenomenon. A reminder of the long and diverse history of suburbanization, Harding Park’s history contributes to the dismantling of the historiographic tropes that that once confined laborers to the city and defines the suburbs as
preserves of the affluent. In fact Harding Park’s ownership-rental strategy began attracting a new generation of working-class residents, Puerto Rican and Dominican immigrants who couldn’t afford a mortgage but could afford to buy a bungalow and rent the land. New immigrants continued to value the neighborhood’s unique village community life and the opportunity of building one’s own home. “This is ours now,” said Luis Perez in the mid-1990s, evoking a sense of community pride. “And I personally want to feel,” he explained “‘Hey, I’m Puerto Rican and I want to look good as a Puerto Rican. I’m no sleazy neighbor.” Perez pointed to the importance of Puerto Ricans to Harding Park’s revival as proof that the historic blame that Hispanic immigrants degraded neighborhoods was simply prejudice. While the arrival of Hispanic residents was not without racial tension, the influx of new Hispanic residents willing to invest in the neighborhood’s building stock inspired even life-long residents to renovate. But this story also reveals the tensions between informality and localism: the informality of Harding Park’s unique ground-leases and owner-built homes at times proved liabilities to the community, as the community’s evolution to co-operative ownership made clear.

Soundview Park did not benefit from either the shift in planning and practices towards localism or the special legislative treatment that made possible community-level planning, reinvestment, and the preservation of Harding Park. Moses’s 1940s label for the Soundview Lagoons—“future park land to be created by sanitation landfill”—captured the bluster the Parks Commissioner often employed to forward his modernist vision for the city’s waterfront. Soundview was an exception to Moses’s impressive park-building record and a reminder that even at the apex of his park work the master builder was never omnipotent. Yet Moses’s failure to finish Soundview marks a potential missed opportunity. As Nicolas Bloom argues, on Jamaica Bay Moses established John F. Kennedy International Airport and built arterial
highways and vast housing projects, but also preserved as public Rockaway beaches and established nature reserves on the bay.\textsuperscript{154} Without such large-scale planning work and ecological preservation, Soundview remained unfinished and residents struggled to mitigate the worst of the coastal degradation along the Harding Park lagoons. In the 1980s when Harding Park turned co-operative, the city agreed to maintain infrastructure such as a new sewerage system and agreed to address long-ignored coastal pollution. The city removed four million pounds of garbage from the waterfront and sealed off vacant areas to prevent further dumping along the shore.\textsuperscript{155} This work underscores the decrepit state of the waterfront and the fact that the conditions of Soundview, Harding Park, and the coastal environment remained entwined.

An increased awareness of coastal vulnerability and ecology reinvigorated investment in the Soundview lagoons and shoreline in the twenty-first century. The Parks Department finally acquired the Soundview Lagoons in April 2002.\textsuperscript{156} Just as Harding Park was reevaluated by city planners in the 1970s, in the early 2000s Soundview experienced substantial interest and reinvestment. A series of punishing storms, culminating with Superstorm Sandy in October 2012, inspired Mayor Michael Bloomberg to address coastal resiliency through a diverse set of issues that traditionally plagued Clason Point: housing, aging infrastructure, coastal protection, and parks.\textsuperscript{157} The Mayor’s Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability initiated what Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe called “the largest park expansion” era since the WPA.\textsuperscript{158} Benepe harkened back to the heyday of Moses’s large-scale municipal planning, but with an increasingly influential focus on modern ecological stewardship. In the spring of 2013 Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced the $700 million coastal redevelopment program, which included an East Bronx Waterfront resiliency plan.\textsuperscript{159} Due to the Office of Long Term Planning and
Sustainability, NYRCRP, and new Parks Department initiatives, the waterfront has been fundamentally rethought—and as a result Soundview enjoyed a stunning capital reinvestment.\textsuperscript{160}

Clason Point’s marshy waterfront was a stage on which the long-standing conflict between master-planning and vernacular development in American cities unfolded. The entwined histories of Soundview Park and Harding Park through 1981 complicate the popular narrative of master planners who wrestled waterfords from their communities to build public housing, public parks, and arterial highways and bridges in the twentieth century. Residents maintained their neighborhood, and the city responded to community needs—for example, in the co-op negotiations, the city agreed to invest capital funds and federal community development funds to replace Harding Park’s sewers.\textsuperscript{161} In fact the sweeping public intervention so often associated with Moses and urban renewal was far less important in the shaping of Harding Point than vernacular development, community values, and the social and environmental consequences of local isolation. The history of parks and housing on Clason Point makes visible the limits of large-scale development, even during the heyday of slum clearance and park building, the waning of municipal funding for such work, and the shift in professional planning towards local perspectives in the wake of urban renewal. This joint history furthermore allows for a parsing out of both the beneficial and detrimental effects of community-led development on housing stock and public infrastructure. The linkages between Soundview and Harding Park underscore the inherent tensions and interdependencies between localism and large-scale public plans, the twin forces that drove East Bronx development.
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Acknowledgments
I would like to thank Catherine McNeur for her discerning feedback and Dennis Halpin and Adam Wolkoff for reading earlier drafts of this article and providing insightful suggestions. The anonymous reviewers of this piece also offered several helpful suggestions for which I am appreciative.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Figure 1. The history of Soundview Park. The top right corner of the map shows the original extent of Soundview Park. Decades of additions expanded the park south and east, eventually encompassing the lagoons built by the Parks Department in the 1940s in the early 2000s.

