2009

AccessRI

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A STUDY COMMISSIONED
BY THE OFFICE OF
NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
JOSÉ M. SERRANO

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A Blueprint for Advocacy and Action

A STUDIO PROJECT OF ACCESSRJ AND THE HUNTER COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AFFAIRS AND PLANNING

2009
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Many thanks to the individuals that AccessRI interviewed and consulted to inform the production of this study.

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EXCLUSIVE SUMMARY

AccessRI—a studio team comprised of ten graduate students in the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning at Hunter College—was commissioned by New York State Senator José M. Serrano to identify and provide strategies to address residents' concerns regarding the quality of life on Roosevelt Island.

Roosevelt Island, located between Manhattan and Queens in the East River, is an exceptional place within the varied fabric of New York City. The island provides its residents with an existence apart from the typical hassles associated with urban life, yet its proximity to the rest of the city allows residents to partake in countless amenities. Not only does the island possess a unique geographic location, but its history as a master-planned community has helped to create its distinct character, while simultaneously creating many challenges.

Roosevelt Island was virtually abandoned after decades of service as a place for New York's sick and infirmed. The city, under the Lindsay administration, embarked on an ambitious redevelopment plan. The master plan designed by architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee in 1969, utilized the island's exceptional views and established a framework for an idealized, “auto-free,” mixed-use development. The development scheme included low and moderate-income housing, a parking garage, the preservation of six historic structures, abundant public spaces and a commercial corridor.

The original master plan successfully established a distinctive community that enjoys some of the finest views and greatest amounts of open space that the city has to offer. Yet despite these advantages, the current residents of the island are struggling with a myriad of issues that range from problems caused by aging and neglected infrastructure to demographic and social changes resulting from an influx of residents moving into newly built or renovated residential developments. These concerns are coupled with residents' perceptions of inadequate governance, that result in the feeling that their concerns are ignored and will never be addressed. Through initial investigation, AccessRI found that the best way to assist residents in improving their quality of life would be to improve access to the facilities and services necessary for well-being.
Access
Using an expanded definition of the term “access,” AccessRI evaluated the community’s issues and concerns. The studio looked at the community’s ability to access transportation options, public spaces such as parks and recreational facilities, as well as food and viable retail outlets and services. This approach focused the studio’s efforts on the barriers preventing residents from realizing the full benefits of Roosevelt Island. By identifying barriers, the studio was able to create solutions to improve current conditions and increase opportunities for future advancements.

Community Planning Principles
In order to identify barriers, AccessRI embarked on an ambitious campaign to elicit resident participation throughout the planning process. Engaged in a planning program focused on advocacy, the studio was able to inject their advocacy training into the process. Through an advisory committee, focus groups, targeted interviews, and community meetings, which included youth participation, oral histories and mapping activities, the studio gained valuable insight into Roosevelt Islander’s lives. The AccessRI Community Survey, available both online and in paper form was created along with the AccessRI blog, to further connect the studio to the island community. These tools helped to maintain a transparent planning process while providing AccessRI with valuable information regarding resident concerns.

AccessRI’s research and community interaction resulted in several long- and short-term solutions to address key issues identified by both the studio and residents. The issues and solutions were placed into four broad categories: Placemaking, Revitalization, Infrastructure, and Governance.

Placemaking outlines the need to improve public spaces and circulation on the island. Ample public spaces and an “auto-free” environment were large components of the island’s original development plan. Maintenance and improvement of access to vital public spaces is a key component to improving residents’ quality of life. AccessRI suggests adding seating and greenery to significant island locations such as transportation nodes and plazas. In addition, the studio proposes to create a wayfinding system to make it easier for both residents and visitors to navigate the island. This system includes maps and markers designed to draw attention to the island’s many historic sites and destinations as well as its perimeter promenade.
Revitalization focuses on the island’s Main Street retail corridor, which lacks viable services and amenities. AccessRI found the current leasing structure inadequate, resulting in too many vacant spaces and an overall lack of coherence and vitality. The studio proposes a third party manager to improve the leasing process and make it easier to locate viable businesses. In addition, the studio suggests the implementation of design guidelines to enhance the aesthetics of the area. Together these suggestions will increase access to goods and services. The studio also aims to help the island’s many community based and non-profit organizations located on Main Street. Despite the advantage of a rent-free space, these institutions are unable to build the capacity to grow and become more independent. AccessRI proposes a non-profit incubator, enabling these organizations to function collaboratively, thereby lowering operation costs and allowing them to continue their work on the island.

Infrastructure provides access to transportation, water, food, and many other daily necessities. On Roosevelt Island, lack of maintenance and a rapidly increasing population are putting a great deal of pressure on the island’s aging infrastructure. Innovative features of the original development plan, such as the island’s Automated Vacuum Assisted Collection (AVAC) system, the tram and the island’s perimeter promenade are either in need of repair or are close to operating capacity. AccessRI recognizes the need to address these issues and offers solutions, such as an island-wide infrastructure assessment report to better prepare for the current and expected increased population demands.

Governance is another area of Roosevelt Islanders’ lives where the studio found effective access was lacking. The island is unusual in that it is city-owned but controlled by the state-chartered public benefit corporation known as the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC). This entity manages the island’s operations and infrastructure. Island residents seek greater transparency and community involvement in the corporation. AccessRI recommends establishing a service-request tracking system to provide documentation of needed infrastructure improvements and core services. The studio also recommends training improvements for RIOC board members and supports ongoing legislation to restructure RIOC.

The problems and solutions identified by AccessRI draw attention to the challenges faced by island residents. Many of the Studio’s solutions were designed to be practical and easy to implement. The studio is confident that this study will address community concerns and provides a framework that Senator Serrano can use to advocate for his constituents.
INTRODUCTION
Through A Lens of Accessibility

Roosevelt Island is a thriving urban community in the East River between Manhattan and Queens, though it is a neighborhood that remains mysterious to the average New Yorker. Often, Roosevelt Island and its more than 12,000 residents’ needs and aspirations remain disregarded, leaving the island vulnerable to disinvestment. AccessRI, a student studio team from Hunter College’s Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, conducted a year-long study from September 2008 to May 2009. The studio considered Roosevelt Island through a lens of accessibility to address issues and opportunities outlined by the community. This report provides a comprehensive review and assessment of these planning issues.
Defining Access and Accessibility

AccessRI looked to research and literature to define the meaning of accessibility in order to inform the study. Although it is a commonly used English word, “access” is often interpreted in different ways. At its simplest, access can be defined as the ability to get from one place to another. Transportation planners in particular have used this conceptualization of access to measure the ease of travel between two geographical locations (Harris 2001). Framed in this way, much research and practice in transportation planning is about reducing barriers to personal mobility, in other words, increasing access. The terms “access” and “accessibility” are also used interchangeably, although accessibility usually refers to the rights of the disabled as set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (U.S. Department of Justice 2005). Public facilities are required to be ADA compliant by law. The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, Federal, State and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation and telecommunications. The Act creates an equitable environment for people with different impairments to access services that non-handicapped people can accessibly.

Planners have long recognized that an exclusive focus on mobility can mask other problems of physical and social isolation. Thus, planners tend to conceptualize access more broadly, focusing on the quality of an urban environment and how it influences the well-being of its residents. Quality of an urban environment is determined by the availability of community resources (Witten et al 2003). In addition, safety and equity in public spaces are also valued, as well as education and civic participation. Communities with an abundance of resources, that provide goods, recreational outlets for fresh air and exercise, public spaces and political outlets that foster social cohesion and participation benefit from high levels of physical and mental health and increase individuals’ feeling of security and self esteem (Macintyre et al 1993). At the same time, scholars have observed that availability of community resources is not the same as having access to those resources. Although certain facilities are available at some capacity within a particular community, barriers may exist which prevent the empowerment of individuals to obtain the services provided (Mcintyre et al 2009). The inability to access certain essential services cannot only endanger an individual physically, but also place unnecessary stress on one’s mental health (Heenan 2006). Quine et al (2003) argue that a variety of socioeconomic, gender and geographic factors affect the ability of Australian teens to access health care. Likewise, the results from Food Stamp Program Access Study: Local Office Policies and Practices (Gabor et al 2003) demonstrate how food stamp office policies inhibit qualified households from participating in the food stamp program. In developing countries, high costs and limited supply locations reduce the chances that infected populations will receive treatment for serious diseases (Khonyongwa 2004). Thus, the ability for certain populations to obtain necessary services is affected by significant barriers, although these barriers are not consistent across communities.

To summarize, barriers to access are characterized by different factors acting alone or in combination with each other. These factors can be physical, social, political, economic or cultural.

Interestingly enough, transportation networks, created to improve access for some communities, can become barriers for others. The Newark Waterfront Access Study (2003) found that the McCarter Highway created a physical barrier that isolated the site of the future Passaic Riverfront Park from local Newark neighborhoods. To overcome these barriers, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a nonprofit advocacy group, collaborated with local stakeholders to create linkages to the waterfront by providing pedestrian access. Similarly, as part of the creation of Brooklyn Bridge Park, an accessibility study was commissioned in order to address the barriers which isolate the site of the park from the nearby Brooklyn and Manhattan communities (HDR/ Sam Schwartz Engineering 2006). The study provided recommendations to increase accessibility to the
park through non-auto transportation options, including bus service, pedestrian and bike access, and water transport. These solutions not only solve issues of physical exclusion to the park, but also social exclusion by providing access options that are available to all socioeconomic groups.

The AccessRI study incorporates multiple processes of measuring access both quantitatively and qualitatively in order to identify and mitigate barriers to accessibility. Measuring access spatially, monetarily and in relation to time helps quantify access, enabling social scientists to compare access issues across urban communities. Mapping the location of resources helps illustrate the spatial relationships of these resources to the community (Witten 2003). Temporal constraints are also measured in terms of accessibility, which combines distances with the transportation system of a community (Handy and Clifton 2005). Transportation costs and the price of goods can be measured and compared to the costs for other communities. The collection of this data allows for comparisons to be made, which in turn help identify whether distance, time, or money create barriers of inaccessibility.

Quantitative data alone cannot identify accessibility issues in a community. According to Deirdre Heenan (2006, 387), access is influenced by “several economic, geographical, cultural, and environmental factors, including the population’s prevalent beliefs, expectations, attitudes and personal experiences.” For example, issues of internet accessibility reach far beyond the ability to physically access an internet connection. Cultural and social context are often greater determinants to how and by whom information from the internet is produced and consumed (Niles 2003). These factors cannot be found in quantitative data, but can be obtained by inviting residents to frame accessibility issues within their neighborhoods (Handy and Clifton 2005).

Adding qualitative research methodology creates a collaborative process between the expertise of the researcher and the local knowledge of the neighborhood residents. Furthermore, not only does involving the community help identify barriers to access, but also empowers residents to mitigate these barriers. Such empowerment addresses access as a means of intervention rather than as a measurement of how achievable surmounting the barrier is (Caldwell et al 2008).

The extensive literature on accessibility has framed the concept of access in this study. By identifying those barriers that inhibit accessibility, whether physical or social, the studies frame issues in a manner that helps mitigate obstacles to access. Residents of any city or neighborhood need the ability to obtain specific amenities in order to feel safe, prosperous and welcome in the area surrounding their homes. Throughout the AccessRI study, residents of Roosevelt Island identified deficiencies in the ability to access basic neighborhood essentials. AccessRI listened to the concerns of the residents and created a plan consisting of proposals to overcome barriers to access and improve the quality of life on the island.

The Studio

The AccessRI team is made up of a group of ten graduate students from the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning at Hunter College. All second-year graduate students in the urban planning program are required to enroll in a year-long planning studio to complete their Master’s degree. The studio experience gives students an opportunity to apply academic knowledge in a variety of subjects, as well as history, theory and methods of civic engagement to a real world situation and client. The studio project is the culmination of an urban planning education at Hunter College.

Studies are initiated by clients who require professional expertise to investigate a range of community concerns. AccessRI was commissioned by New York State Senator José M. Serrano who represents the 28th
State Senate District encompassing parts of the Bronx and Manhattan (see Figure 1). The studio, responded to Senator Serrano’s Request for Proposals (RFP), created specifically for the studio, to perform an accessibility study for Roosevelt Island (see Appendix A).

In the RFP, Senator Serrano outlined the expectations for the study, which was to develop a comprehensive plan for Roosevelt Island taking into consideration the island’s history, as well as existing and projected demographic and social characteristics. The client also requested that the studio produce a final product containing innovative short and long-term solutions for issues related to accessibility, ones that could be implemented promptly and others that would require significant commitment and investment.

This report is the final deliverable of the studio. During the project, AccessRI members committed skills, time and energy to the study of the island. The report is grouped into five themed sections, Community Planning Principles, Placemaking, Revitalization, Infrastructure and Governance. The studio team established a collaborative planning process that relied heavily on community input, feedback and scrutiny. This community-oriented process included community meetings and stakeholder consultations that helped to broaden the studio’s understanding of the island and the challenges its residents face. Section II of the report, Community Planning Principles, describes the planning process in further detail. The report discusses key accessibility issues, specific to Roosevelt Island, identified by the community and studio members. The Placemaking and Infrastructure sections of the study deal with access to physical spaces, information and social networks. Revitalization addresses access to retail amenities and community services, while Governance focuses on access to decision-making bodies. All of the proposals have been vetted by the community, the majority of which received extremely positive feedback. The AccessRI team is confident that Senator Serrano and the Roosevelt Island community are committed to the proposals and will pursue their implementation.

**AccessRI: Vision Statement**

Roosevelt Island is a unique, planned community in the midst of New York City, characterized by innovative urban design that fosters a strong sense of place and social identity. The island’s physical beauty, location, and reformist traditions that attracted residents to the island continue to do so today. Facing the challenges of recent population growth, aging infrastructure and fiscal constraints, the island’s stakeholders must work collaboratively to seek creative, innovative solutions that will ensure the community’s future well-being. Addressing the issues of access and accessibility will forge both practical and visionary solutions to these challenges. The community should build upon the island’s assets to improve their quality of life.
Planning Context

History

Although Roosevelt Island is located only 700 feet from Manhattan’s Upper East Side, most New Yorkers do not know very much about the Island or its unique and varied history. The island has undergone several transformations due to changes in ownership and land use. Remnants of these transformations remain as visual reminders telling the compelling story of the island’s past. AccessRI’s view of the island was shaped in many ways by this rich history. An understanding of the past informed the studio’s planning for the future, directing the group’s efforts to reveal the island’s many attributes to the rest of the city.

