



Platform Development Opportunities in The Bronx



The Office of Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.
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Bronx Rail Yards for Potential Development



In his 2015 “State of the Borough” address, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. announced that his office would conduct a preliminary study of the feasibility of building decks over three railyards operated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)—149th Street in Mott Haven, the Concourse Yard adjacent to Lehman College, and the 1 train yards connecting Riverdale and Kingsbridge.

“But to truly bring transformative housing development to The Bronx, we have to examine not just available space, but space that does not even technically exist,” said Borough President Diaz of his proposal in his speech. “We will examine possible costs and potential density, and will take the first step towards creating new space as a key component of our city’s housing and economic development future.”

As each of those yards was examined for future development, one location outshone the rest, for a variety of reasons.





149th STREET

The MTA yard at East 149th Street and the Grand Concourse has long been seen as offering tremendous opportunity for potential development. The site is located at one of the busiest transportation hubs in the city, and features neighboring attractions such as the Hostos Community College, Lincoln Hospital, the future Bronx GPO project and Cardinal Hayes High School. A little further away to the north sits the borough's Civic Center district as well as Yankee Stadium.

In 1955, then-Bronx Borough President James J. Lyons called for the site to be decked over and developed as part of a 78-acre development plan in the South Bronx. Borough President Lyons hosted a meeting with numerous City officials to discuss the project, and was able to secure a site survey from City Construction Coordinator Robert Moses.

Eventually, the northern portion of the railyard would be developed as Concourse Village, a cooperative housing development in partnership with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America that was announced for the site in 1960. In 2003, a team of developers proposed that the 149th Street site be used to construct a 25-story luxury hotel.



More recently, the site has been proposed for use as the right-of-way for a future bridge reconnecting East 153rd Street between Park/Morris Avenues and Concourse Village West/Grand Concourse, a project that enjoys considerable community and institutional support, including that of the borough president's office. Given the complexity of the bridge project, any proposed decking of the 149th Street railyard would require greater study of the potential to work alongside the bridge, if that would even be possible. Therefore, it was decided that the development of this yard would not be a priority at this time.





240th STREET

The railyard located along Broadway, nestled between the northwest Bronx communities of Riverdale and Kingsbridge, has more recently come into focus as a location offering the potential for imaginative, transformative development.

In addition to serving as the home of the 1-Subway line, this property is also the location of Gaelic Park, which since the 1920's has played host to traditional Irish sporting events. In addition to serving as the home of the Gaelic Athletic Association of Greater New York, the Gaelic Park also hosts outdoor sporting events for its neighbor, Manhattan College.

Though this office has heard considerable interest from all corners about the future development of this site, certain geographical hurdles make this location difficult to develop at this time. In particular, the site is significantly elevated on its western border compared to the rest of the yard, a proposition that would likely make this yard more expensive to build on. Thus, it was also decided that the development of this yard would not be a priority at this time.





CONCOURSE YARD

One yard, however, was found to have tremendous potential for future development: the Concourse Yard located adjacent to Lehman College.

These MTA yards, located between Jerome Avenue on the east, Paul Avenue on the west, East 205th Street on the north and roughly East 198th Street on the south, has long been seen as a key outpost for potential development. In fact, this outpost likely represents the greatest potential for mixed-use development of any piece of public land in the borough.

This subway yard currently provides storage, maintenance and washing facilities for the B,D, and 4 subway lines. It is located in the footprint of the original plans for the Jerome Park Reservoir, and is largely below grade.

The Concourse Yard encompasses three parcels, totaling nearly 19 acres. The northernmost parcel located north of West 205th Street is only 0.19 acres, and would therefore be cost prohibitive to develop. It will not be included in this study.



The center yard, located between Bedford Park Boulevard and West 205th Street, sits at 10.27 acres and offers the most potential for development. South of Bedford Park Boulevard, and immediately adjacent to Lehman College's campus, is a third yard that sits at 8.47 acres. Our office believes that future development of this yard should only encompass the northern third, putting the entire footprint for potential development at roughly 13 acres. The yard is roughly 18 feet below grade, and surrounded by retaining walls on all sides.

SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD

The site, which is strategically located at the center of a nexus of Northwest Bronx neighborhoods including Bedford Park, Kingsbridge Heights, Norwood, Van Cortlandt Village, Kingsbridge, Jerome Park, Woodlawn, Fordham and Riverdale, has numerous amenities that make it an excellent candidate for mixed-use development.

The site is adjacent to Lehman College, the borough's premiere CUNY institution, as well as well-regarded public high schools such as the Bronx High School of Science, the High School of American Studies at Lehman College, DeWitt Clinton High School and the Walton High School campus. Other area amenities include the adjacent Harris Field, Mosholu Parkway to the north, and the Jerome Park Reservoir.

Very little housing stock exists in the immediate vicinity of the railyard. Two large developments—Tracey Towers and Scott Towers—sit to the immediate north. The eastern border of the yards on Jerome Avenue is largely made up of commercial properties, though the residential community of Bedford Park sits just behind that. To the west, most housing is located on the opposite side of the Jerome Park Reservoir.

