

Juice Crew Park

Taking Down Borders in Queensbridge



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Introduction

Although ‘Queensbridge’ now commonly refers the areas under and around the Queensboro Bridge in Queens, including the popular Queensbridge park, the name originates from the Queensbridge Houses. The largest public housing development in North America, the Queensbridge Houses were finished in 1940 on a 61 acre tract around old factories. The development is famous for the many hip hop artists that lived there, and infamous for the crime and gang activity that ravaged it for decades. The Queensbridge Houses have largely recovered from these tumultuous times. Unfortunately, however, after two years without a single murder, a man was killed there on May 18, 2017.¹

Like other American public housing developments, Queensbridge remains isolated from other neighborhoods. Its superblock layout also disconnects it from the city grid, and both pedestrian and automobile access into the development are limited by design. The surrounding area remains industrial, further isolating Queensbridge. Exacerbating this isolation is the fact that the entire stretch of land just south of the development (about 1500 ft in length) under the Queensboro Bridge is completely fenced off, cutting off access communication between Queensbridge and neighborhoods to the south. The eastern border is comprised of 21st street, a wide, high-speed road, even more menacing due to the highway like vehicle entrance to the Queensboro Bridge. These barriers isolate the Queensbridge community. My project aims to mitigate this isolation through the redesign and opening up of public space under and adjacent to the Queensboro Bridge, the creation of an innovative park, and strategic rezonings in the blocks surrounding the Queensbridge houses.



Queensbridge in the '90s



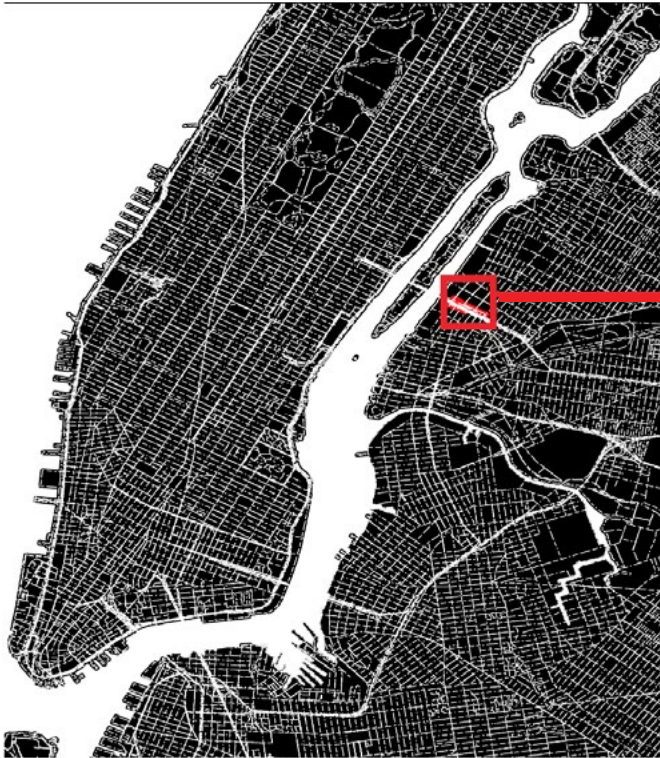
Queensbridge Today

Taking down barriers, making streets safer, and updating zoning regulations to allow for commercial amenities, street life, and more housing are not the only elements in this project. The park's programming and design must be carefully crafted to bring a constant flow of diverse users.

My solutions and vision are simple and pragmatic. All of my physical proposals are on city-owned land. I envision physical changes to spaces that are currently under-utilized, and to streets that no longer see the same levels or types of traffic that they were designed to carry while industry boomed along the Queens waterfront. Population has seen rapid growth in all directions, with a number of high density residential rezonings along the waterfront and along Sunnyside Yards. These communities would also benefit from changes I propose.

1. Ariel Hernandez, "First Murder in two years at Queensbridge", May 18, 2017, Queens Tribune, <http://queenstribune.com/first-murder-two-years-queensbridge/>.

Queensbridge



Industrial

Ravenswood Generating Plant
(Natural Gas)

Park and Water Access

(Queensbridge Park and East River)

Residential

Queensbridge Houses (NYCHA)

Greenway

Vacant and City owned Land

The elements above define Queensbridge. The industrial surroundings isolate and contaminate. The greenway and park are wonderful amenities that bring nonlocals to and through the area. The partially vacant, park-owned land adjacent to and under the bridge lies in fallow, awaiting transformation and improvement. Nestled amongst these diverse elements reside over 6,000 residents of the Queensbridge Houses.

Queensbridge Area Overview



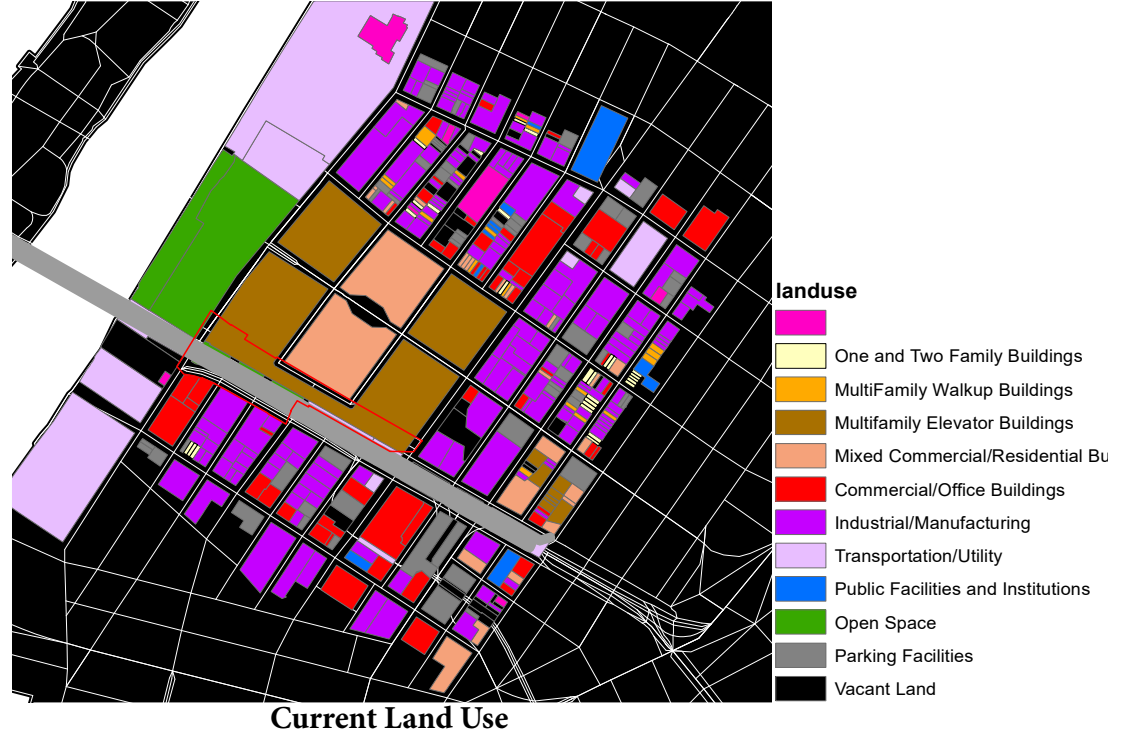
Well Forested



**Owned by
NYC Parks**



**Not especially
vulnerable to
flooding.**



The Queensbridge Houses are well forested. Trees are an important element of the urban fabric. They offer shade, keep the air and ground cool, host a variety of fauna, make places more pleasant, and even clear the air of harmful particles from industry and traffic.

Although the area is largely industrial, many industrial businesses have moved out of the area and city altogether, creating opportunities for large-scale transformation. Area streets no longer carry the same amount of traffic, and no longer must be designed for large, freight carrying trucks. They can be redesigned to meet the new demands of a changed city.