Roosevelt Island became farmland in the early 17th century after the Dutch purchased the land from the Canarsie tribe. When the English gained control over the Dutch settlements in the 1660’s, the island became the property of Captain John Manning. After Manning’s death, the island was inherited by the Blackwell family, renaming it Blackwell’s Island. The Blackwell family continued to farm the land until 1828, when the City of New York, found the island location a suitable solution to the rapidly expanding city’s social problems. The city purchased the Island for development of charitable and corrective institutions (Berdy 2003).

The island’s isolated location in addition to its open-air environment was considered an ideal place to conceal the city’s sick, infirmed and criminal populations. Because of this, the island experienced a prolific phase of institutional building, resulting in a concentration of hospitals, churches and corrective institutions that drastically changed the character of the island. This change in character caused the island to become known as Welfare Island. For much of the 19th century, Welfare Island remained New York’s foremost location for the city’s infirm and criminal populations. However, by the turn of the 20th century, many institutions had left the island, relocating to more modern buildings and convenient locations in Manhattan and the surrounding boroughs. Structures, such as the Lunatic Asylum, the Smallpox Hospital, churches and synagogues, were left abandoned. By 1975, only two long-term care hospitals and a training facility for the New York City Fire Department remained on the island (Berdy 2003).
In 1968, Welfare Island became a prime target for revitalization efforts when Mayor John Lindsay appointed a committee to plan new uses for the now neglected and abandoned Welfare Island. The committee was comprised of architects, city officials and social reformers, who together envisioned a model residential community specifically designed for a mixed-income, ethnically diverse, and handicap population. In 1969, the Urban Development Corporation of New York State obtained a 99-year lease on the island in order to realize the committee's recommendations. With new hope for the future, Welfare Island was renamed Roosevelt Island in honor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The plan for Roosevelt Island was designed by the well-known architects John Burgee and Philip Johnson. Their development plan envisioned a utopian, “automobile-free” community of two “Island towns”, Northtown and Southtown. Construction on the first phase, Northtown, began in 1971 and included the WIRE residential buildings of Westview, Island House, Rivercross and Eastwood. Combined, these brick-clad buildings contain more than 2,000 housing units and are divided by walkways leading to the waterfront so that residents may enjoy access to the island’s remarkable views of the city (Stern, 1977).

The Northtown development was also designed to include a retail corridor, the Motorgate Parking Garage, a school, and the restoration of six historic buildings that were intended to remain as reminders of the island’s heritage (Stern 1977). In addition, the plan called for an automated vacuum collection (AVAC) facility, which was built with the original development. The AVAC is an innovative waste disposal system that utilizes a series of underground pneumatic tubes that carry waste from every building on the island to a centralized processing location. This system is the largest and only one of its kind used in a residential setting in the U.S. The AVAC system in conjunction with Northtown’s many unique design elements remain as reminders of Johnson and Burgee’s “urban utopian” intent (Tandon 2000).

Financial difficulties caused an extended delay in realizing Southtown, the second phase of the original development plan. Construction on Southtown did not begin until 2002 (Berdy, 2003). In between, there have been other additions to Roosevelt Island not laid out in the original development plan. The 800-unit Manhattan Park housing complex was built in 1987 and the Octagon, one of the island’s six restored historic structures, was renovated to include 500 rental units. The Roosevelt Island Racquet Club, PS/IS 217, and the Child School/Legacy High were also added. Since 2002, four of nine buildings planned for Southtown have been completed. When finished, the residential component of the original development plan for Roosevelt Island will be fully realized.
Demographics

The population of Roosevelt Island has always been diverse. However, AccessRI’s analysis of island demographics found that the island is wealthier, whiter, older, and more dependent on public transportation than the rest of New York City. Several population characteristics and trends were analyzed by the studio for background purposes and to gain an understanding of community needs. This section states demographic characteristics that were key to AccessRI’s study of Roosevelt Island.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, on average, island residents earn more money than New York City’s residents. The island’s median household income of $49,976 is 30.5 percent higher than the New York City median household income. Furthermore, the island’s per capita income of $26,199 is 17 percent higher than New York City’s. Census data also revealed that the white population represented 44 percent of Roosevelt Island’s total population, the Black/African American population 26 percent, the Hispanic population 14 percent, and the Asian population 11 percent. The median age of Roosevelt Island residents is 41, which is 6.8 years older than the New York City median age of 34.2.

The loss of affordable housing on the island, the demographics are changing. Buildings that were originally financed through the Mitchell-Lama program, which provided favorable financing and tax incentives in exchange for affordable units, are beginning to transition to market-rate housing. This transition combined with the newer market-rate housing of the Octagon and Southtown developments, will likely change the characteristics of the island’s population (Brozan 2005).

According to U.S. Census data and studio estimates, the island is growing at a fast pace. In 2000, the population was 9,520. AccessRI estimates the 2008 population was 12,595.1 This represents an approximate 32 percent increase in population in just eight years, significantly higher than the growth rate for the rest of the city which was about 3.8 percent during the same time period. With continued development, the population could increase by nearly 4,000 people within the next decade (Hughes 2007). This rate of growth reveals the need to evaluate many aspects of the island’s infrastructure in order to ensure that the island will be equipped to manage this growth effectively.

Roosevelt Islanders average commute time to work is virtually the same as the New York City average, 38.8 minutes as compared to 38.4 minutes, respectively. The difference is attributed to the fact that the island is significantly more dependent on public transportation than the city as a whole; 74 percent of its commuters take public transit compared to 53 percent of New York City commuters. Although their commute time is virtually the same as other New Yorkers, Roosevelt Island residents experience added frustration due to the island’s close proximity to Manhattan. Island residents are only 700 feet from Manhattan, yet to bicycle or walk to Manhattan, residents must take a 2.8-mile route across the Roosevelt Island Bridge, through Queens, and over the Queensboro Bridge. This circuitous route may be the primary reason why the Census recorded only 11 bike commuters on the island, less than .01 percent of the population compared to .07 percent for New York City. The high dependency on public transportation exhibits the need to evaluate the island’s transportation infrastructure, particularly in light of the high rate of population growth.

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1 The 2008 population was estimated by multiplying the housing units built since 2000 by the island’s average household size.
The construction of Roosevelt Island’s most recent residential developments has changed the dynamics of the community. Through research and interviews with island residents, AccessRI found that many residents feel that there is a division between longer-term residents and newer residents. Many longer-term residents believe that newer residents, some of whom are living on the island only temporarily, are not invested in the island community. There is also a perception of inequitable treatment between residents of different incomes. For instance, during community meetings, some community members expressed sentiments that island authorities prioritize the needs of those who reside in the luxury Octagon development. The Octagon is the only building with an express bus and is the proposed location for a potential ferry dock. This dynamic created challenges for the planning process. Many members of the Roosevelt Island community are actively involved in planning for the future. The island boasts dynamic community groups such as the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) as well as citizen blogs, such as Roosevelt Island 360 (http://rooseveltisland360.blogspot.com/), and an independent, volunteer-run newspaper, the Main Street WIRE. However, even with these groups present, the divisions within the Roosevelt Island community have made it more difficult for the community to affect the changes that they want and need. The island population is diverse and does not present a united front. Additionally, there is a problem with accountability. Island residents have communicated that the authorities, charged with the welfare of island residents, have not been responsive to their concerns and suggestions in the past. AccessRI has been particularly sensitive to these concerns, and understands that with these precedents and obstacles, it is reasonable for the Roosevelt Island community to be wary of planning agendas, not trusting that consensus will be reached or any real change will occur.

“Generally speaking, if people ask you where you live and if you say that you’re living in a new construction, like the Octagon, they don’t have a nice reaction to you.”
—Octagon Resident
AccessRI Oral History Project

“Most people feel that the newcomers will operate in their own sphere and won’t be integrated into the traditional Roosevelt Island.”
—Dorothy Davis
The New York Times, 2005
COMMUNITY PLANNING PRINCIPLES
Accessibility problems are particular to place (MacIntyre, Maciver and Soomans 1993). Roosevelt Island’s geographic location and social characteristics lend itself to accessibility issues that, without experiencing personally over a prolonged period, are difficult to understand. For this reason, AccessRI embarked on a communicative and collaborative planning process with the Roosevelt Island community, a process that would address the community’s particular needs.
AccessRI built upon academic traditions and adapted the concept of accessibility to meet the particular needs of Roosevelt Islanders. AccessRI’s vision of community-based planning was influenced by the vision of Paul Davidoff, founder of the Department of Urban Planning at Hunter College. He believed that planners should advocate for the interest of community-based groups during the process of planning (Angotti 2007). The notion of the planner as advocate was intended to fight for inclusion of unrepresented or under-represented groups, a conflict driven process. Advocacy planning has since evolved into a vision of a more democratic planning process (Hall 2002). With these foundations in mind, AccessRI moved beyond Davidoff to foster a more consensual model of planning. The studio brought disparate groups together and involved various community stakeholders, with the intention of building consensus through a democratic planning process. The studio’s participatory planning process was guided by the following principles:

- **fairness**: ensuring that all participants have equal opportunity to express opinions, offer ideas and advice
- **respect**: acknowledging and recognizing the participation of individuals and groups, regardless of their views
- **inclusion**: including interests and voices of those directly affected by the plans, but also those who did not participate, or whose participation did not receive meaningful attention
- **relevance**: focusing citizens’ testimony, advice, and deliberation on issues related to the purpose and context of the project
- **competence**: soliciting, supporting, and using the skills and knowledge of participants to improve the quality of the process and the creation of the plans (Ramasubramanian & Quinn 2006)

The planning process worked to build bridges and destroy barriers in its own right. Roosevelt Islanders experience problems that they, rightly, believe few can understand. Initially, the studio experienced a lack of trust on the part of many residents in the ability of “outsiders” to plan for their community. AccessRI gained the community’s trust by employing a strategy of prolonged engagement, involving the community and accepting input at all stages of the study. The statement of issues presented in the study legitimizes the feelings and concerns of the Roosevelt Island community. The product of the study is not just a catalogue of issues and solutions, but evidence that an engaged community can and should inform the planning process.

AccessRI was first introduced to the island while attending a walking tour hosted by the Roosevelt Island Historical Society (RIHS) and the American Planning Association New York Metro Chapter. Shortly thereafter, in partnership with Borough President Scott Stringer’s office, AccessRI participated in a Community Forum on transportation issues which further familiarized the studio with the island and overarching concerns of its residents. These initial encounters provided a framework of how the community interacted with planning issues and the initial formulation of a vision for the needs and concerns of the community. AccessRI held an ongoing dialogue with the community to receive their input in the planning process, organizing two more public meetings, with over a 100 residents in attendance. In addition, AccessRI attended important island meetings such as monthly RIRA Common Council meetings, to remain a constant presence on the island and stay in tune with ongoing relevant planning issues that continued to evolve over the months the studio was in session. The Advisory Committee provided insightful feedback as the studio uncovered key issues for further study and developed preliminary recommendations to address these issues.

In the final planning stages, the studio held a community review period in which residents evaluated proposed solutions with residents. AccessRI strove to gain the community’s trust through a constructive community planning process. The studio was successful in forming lasting relationships with the Roosevelt Island community. A more detailed description of these outreach methods follows.
### Studio Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Events</th>
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| **September** | Survey of Existing Conditions  
Island Tours  
Meeting with RIOC  
Launch of AccessRI Blog |
| **October**    | Town Hall Meeting  
Creation of Community Survey |
| **November**   | Launch of Community Survey  
Appointment of Advisory Committee |
| **December**   | Community Open House  
RFP Response to Senator Serrano |
| **January**    | Focus Groups  
Interviews |
| **February**   | Focus Groups  
Interviews  
Senior Outreach Meeting |
| **March**      | Draft of Proposals |
| **April**      | Public Community Review  
Youth Outreach |
| **May**        | Final Presentation  
Final Report |
Advisory Committee

The studio created an advisory committee of community stakeholders. Community stalwarts were identified through an analysis of various community organizations on the island. Several community leaders were invited to join the Advisory Committee and included:

- Jim Bates, President
  Roosevelt Island Disabled Association
- Judy Berdy, Director
  Roosevelt Island Historical Society (RIHS)
- Frank Farance, President
  Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA)
- Jonathan Kalkin, Board Member
  Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC)
- Yvonne Przybyla, Urban Policy Analyst
  Office of State Senator José M. Serrano
- Eric Schwartzman, Writer,
  Roosevelt Island 360 Blog

The role of the Advisory Committee was to offer the AccessRI studio advice and feedback on planning activities, community outreach methods and proposals. Other responsibilities included: attendance at monthly meetings throughout the project, providing information and contacts to broaden the scope of community participation in the project, and to update the community about AccessRI's activities.

The committee was established in the spirit of participation and collaboration. During monthly meetings, from December through April, the studio consistently presented work as it was being conducted. Advisory Committee members constructively critiqued the work presented, helping to advance ideas put forward; their input was crucial in the formation of the community-based plan presented in this study.
Qualitative Research and Quantitative Data

Attention was paid to gathering both qualitative and quantitative data to support problem statements and proposals. Quantitative data was gathered to frame issues for several studies included in this report such as the Roosevelt Island Main Street Land Use Survey, the AccessRI Community Survey, the Food Survey (see p. 45), and the F-train Survey (see p. 54).

However, the studio did not rely on quantitative data alone to identify and verify planning issues. Qualitative research was gathered from many sources that provided a great deal of information and multiple points of view obtained from historical research, community meetings and the AccessRI Oral History Project (see p. 20). Individual and group meetings with Roosevelt Island stakeholders provided additional data. AccessRI held meetings with targeted communities and organizations on the island, such as the Roosevelt Island Senior Association and RIOC. In meetings, seniors completed surveys and discussed issues specific to their everyday activities. Meetings with RIOC produced constructive feedback and opportunities to improve ongoing proposals, including discussion of Main Street commercial viability. Members of AccessRI also met with experts in the fields of transportation, commercial real estate and the NYC Department of City Planning to get an external perspective on the issues the studio investigated. These qualitative data sources proved to be extremely useful in identifying community issues and possible solutions.

AccessRI Blog (http://AccessRI.blogspot.com/)

Early in the planning process, AccessRI created a studio blog. The blog introduced the studio’s members and the mission of the studio. The blog kept the community posted about AccessRI activities, upcoming events and study results. A link was provided to the AccessRI Community Survey (see p. 21) and community members were free to post comments on the blog in response to the studio updates. Through the blog, the studio also received inquiries from people interested in learning more about Roosevelt Island and the forthcoming AccessRI study.