Given the site's immediate proximity to the 4 line, and the nearby B and D lines, as well as considerable service from both New York City and Westchester bus lines, this location is ideal for transit-oriented development.





KINGSBRIDGE NATIONAL ICE CENTER

A little further away to the south sits the Kingsbridge Armory, one of the most iconic buildings in not only The Bronx but the entire city. Essentially vacant for decades, this structure will soon be the home of the Kingsbridge National Ice Center (KNIC).

KNIC, when completed, will be the world's largest ice center and a state-of-the-art facility. When construction is complete the center will feature a 5,000 seat arena, nine NHL/Olympic ice rinks, over 50 locker rooms, and 30,000 square feet dedicated to dry land training and sports medicine.

The facility has made a \$1,000,000 annual commitment to the surrounding community that includes free ice time, free tickets, free space rental, and other services to the surrounding community. There will also be a 501(c)(3) non-profit Foundation Sports Program to provide local Bronx children the opportunity to use this world class facility, learn new sports, skills and life lessons that they would not have access to otherwise.

The project is also committed to sustainable development and will be a LEED Silver facility. The center will also follow a Green Action Plan that includes healthy foods, nutrition information, free filtered tap water and a boycott of sugared drinks. The project will result in 50,000 square feet of community space dedicated to educational and health programs for local children, students, and adults from across the five boroughs.

The center will create numerous opportunities for employment, both temporary and permanent. The building of the facility will result in 2,700 construction jobs. The eventual facility will employ approximately 820 individuals in permanent positions. In both cases there will be a focus on local hiring and training of at-risk and underemployed applicants. In addition, the project will lead to increased tourism, spending and interest in the immediate and surrounding communities.



PREVIOUS PLANS

Borough President Diaz's call for development at this site was not the first time someone had proposed transformative development for the space above the Concourse Yard.



In the early 1960's, the City University of New York mapped out a plan to construct a new campus for Bronx Community College by constructing a deck over the Concourse Yard. Ground was broken for the \$61 million, 13-acre campus in 1970, which was to be built on 800 columns set between the subway tracks.

The campus was to include a new dining hall and student center, a five-story engineering and science building, gymnasium facilities and new classroom space, among other features. The platform was expected to be completed in July 1971, and the campus was expected to be ready by September 1973.

At the groundbreaking, then-college president Dr. James A. Colston said the new campus was "a classic example of good urban planning." The project was eventually abandoned after the City discovered that the architect and contractor had constructed the pillars slightly too short, which would have prevented subway cars from entering and exiting the yard had the project been completed. As the city faced fiscal crisis in the 1970's, no attempt was ever made to revive the project. Bronx Community College would eventually make its home at the former New York University campus in University Heights, a location it still occupies to this day.



POTENTIAL

Based on information compiled by our office on other similar projects, it is estimated that the low-end cost to build a deck over the 13 acres we have proposed for potential development would be between \$350 and \$500 million. This is a real opportunity to not only provide much-needed homeownership, mixed-income housing and retail space, but to allow Lehman College to expand by better connecting it to the Bedford Park neighborhood and making it a true community campus.

To best maximize potential development, a rezoning to some extent must occur. The Center Yard is currently zoned R6 and C8-2, while the South Yard is zoned R6 and M1-1. Rezoning the C8-2 and M1-1 portions to R6 would create a near “as is” scenario. Under this scenario, the Center Yard zoned as R6 and the Quality Housing Option with a 3.0 residential Floor-to-Area Ratio (FAR) would garner approximately 1.3 million square feet worth of development. Given the spatial constraints of the South Yard with trains exiting the yard to connect to the 4 train elevated line, we propose that 3 acres of the 8.47 acres be considered for expansion of Lehman College. Under a R6 zone with a 4.8 community facility FAR, 627,264 square feet could be realized. Without a significant upzoning, approximately two million square feet of development could be realized.

Given the enormity of the Center Yard, new right-of-ways would need to be mapped north-south and potentially east-west. This layout gives an opportunity for the Center Yard to have a contextual approach. Along the exterior of the yard on wider streets, development of taller cooperative, condominium or rental buildings with local and mid-box retail could be accomplished, while on the middle right-of-way(s), townhouses that include a mix of homeownership and rental on a quieter strip, would create a new village atmosphere in the middle of Bedford Park that would complement existing housing and retail stock.

CONCLUSION

The Concourse Yard is a piece of public land that has seen its potential neglected for far too long. This 13-acre site holds the potential for transformative development in the northwest Bronx, one that could create thousands of new housing units, homeownership opportunities, a vibrant commercial corridor and an expanded Lehman College. Our office has heard from numerous developers and other entities who have informally expressed their excitement for the potential development of this location. We believe that interest must be codified in a more official manner.

Given the potential of the site, this office will begin an outreach campaign with area stakeholders to discuss the opportunity offered by a platform development. In the future, following this outreach, we will consider asking the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to issue a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) for the development of the site, in order to better gauge the cost and potential of platforming the Concourse Yard.