Stakeholders and Players

As this area transforms and sees inevitable redevelopment, who will be affected? Consideration for and engagement with local communities should be a central part of this redevelopment, and will be essential to creating the equitable, progressive park that I envision. Below is a list of communities that will be impacted by future redevelopment and the creation of Juice Crew Park.

Stakeholders

Queensbridge Residents
Industrial Businesses
Park Visitors
Passers Through
Western Queens Residents

Agencies

DOT
NYCHA
NYC Parks and Recreation
DEP
MTA (Property on Site)



Queensbridge Issues

Traffic and Air Pollution



Barriers



The eastern border consists of 21st St, a high speed road lacking pedestrian friendly design.

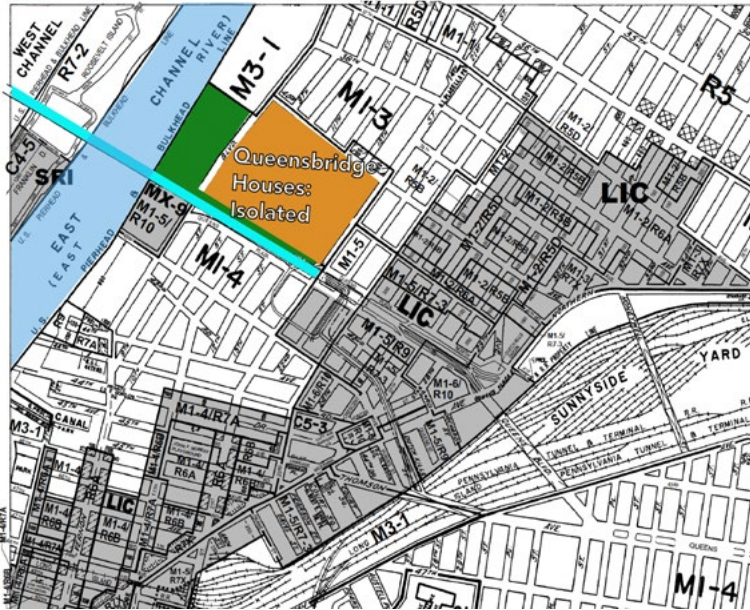


Barriers prohibit access and isolate communities.

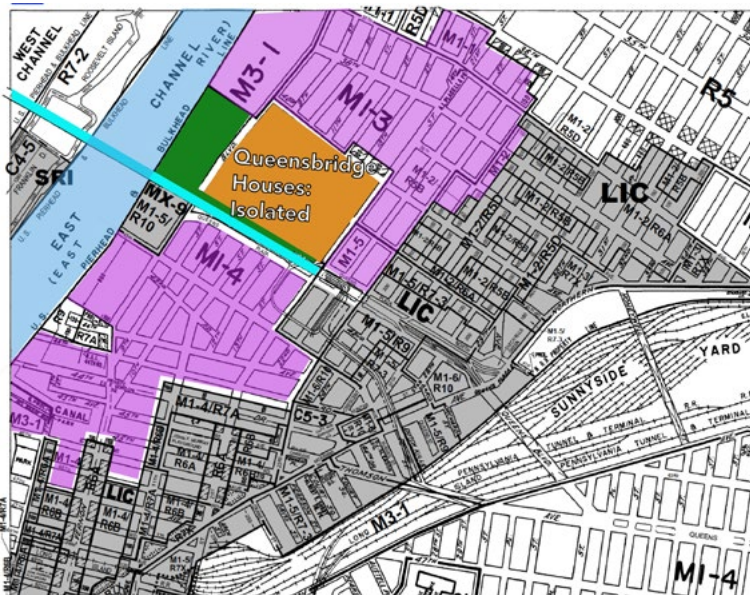


Physical barriers under bridge block access for 6 blocks.

Project Context



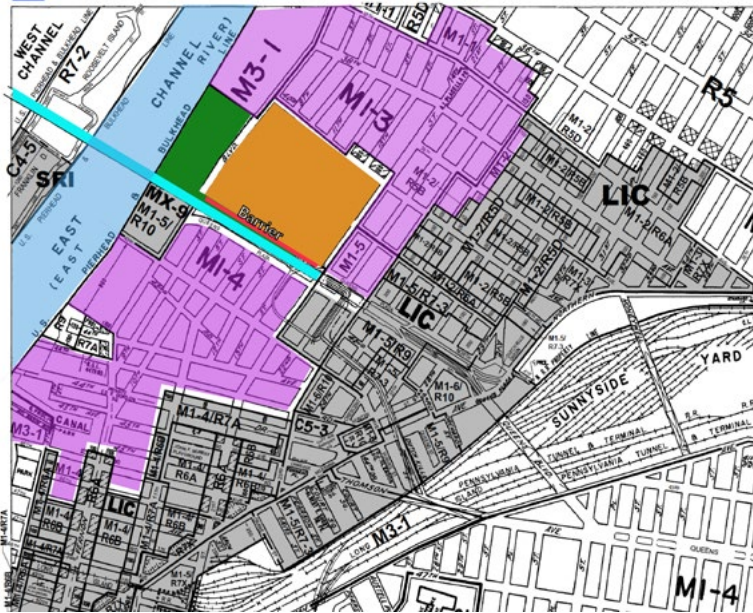
Queensbridge is adjacent to the East River, an incalculable asset to the area. Queensbridge Park sits between the river and the Queensbridge Houses. The Queensboro Bridge passes just to the South of the Queensbridge Houses. The Queensboro Bridge is a major connection between Queens and Manhattan. A greenway passes along Vernon Blvd south to the Pulaski bridge (to Greenpoint, Brooklyn), north to Astoria and northern Queens, and west along the northern side of the bridge to the entrance to the Queensboro bridge a few blocks west of the Queensbridge Houses. This greenway brings a large number of cyclists through the Juice Crew Park site, and plays a central role in the development of the park.



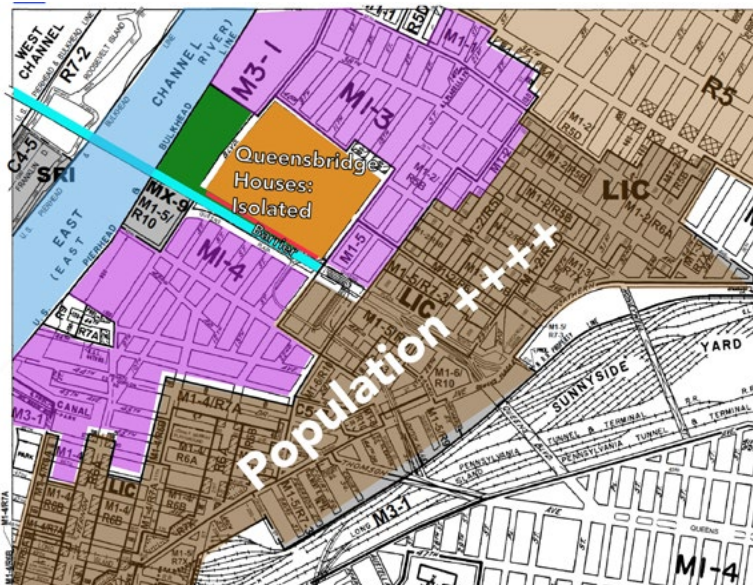
The Queensbridge Houses were built in the middle of a large industrial zone in 1938. This creates a significant buffer between Queensbridge and other communities. Industrial zones are also toxic, and characterized by large, dangerous streets that are designed for large trucks. As industry no longer relies on access to the East River, and as the value of such areas continues to climb (along with rents), the future of industry in the area is uncertain. There is now a tremendous opportunity to redevelop the Queensbridge area. This means building new parks, altering road designs, and encouraging the growth of new neighborhoods.

Project Context

The area under the bridge is the site where I propose Juice Crew Park. It is currently completely fenced off, prohibiting communication between the areas north and south of the bridge. Removing this barrier would be incredibly beneficial to access and walkability in the Queens-bridge area.