Pictures in this section were taken over the 10 month studio period at different community meetings and events.
Community Forum on Transportation Issues

On October 21, 2008, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer invited AccessRI to participate in a transportation-based community forum for Roosevelt Islanders. Studio members assisted in planning the event, attended by elected officials representing Roosevelt Island and agency representatives from NYC Department of Transportation, the MTA, and NYC Economic Development Corporation.

Studio members altered the typical format of the Community Forum. First, attendees of the Forum were divided into four smaller discussion groups. AccessRI studio members directed each group to identify their top transportation concerns and develop solutions to address these issues. Studio members facilitated the discussions and following these brainstorming sessions, the groups united and presented their ideas to everyone in attendance. In addition, innovative use of real-time audience feedback enabled attendees to vote on all of the issues and solutions presented. The results instantaneously revealed the Roosevelt Island community's most pressing transportation concerns and preferred short-term and long-term solutions to those concerns. The event was widely acknowledged as a success.

“[The real-time audience feedback] turned what is usually a standard speech dog and pony show with the expected rantings of upset community members, into an event where the public provided the content and the elected officials spoke minimally”
—Eric Schwartzman, Roosevelt Island 360 blog
Real-Time Audience Feedback

Real-time audience feedback is a means for greater community participation. During the Community Forum on Transportation, hosted by Borough President Scott Stringer, the studio utilized clicker technology to survey attendees regarding Roosevelt Island transportation concerns. Clickers were distributed to all attendees allowing every person to have input in selecting the most critical transportation issues and preferred short and long term solutions to those problems.

Real-time audience feedback is a system of handheld, remote-controlled devices. Each clicker has numbered buttons, and others labeled yes and no, that allow participants to answer many different types of questions. Once the answer is recorded and the respondent pushes the clicker’s send button, the response is instantly and anonymously sent to a computer where specialized software analyzes and displays the results graphically. The use of clicker technology enabled the studio, elected officials, and agency representatives to immediately view the results of the community transportation survey.

Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA)
Common Council and Townhall Meetings

AccessRI members attended RIRA Common Council meetings to introduce themselves to the community and to better understand the various viewpoints of each residential building on the island. Information gained from the meetings prompted AccessRI to conduct further research and interviews. For example, AccessRI became aware of plans for new Southtown retail establishments which prompted a meeting with a representative of Southtown developer, Related Companies. This meeting proved helpful in investigating revitalization along the Main Street corridor.
Open House

AccessRI hosted an open house on December 6, 2008, at the Good Shepherd Community Center to introduce the members of the studio, the studio concept and the initial work to the community. The Open House provided a more casual setting to engage residents in discussions about their concerns. Community contributions at the Open House helped direct the studio’s problem statements and future topics of study.

To enrich the event, several activities were planned. The AccessRI Community Survey was available online to Open House participants at a laptop station. Many community members chose to take part in the Roosevelt Island Oral History Project, in which participants recorded their own personal stories about life on the island. A mapping activity was set up for residents to note specific recommendations on post-it notes and place them onto a large map for spatial reference. The studio digitized all the responses into a comprehensive map of issues and suggestions. Youth activities were available for children who came with their parents. In addition, the studio’s summary of existing conditions and preliminary findings were shown on a projector throughout the event.

Roosevelt Island Oral History Project

AccessRI created the Roosevelt Island Oral History Project to obtain a better understanding of how Roosevelt Island residents view their community and guidance for focusing the study. The project was conducted during the studio’s Open House in December 2008. Residents were invited to sit down with studio members and recount their experiences living on Roosevelt Island. Studio members prompted participants with questions, if necessary, to help them feel comfortable expressing their perceptions of life on Roosevelt Island. The project was modeled after StoryCorps, a nonprofit venture that records the stories of everyday Americans through interviews conducted between family and friends that are then archived at the Library of Congress (StoryCorps 2009). The result of the project is a unique collection of personal accounts of island life. Participants included men, women, and children, whose time spent living on the island ranged from thirty to only a couple of years. The oral histories uncovered individual and collective concerns. They also revealed the assets of the island, what people love about the island and would like to see maintained and/or built on in the future. Many of the recordings, for example, reveal favorite locations on the island to sit and relax, socialize and play. The studio will be donating the oral histories to the Roosevelt Island Historical Society following the completion of the project.
Community Review

The studio presented its preliminary proposals to the community for feedback on two separate occasions, March 30 and April 4, 2009. The time in between the meetings and immediately following the April 4th meeting was considered the formal community review period. The presentations allowed the community to directly engage with the studio and offer both support and critique.

AccessRI Community Survey

The 45-question survey was divided into six categories related to access: Housing, Healthcare, Education/Childcare, Public Spaces, Emergency Services, and Transportation. The survey itself was developed using the online survey service SurveyMonkey.com, and was administered both online and in paper format using the following methods:

- Links to the survey were established on the AccessRI Blog, and local blogs the Roosevelt Islander and Roosevelt Island 360
- Regular e-blasts sent by State Senator José M. Serrano to his constituents contained a link to the survey
- Instructions for accessing the survey were posted in the computer lab of the Roosevelt Island Senior Center
- Handbills advertising the survey were distributed during a RIRA Common Council meeting
- Advertising flyers promoting the survey were inserted into copies of the Main Street Wire and distributed to every household on Roosevelt Island

The Community Survey was completed by 127 respondents, approximately 1 percent of the resident population of Roosevelt Island. Although not a scientifically representative sample of the population as a whole, the results provide some useful insights about the views and attitudes of the Roosevelt Island population. A full breakdown of the survey and its results are available in Appendix B.

The survey results revealed that residents are generally satisfied that their basic needs are being met: 89 percent of respondents are satisfied with their ability to access healthcare services; 87 percent are pleased with their housing; 84 percent are satisfied that they will be able to remain there for the foreseeable future. Likewise, over 79 percent of respondents are satisfied with the accessibility of schools and childcare services. Satisfaction with the quality of the emergency services on Roosevelt Island ranks pretty high at 79 percent.

Areas of improvement were also identified through an analysis of survey data. While the respondents are pleased with the open spaces, parks and plazas, the quality of public signage received low marks. The overall quality of commercial services ranked poorly. Almost 90 percent of respondents are dissatisfied particularly with the selection and quality of retail stores found on the island. Access to groceries and other food related services ranked low and is frequently criticized in the comments section of the survey. In addition, while most have never ridden a bicycle off of Roosevelt Island, 60 percent of respondents showed interest in the establishment of a bicycle sharing program for the island. Many of these concerns are directly addressed in the accessibility study.
AccessRI Kids Korner

AccessRI actively engaged all members of the Roosevelt Island community in the planning process, including its youth population. Twenty percent of Roosevelt Island’s population is under the age of 18, creating a sizeable group of individuals with particular perspectives and concerns. Perhaps the most uninhibited, imaginative and creative voices the studio heard came from youth groups invited to participate in the planning process. Their input provided a well-rounded snapshot of both the issues at hand and possible solutions for the future.

AccessRI developed a youth program philosophy that worked in two directions, cultivating ideas from the young residents and providing a platform from which to teach the purpose of community-based planning. AccessRI referenced youth participation literature to develop ideas and activities for youth engagement (Driskell 2007). Planning activities were created that allowed youth audiences to actively contribute to AccessRI’s study, planting seeds of empowerment for improving their own community.

At the AccessRI Open House, youth residents were asked to describe their community through illustration in the “My Neighborhood” drawing exercise. A lack of entertainment and retail options, infrequent cultural activities and concerns about the impending tram closure were prominent themes. With the help of Roosevelt Island Youth Program Director, Charles DeFino, AccessRI hosted a local girl scout troop during the Community Review held on April 4, 2009. The girl scouts worked with AccessRI to develop plans for the future of Roosevelt Island, identifying key qualities and issues in the community. The participants tackled issues such as energy, food security, and equity housing. The girl scouts were then asked to present their plans to State Senator José M. Serrano. Younger scouts illustrated their plans in a drawing exercise while the older cadets drafted letters explaining their plans to the Senator. Their plans were greatly varied and forward thinking. The illustrations and letters will be sent to the Senator’s office as a supplement of this study. The illustrations will also be shared with the Roosevelt Island Historical Society.
Creating a More Livable Community

The non-profit organization Project for Public Spaces (PPS) defines “placemaking” as a place-centered approach to helping citizens improve public spaces and make great communities (PPS 2009). Combining this framework with residents’ community input, AccessRI carefully surveyed the island’s physical layout, focusing on the accessibility of public spaces. In doing so, the studio found that Roosevelt Island contains interesting architecture, historic sites, parks and open spaces, most of which feature spectacular views of the New York harbor. With such great amenities, AccessRI focused on improving existing spaces, enhancing circulation and the appearance of the island; the main purpose being the improvement of the public realm for residents, in addition to making the island a more inviting destination for visitors.
Residents are highly sensitive to the character and quality of the environment through which they walk. A study of street character showed that perceptions of safety, shade, and the presence of other people were important determinants of the frequency with which residents walked in their neighborhood (Handy and Clifton 1998). By creating attractive human-scaled spaces, rather than departing from the utopian vision in the first place, the island can begin to adopt some of the original ideas that made it unique and increase usage of public space.

“Ironically, however, it was in part of the Island’s ability to distinguish itself from the surrounding ‘mainland that limited its success; while Roosevelt Island did indeed avoid some of the urbanistic chaos of Manhattan, it also lacked its vitality.”

Stern, Mellins & Fishman 1997, 659

After careful observation, field visits, community input, personal interviews and a “walkshop” with the Roosevelt Island Historical Society, the studio determined there was a need to enliven public spaces and improve safety and circulation throughout the island. The distinct modern architecture of the island would not be altered, but rather the spaces that encompass the island and used everyday would be studied. In order to create a more welcoming environment for residents and visitors, a practical set of recommendations involving enhancement of the public realm are advocated for.

Survey results analyzed by AccessRI offered valuable information. For instance, according to AccessRI’s Community Survey, 36 percent rank the quality of public signage as below expectations or poor, which supported recommendations for improved signage throughout the island.

**Quality of Public Signage**

- Excellent: 3%
- Good: 23%
- Satisfactory: 37%
- Below Expectations: 22%
- Poor: 15%

In addition, research into improved biking conditions was encouraged by the results of the survey; 79.9 percent of respondents indicate that they never use a bicycle to travel off of Roosevelt Island, although 59 percent of respondents expressed interest in establishing a bike sharing plan, with 31 percent expressing a strong interest.

**Interest in Bike Sharing**

- Very Interested: 31%
- Interested: 28%
- Not Interested: 41%
The strong sense of community that is evident on the island would benefit immensely from this desire to improve spaces and would help bring together all the diverse groups that inhabit the island. The desire to look beyond studying the accessibility of different points of entering and leaving the island were confirmed after the studio’s investigation into realistic and feasible transportation improvements.

Further investigation uncovered that the island’s built environment and existing conditions need improvement. Final recommendations involved issues that can be advocated for by the community, in the hope that they will be made aware of the opportunities that can make a difference in the everyday lives of residents, along with attracting a new visitor population to the island. The following sections outline the specific issues identified by the AccessRI studio in regards to Placemaking. The issues are categorized into the following topics of key importance: Gateways, Wayfinding, Pedestrian Circulation, Public Spaces, and Biking.
GATEWAYS

issue: Unwelcoming Gateways

Manhattan Tram Station

The Roosevelt Island Tram is an integral part of many residents’ lives, providing a short, smooth trip to or from Manhattan in approximately 4 minutes. At first a temporary form of transportation, the tram has become one of the island’s unique assets. The tram station in Manhattan is often the first impression associated with the island before one is whisked away to amazing views over the East River. While the newly renovated Tramway Plaza provides seating and open space (see figure 1), the immediate area around the station is disconnected from this park. The station’s blank walls and dark atmosphere are not very comforting, creating an unsafe environment (see figure 2). The massive amount of traffic, vehicular noise and pollution at the Queensboro Bridge approach on 2nd Avenue further degrades the pedestrian experience. The tram area is also lacking in wayfinding signage, as both the immediate tram station and vicinity of the tram area are absent of signs to orient pedestrians to this key transportation node.
Roosevelt Island Bridge/Queens Approach

Roosevelt Island’s only physical connection to the mainland is the Roosevelt Island Bridge connecting the island to 36th Avenue in Long Island City. This gateway serves as a connection to the neighborhoods of Queens, offering residents access to shops, services, and amenities not found on the Island. A power plant abuts both the north and south side of the bridge’s approach making for a harsh aesthetic and unfriendly environment. Although a Class II bike lane runs along Vernon Boulevard, the amount of space for vehicles is excessive, catering to traffic while discouraging pedestrians and bicyclists from entering the area. Improving accessibility starts by giving all modes a more balanced role at this important inter-borough approach.
proposal: Beautification

Manhattan Tram Station

This gateway can be improved with a series of cost-effective proposals such as greening, installing wayfinding signage at and around the tram station, providing a safe pedestrian environment with more lighting, and encouraging the use of street art along the tram station walls. Planting more street trees around the tram area creates an overall aesthetic improvement to the area. Strategically placed, trees help to organize empty sidewalks, providing a safe, green buffer from the heavy traffic.

Encouraging the use of creative lighting at key locations can improve the safety of the area. In New York City, business improvement districts (BIDs) are taking a leading role in providing supplemental lighting to improve their jurisdiction’s public realm (see figure 3). The presence of the East Midtown BID at this location offers a realistic partnership opportunity for RIOC to explore. The use of public street art is another method of enhancing this space. The station’s numerous blank walls are a prime target for this recommendation for beautification.