Figure 2. The existing conditions of the southeast boundary of Soundview Park in December 1941. This photograph captures the view to the southeast, across the northern end of Harding Park on the southern tip of Clason Point to the northern tower of the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge. This image captures high tide—at low tide this waterbody was mudflats. The fill was completed by 1942, replacing the mudflats Moses disdained with solid land. Source: “Picture 21054_12_11_1941 ‘Southeast Boundary of Soundview Park, Showing Existing Conditions.’” Photograph. Parks Photo Archive, The Olmsted Center, Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Flushing, New York.
Figure 3. Clason Point and Soundview in Relation to Greater New York, a section of the map included in the Soundview Title I proposal. Source: New York Committee on Slum Clearance, *Soundview: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: Committee on Slum Clearance, 1959), 7.
Figure 4: The white outline south marks the proposed Soundview Title I site. This image, included in the Soundview Slums Title I brochure, captures the growing proximity of Soundview Park and Harding Park. It also shows that Moses’s longstanding interest in making Harding Park’s waterfront as an extension of Soundview. Harding Park’s narrow streets stretch between the lagoons and Bronx River Avenue, which follows the curve of the point. The land in the top left corner was made in the 1940s with Sanitation Department fill. In the 1940s-1950s the lagoons were frequently labeled “proposed addition to Soundview park.” Source: New York Committee on Slum Clearance, Soundview, 6, and “Title I Slum Clearance Progress, City of NY April 16, 1956,” Folder 4 Housing Corres. For Mr Moses Library Project Jan 1 1955 to Dec. 31, 1955, Box 116, Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.
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5 Tim Mennel, “A Fight to Forget: Urban Renewal, Robert Moses, Jane Jacobs, and the Stories of Our Cities,” Journal of Urban History, 37 no. 4 (2011), 627. Robert Moses’s career has fascinated the public and historians alike since he rose to prominence in New York state government in the 1920s. While his work was generally applauded by elected officials and the press during his first three decades of active public life, the defining history on Moses’s career is Robert Caro’s scathing biography The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York (New York: Knopf, 1974), which condemns his Title I projects.


11 Seifert, 16.


16 New York Committee on Slum Clearance, Soundview: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended (New York: Committee on Slum Clearance, 1959), 42.

17 Ubell, 9.

18 Ubell, 8, and Ubell, 9.

19 “Havoc by Wind at Clason’s Point Amusement Park,” The Hartford Courant (June 12, 1922), 1.

20 Vivan Cavilla, interviewed by Raymond C. Schloss, #241, May 22, [no yr], The Bronx Institute Oral History Project.

21 The proportion of children was larger than the rest of the city; more than 27% of the residents were less than fifteen years old. Works Progress Administration, 6, 19.

22 Ellen Weiss argues that the Martha’s Vineyard camps developed a distinctive natural environment, street width and pattern, architectural character that became similarly associated with the community’s unique social life and religious underpinnings. See Weiss, City in the Woods: The Life and Design of an American Camp Meeting on Martha’s Vineyard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 33.

23 Works Progress Administration, 5.


Ibid.

“Jitterless Village Hides in the Bronx.”

Business and industry together occupied less than 5% of the territory; see Works Progress Administration, 1-3. For quote see 3.


Moses, “New York Reclaims its Waterfront.”


Broad Channel, the largest and most established of the fishing villages on islands in the bay, Springfield Dock and Meadowmere alongside Hook Creek, both tiny collections of houses on piles, represent the variety seasonal communities on Jamaica Bay. For an overview see Vincent F. Seyfried and William Asadorian, Old Queens, N.Y. in Early Photographs (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1991). See also Bloom 23, 120. On the history of the Rockaways as a working-class summer resort, see Kaplan and Kaplan.