Another important consideration for this project is the rezoning along Sunnyside Yards. Development in the area, which is occurring at a frenetic pace, is characterized primarily by tall residential skyscrapers. This new population would benefit from new park space and a green corridor leading to Manhattan. As the city grows and densifies, transit and greenways will inevitably replace some roads in and around Manhattan.



Ending Queensbridge Isolation

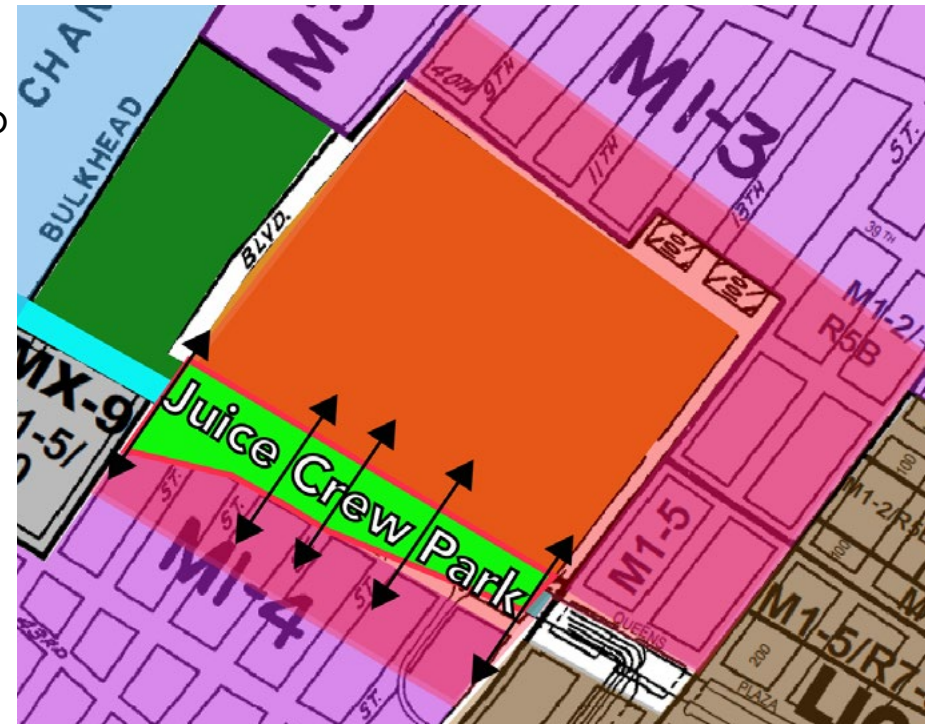


Parks Without Borders

Project Key Elements

- Create new 'borderless' park under Queensboro Bridge.
- Strategically rezone streets around Queensbridge Houses. Commercial overlays and mixed use buildings would help bring amenities and wider community to the area.
- Improve Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities in Area, especially at 21st St.

Parks Without Borders, <https://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/planning/parks-without-borders>



Juice Crew Park

The site where I envision Juice Crew Park sits under the Queensboro Bridge, its borders formed by Vernon Blvd. to the west, 21st St. to the east, the Queensbridge Houses to the north, and Queens Plaza South to the south. Currently the space is broken up with barriers, fences, muddy, unused open space, rampant illegal car parking, garbage, dilapidated park space, NYCHA parking lots, and fenced off Parks and Rec operational space under the bridge. Pictures are worth a thousand words. In the coming pages I include a plethora of images and diagrams to orient readers with the site's current conditions and elements.