In addition, AccessRI has developed a series of signs for use throughout the island. The Manhattan tram station is a key transportation node and accessing the island would be made easier by providing a large map of the island at the station and other high activity spaces on the island (see figure 4). The large wayfinding maps will better orient visitors to the Island, offering a sense of place once they step foot on it. These signs will be further addressed in the Wayfinding discussion of this section. The placement of tram station signs on and in the vicinity of the station, including adjacent routes from the Lexington Avenue-59th Street subway line would better inform pedestrians of the station’s location.
Roosevelt Island Bridge/Queens Approach

Creating a more welcoming place to pedestrian and bicyclists can achieve improving this gateway. Traffic calming measures at this key intersection can be implemented; road space can be narrowed and sidewalks extended (see figure 5). Crosswalks can be made more visible with textured and/or pigmented pavement, while neckdowns can shorten long crossing distances. These calming measures are especially important for elderly and handicapped residents who rely on walking as their primary means of travel. The demarcation of the bike lanes running north and south on Vernon Blvd can be painted green, making their presence more visible to vehicles. The current bike lane and approach is part of the proposed Vernon Boulevard East River Greenway and will continue to calm traffic in the area, as space is allocated to all modes of transportation. Greening can be achieved by planting more trees along Vernon Boulevard, providing an aesthetic improvement in an otherwise desolate area (see figures 6 and 7).
WAYFINDING

issue: Lack of Wayfinding Maps and Signs
Although Roosevelt Island has many substantial amenities, the gradual nature of the development that has taken place over the last 38 years has resulted in a somewhat piece-meal appearance overall. Currently, there is a lack of cohesiveness between the different developments on the island, as developers began to stray from the vision designed for Roosevelt Island. Because of this, the island is disorienting to visitors, producing somewhat of an unwelcoming atmosphere.

proposal: Large Wayfinding Map and Signs
AccessRI believes that a simple method to make the island more navigable is by implementing an island-wide wayfinding system. Creating a wayfinding system would not only encourage an awareness of island amenities, but also help orient visitors and residents alike.

Many cities and towns have employed such systems in order to enhance circulation and promote area attractions. For instance, the Dumbo BID has implemented a successful wayfinding program, which helps visitors locate hard to find pedestrian entrances to the Brooklyn Bridge, and provides residents and visitors with guidance to the entire waterfront area (see figure 8).

Roosevelt Island's wayfinding system would include large wayfinding maps located at major transit locations and gateways such as the tram and F-train stations on and off the island. The maps would also be located at other prominent locations such as the Good Shepherd Community Center, and the Red Bus stop at the Octagon.

The maps themselves would display the island's major amenities such as the landmarked structures and would provide directions to the promenade, locating areas of handicap and bike access. Additionally, these maps could potentially provide addresses along Main Street.

“…RIOC should put up some signs, so that as soon as somebody arrives here, or gets to a rotary or intersection, they will have a reference point…”
Kurt Wittman, Letter to the Editor-The Wire, 2/09
in order to make identifying specific locations easier. To exemplify how these maps might look, AccessRI has designed a sample map and provided some examples of how these maps could be integrated on the island.

In addition to wayfinding maps, the reimplementation of historic markers throughout the island would also provide awareness of the many unique features existing on the island. These signs would highlight important aspects of the island’s character and would serve to enhance the visitor’s experience. In conjunction with these markers, additional signs would be used to indicate amenities such as parks, playgrounds and the promenade. For examples of how these signs might look, refer to figures 9 and 10. AccessRI has also designed directional signs for orientation at key locations and intersections.

A visitor’s experience of the island could be further enhanced with the creation of a brochure or pamphlet designed to coincide with island’s sites and wayfinding system. The current pamphlet recently released by RIOC does not adequately address the island’s potential as a one of the city’s great destinations. Placing these brochures at the Roosevelt Island Visitor Center as well as at major visitor centers throughout the city would draw attention to the island and bring visitors that could help maintain vitality by sustaining island businesses.
issue: Poor Pedestrian Conditions

Both community input and field observations by studio members revealed pedestrian conditions need improvement. Many of the problems are due to a lack of space for pedestrians, especially important for an island with a large elderly and disabled population. The original plan for Roosevelt Island involved an auto-free environment. The Motorgate Parking Garage was originally intended to accommodate all vehicles on the island. Over the years this vision has slowly eroded, as vehicular traffic and inattention to the pedestrian have increased (see figure 11).

Main Street has become particularly unfriendly to the pedestrian. Its wear and tear is evident, as sidewalks and street conditions have worsened over the years. Many street markings are faded, while crosswalks are often longer than necessary. In addition, the use of excessive signage clutters the sidewalk, hampering visibility for all users, and lessening the intended message of each sign. Our suggestions involve cost-effective measures that can be easily enacted by RIOC, and would result in a safer environment for all.
proposal: Traffic Calming and Improved Pedestrian Experience

A combination of traffic calming techniques and other simple steps are recommended to create a more pleasant pedestrian experience on the island. The use of standard thermoplastic marking on all roadways can provide a more visible and durable material that will last longer, a significant upgrade from the current faded markings. All crosswalks should have a high visibility ladder configuration and a recessed stop bar of 5-10 feet. Placing the stop bar farther from the crosswalk minimizes pedestrian and vehicle conflicts.

The overall pedestrian experience can be improved by shortening long crosswalk distances. Curb extensions, or bulbouts, are an effective traffic calming technique to achieve this, providing a raised peninsula, either at an intersection or mid-block, resulting in better visibility between pedestrian and vehicles (see figures 12 and 13). The use of bulbouts is usually accompanied by protective bollards. The expansion of the lighted bollards used on the island is recommended for helping to define pedestrian space on the island and provide supplemental lighting. They also create more sidewalk space for streetscape improvements such as the addition of trees or bike racks in these reclaimed spaces. The key locations identified by AccessRI as ideal for bulbouts among other improvements can be found in Appendix D, Overall Recommendations Map.

Residents have also expressed concern of overuse of traffic signs on the island. Besides ruining the physical beauty of the island, the confusion that arises due to many signs often lessens their effect. An increasingly popular trend in Europe, “woonerf”, involves the removal of all signs forcing all street users to better communicate through eye contact and human interaction. This often works with the concept of “shared streets” in which spaces on the roadway are shared by all users (Ben-Joseph 1995). These concepts would be considerably more feasible if most vehicular traffic was banned from Main Street, although the studio recognizes the constraints due to the street’s importance as the island’s main thoroughfare. Other factors such as loading requirements for commercial goods and the needs of the disabled community also have to be considered. In the end, we recommend more judicious use of signs and consideration of their effect on the public realm.

AccessRI’s recommendations involve practical solutions that can be implemented without any major changes to the island’s vehicular policy. Improving walkability and providing alternative methods of transportation can help make Roosevelt Island a safer, healthier place to be. Despite community concern, AccessRI acknowledges RIOC could implement “auto-free” days during several weekends in the summer, offering citizens a chance to experience a pedestrianized street. A successful example is the NYC Department of Transportation’s “Summer Streets” program, in which thousands took to the streets to enjoy public street space normally off-limits. An “auto-free” Main Street would allow residents and visitors alike to enjoy a reclaimed public space on a temporary basis.
issue: Underutilized Public Spaces

Public spaces provide communities with places to be active, enjoy nature and socialize. These spaces are vital to maintaining healthy communities and are proven to enhance the overall quality of life. The original plans for Roosevelt Island’s redevelopment in the 1970s called for ample amounts of open space. In fact, many island residents cite the island’s large quantities of green space as what initially drew them to reside on the Island. While Roosevelt Island possesses many wonderful public spaces that serve the community well, AccessRI’s close examination of more utilitarian spaces found that several of them are underutilized and often vacant. Increasing accessibility to places that are human-scaled is essential to creating a community that takes pride in its surroundings.

proposal: Activate Public Spaces

More attention and investment must be given to the public spaces of the island. AccessRI created a comprehensive set of actions for activating public spaces. These recommendations are specific to the Roosevelt Island tram station area, the F-train station area and the Good Shepherd plaza due to their transportation connections and central location, though they are adaptable to other island locations.

Install Amenities

Active spaces offer people amenities and attractions that serve basic needs. Food vendors, fruit carts, newsstands and other small commercial entities provide for these needs and should be encouraged on the island. These amenities attract people, making the space safer, more interesting and enjoyable.

Additional Seating

Seating welcomes residents and visitors to a place. Movable chairs, benches, and picnic tables are simple, inexpensive ways to improve a public space.

Improve Street Furniture and Lighting

Quality street furniture enhances the public realm. New York City’s agreement with the Spanish company Cemusa, to maintain and upgrade street furniture in exchange for advertising rights on the structures, is one cost-effective example. Through public-private partnerships, RIQC can maintain the integrity of urban design while creating revenue for island operations.

Physical spaces on the island can be improved further by installing consistent lighting. After speaking with the community and Roosevelt Island Historical Society, AccessRI advocates for replacing the out of scale lighting in Good Shepherd plaza with historical lampposts that are used throughout the island.

Enhance Sidewalks

Many sidewalks on Roosevelt Island are obstructed or bleak. The studio encourages organizing sidewalk space through the use of consistent street furniture and vegetation, providing a more attractive pedestrian environment as well as protection from motor vehicles.

Green Spaces

Many key locations on the island are comprised of rigid, harsh-looking surfaces. Adding vegetation softens spaces and makes them more inviting. Bringing nature into spaces dominated by impervious surfaces or along sidewalks by installing planters and trees softens and beautifies public space.

Encourage Public Art

Public art can communicate the unique character of a community or neighborhood while enlivening public spaces. Currently, Roosevelt Island has very few locations exhibiting public art though many spaces would lend themselves well to murals, sculptures, or the like. Examples of how public art might be integrated onto the island can be found in the Gateways portion of the Placemaking section or in the Promenade portion of the Infrastructure section of the report.

A public art program may be implemented on the Island by holding design contests involving the Roosevelt Island Visual Art Association, schools or Roosevelt Island Youth Center. Additionally, several city and state agencies have public art programs, such as the Public Art Fund (http://www.publicartfund.org/), the Municipal Arts Society, the New York City Design Commission and the MTA’s Arts for Transit (http://www.mta.info/mta/aft/index.html).
The sidewalk along the F-Train station is devoid of amenities such as trees, bollards and lighting but can be easily be transformed into a pedestrian friendly space.

**Roosevelt Island tram station**
With added food kiosk, seating and signage

**Good Shepherd plaza**
With added greenery, seating and historic light fixtures

**Sidewalk along the F-train station**
With added greenery, signage and lighting

**Bus stop along Main Street**
With updated street furniture and pedestrian improvements
issue: **Lack of Options for Short Trips**

There is a high demand for short trips on Roosevelt Island. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 77 percent of island commuters use public transportation, and every trip on public transportation begins and ends with a short trip to public transportation.

Most island residents depend on walking or Red Bus trips on the island. If the trip is very short, walking is sufficient but many destinations are more than a 20-minute walk apart. For example, it takes about 22 minutes to walk from the Octagon to the tram station, which is a significant amount of time to add to an already sizable commute. The Red Bus is a faster option, but often not by much. With no wait, the Red Bus takes about 11 minutes to travel between the Octagon and the tram station, but the buses only run every 7 minutes; the entire trip can take up to 18 minutes. At night the buses only run every 15 minutes, which means if a resident misses a bus, the trip takes roughly 27 minutes, five minutes longer than walking.

For travel between the Octagon and the tram, the fastest and most reliable travel mode is a bicycle (see figure 14). The trip would take about five minutes peddling at a relaxed speed. AccessRI believes the bicycle is the more efficient option because there is no waiting; it can be parked close to a destination, and does not make stops to let passengers on and off slowing other passengers down.

Although bikes are the fastest way to travel around the island, many Roosevelt Island residents do not own one. Results from AccessRI’s community outreach revealed many residents would like to own a bike, but small apartments make storage difficult. If they do indeed own a bike, there is lack of safe bike parking at key locations.

![figure 14 Travel times between the Roosevelt Island tram and the Octagon using various modes of transportation](image)
**Proposal: Bicycle Sharing Program**

AccessRI proposes a bike sharing program for Roosevelt Island to make cycling a more convenient option for short trips. A bike sharing program will allow users to cover a greater distance in a shorter amount of time. Bike sharing is convenient and allows residents the use of a bicycle whenever they want without a wait.

Bicycles would be available to subscribers at stations located at important destinations such as transit stations and residential buildings. To access a bicycle at a station, subscribers tap their membership card on an electronic card reader and their account information is displayed. The user would type in the number of the bike they want with 60 seconds to remove it from a locking mechanism. The entire operation, from scanning the card to withdrawing or returning the bike takes less than a minute. Once the bike is released the rider simply gets on and rides to the bike station closest to their destination.

The proposed bike stations, eight in total, would be spaced so residents and workers can access bikes in a 1-3 minute walk from anywhere on the island (see figure 15, p. 40).

There would be one station off the island at Costco, as it is an important shopping destination for residents. The largest bike stations will be at the tram and at the F-train stations because they are the island’s busiest transportation nodes. The fully equipped bikes can be used on a whim. They are durable 3-speeds, with adjustable seats, built-in front and rear lights, and front baskets for residents to carry handbags, groceries, and other personal items.

Most cities with successful bike share programs have one bike per 100 residents and report that each bike is used 10-15 times per day. Roosevelt Island’s bike share program would ideally have 120 bikes for its 12,000 residents. If the bikes are used at the rate they are in other programs, they will take 1,200-1,800 trips per day (Mairie de Paris, 2008).

The proposal includes an annual bike sharing subscription fee that is affordable to all residents. Though, to encourage a wider circulation of bicycles, user fees are proposed for residents and visitors who would not necessarily use the bicycles on a regular basis.
To reduce theft, subscribers must provide a credit card number to qualify for a bike sharing membership card. Failure to return a bike results in a $150 fine. The bike sharing system makes cycling affordable and convenient for all Roosevelt Island residents. For as little as $30 per year residents have 24 hour access to bikes to travel anywhere on the island. The system can be used for one-way trips which gives residents expanded travel options. For example they could take the Red Bus in one direction, and then bike back.

The bike sharing program will also make public transit more appealing for people commuting to the island because it will make the island portion of their trip much faster. Many of the island workers who now drive because they don’t want to make the long walk or Red Bus ride to and from the F-train or tram, might switch to transit and relieve the island’s traffic congestion.

RIOC would own a future bike sharing program, though it would be financed, managed and maintained by a private sponsor in exchange for membership fees, user fees and use of public advertising space. The system includes the bikes, the bike stations, and the membership accounts. The characteristics of a higher household income as compared to the rest of the city, and the nature of a captive audience offer a great opportunity for advertisement. This bike share plan could be eventually incorporated into New York’s future implementation of its own citywide plan (see Bike Share: Opportunities in New York City, NYC Department of City Planning, 2009).