Metropolitan Conference on Parks, Program For Extension of Parks and Parkways in the Metropolitan Region...as to Suggested Projects Within the City and to The Governor and Legislature of the State as to State Recommendations (Feb. 25, 1930), Folder 970, Box 108, Series E: Cultural Interests Park Ass. Of New York City, 1926-1961, Record Group 2: Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller General Files, 1858-(1879-1961), Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.


In December 1936 Moses first requested the Board of Estimate and Apportionment fund the acquisition of 94 acres for Soundview Park. Board of Estimate and Apportionment, Department of Parks—Approval of Selection and Acquisition of Title to Property Required for Park Purposes, Borough of the Bronx (Cal. No. 186) Dec 23, 1936. Folder Documents X-118, Box X-118, Parks Library.

Additional sections of land were acquired in 1939-1941, 1952-3, and 1953 (although this third section was not formalized until 1975-9). By 1979, the park area totaled 156 acres. Parcels 5-10 were acquired in 1994, 1997, 1999, 2001 (two parcels), and 2002. With the final addition in 2002, the total park area reached 205 acres. See Minutes of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, Jan. 15, 1937. The land was acquired by condemnation pursuant to a resolution by the Board of Estimate on May 28, 1937, Cal. No. 5, Sept. 13, 1937, and Record Map Soundview Park X-118, Folder X-118 Soundview Park, Box X-118, Parks Library.
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44 “Carey Agrees to Bronx Site as a Garbage Dump,” New York Herald Tribune (Mar. 3, 1939), 4, and Board of Estimate Committee of the Whole, Calendar for February 23, 1939, page 1, Folder X-118 Soundview Park, Box X-118, Parks Library.
45 Moses, “Press Release, Dec. 29, 1941.”
48 For Immediate Release- Soundview Title One Project 7-27-59, Folder 1 Housing File 1.1.59-12.31.59 Robert Moses- Library corres. (Folder 4 of 6), Box 117, Folder 1 Housing File 1.1.59-12.31.59 Robert Moses- Library corres. (Folder 4 of 6), Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.
49 The New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services did not assign the lagoons as a park addition until February 1999. See Record Map Soundview Park X-118 and Folder: Parcel 7 X-118, Box X-118, Parks Library.
51 Aviation Volunteer Fire Co.
52 Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar frame their influential history of Central Park around the questions “[w]ho participates in decisions about the management of public resources? Who benefits from…public spaces?” The authors argue that this struggle to define central park as a public park, was also a struggle over the meaning of democracy. Rosenzweig and Blackmar, The Park and the People: A History of Central Park (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 7.
54 Neighborhood Voices, and Helena Orchuizzo, interviewed by Yolanda L. Zink, #17, Mar. 26, 1982, Bronx Oral History Project.
55 Moses, “New York Reclaims its Waterfront.”
58 New York City Parks have a long history of minority and working-class dislocation. Rosenzweig and Blackmar outline the dislocation of the African-American population of Seneca Village and immigrant settlements to build Central Park. See Chapter 3: Private to Public Property, Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 59-91. Catherine McNeur also examines this episode of working-class and minority dispossession from Central Park. See Chapter 5: Clearing the Lungs of the City, McNeur, Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014) 175-223. Outside of New York City, Andrew W. Kahrl shows that coastal development was in many locations tied to racism, and the dispossession of blacks from long-held coastal communities in the post-civil rights Sunbelt South. See Kahrl, The Land was Ours: African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 “Press Release Monday June 22, 1959,” 1, Folder 1 Committee on Slum Clearance 1959, Box 118, Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.
64 Two leading histories of urban renewal and Title I in New York City are Joel Schwartz’s New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), and Samuel Zipp, Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For a state of the field survey of urban renewal with a specific focus on the...
intellectual debates behind it, see the special volume of the *Journal of Urban History*, edited by Samuel Zipp and Michael Carriere, “Special Section: Thinking through Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 39 no. 4 (May 2013). Zipp’s synthesis of how avante-garde modernism fused with progressive housing reform aligns with the public design proposals and private housing evaluation of the Soundview Title I project.

65 Kaplan, 89.

66 *Report on New York City Slum Clearance Program Under Title 1, 3*. By this 1956 report, the committee had 10 projects under contract, 7 under study, and 18 proposed projects for the future. See also “Title I Slum Clearance Progress, City of NY April 16, 1956,” Folder 4 Housing Corres. For Mr Moses Library Project Jan 1 1955 to Dec. 31, 1955, Box 116, Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers. See also “Renewal Stirs Up a Storm” *Engineering News Record* (July 9, 1959), 22, Folder 2 Committee on Slum clearance 1959, Box 118, Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.


For the press release, see “Title I Slum Clearance Progress, City of NY April 16, 1956,” Folder 4 Housing Corres. For Mr Moses Library Project Jan 1 1955 to Dec. 31, 1955, Box 116, Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.