Under Queensbridge

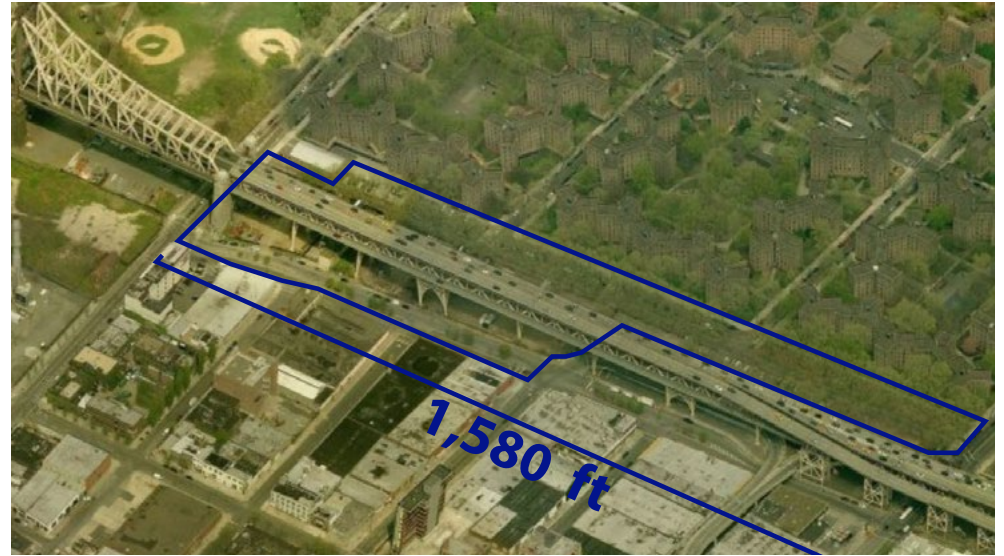
Current Conditions

Park and Rec storage, compost, and junk yard

Greenway and Baby Park

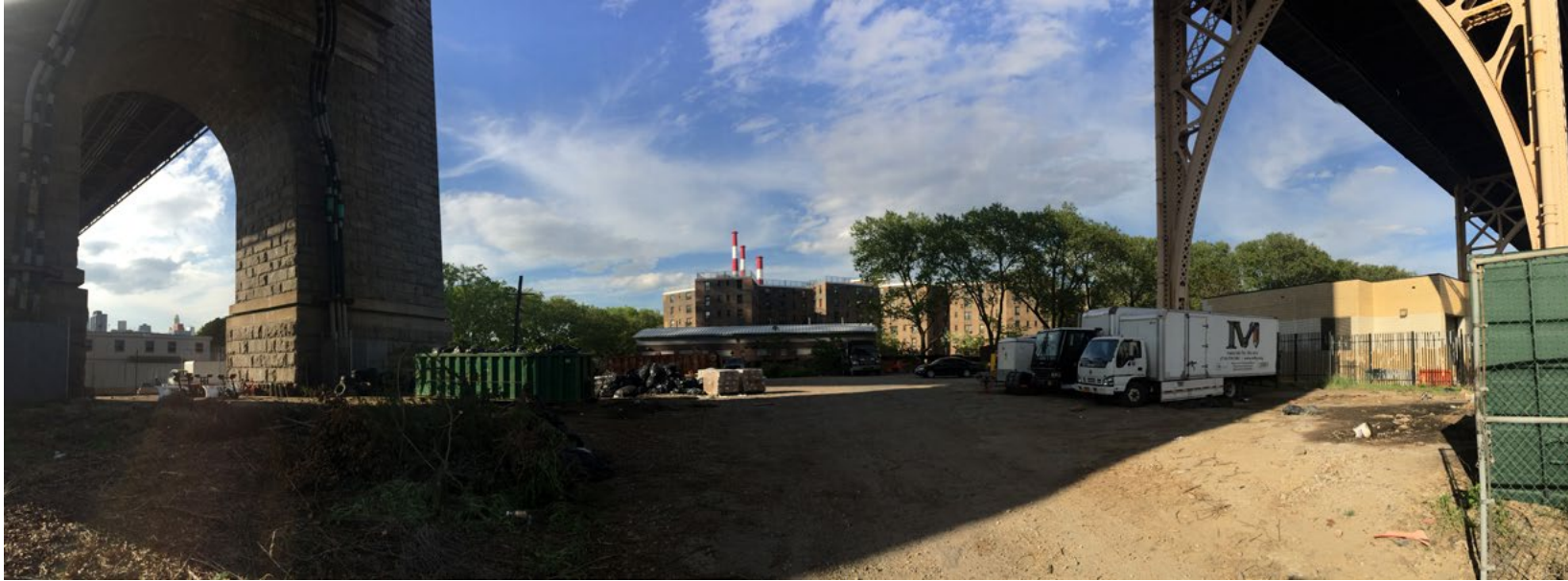
Trees and Unused space

Parking



Under Queensbridge

Current Conditions



Juice Crew Park Future Site - 450,858 ft²



Current Uses at Site

---- Existing Fence or Barrier

■ Vacant

■ NYCHA parking

■ Green Open Space

■ Park Operations

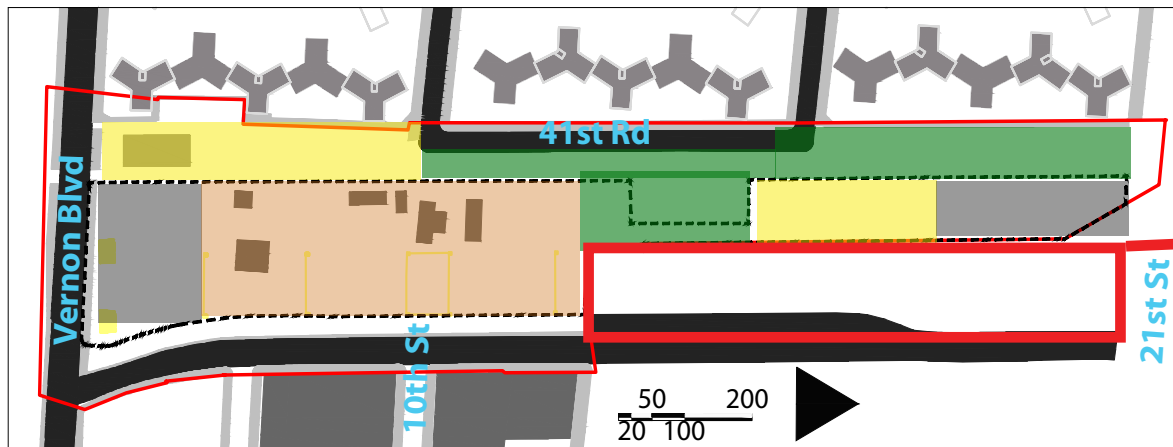
Remove

Repurpose into Park Space

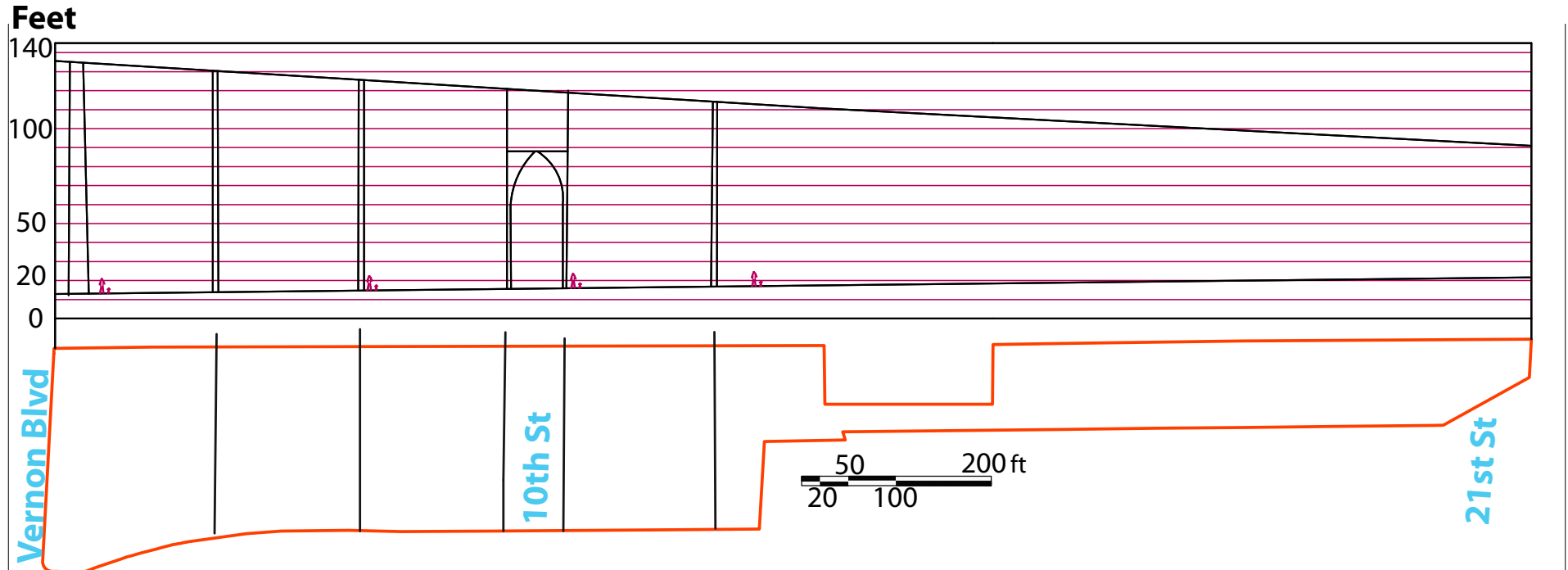
Consolidate and Remove

Preserve and Improve

Consolidate and Relocate



Elevation



Overhead structure is so tall that the area is quiet and still receives plenty of light and air.

Bridge structures are monumental and should be celebrated.

Juice Crew Park Key Elements

Barriers Removed

- Queens Plaza South width cut in half.
- 21st Street calmed.
- NYCHA fences removed.
- Current parks operations consolidated and moved
- Borderless park design

Designed for diversity

By investing in park amenities and equipment that are in high demand, but scarce in the city, Juice Crew Park aims to attract a diversity of users and remove social barriers.

Community Engagement

The Compost and Gardening Center will help local residents create new community gardens on NYCHA property.



Barriers reinforce and maintain social inequality. This striking example is in São Paulo, Brazil. Photo by Tuca Vieira



A gardening and farming program would foster community and well-being.