*figure 15 Map of eight proposed bicycle sharing station locations*
issue: Lack of Bicycle Parking

Often, Roosevelt Island residents will want to use their own bicycles and need a safe place to lock their bike. Unfortunately, most racks at the island’s current locations are at capacity or close to it. There are not enough bicycle racks where they are needed most, and too many abandoned bikes are taking up valuable space. For example, the studio surveyed the 27-space bicycle rack at the F-train station that and found that 33 percent of the bicycles were abandoned and only 8 percent of the spaces were free (see figure 16).

proposal: Increase Bike Parking Capacity

To give cyclists confidence that a free bike rack space will be waiting for them when they arrive, bicycle rack capacity must be increased. At locations where bike racks are chronically full, new racks will be added incrementally until 10-20 percent is free at peak periods. Abandoned bikes take up valuable rack space, are unsightly, and would be systematically removed every few weeks. Unclaimed bikes will be held for three months and then considered abandoned property. Obviously signs a bike is abandoned are rusty chains and flat tires. Fortunately, there is a good use for abandoned bikes. Recycle-a-Bicycle (http://www.recycleabicycle.org/) is a non-profit organization that conducts workshops in Brooklyn and Manhattan to train kids to repair abandoned bikes. At the end of the program the children get to keep the bikes they work with. The Recycle-a-Bicycle program is a great way to reuse Roosevelt Island’s abandoned bikes while providing the island’s youth with a constructive activity.
REVITALIZATION
Rethinking Main Street

Roosevelt Island’s Main Street is located at the island’s core and is an integral part of the unique Northtown development. Main Street encompasses nearly 82,000 square feet of prime retail space, and its central location makes it a convenient spot for island residents to access shopping, services and public spaces. Main Street has the potential to be a great island asset. However, the current state of the strip presents a missed opportunity. Due to consistent neglect, many of the storefronts are vacant. Currently, the commercial vacancy rate of the strip is 31 percent in a city with a vacancy rate of approximately 12 percent. This high vacancy rate creates uninviting spaces, which permeate to the sidewalks and streets, making the entire area largely detached from island residents. This disregard creates a barrier to community investment and prevents access to a vibrant commercial corridor.

Collectively, AccessRI’s proposals for revitalization are intended to remove the barriers that have prevented Main Street from becoming a vibrant community-based shopping/commercial street. The proposals are designed in accordance with the community’s needs, and are informed by our field work and the analysis of results from our survey. The studio is confident that the proposals, if implemented, will create a thriving commercial corridor that serves the everyday needs of residents and visitors. In addition, the revitalization of Main Street will enable Roosevelt Island to address the challenges posed by the island’s unique circumstances, and to effectively reintegrate into the fabric of the greater New York City region.
The Obstacles
Several clear obstacles stand in the way of revitalizing Roosevelt Island's Main Street. One problem arises from recent legislation known as the Public Authorities Accountability Act (PAAA) (2005). This Act requires stringent guidelines and regulations of real estate transactions for public benefit corporations. The Act was created to hold these entities accountable in the development process, however, the implications for smaller authorities can be detrimental. Roosevelt Island's Main Street retail corridor presents a perfect example of how this legislation can negatively impact small operating corporations.

The PAAA of 2005 has established specific protocols for public authorities that relate to the acquisition, transfer, sale or leasing of real estate. For instance, transactions of $50,000 or more require a competitive bidding process. The authority, in this case RIOC, must issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) and entertain bids by prospective entities that address the specific requirements laid out in the RFP. For RIOC, conforming to the stringent guidelines set forth by the Act requires them to create and manage a competitive bidding process for each and every retail lease. With numerous vacant spaces to fill, RIOC lacks the resources necessary to accomplish this undertaking.

In addition to the high vacancy rate, the corridor is bereft of a cohesive design scheme that complements the modernist architecture of the development. Without design guidelines, Main Street businesses are not beholden to any significant standards. The lack of guidelines drastically effects Main Street's appearance, resulting in a visually inconsistent facade that reinforces the air of neglect that seems to permeate Main Street.

Benefits of Revitalization
Urban commercial districts have complex and locally specific problems that require locally specific solutions. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) highlights eight key principles that anchor successful revitalization programs. They include solutions that are community initiated, comprehensive, collaborative, diverse, vision directed, capital intensive, market oriented, and sustainable (Conti et al 2008). AccessRI incorporated these principles in the development of proposals to revitalize the Main Street corridor.

“The is no reason for me to go to Main Street, so I avoid it”
— Roosevelt Island Resident

The Roosevelt Island community expressed clear dissatisfaction with the current condition of Main Street. According to AccessRI’s Community Survey, 53 percent of respondents ranked the quality of Main Street as below expectation or poor, and 81 percent of respondents ranked the overall quality of commercial services on the island as below expectations or poor.

Overall Quality of Commercial Services

AccessRI has identified resident’s ability to access banking, food and retail services as crucial elements of a livable community. Access to quality financial services, such as commercial banks and savings institutions, prevents underserved communities from exploitation through predatory financial services, such as check cashers, rent-to-own shops, money transfer operators.
or high-interest mortgage lenders. These businesses become the de facto financial services in neighborhoods without quality financial institutions.

According to the NYC Department of City Planning (2009), access to food has a direct bearing on an individual’s health. Studies conducted by these agencies have cited data that indicates that affordable, full-time supermarkets positively affect health.

Vacant properties in neighborhoods directly cost local communities and governments in both economic terms and in quality of life. Underused or abandoned properties present an opportunity to revitalize and rethink Main Streets and other commercial areas.

Throughout the Community Survey, availability of banking services ranked the worst with 90.8 percent of respondents designating it below expectations or poor. The accessibility of food was also identified as a consistent concern. Services were ranked by 79 percent of respondents as below expectations or poor. When asked to describe desirable retail establishments, 98 percent of respondents advocated some type of food establishment, suggesting everything from take-away and fast food, to high-end grocery chains. Finally, when asked to rank the ability of their households to obtain food, 45 percent of respondents ranked their access to food as below expectations or poor (See AccessRI Food Survey).

**Lost Revenue**

An analysis of the RIOC FY 2009-2010 budget demonstrated that Main Street's current situation amounts to a serious missed opportunity and a considerable loss of revenue. To illustrate the loss of revenue, the studio compared the revenue generated by the Motorgate Parking Garage to all of the commercial rent on Roosevelt Island. The result revealed that Motorgate alone generates nearly $1.8 million annually, noticeably more than the approximately $1.5 million generated by all the commercial real estate on Roosevelt Island.

In 2008, Liberty Appraisal, a property appraisal service, was commissioned to conduct an analysis of Roosevelt Island’s Main Street in order to estimate potential rental values for the corridor. The study compared the island’s retail core to a comparable location in neighboring Astoria/Long Island City, Queens. Liberty Appraisal found that commercial rents along Main Street generate $495,544 annually, which is approximately $6 per square foot. This is significantly lower than neighboring Astoria/Long Island City’s commercial spaces, which are generating approximately $22 to $49 per square foot. This comparison reveals that Main Street has the potential to generate nearly $18 per square foot; thereby increasing its revenue to nearly $1.5 million annually. This conservative estimate using the RIOC proposed budget for FY 09-10, shows that Main Street has the potential to generate an additional $1 million annually.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Main Street Retail Revenue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Revenue Generated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated Revenue per sq ft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential Revenue per sq ft</td>
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<td>Potential Revenue Generated</td>
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As an independent public authority, RIOC must generate revenue to support the operations of Roosevelt Island. Unlike the much larger Battery Park City Authority, RIOC does not have a large commercial base from which to draw resources. However, with better management, the Main Street retail corridor could potentially be a more substantial revenue source. Based on the available evidence, AccessRI concludes that Main Street is an underutilized asset.
issue: Vacant Storefronts

The bidding requirement outlined by the PAAA presents a complicated process to potential small business tenants who may lack the resources needed to participate in competitive bidding. The process might include the submission of financials and detailed business plans, and also requires potential tenants to buy back past rents and purchase any equipment already present in the spaces. This process puts an unrealistic burden on small businesses. Because the character of the island lends itself to small locally-owned businesses and few chains, small business owners should be given the opportunity to compete with more established entities in the competitive bidding process.

Another complication arises in RIOC’s own ability to support multiple competitive bidding and leasing obligations. Since the PAAA was passed in 2005, RIOC has been unable to fill Main Street’s vacant spaces. This year alone the island lost two Main Street businesses; the Flower Shop, unable to recover from a fire, has closed, and the New York State Bank announced that it too planned to close its doors and move off the island within the next six months.

proposal: Third Party Management

AccessRI investigated several third party management options. The studio found that the most functional option would require one master leaseholder that would be able to compete in the competitive bidding process required by the PAAA. The leaseholder would pay RIOC a flat fee or a percentage of the rent money it collects. With a third party in control of the leasing, the PAAA requirements would be satisfied, absolving RIOC’s need to conduct a competitive bidding process for each space.

Southtown is nearly at capacity with its retail spaces. Related Companies/Hudson Inc. has been able to attract a mix of local and chain tenants at near market rate rents. “Businesses are lined up to get onto the island, it is a vibrant market with a captive consumer base,” said a representative from Hudson Incorporated. Rivercross tenants are required to adhere to the design guidelines listed in their leases. The bar’n’grill and bakery will open in the summer of 2009 to complete the retail development of Southtown. AccessRI believes that the successful occupancy in Southtown is evidence that Main Street can reduce its vacancies and became a thriving retail corridor.
Food Survey

Good health is strongly linked to healthy diets that include fresh fruits and vegetables. Studies indicate that environmental factors, such as the ability to access fresh produce, can influence positive dietary choices (Richards and Rose 2004). Communities with limited access to fresh food tend to have higher levels of food related diseases such as diabetes and obesity (Caldwell et al 2008).

Roosevelt Island residents have consistently raised concerns about the quality and affordability of groceries on the island. According to the AccessRI Community Survey 45 percent of respondents ranked accessibility to food as below expectations or poor. Three stores on Main Street sell groceries: Gristedes, the sole grocery store, Duane Reade, a drugstore chain and M&D Deli. There is also a weekly farmers market every Saturday. AccessRI performed an analysis of these options (see Appendix E), which confirmed that the community does not have adequate access to groceries.

Roosevelt Island has a grocery store coverage of 22,000 square feet for 12,500 residents. This falls below the 30,000 square feet per 10,000 people in a neighborhood ratio that the Department of City Planning recommends for grocery store coverage.

Roosevelt Island’s current coverage is slightly better than the current citywide average of 15,000 square feet per 10,000 people in a neighborhood (NYC Department of City Planning 2008). The expected population growth resulting from the completion of Southtown will push the island’s grocery store coverage below the current citywide average. The expansion of the current grocery store coverage is essential in order to accommodate population growth (NYC Department of City Planning 2008; Laux-Bachand 2001).

Comparing the cost of groceries on Roosevelt Island with surrounding neighborhoods confirmed that groceries are generally more expensive on the island. The most expensive items tend to be vegetables, fruits and dairy products. The most affordable option available to the community is the online delivery service, Fresh Direct.

Roosevelt Islander’s inability to easily access fresh produce on a regular basis creates a significant barrier to healthy living. With the exception of Saturdays, when the farmers market comes to Roosevelt Island, fresh produce on Main Street is scarce. This, in itself, is a significant barrier as studies have linked the visibility of fresh produce to higher consumption levels (Caldwell et al 2008). Gristedes offers produce of acceptable quality but has a limited selection and tends to be expensive. M&D Deli has a limited selection and most of the produce is of poor quality and is more expensive than Gristedes. The farmers market provides the best quality produce and the biggest selection but tends to be the most expensive option and is only available for six hours each week.

AccessRI recognizes the need to increase the accessibility of groceries on Roosevelt Island. As part of the effort to revitalize Main Street, special attention must be paid to increasing the availability of fresh foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables. The grocery store coverage does not meet the needs of current residents and will have to increase to accommodate future population growth.
STREETSCAPE DESIGN

issue: Uninviting Streets, Sidewalks and Storefronts

Roosevelt Island’s Main Street retail corridor was designed as a mixed-use neighborhood highlighted by a semi-enclosed pedestrian arcade in the modernist architectural style. Design elements from the 1960s have not fared well over the years. Public perception has changed over time, and the Main Street corridor is often categorized as uninviting. This feeling is compounded by the light fixtures attached to tubes, which are large and emit a yellow light that flushes out all other colors. A consistent feature of all the arcades along Main Street is the exposed concrete pillars. These pillars serve a structural purpose, but are monotonous and repetitive, contributing to a dreary, claustrophobic environment.

proposal: Streetscape Improvements and Design Guidelines

AccessRI proposes changes to the overall look of the island’s Main Street retail corridor through design guidelines and streetscape improvements. The goal is to create a lively retail corridor that attracts both island residents and visitors to Main Street. In turn, the increase in Main Street traffic will boost sales for existing businesses as well as attract new businesses to the island. Examples of streetscape improvements:

- Remove the horizontal tubes and the high pressure sodium lights
- Install new chandelier fixtures with metal halide lights mounted from the ceiling to create a more natural light
- Place signage banners on the retail wall
- Add texture and color to soften the concrete columns (i.e. mosaic tiling, community murals, green walls)
- Removal concrete pillars that are not structurally significant to create a more open space
- Add planters and benches
Streetscape improvements in the retail corridor would be accompanied by a set of design guidelines for retail outlets. These guidelines are not intended to burden tenants with restrictions, rather, they are meant to steer tenants towards creating an appearance that attracts customers and increases business. Design guidelines increase sign legibility, promote effective window displays, and encourage the overall marketability of storefront space. Examples of design guidelines:

- Maintain 60 percent window transparency
- Mandate signage details: font style and size, banner system, signage height and style

The creation and enforcement of retail design guidelines should be a cooperative effort between three parties: RIOC, the tenant, and the third party master leaseholder. RIOC will be responsible for stipulating in the RFP that design guidelines be included in all proposals. To preserve the modernist character of the island, RIOC would have the ability to use the design guidelines as a policy instrument to shape Main Street’s visual character. Once the bid is awarded and the guidelines are approved by RIOC, it is then up to the third party master leaseholder to enforce these design guidelines. The best way to regulate this is to require that all tenant designs first be approved by the master leaseholder. In addition, the master leaseholder has the right to inspect all retail stores and issue violations as needed.

Two restaurants on the island best illustrate the positive impacts that can be achieved through the use of retail design guidelines. China One, located on Main Street, has neon lights and a nondescript storefront. Meanwhile, Fuji East (see below), located in Southtown, has an attractive awning with legible signage. These two restaurants have the same owner, yet their storefront appearances vastly differ. The design guidelines required by Related Companies in Southtown fostered the attractive Fuji East storefront, while the absence of enforced design guidelines hinders the appearance of Main Street’s China One.