71 Themis Chronopoulos analyzes the meanings of the terms “blight,” “obsolescence,” and “slum” in “Robert Moses and the Visual Dimension of Physical Disorder: Efforts to Demonstrate Urban Flight in the Age of Slum Clearance,” *Journal of Planning History* 13, no. 3 (July 2014), 207-33.


73 This designation included inadequate original construction, requiring major renovations, or lacking inadequate facilities, such as central heating. New York Committee on Slum Clearance, *Soundview: Slum Clearance Plan Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 as Amended* (New York: Committee on Slum Clearance, 1959), 6. 40.


74 In both public and private messages Moses rarely mentioned the white and working-class population of the community. The only mention of resident’s finances appear in Title I brochure, which estimated that 93% of the 279 households located on the proposed site qualified for either state or federally aided public housing due to low income and apartment size; the remaining 7% qualified for city subsidies. New York Committee on Slum Clearance, *Soundview*, 48.


77 George James to Robert Moses 14 July 1959, Folder 1 Housing File 1.1.59-12.31.59 Robert Moses- Library corrs. (Folder 4 of 6), Box 117, Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.

78 “For Immediate Release- Soundview Title One Project 7-27-59,” Folder 1 Housing File 1.1.59-12.31.59 Robert Moses- Library corrs. (Folder 4 of 6), Box 117, Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.

79 Ibid.

80 Quoted in Caro, 1046.

82 J. Anthony Banuch to Robert Moses 13 Nov. 1959, Folder 1 Housing File 1.1.59-12.31.59 Robert Moses- Library corres. (Folder 4 of 6), Box 117, Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.
83 “Press Release Monday June 22, 1959.”
84 New York Committee on Slum Clearance, Soundview, 42.
85 “Press Release Monday June 22, 1959.”
86 Kaplan and Kaplan, 42, 91.
88 A reporter pointed out the investors’ holding company had already been denied a tax concession necessary to build union-sponsored housing in 1953. They now stood to make a substantial profit on land that was essentially undevelopable and thus of little value; Wayne Phillips, “Park Site a Factor in Bronx Slum Plan,” New York Times (Jun. 21, 1959), 1.
89 See Phillips, “Moses Reveals city Work at Proposed Slum Project,” as well as the bulk of the materials in Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.
93 On his resignation, see Kaplan, 99. See also Phillips, “Moses Reveals city Work at Proposed Slum Project,” as well as the bulk of the materials in Series 11: Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959, Robert Moses Papers.
99 In 1973 the South Bronx suffered through an estimated 10,000 fires; the following year this number rose to nearly 15,000. On the South Bronx fire epidemic, see Sahd, 114.

Ibid.


“Village Concept Revived in Bronx.”


Ibid.


Siegal.


“Statement of Housing Needs and Priorities for CB #9,” *Statements of Community District Needs for Fiscal Year 1982.*
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126 Environmental Assessment Statement, 1-1.
129 F. X. Lutes to M. Bender, (Jun. 8, 1967), 1, Folder X-118 Soundview Master Plans, Box X-118.
130 Nicolaides, 81.
131 Jonnes, “City is the Latest Owner of a ‘Poor Man’s Paradise,” New York Times (Fe. 8, 1981), R1. See also Neighborhood Voices.
135 Fowler.
136 Fowler.
137 This was true for Thomas F. Huaghey, who purchased Lot #246 known as 1526 Harding Park, in 1964. The original written lease for the lot prohibited a tenant from selling or assigning rights to the balance of the term on the ground lease without obtaining a landlord's consent in writing. These terms, frequently signed for three year periods, were often not made clear to new owners at sale. Sales of lands remained generally on informal oral agreements for longer tenancies. See Clason Management Co. v. Altman.
140 Jonnes, “City is the Latest Owner of a ‘Poor Man’s Paradise.”
141 Ibid.
146 Jonnes, “City is the Latest Owner of a ‘Poor Man’s Paradise.”
147 New York City Planning Commission, Planning Proposals for the Soundview Peninsula, 39.
152 Neighborhood Voices, 4:00 min, and Jonnes, “City is the Latest Owner of a ‘Poor Man’s Paradise.”
153 New York Department of Parks, 26 Years of Progress, 13.
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158 “PlanNYC Project at Soundview Park Commences” and “Parks Cuts the Ribbon on New Track and Field at Soundview Park,” *The Daily Plant* XXIX, No. 6161 (Aug. 26, 2014), 1, Folder X-118 Soundview Park, [no box], Parks Library.
161 Campbell, “Rent Strike on City Land Faces Day of Reckoning.”