Park Elements

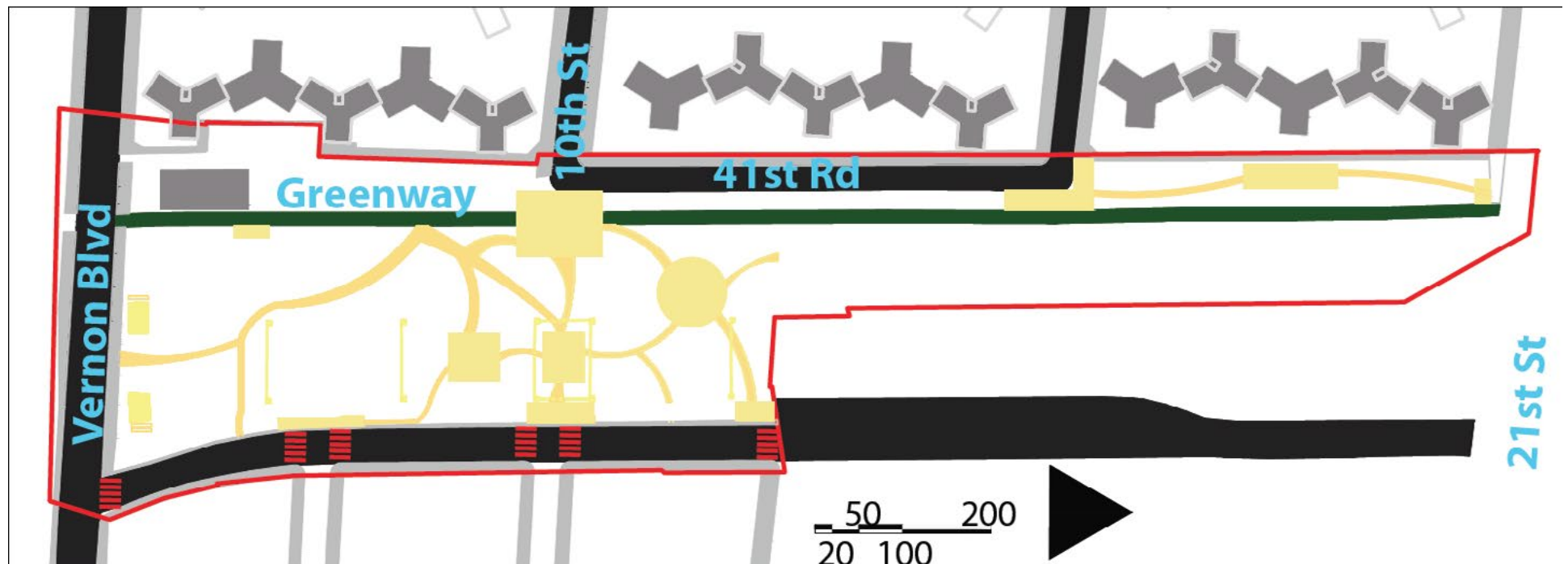
Communication

Paths

Greenway

Plazas

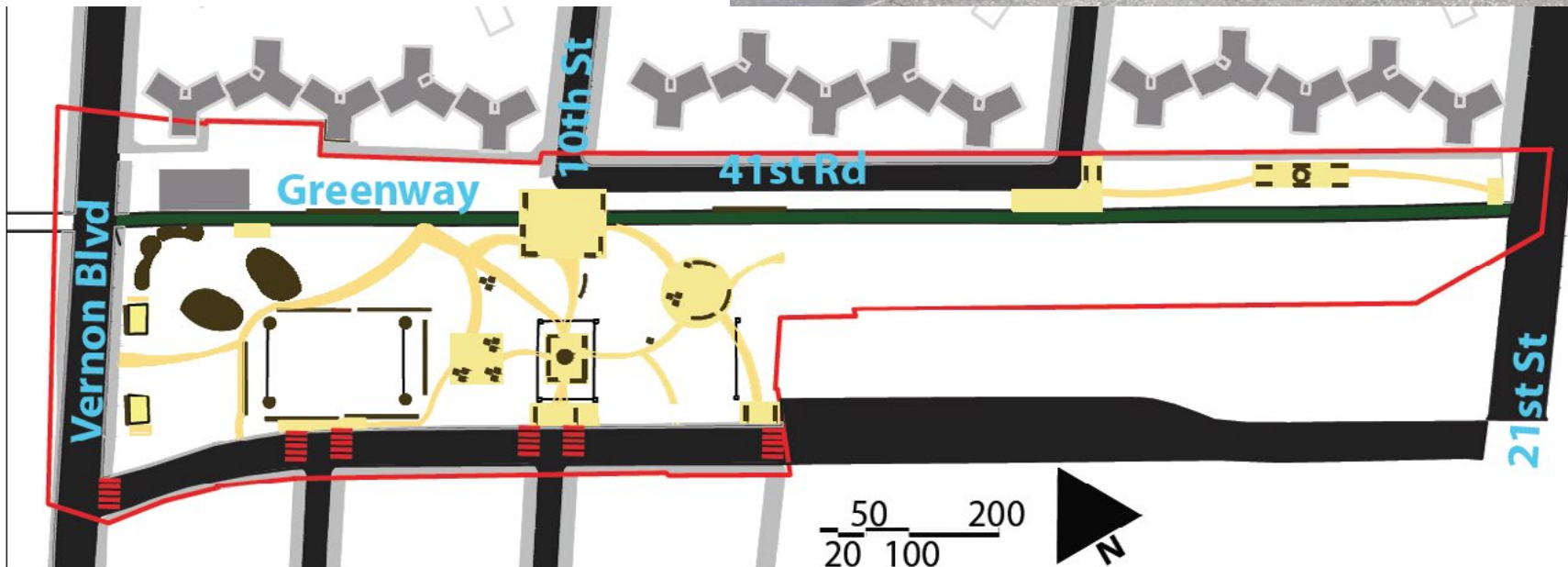
Well marked raised crossings
at intersections



Park Elements

Seating

- Marks virtual 'streets' and helps guide movement through park.
- Designed to program space: seating in skate park is designed to be skated on. Other seating in park is designed to prevent skating.
- Multitiered design for spectators in sports area.
- Evenly spaced throughout garden for comfort



Elements - Programming

Sports

Climbing, Basketball and Hockey, Skateboarding.

Art and Music

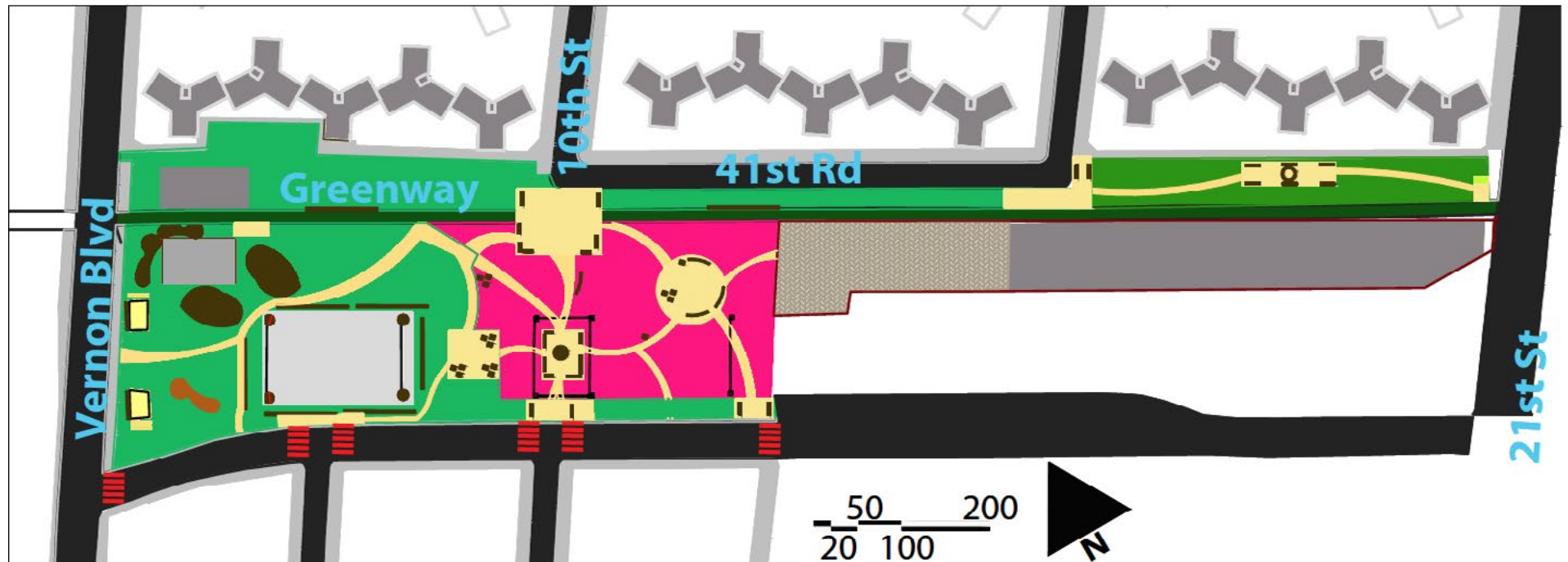
Stage with power for P.A. and Dance Floor. Commissioned graffiti artists.