Design requirements can make retail spaces more attractive.
issue: Struggling Non-profits

Roosevelt Island has a strong non-profit tradition. These institutions are an important part of the community service mission espoused on the island from its inception. Presently, a large number of non-profits inhabit space along Main Street in separate quarters. Many of these are smaller non-profits that rely on minimal budgets to cover operating and programming expenses.

proposal: Create Non-profit Incubator

To better serve these institutions, AccessRI proposes the creation of a dedicated non-profit incubator. A multi-tenant non-profit center (incubator) is defined by the Non-profit Centers Network as a building or defined geographic area in which primarily nonprofit organizations are located in proximity to one another and designed to provide quality workspace for tenant organizations and the community (Conti et al. 2008). The benefits of such an institution are increased visibility for non-profits and their work, shared resources and expenses, new initiatives, and capacity building opportunities, while promoting sustainability by using less waste and resources.

In providing a central location for the island's non-profits, the incubator would increase the visibility of the work these agencies take part in. A non-profit incubator can also enhance the community in which it is located. The history of Roosevelt Island is rich with a service mandate in many forms. AccessRI views this proposal as a way of continuing that mandate and strongly recommends the creation of a non-profit incubator/center on Roosevelt Island. RIOC would be officially in charge of operations while the collective non-profits would manage the actual incubator. Maintaining affordability is paramount and reasonable rent and shared expenses ensure that these spaces will provide a much needed sanctuary for Roosevelt Island's non-profits.

Shared resources reduces operation costs

The former Blackwell School site would be an ideal site for the non-profit incubator.
INFRASTRUCTURE
Infrastructure is a network of facilities, systems and equipment required to provide public services and support economic activity (Ontario Ministry of Finance 2008). Investment in infrastructure supports the economy at all levels, enabling increased productivity, improved living conditions, and greater prosperity (Association of Local Government Engineers New Zealand 1998). As an island community, more than 12,000 Roosevelt Island residents rely heavily on infrastructure to provide access to their homes, work, food and to places of recreation and social engagement. Currently, the island has many connections located both below and above ground. These connections range from the island’s unique AVAC waste disposal system (see Introduction), to the subway tunnels and bridges that provide mainland connections on and off Roosevelt Island.

Maintaining the island’s infrastructure in a state of good repair is important because it improves the safety and quality of life for both residents and visitors. The April 2006 power outage on the Roosevelt Island Tram was an important reminder that heavily used infrastructure needs maintenance. Reserves for funding these projects must be put aside so conditions can be improved and plans made for new infrastructure suitable for the 21st century. AccessRI seeks to provide an understanding of the issues that are facing the residents of Roosevelt Island so that adequate measures will be taken to improve the infrastructure systems that make daily necessities more accessible to island residents.
The Roosevelt Island community has expressed legitimate concerns regarding the island’s aging infrastructure. An increasing population continues to put pressure on existing infrastructure, necessitating a thorough examination of island conditions in order to determine what maintenance, upgrades and solutions may need to be implemented. Many issues arise regarding the impacts of an increased population on an aging infrastructure. Perhaps the greatest question addressed to RIOC involves its plans, if any, to solve these issues and how do they intend to involve the community to alleviate the dissatisfaction many residents feel when they confront RIOC with inquiries.

Many Roosevelt Island residents consider island infrastructure to be obstructive and disconnected, making its role antithetical to that in which it is supposed to play within the community. Current structural conditions are beginning to affect reliability, creating inconsistencies in service. This signals disinvestment and uninspired thinking which is counter to the innovative ideas prevalent within Roosevelt Island’s original redevelopment plan.

Public Infrastructure, Public Information
One problem that residents face is identifying which agencies are responsible for the operation and maintenance of the island’s major infrastructure systems. Several agencies have jurisdiction over the island’s varying areas of infrastructure and are responsible for their upkeep. For instance, the waterfront promenade used by many islanders is maintained by NYC Department of Transportation. The maintenance of Main Street, on the other hand is RIOC’s responsibility. This creates confusion for residents attempting to request repairs. Unaware of the proper entity to contact regarding infrastructure issues can be frustrating for island residents. Improving avenues of communication between residents and governing agencies is an important step to improving infrastructure conditions. Community awareness allows a free flow of information resulting in greater access to well maintained, functional infrastructure systems. This is especially important for a growing population. Although, AccessRI recommends a more transparent method of how island infrastructure is being maintained, the forthcoming Governance section offers more ways to improve communication between Roosevelt Islanders and RIOC.

Improving Connections
Improving accessibility to the island’s promenade and to mainland connections is important to realizing the island’s significance to the region due to its historic affordability. Roosevelt Island boasts many assets important to the urban fabric of New York City. With its unique characteristics, connections and related infrastructure should be maintained in order to improve movement to and from the Island.

The Roosevelt Island community has stated that its connections and traveling paths should be improved and maintained remaining accessible to pedestrian activity. The island is extremely walkable and bike-friendly. A renewed commitment to pedestrian access, supportive of all mobile abilities will only be realized with a well-maintained infrastructure. This commitment is a lasting reminder of the uniqueness of the island’s character in continuing to provide safe and efficient mobility for all.
**ISLAND CONDITIONS**

**issue: Assessment of Infrastructure Conditions**

Many residents and island employees using the island’s infrastructure have sought to log a complaint or suggestion but did not necessarily know which agency to contact. Currently, there is no comprehensive report of the island’s infrastructure conditions. During community outreach efforts, residents declared this an issue because the responsibilities of various agencies are unclear. Knowing who to contact regarding these issues and having the ability to access information regarding the status of these conditions are important livability factors.

**proposal: Infrastructure Inventory and Conditions Report**

AccessRI inventoried the current conditions of the island’s infrastructure and created a simple spreadsheet summarizing the findings (see Appendix F, Infrastructure Inventory and Conditions Report). The studio examined the status of the island’s drinking water, parks and recreation, schools, solid waste, wastewater, pavement, and F-train and tram stations. These systems were examined in terms of their basic conditions of use, age, and available funding for the maintenance of the facility or structure. In addition, because many jurisdictions share responsibilities for infrastructure systems in and around Roosevelt Island, the studio included the agency or authority responsible for each specific infrastructure system.

Similar to many urban environments, maintenance and investment toward heavily used infrastructures are not given enough attention. Roosevelt Island is no exception to this, as some of its structures have not been updated or improved since their introduction to the island. These facilities include the tram, the MTA subway station which is approaching 20 years old, and the water supply system which is over 150 years. Often conditions of aging are overlooked, compromising the effectiveness of the infrastructure. There are many benefits to reporting conditions to residents on the island. These types of reports can improve relations between the community and RIOC or any other agency, as they are responsible for providing for an improved aspect of quality of life. AccessRI believes that RIOC should invest time in creating and maintaining these infrastructure conditions reports, which can be used effectively as an advocacy tool to secure much needed funding.

*A view of the Roosevelt Island Bridge*
F-train Survey

Overcrowding on the F-train was the number one transportation concern of attendees at the community forum on transportation, hosted by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and AccessRI. In response, the AccessRI team conducted a survey of Roosevelt Island F-train conditions on six weekday mornings from 7:30 am to 9:30 am, between November 2008 and February 2009, to verify community concerns. Data was collected related to service capacity and reliability, such as the number of people on the platform before departure, the number of people left on the platform after departure, and the time in between the departure of one train and the arrival of the next (see Appendix G).

The AccessRI F-train Survey showed current F-train capacity to be adequate. The F-train is scheduled to arrive every 4 minutes during rush hours. When service ran on or close to schedule, there was generally no difficulty accommodating Roosevelt Island passengers. The problem proved to be related to reliability as a train delay as short as 1-2 minutes caused platform overcrowding. At these times, AccessRI surveyors observed:

- Trains arriving at or close to capacity, with no space near the doors or in the middle of cars
- Wait times of over 10 minutes
- Greater than 1/3 of people were left on the platform after a train’s departure due to crowding; the greatest number having to wait for the following train was 82 people
- Riders unable to board two consecutive trains resulting in wait times as long as 25 minutes
- Wheelchair users unable to board crowded trains

Roosevelt Island’s population is due to increase over the next few years. Given the small margin of error on which the system currently operates, AccessRI believes that Roosevelt Islanders will experience recurrent capacity problems in the future if no action is taken. The MTA has been reluctant to consider solutions, but there are programs that can be implemented to address short-term reliability problems and long-term capacity issues. According to Glenn Lunden, Senior Director of Rail Operations Improvement at the MTA, the Line Manager program has improved the reliability of service on other subway lines and Communication-Based Train Control (CBTC) will allow more trains to run on the F line. The studio supports the Roosevelt Island community in pursuing these and other solutions that will improve service.
Ferry Service

Mayor Bloomberg recently proposed a ferry service linking Roosevelt Island with Midtown Manhattan, though no specific plans are on the table (Brosh 2008). Ferry service has also been advocated by Becker and Becker, the owners and managers of the Octagon, located near the island's northernmost dock. This dock location is very convenient for Octagon and Manhattan Park residents and Coler Hospital staff and visitors. A representative from Becker stated that many Octagon residents work at the United Nations and would patronize a service that landed at the 34th Street dock. He also believed that a number of residents would use ferry service to travel to Pier 11 in the financial district. (Renner Interview 2009)

The firm sponsored engineering and design studies for retrofitting the existing Octagon dock to serve as a ferry landing site. The New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) will ultimately be responsible to fund the construction. No arrangements have been made to contract or subsidize ferry service to this facility, estimated to cost over $1 million annually (Olmsted 2009). The City has continued to abide by the 1986 Mayor’s Waterborne Transport Policy which establishes public investment in fixed-base infrastructure (e.g., ferry terminals) but offers no operating or fare subsidy to private ferry operators. Therefore, a permanent funding source for this service must be identified.

A proactive approach to implementing ferry service should include the following:

• Identify an institutional sponsor for ferry operations. Possibilities may be RIOC, NYC Department of Transportation, the Port Authority (particularly if ferry service to LaGuardia Airport’s Marine Air Terminal were to resume) or a combination of agencies.

• Improve the island’s ferry service infrastructure. Monitor the NYCEDC’s progress in renovating the Octagon Dock and identify other possible landing locations, such as Observation Pier, opposite the Roosevelt Island subway station, or Southpoint Park. The pedestrian access shed for an effective ferry operation is between 1/4 and 1/2 mile (NYMTC 2008). Additional docks will ensure that ferry service is convenient to all island locations.

• Configure ferry service as part of a lateral commuter service. (e.g. Beginning at the now dormant landing at 90th Street in Manhattan, calling at the Octagon Dock, the Observation Pier, and Southpoint Park on the island, then accessing its major Manhattan landing, at the East 34th Street Ferry Terminal in midtown Manhattan with continuing service to the Financial District at Wall Street/Pier 11).

The East River Commuter water taxi network is projected to serve new waterfront destinations in Williamsburg and Greenpoint. Ferry service to Roosevelt Island can be realized in the future by making connections with existing ferry services and other potential markets that will enhance the island’s transportation utility.
**PROBLEM**

**issue:** Incomplete Promenade  
Roosevelt Island’s waterfront is one of its most significant assets. It boasts incredible views overlooking the Queens and Manhattan skyline, and, unlike much of New York City’s waterfront, has unbroken public access unspoiled by highways. Unfortunately, the poor quality of the island’s perimeter promenade robs residents and visitors of full enjoyment of the island’s waterfront. In many places it lacks amenities like benches and landscaping and is too narrow for people to comfortably use. Even worse, it is not complete; it simply disappears in places, making it impossible for users to make a complete lap around the island.

The main problem with the current state of the promenade is its inconsistency. In some sections the promenade does have amenities and is wide enough for comfortable use. In other sections it is too narrow, and frequently blocked by Coler Hospital’s ventilation system; often sections of the perimeter completely lack a promenade.

**proposal:** Enhance Promenade  
AccessRI proposes a continuous promenade so residents can comfortably walk, jog, bike and enjoy the entire island waterfront (see figures 1 and 2). The promenade would be uninterrupted along the island’s eastern and western shores to its southern and northern tips. Where possible, the promenade will be a minimum of 16 feet wide to safely accommodate pedestrians, joggers, cyclists and skaters. The width recommended by New York City Department of Transportation’s Bicycle Master Plan for a multi-use path is 16 feet. The path will be landscaped and will provide benches for residents to enjoy the amazing views (see figures 3 and 4). Along the path there will be wayfinding maps, described in further detail in the Placemaking section of the report, to direct residents and tourists to get to various points of interest on the island.
Figure 1: Promenade before proposed improvements

Figure 2: Promenade after proposed improvements

Figure 3: Existing promenade

Figure 4: Promenade with landscaping and added seating
On-Island Urgent Care

Although Roosevelt Island is part of the borough of Manhattan, due to its island geography, many of its emergency services are located in Queens. The Roosevelt Island Bridge, linking the island to Queens, is the only connection for emergency vehicles to enter and exit the Island.

During the Open House held by AccessRI, members of the community who voiced concerns about accessibility to emergency services, focused on the lack of hospital choices available to them in emergencies. After consultation with the Advisory Committee and Michael Acevedo, Chief Executive Officer of Roosevelt Island Search and Rescue (RISAR), the studio found that, depending on the severity of the emergency and traffic conditions Roosevelt Island residents are given a choice of a hospital. However, these concerns led studio members to investigate emergency medical service availability further.

The AccessRI team uncovered problems related to poor emergency medical response times that may have contributed to the deaths of residents (Main Street Wire 2003). RISAR has recorded response times of over 20 minutes (Acevedo 2008). In the fall of 2008, the FDNY began stationing an ambulance on the island, however, if the ambulance is responding to an emergency on Roosevelt Island or western Queens, which it also serves, it may be off the Island for several hours leaving residents at risk.

Geographic factors compound the problem. When the Roosevelt Island Bridge is raised, the island’s emergency service lifeline is cut. The bridge has also been stuck at several times, resulting in critical patients being transported to hospitals by tram (Roosevelt Islander 2007).

As the population of Roosevelt Island grows older and larger, it is critical that Roosevelt Island residents have reliable access to urgent care service. To reach this goal, AccessRI proposes that a portion of the existing Coler-Goldwater medical facilities be used for urgent care. An on-island urgent care clinic would have several benefits, including providing convenient care, reducing response times and freeing residents from geographical bounds through increased self-sufficiency. Though there are significant hurdles that must be overcome to advance this proposal, such as licensing changes, city and state approvals, establishing urgent care on Roosevelt Island is the only way to ensure dependable urgent care medical services for Roosevelt Islanders in the future.
issue: **Poor Mainland Connections**

The Roosevelt Island Bridge is wide enough to serve the needs of drivers, but it does little to provide a safe, enjoyable crossing for cyclists and pedestrians. While bikers can legally use the bridge’s center span, few do so because riding on its corrugated metal decking can be dangerous (see figure 5). Cyclists can walk their bikes across the 1,000 foot-long pedestrian path, but it is an inefficient use of their travel mode. Many choose to ignore the signs instructing them to walk their bikes, but because the walkway is only six feet wide, it is too narrow for pedestrians and cyclists to comfortably pass (see figure 6).