Nature

'Forest' and Formal Garden

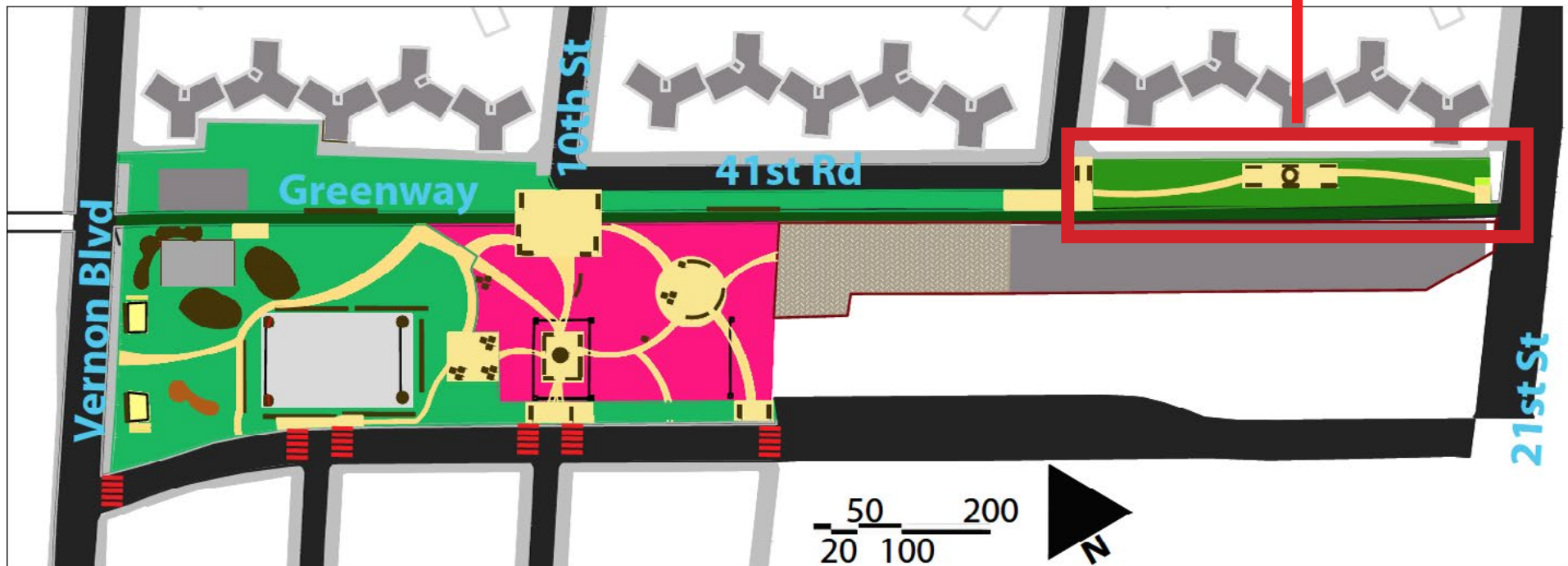
Education

Compost and Gardening Center



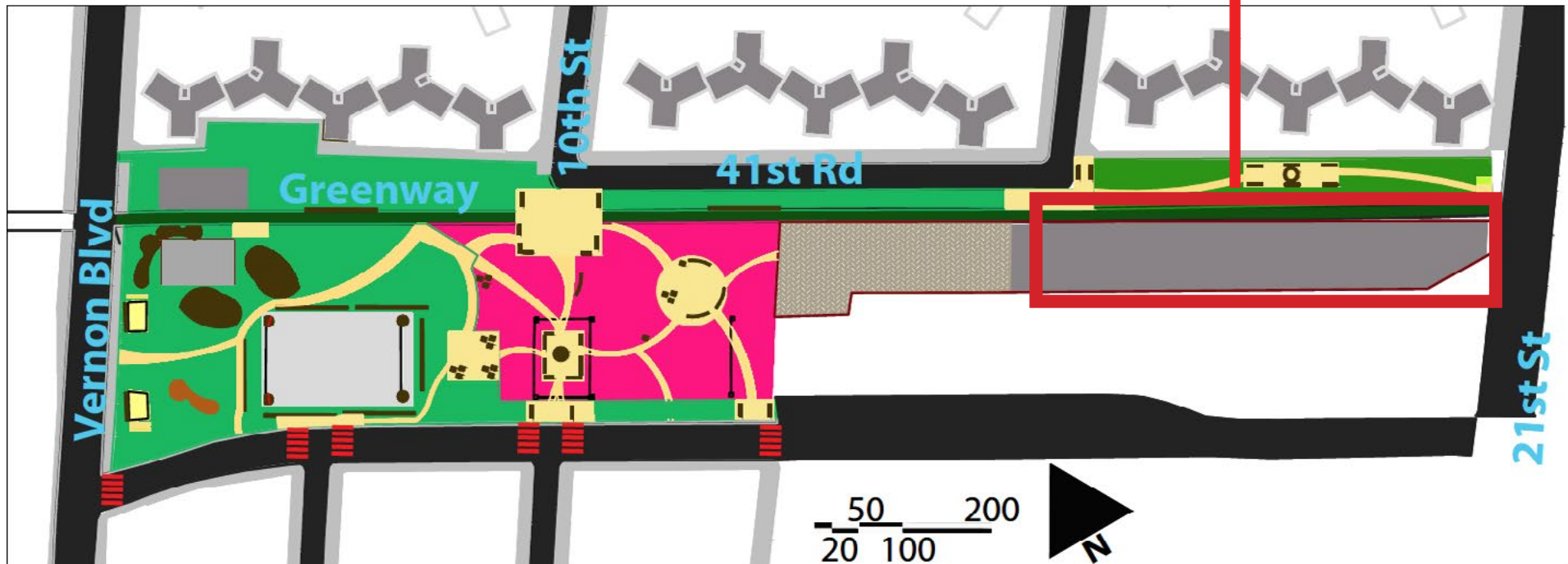
Elements - Forest

Trees add great value to the city. They clean the air and soil and beautify the city. Juice Crew Park preserves these areas and improves them with the addition of a small plaza and seating, as well as grass and flowers where there is currently only mud.



Elements - Park Operations

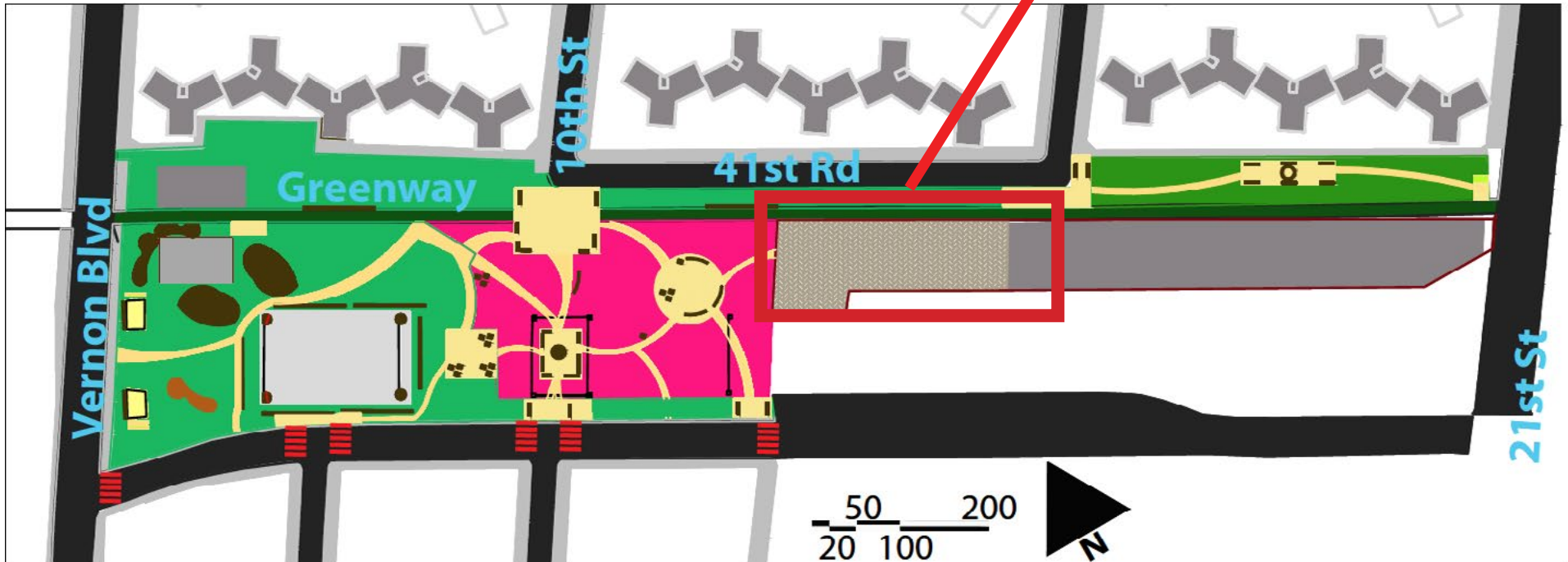
The only way to fully remove the barriers is to consolidate and/or move some of Parks and Recreations operation space.