**proposal: Roosevelt Island Bridge Cantilevered Path**

AccessRI proposes constructing a cantilevered bike path on the south side of the Roosevelt Island Bridge. The path will increase the speed and safety of cycling on and off the island and eliminate current conflicts with pedestrians on the walkway. For example, the Manhattan Bridge has separate paths for pedestrians and cyclists that allows cyclists to ride without fear of striking pedestrians and pedestrians to walk without fear of cyclists. The recommended minimum width for a bi-directional bike path is eight feet (AASHTO 2004), therefore the Roosevelt Island Bridge should have an 8-foot wide path to allow cyclists traveling in opposite directions to pass safely.
Looking To The Future:  
A Pedestrian Bridge To Manhattan

Manhattan is only 700 feet across the East River from Roosevelt Island; but for island residents traveling by bike or by foot, it is miles away. To ride a bike or walk to Manhattan, residents must take a circuitous 2.8-mile route across the Roosevelt Island Bridge, through Queens, and over the Queensboro Bridge. This long and indirect route discourages Islanders from commuting to work by bike. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, less than .01 percent of island commuters biked to work compared to .07 percent for New York City. For pedestrians, 2.8 miles is a considerable journey and at the average walking speed of 2.5 mph it would be take over an hour to reach Manhattan.

Although this is not an official recommendation, AccessRI sees benefits in long term visioning. The studio recognizes that a link from Roosevelt Island to Manhattan could be beneficial serving both Roosevelt Islanders and Manhattanites. This vision could be realized by constructing a 1,000-foot pedestrian and bicycle bridge across the East River. This visionary bridge will allow residents to reach Manhattan by foot in less than five minutes, by bike in less than two minutes, relieving congestion on the tram and the F-train (these travel times are calculated using an average pedestrian speed of 2.5 miles per hour and an average cycling speed of 12 mph). The new bridge would make biking particularly convenient, as it will make it possible to ride from Roosevelt Island to Central Park in 4-6 minutes. The bridge will also provide an emergency access route off the Island in the event of a tram and/or subway outage. A similar bridge, the 1,000-foot Simone de Beauvoir Pedestrian Bridge in Paris, was constructed in 2007 for 21 million Euros ($29.5 million) (Dietmar Feichtinger Architects 2009). Roosevelt Island’s new bridge would be required to have a center span allowing a 140-foot clearance because of the East River’s use as a shipping channel.
Vision of a new connection to Manhattan
GOVERNANCE
In both its physical situation and its governance, Roosevelt Island stands as an “island apart” within New York City. In some sense, Roosevelt Island is a ward of the State of New York, which holds its long-term lease from the City. Therefore, all of its residential and commercial development sit upon City-owned land but is controlled by the State. Since its inception, the state’s governor has, directly or indirectly, played a predominant role in the island’s management and operations. To a large degree, the island’s residents have been excluded from this decision-making process.

The Roosevelt Island community has long sought greater input and control over the island’s direction, in terms of both long-term investment and immediate operational decisions and policy. In this context, access to governance, for Roosevelt Island’s residents, workers and business interests, means that their vital community concerns will be addressed by accountable and responsive political leadership. Further, access to governance means that the islanders’ planning and infrastructure conditions concerns are addressed by RIOC, the state chartered public benefit corporation charged with the management of the community’s basic operations and core infrastructure.
Roosevelt Island is a deliberately planned urban community. Derived from New Deal and Great Society urban planning experiments, Roosevelt Island was one of two federally-sponsored urban “new town in town” developed under Title VII of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1970. The predominant role of New York State in the redevelopment and operation of the city-owned island, under a 99-year lease by the Urban Development Corporation, was an outgrowth of Governor Rockefeller’s urban renewal initiatives which, coupled with New York City’s concurrent fiscal crisis, channeled the initial funding to replace the island’s crumbling, largely abandoned city buildings with new residential development.

The role of New York State and its governor, in particular, has loomed large throughout the 34-year history of Roosevelt Island as a functioning residential community. That role has not always been entirely benevolent, as political appointees have exercised haphazard managerial and fiscal oversight, and the state’s precarious finances have left a structural funding void that has imperiled the construction, operations, and maintenance of the island’s core infrastructure. Unlike the state-sponsored Battery Park City development, Roosevelt Island has no independent taxing or bonding authority, and is dependent on state appropriations or new development fees for operating revenue. With the final three units of the Southtown development on indefinite hold, new development revenues are not likely to be forthcoming in the near term.

AccessRI discovered that Roosevelt Islanders are not reticent in expressing their opinions and ideas for the improvement of conditions on the island. Island residents communicated a strong sense of commitment to their island home but are, at times, frustrated that key players in political decision making, particularly the island’s state-authority corporate managers, do not act in a coordinated and responsive way on their behalf. As a result, physical infrastructure conditions have been allowed to deteriorate, and requisite improvements have not been adequately planned for. Underlying any examination of current physical conditions and any proposed improvements to Roosevelt Island must be a consideration of which parties are responsible to guide and implement any such suggested repairs and improvements.

In response to the perceived inadequacy of state oversight, the Roosevelt Island community, led primarily by its residents, has attempted to assume a greater control over its own destiny. Now in its fourth decade as a functioning residential community development, reforms to RIQC management and board structure have been gradual and victories hard-fought. Through an often contentious process of political evolution, backed by a core community of both newly-arrived and longer-term residents, the island has become a community perhaps unique within New York City -- defined by its island boundaries, cosmopolitan situation, unique state influence and control, and activated citizenry.

Political Representation

Roosevelt Island lies within the political boundaries of Manhattan, while it is physically connected by its one-bridge link to Queens. According to the Census, its population is slightly more affluent and older than the citywide average and consists of some diversity of incomes and ethnic backgrounds, though far short of the diversity goals envisioned by the now-defunct Title VII program. The studio has experienced that the island’s legislative delegation members (city, state and federal) are actively engaged in addressing community concerns; their knowledgeable staff members participate regularly at island meetings and forums, and current delegation members have pushed for member items that bring resources to their island constituents.
Citizen Involvement
Roosevelt Island has a particularly noteworthy, if intangible, human asset -- an active and engaged civic culture. This participation can most visibly be observed in the form of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) a unique umbrella community group that represents residents from all of the housing units on the island and plays a watchdog role regarding the management of RIOC. RIRA’s Maple Tree Group (so named for their first meeting, in July 1997, under the maple tree at Blackwell House) has been a forceful advocate for expanded island resident representation on the RIOC Board, among other reforms. In February 2008, RIRA held the first island-wide election to select candidates for the RIOC Board.

Bolstered by a local community newspaper and several active island-focused blogs that report on significant island issues, those seeking expression of their concerns can easily access informal island-focused media outlets. What appears to be lacking are more formal opportunities to address substantive issues directly with the RIOC Board.

RIOC itself has evolved from a state-controlled subsidiary of the Urban Development Corporation into a nominally independent public benefit corporation under the aegis of the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR). Its level of professional performance and community accessibility has improved over its 25-year lifespan, but there remains room for improvement in transparency and forthrightness of RIOC’s budget and operations to the community, and sometimes even to its own board members. As large a role as the governor plays in the overall management of Roosevelt Island, the appointment and oversight of the RIOC president and CEO has, in the recent past, been subject to both perceived patronage appointment, and lack of oversight by the governor of RIOC manager’s performance. This has led to several dismissals, after protracted community complaints of ineffective and sometimes malfeasant executive management (NYS Assembly 2005). Effective monitoring and control of the RIOC president by RIOC board members is imperative as a first line of locally-aware defense against managerial misconduct.

Even more routine fiscal managerial decisions, such as RIOC’s refusal of state grant funding (which it applied for) to stabilize the Smallpox Hospital have been rightly questioned by oversight agencies (NYC Office of the Comptroller 2003). Effective state oversight would certainly have forestalled this unwise decision.
BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

issue: RIOC Board Performance

The performance of any organization’s board of directors can be affected by a variety of factors, including the knowledge, experience, commitment, leadership and interplay of its members, its operating charter and bylaws, and its relationship with management. In order for the RIOC’s appointed board, constituted of volunteer community members from a variety of professional and experiential backgrounds, to play a substantial role in the oversight of RIOC management, its budget and operations, there is a need to assure that each member receive an adequate level of orientation and effectiveness training (NYS Office of the Comptroller 2004).

It has been reported that RIOC board members are not apprised of substantive policy issues when such items are inserted into the board agenda just before their meetings occur. This leaves no time for board members or community members to consider these items in advance, and formulate reasoned responses and alternatives.

proposal: Board Training and Revised Procedures

It is suggested that each newly-appointed RIOC board member be enrolled in focused, professional authority-board training, such as that provided by CUNY’s Public Authorities Training Program. This will help insure that each board member is aware of the roles and responsibilities incumbent in the position, as well as providing some key analytical tools to make effective decisions as board members. As incumbent board members might likewise benefit from this training, it is further suggested that the first of these trainings be conducted for the entire board membership, on site.

The studio further recommends that RIOC board members, and the community at large, be given advanced notice of all issues of substantial policy impact, at least two weeks in advance of the RIOC board meeting at which they will be considered. Further items of substantive policy impact should be subject to final action at a second reading during the following board meeting, unless extraordinary conditions warrant immediate action.
ACCOUNTABILITY

issue: Poor Communication Channels and Inadequate Responsiveness

The community has expressed a longstanding dissatisfaction with RIOC’s responsiveness to community concerns, complaints and suggestions. For example, the current process for handling requests and complaints regarding services and infrastructure was found to be outdated and in need of improvement. The current complaint mechanism, Ask Erica, operated by RIOC, lacks any official receipt process. Many people who wish to file a complaint are told the CEO will receive an extra copy of those requests.

Many management, governmental and policing entities have both an on-line and in-person components that issue receipts. The New York City 311 non-emergency system should be explored as one model to adopt on Roosevelt Island. In New York City, each call is answered by a 311 operator, who then takes down a request or complaint, or transfers the call to someone else who can. If necessary, a caller is given a tracking number so that he or she can check back on a complaint’s status (Hu 2003). While Roosevelt Islanders rely on many of the services New York City provides, some jobs are more appropriate for RIOC, and this is where RIOC can benefit with an updated 311-model complaint or request mechanism with a receipt number holding RIOC accountable for that individual’s request or complaint.

proposal: Create a Customer Service Request System

The studio has proposed a mechanism to channel this input to RIOC management in a formalized manner that can be accounted for by all parties involved. A model complaint form (see Appendix H, Customer Service Request Form), seeks to rectify this issue of accountability that residents have identified. A new in-person, also doubling as an online, official complaint form should be made available to island residents. These forms should include a date stamp and data entry process information, such as the RIOC employee who is handling this matter, customer response contact information, the description of the individual’s complaint, RIOC internal action or routing information and a description of RIOC’s response to the complaint or request. This new mechanism should improve RIOC’s relationship with the community, promoting a more transparent scheme other than Ask Erica, to make RIOC more accountable for their responsibilities to residents.

In addition to improving community relations, RIOC can use the results of these records and complaints as a tool for advocacy. With these forms, they will be able to analyze community needs and use the results lobby for more funding to improve infrastructure and quality of life on the island. These analyses can also create a listing of priorities that RIOC should consider before acting upon changes that will affect island life.
issue: **Perceived Lack of RIOC Transparency**

Despite some progress in recent years, RIOC has been historically deficient in promptly reporting to its primary constituency, the island's residents. There remains a perceived lack of transparency by RIOC management that has fostered a long-standing and pervasive adversarial culture in its relations with the community. More open operations, combined with less defensiveness by RIOC management, would allow all stakeholders to engage in the constructive dialog. Only then can RIOC plan for its long-term financial health and stability, and to perform its role in assuring the island's critical and long-deferred capital and land use planning needs. RIOC policy, current budget and future projections, and personnel practices must be an open book (Citizens Budget Commission 2006). Only in an atmosphere of disclosure and trust can RIOC form the lasting partnership with its community that will allow the island's needs of the clearly expressed and advocated at the state level, where its financial future will be determined.

proposal: **Restructuring the RIOC Board – Serrano/Kellner Legislation**

To further foster transparency, codify and expand recent gains in self-rule representation on the RIOC Board, and to begin to plan for the island's major capital construction and maintenance needs, the studio strongly supports legislation proposed by State Senator Serrano and Assembly Member Kellner (Serrano S01394 /Kellner A3953 Bill), currently pending in Albany, to structurally reform RIOC.

Specifically, this legislation will amend 1984 RIOC enabling legislation to restructure the RIOC Board to a secure the community election of RIOC board members. The legislation also expands the board membership to nine members, mandating that at least six members be island residents. The Board's role in oversight of RIOC management would be strengthened and more stringent purchase and contracting requirements imposed, in compliance with the newly-passed Public Accountability Authorities Act.

One key facet of this legislation is a mandate that regular audits and studies of physical infrastructure requirements be conducted, and further it obligates the State Budget Director to prepare an annual report to the legislature of RIOC’s budget needs and funding alternatives. In essence, responsibility for the long-range planning and operations of RIOC will be required of the state’s overseers. Coupled with this assessment will be the power to make this happen as RIOC will be able to issue revenue-backed bonds for its long-term capital needs. Finally the legislation will prohibit the development on designated open space areas.
CONCLUSION
For this study, AccessRI sought to expand the scope of Paul Davidoff’s vision of advocacy planning to address issues of accessibility. The studio members actively worked to bring disparate groups together, and involve community stakeholders in order to foster a more equitable, collective planning model. AccessRI employed a strategy of prolonged engagement to keep the community involved during the entire study process. The commitment to the process legitimizes the study and the studio’s mission to create a comprehensive plan that reflects the visions and voices of the residents of Roosevelt Island.

Roosevelt Island’s assets are conducive to the livability of the island, though the studio has identified the possibility of a new, inspired way to approach the future of the island. The study emphasizes the reuse and revitalization of the rich resources already in place to improve the quality of life and access to lines of communication not currently in place. A diverse and growing population requires additional access to amenities for all residents. The studio’s approach to addressing these needs is built around the concept of access to a more livable community. This approach provides the opportunity for the community to strengthen its values of responsibility and innovation by advocating policy makers to bring change that will improve life on Roosevelt Island for all residents.
AccessRI has discussed the key accessibility challenges on Roosevelt Island. These include Placemaking, Revitalization, Infrastructure, and Governance. By addressing these challenges, the studio is confident that the Roosevelt Island community can improve the quality of life for present and future residents alike in addition to transforming the island into a popular visitor destination. AccessRI's main recommendations are summarized below:

**Placemaking**
Roosevelt Island can enjoy access to physical space, information and social networks with the improvements outlined for the island by the studio team. The physical layout of the island possesses a uniqueness, which can be improved upon by rejuvenating existing spaces, gateways and wayfinding system, building on the strengths of the historical and architectural sites, and enhancing pedestrian and bicycle circulation on the island. By creating more human-scaled spaces, the island can modernize while invoking the celebrated utopian ideas of its conception.

**Revitalization**
Roosevelt Island’s Main Street is the historic heart of the island. As it is now, Main Street, the core of the Northtown development, is characterized as an uninviting street with over 29,000 square feet of vacant or underused retail space. These vacancies, the unwitting result of legislated policy, are reversible. Improving Main Street to include much needed community shopping and commercial amenities will transform it into a vibrant, sustainable destination for both residents and visitors.

**Infrastructure**
The island can address its problem of aging infrastructure by improving lines of communication with access to information. An infrastructure conditions report will inform the residents as to responsible parties for maintenance and construction of certain infrastructure. With improved communication channels, physical infrastructure needs can begin to be addressed. Moreover, improving connections throughout the island will enhance residents’ mobility and overall quality of life.

**Governance**
The structure of Roosevelt Island’s governing authority currently excludes the majority of residents from effective access to its decision-making processes. Longstanding initiatives by island residents to achieve greater control of this governance structure have met with limited success. The perception remains that island residents’ interests are not routinely assessed or accounted for by the operating corporation. The studio’s proposals to improve the governance structure of the island can help assure that the corporation becomes more accountable and transparent to its constituents. At the same time, these proposed improvements will forge a more direct, cooperative community-improvement conversation, which has long been lacking.

The studio’s recommendations provide a framework to approach and understand the problems faced by residents and visitors. Both short-term and long-term solutions will enhance access and accessibility to island amenities and services. The recommendations, specifically, make a strong argument for the Roosevelt Island leadership to improve accessibility to a wide range of amenities and services and in a respectful and transparent manner.

Over the past ten months, AccessRI has recognized that Roosevelt Island is a special place. The studio leaves with a sense of appreciation for all the hard work and advocacy that the community leaders provide their constituents. It is the hope of the studio members that this study provides the opportunity for the community to strengthen its values of responsibility and innovation by advocating policy makers to create more positive changes.
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Introduction- Demographics

Community Planning Principles

Placemaking


Revitalization


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Infrastructure


Governance


New York State Assembly, Committee on Corporations, Authorities, and Commissions. 2005.


Appendices
Appendix A
OFFICE OF NEW YORK STATE
SENATOR JOSÉ M. SERRANO

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

FOR

Access Study for Roosevelt Island

Closing Date: October 30th, 2008

Closing Time: 3:00 p.m., Local Time
Appendix B
Demographics:

127 respondents, or 1% of the population of Roosevelt Island completed the AccessRI Community Survey. Based on available census data, the age range, income levels and mobility of the respondents to the Community Survey are somewhat representative of the Roosevelt Island population.

1. Please indicate your gender.

   ![Gender Pie Chart]

   - Male: 45%
   - Female: 55%

2. Please indicate your age range.

   ![Age Range Bar Chart]
3. Please indicate how you self-identify.

4. Please describe your employment status.
5. Please rank your mobility.

![Mobility Chart](image)

6. Please indicate your income range.

![Income Range Chart](image)
Healthcare

Overall the respondents to the survey do not see significant barriers to accessing health care; 96% are covered by some form of insurance and 72% ranked their ability to access healthcare as Good or Excellent. Residents do not travel far to visit the doctor; 23% of respondent's primary care physician is located on island, while 52% of respondents’ primary care physician is located on the east side of Manhattan.

7. Please indicate if you have some form of health coverage.

8. Please rank the availability of health care services to your household.
9. Please indicate where your primary physician located.

![Bar Chart: Location of Primary Physician]

**Retail**

Overwhelmingly respondents rank the accessibility of retail and commercial services as a significant barrier. 89% of respondents ranked the selection of retail services as Below Expectations or Poor. The accessibility of food is the biggest concern. 79% respondents ranked the selection of food services as Below Expectations or Poor. 46% respondents rank their ability to access groceries as below expectations or poor. When asked to elaborate on what types of retail was desired on Roosevelt Island, 98% responded with additional food or grocery services.
10. Please rank the quality of retail services on Roosevelt Island.

11. Please rank the ability of your household to access groceries as needed.
Education

Overall, respondents do not see significant barriers to accessing educational institutions and services. 24% respondents had children enrolled in school. Despite the presence of grade school and middle school on Roosevelt Island 81% of respondents with children in grade school send them off island as did 100% or respondents with children in middle school. Broadly speaking, respondents are satisfied with the quality of the educational institutions and services available to their households.

12. Please indicate if members of your household attend an educational institution (pre-school through high school).

13. Please indicate the type of institution.
14. If one or more members of your household is enrolled in grade school (Kindergarten – 6th Grade), please indicate the location.

15. If one or more members of your household is enrolled in middle school (6th Grade-9th Grade), please indicate the location.
16. If one or more members of your household is enrolled in high school (9th Grade-12th grade), please indicate the location.

![Location of Child's High School](image)

17. Please rank the quality of the educational services available to your household.

![Quality of Educational Institutions](image)
Housing

Overall respondents to the Community Survey do not see housing as a significant issue. 67% rank their satisfaction with their current housing as Good or Excellent. 84% indicated that they are satisfied or better with the likelihood that they will remain in their housing for the foreseeable future.

18. Please indicate your primary place of residence.

19. Please indicate if you rent or own your home.
20. Please rank your satisfaction with your current housing.

21. Please rank the likelihood that you will remain in your home in the foreseeable future.
Commute

Overall respondents do not see significant barriers in commuting on and off Roosevelt Island. 81% of respondents commute on a regular basis and 71% rank their commute as Satisfactory or better. 41% of respondents have commutes that are between 30 and 45 minutes. 39% respondents have commutes that are less than one half hour.

22. Please indicate if commute off of Roosevelt Island for work, school or volunteer activities on a regular basis.

23. Please indicate the average time of your commute.
24. If you commute during the morning rush hours, please indicate the average time you leave your home each morning.

**Morning Commute Start Time**

![Bar chart showing morning commute start times](chart)

25. If you commute during the evening rush hours, please indicate the average time that you arrive home each evening.

**Evening Return Times**

![Bar chart showing evening return times](chart)
26. Please rate the quality of your commute.

![Quality of Commute](image)

**Travel Modes**

Roosevelt Island is heavily dependent upon mass transit. 61% of respondents do not keep a vehicle on Roosevelt Island and 31% never drive. Respondents ranked the Subway as their top mode and the Tram as second, both in terms of importance and preference. Slightly more respondents 42% ranked MTA Bus service as their third travel mode preference than the 36% who ranked the automobile as third. 27% of respondents consider walking as a secondary mode for traveling on and off of Roosevelt Island. 70% of respondents never use bicycles for traveling on and off of Roosevelt Island, but 19% do consider it a secondary form of transport. Yet 59% of respondents indicated interest in establishing a bicycle share program on Roosevelt Island. The Red Bus is an integral part of the transportation network with 31% of respondents using it daily and 28% using it several times a week.
27. Please rank your top three forms of transportation for traveling on and off of Roosevelt Island.

![Travel Mode Preference Chart]

28. Please rate the importance that each method of traveling on and off of Roosevelt Island plays in your life.

![Travel Modes Ranked by Importance Chart]
29. Please indicate how often you use the Red Bus service on Roosevelt Island.

![Bar chart showing Red Bus usage by respondents.]

30. Please indicate if you park a vehicle on Roosevelt Island.

![Pie chart showing whether respondents park vehicles on R.I. with 61% saying no and 39% saying yes.]
31. Please indicate where you park your vehicle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parking</th>
<th>Motogate</th>
<th>At my building</th>
<th>Special Permit parking</th>
<th>On the Street</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32. On scale from 1 to 3 please rate your interest in the establishment of a bicycle sharing program on Roosevelt Island. A bicycle sharing program would offer residents the use of communal bicycles that could be used for circulation around on Roosevelt Island.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest in Bicycle Share Program</th>
<th>Very Interested</th>
<th>Interested</th>
<th>Not at all Interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public Space

With a few notable exceptions, respondents are pleased with the public spaces. The overall quality of Main Street ranked poorly as did the quality of public signage. With the exception of the sports facilities most public spaces on Roosevelt Island received high rankings for accessibility.

33. Please rank the following aspects of the public spaces on Roosevelt Island.

![Quality of Public Spaces](image1.png)

34. Please rank how accessible the following public spaces are to you and members of your household.

![Accessability of Public Spaces](image2.png)
35. Please indicate if members of your household use the playgrounds on Roosevelt Island.

36. Please indicate if members of your household use the sports facilities on Roosevelt Island.
37. Please indicate if members of your household utilize the community gardens on Roosevelt Island.

Respondents who use community gardens

- Yes: 28%
- No: 72%

Public Safety

Overall, respondents do not see significant barriers to accessing emergency services; 62% of ranked FDNY coverage as Good or Excellent and 51% ranked Emergency Medical Services as Good or Excellent. Respondents are less satisfied with Public Safety, with 33% ranking it Below Expectations or Poor. Most respondent are not personally prepared for an emergency, 70% of respondents do not have an emergency evacuation plan and 75% do not have Go-bags.
38. Please rank the adequacy of the emergency response services on Roosevelt Island.

![Adequacy of Emergency Services](chart)

39. Please indicate if your household have an emergency evacuation plan.

![Households with Emergency Evacuation Plans](chart)
40. Please indicate if your household have a Go-bag (emergency evacuation kit).
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Vegetables</strong></th>
<th><strong>Price</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes (bagged, 5lbs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrots (bagged, 1lbs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broccoli (Bunch)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinach (4oz)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Fruits</strong></th>
<th><strong>Price</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banana (per pound)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple (Red Delicious)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange (Juice, Bag)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Protein (by weight)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Price</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boneless Chicken Breast (2)</td>
<td>per lbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopped Meat</td>
<td>per lbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooked Ham (Pork Shoulder)</td>
<td>per lbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Beans (boxed black beans 16 oz)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Grain/Cereals</strong></th>
<th><strong>Price</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cereal - (Cheerios 14 oz)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice (Carolina, boxed white)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta (Boxed Ronzoni Spaghetti)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sliced Bread</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Dairy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Price</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallon Milk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt (32 oz, Plain Dannon)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter (4 sticks, land o lakes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs (grade A brown)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Notes**                               |           |
## Infrastructure Inventory and Conditions Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
<th>Agency / Authority</th>
<th>Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water Supply</strong></td>
<td>NYC Department of Environmental Protection</td>
<td>NYC DEP budgets $262 million for operations and $114 million for capital projects annually. Water usage for Island residents amounts to at least 4.1 million gallons per day for each use.  NYC water supply system is over 150 years old. Bowery Bay WPCP is 70 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parks and Recreation</strong></td>
<td>NYC Department of Parks and Recreation</td>
<td>$1.63 B on city-wide capital park and recreation improvements and projects (2010-2013); RIOC will spend $1.28 M (2009-14) on its park and recreation infrastructure.  35.1 acres of open space; Open space ratio = 2.40 acres of open space per thousand residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools</strong></td>
<td>The Child School</td>
<td>PS/IS 217: Capacity 789, 56% seats filled.  Child School: Capacity 278, 101% seats filled (unconfirmed).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solid Waste</strong></td>
<td>Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation</td>
<td>$2.9 M is budgeted for maintenance and capital improvements (2009-14).  AVAC system is 33 years old; operations cost $500,000 annually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wastewater</strong></td>
<td>NYC Department of Environmental Protection</td>
<td>Sewage amounts to at least 4.1 million gallons per day for the residents and students of the Island.  The capacity of the WPCP that serves the Island has a capacity of 150 million gallons per day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pavement</strong></td>
<td>Not reporting</td>
<td>Not scheduled for construction, call Keith Howard, Sidewalks Program, NYC Dept. of $6.5 M RIOC funding for road improvements and brick replacement. (2009-14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F Train Station</strong></td>
<td>Metropolitan Transportation Authority</td>
<td>MTA New York City Transit will spend $2.75 billion over 2008-2013 budget years on station improvements and bringing it to State of Good Repair.  Average weekday ridership is 5,871 in 2007.  Station is 20 year old; Subway service began in 1989.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roosevelt Island Tram Station</strong></td>
<td>Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation</td>
<td>$18.4 million budgeted until 2014 for capital projects.  State is providing $15 million for modernization project (2009).  Satisfactory. Typical wear and tear issues.  32 years old; Modernization begins in August.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citations for this data is located in the Works Cited section.
Appendix G
# F Train Observation Form

## Name: 

## Date: 

## Day of the week: 

## Time of day: 

## Weather Conditions: 

## Location on platform: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of 1st subway Car</th>
<th>Time of Arrival</th>
<th>Time of Departure</th>
<th># of People Left on Platform after Departure</th>
<th>Is train at full capacity?</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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Appendix H
NOTE: RIOC BOARD OF DIRECTORS RECEIVES COPIES OF ALL COMPLAINTS

Customer’s Name (Anonymous submissions are not accepted) | Date | File #  
---|---|---

Street Address | Phone (Residence) | Phone (Business)

Mailing Address | Postal Code | Complaint taken by

DESCRIPTION:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank-you for your input. Your completed form will be forwarded to the Department responsible for the service discussed. This information is collected for the purpose of responding to your concern.

If you have not been contacted within 72 hours regarding your concern OR if you are dissatisfied with the response, please contact __________________________.

For further information, contact the Director of __________________________.

For Completion by Administrative Services’ Department:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building/Unit:</th>
<th>Location of Complaint:</th>
<th>Category:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Department for Action (if known): | Date Filed: |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date(s) Customer Contacted:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contacted by: ________________</th>
<th>By phone ☐ or letter ☐ (Copy attached)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Print Employee Name)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date Concluded: __________________ Signature of Department Head: __________________

Entered in Database: ____________________________