Elements

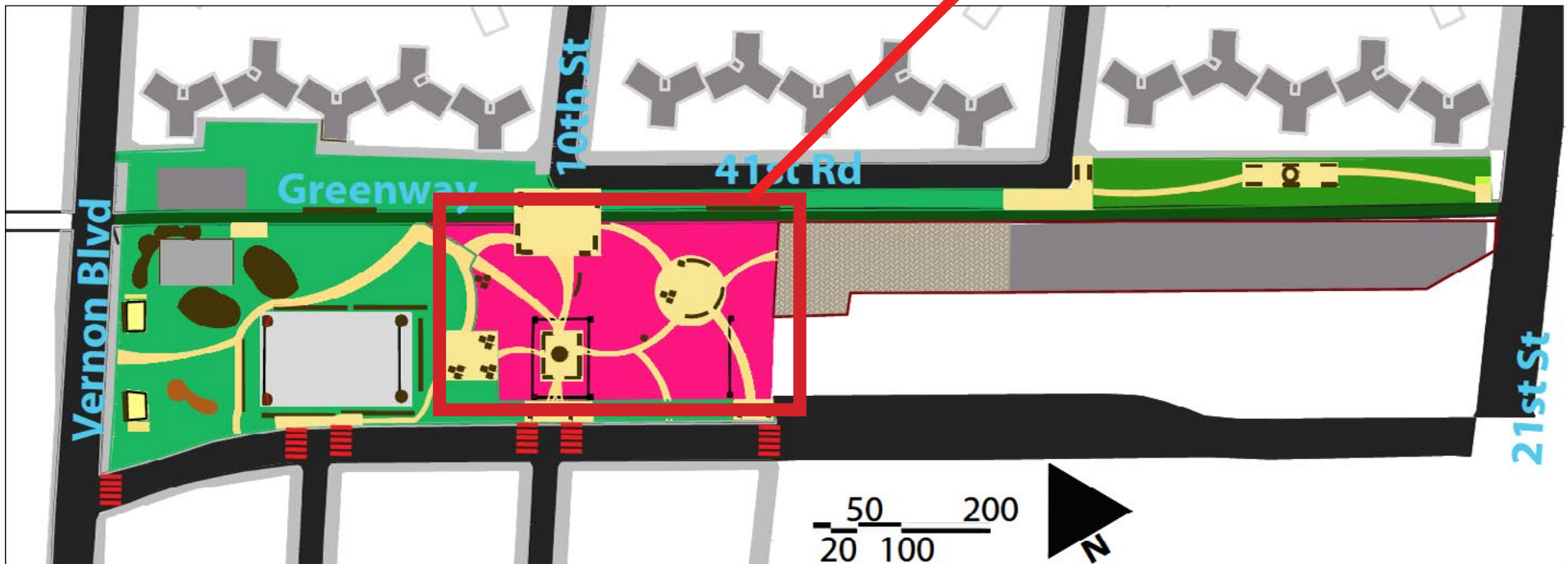
Community Composting and Garden Center

Juice Crew Park engages the community in a number of activities. At the Composting and Garden Center, families can take skills and rich soil back to their homes to start their own gardens!



Elements - Formal Garden

A formal garden with small plazas, wandering pathways, trees, and a variety of plants and flowers connect communities North and South of the bridge in beautiful ways.

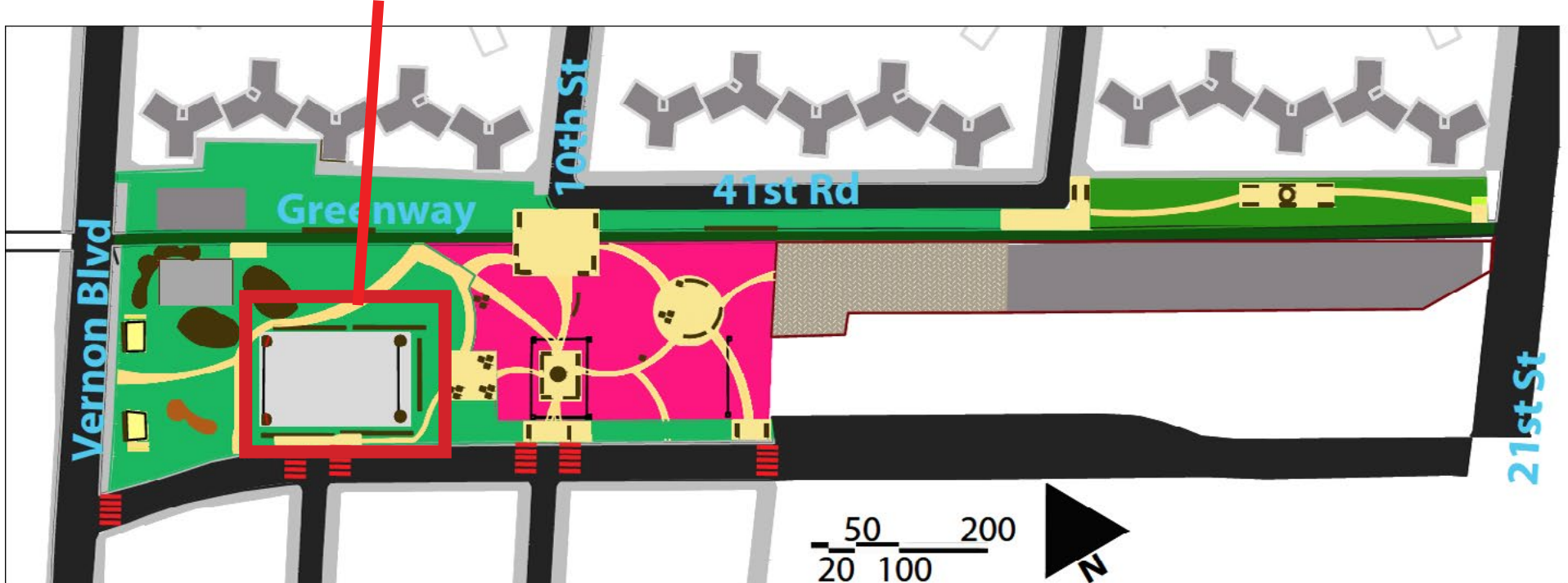




Elements

Skate Park, Dance Floor, Stage, Exhibition Space

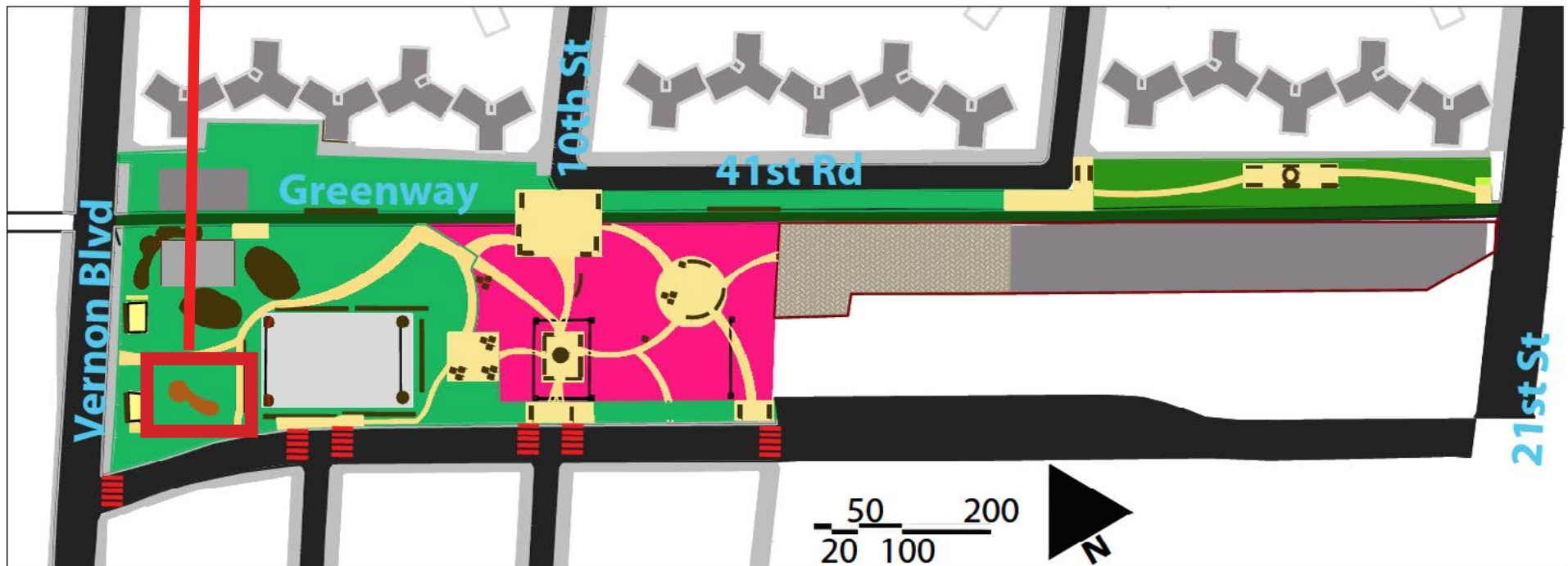
This flexible space functions primarily as a skate park. Stunt furniture is quickly removed to make way for a dance event, art show, or concert.





Elements - Rock Climbing Wall

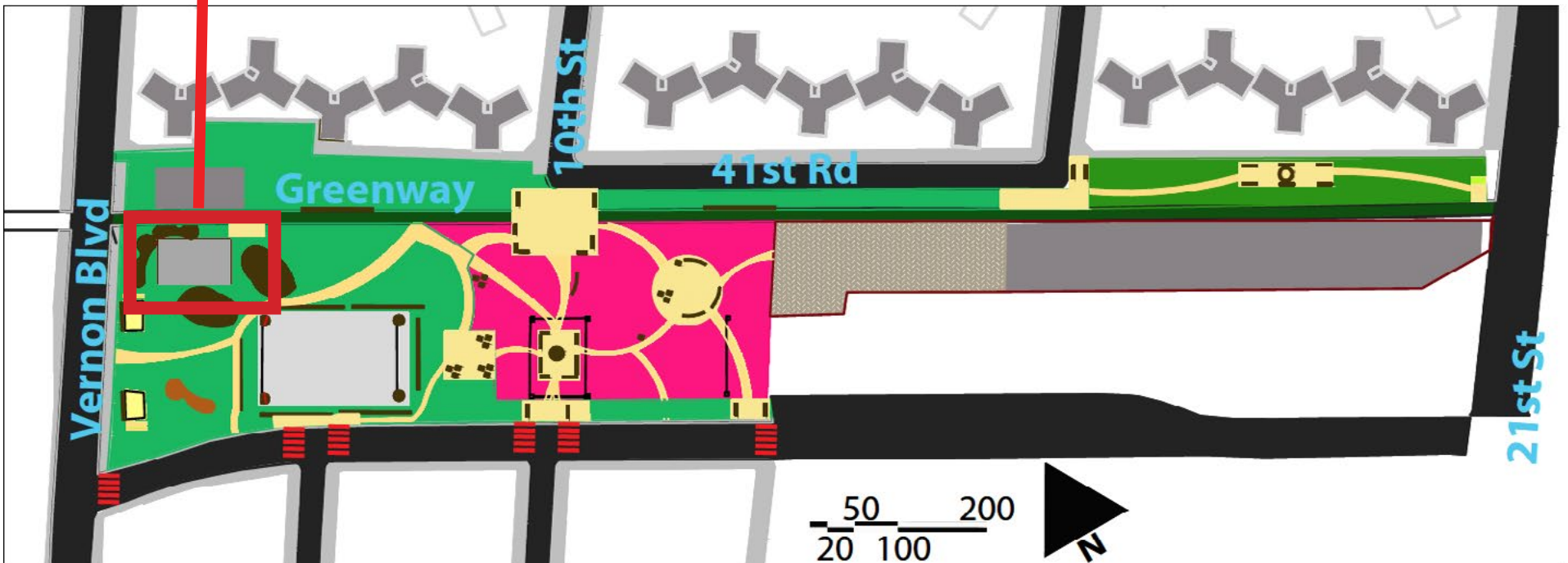
A key goal of this project is to include equipment and amenities that are lacking in the city. Juice Crew Park is designed to meet unmet demands and attract a diverse range of visitors. A rock climbing wall is an obvious way to bring people together, and these walls don't take up much space.





Elements

Basketball Court

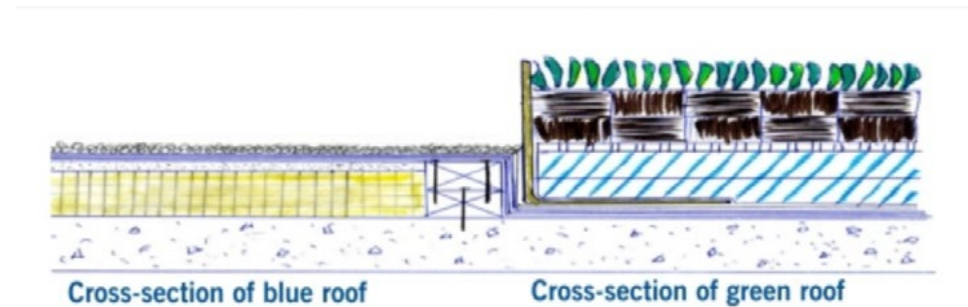


Moving Beyond Juice Crew Park

NYCHA Garden Program

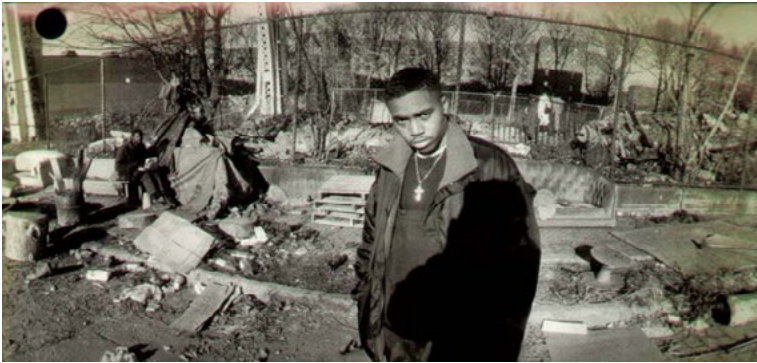
Green Roof, Blue Roof,
Solar Roof, Wind Roof.

Bringing back public art and activity programming.



Juice Crew Park is envisioned as part of an area wide transformation. The park is designed so that its progressive elements bleed out into the city. This means rethinking NYCHA land and creating gardening programs that start in the park and extend to rooftop gardens atop the Queensbridge Houses. These types of projects would help beautify NYC, clean the air and water, and uplift communities that would most benefit from these types of inclusive projects. It means calming streets and expanding the greenway deep into Queens. It means highlighting all of the famous music and beautiful hip hop culture that was born in the Queensbridge projects, and bringing new communities into the area. It means rezoning area streets, and taking down physical barriers to create short, vibrant, mixed-use streets that would make Jane Jacobs revisit her critiques of NYCHA projects.

Dedication



THE JUICE CREW 