### SCAPE / LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE DPC

BJARKE INGELS GROUP AKRF INC. HR&A EDESIGN DYNAMICS TIGHE & BOND TYLIN ATELIER TEN KOHLER RONAN CCI

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# MANRESA ISLAND PARK MASTERPLAN

#### Thank you for your interest in Manresa!

From our first kayak visit forward, we have been captivated by the potential of Manresa. The forest, the waterfront, the marshes, and the industrial structures all have so much to offer. The idea that a location of this scale and with these resources could begin a new life in service of the public is a calling for us. This masterplan is a high-level overview of our current understanding of the site, and serves to guide a new vision for how Manresa's transformation could take place.

In this day and age, it's far too common for dreams to be deferred and for our sense of what's possible to shrink. We firmly believe this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to dream big, and to turn a blighted industrial site into a thriving, cherished community asset. Manresa will become a place for both active and quiet recreation, gathering, and education. We hope it will inspire future scientists, conservationists, and lovers of the sound for generations to come. Whether you are someone visiting for a daily morning walk, or someone who makes a special trip, the site will offer something for everyone, in every season.

This masterplan showcases the great deal of thought that has gone into making the future park sustainable from an ecological, environmental, and economic perspective. Through careful and extensive environmental remediation, we will work to make the site safer for both people and wildlife. Resiliency measures in the plan will adapt the site for future sea level rise. The existing structures and their new programming will create a year-round economic engine to support maintenance and operations. Throughout the transformation and with the completed project we will strive to be good neighbors, and ensure that the process is thoughtful, open and respectful to the adjacent community.

This project is about giving. We are not seeking to attach our names to the site in perpetuity. We feel grateful to be able to commit our resources and to help shape this vision. But for Manresa to be truly successful, it must become a calling for many more people than just us. We hope that in reviewing this masterplan, you are equally inspired and excited about Manresa's future. The opportunity before us is extraordinary, and together we can bring this vision to life.

Sincerely,

Ш

Austin and Allison McChord

Con Und Allin Milhow

MANRESA ISLAND PARK





### **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

Manresa Island will become a thriving, publicly accessible park that reconnects the community to the waterfront for the first time in nearly 75 years. Anchored by a decommissioned power plant, the new Manresa Island Park will be activated with programming and natural spaces for people of all ages, abilities and interests. Visitors can explore a revived ecological habitat with multiple access points to the water and year-round spaces for events and education. The project is led by the non-profit Manresa Island Corporation and supported by private philanthropic investment.

From December 2023 to January 2025, Manresa Island Corporation (MIC) worked with SCAPE, Bjarke Ingles Group, HR&A, AKRF, Tighe & Bond, eDesign Dynamics, Atelier Ten, Tylin, Kohler Ronan, and CCI to develop a vision for a new public park at the Manresa Island site. This yearlong effort resulted in the Master Plan for Manresa Island Park, a 125-acre waterfront park.

PREPARED FOR Manresa Island Corporation

#### PREPARED BY

SCAPE Landscape Architecture Bjarke Ingels Group AKRF Inc. HR&A **EDesign Dynamics** Tighe & Bond TYLin Silman Atelier 10 Kohler Ronan CCI

#### **IMAGE CREDITS NOTE**

All reasonable efforts have been made to ascertain and obtain licenses to use third party images and materials. All images, unless noted in captions in each spread, are provided by the design team.

#### **DATE OF PUBLICATION**

2025

### **CONTENTS**

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### 

SITE HISTORY & CONTEXT..... MANRESA TODAY..... A COLLECTIVE VISION..... A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE..... REMEDIATION..... PHASING + IMPLEMENTATION.....




### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Located on the Long Island Sound in Southeast Connecticut, Manresa Island holds centuries of history and ecological significance. The original Island was formed by glacial process and has been expanded and reconnected to the mainland over multiple generations; its identity has transformed from a site of indigenous culture to a spiritual retreat to an active power plant to a post-industrial urban ecosystem. Today, the 125-acre Island remains a legacy site of power creation while also being home to significant forests and waterfront ecology.

In the future, Manresa Island will become a thriving, publicly accessible park that reconnects the community to the waterfront for the first time in nearly 75 years. Anchored by a decommissioned power plant, the new Manresa Island Park will be activated with programming and natural spaces for people of all ages, abilities and interests. Visitors can explore a revived ecological habitat with multiple access points to the water and year-round spaces for events and education. The project represents 1.75 miles of new public waterfront access in Norwalk and serves as a model for transforming 20th century decommissioned power plants into publicly accessible spaces.

The vision for Manresa Island Park incorporates five key goals:

- 1. Create a magnetic, other-worldly destination for recreation and retreat that celebrates Manresa's regional context
- 2. Expand access to Norwalk's coastline through a diverse array of immersive waterfront experiences that welcome people of all ages and backgrounds
- 3. Connect building and landscape through an integrated system of technology, sustainability and resiliency measure that can serve as a model for the region
- 4. Create a network of public spaces dedicated to rear-round experiential leaning and engaging public programming

5. Heal and enhance Manresa's coastal ecosystem and post-industrial wilds in order to cultivate a landscape that is healthy, safe, and vibrant

The industrial legacy of Manresa Island requires thoughtful remediation strategies to make the site safe and accessible for all visitors. This masterplan vision shares a strategy for remediation that integrates this required work with new park creation, creating opportunities for an enhanced ecosystem, resilient landscape, and sustainable construction practices.

The park will be an adaptive reuse model for post-industrial infrastructure that revitalizes communities, unlocks waterfront access and brings more quality public space to the region. At the core of the site, the Power Plant building provides opportunities for play, education, events, and hospitality. This adaptive reuse of the decommissioned plant creates a framework for building program and opportunity for a community driven asset.

The Manresa Island Park will be a first-of-itskind community hub that offers visitors of all ages, abilities and interests a place to enjoy the waterfront. With the first phase projected to open by 2030, the park will transform the abandoned power plant site into a vibrant and sustainable space for Norwalk and the region.

The project is led by the non-profit Manresa Island Corporation and supported by private philanthropic investment. This masterplan outlines the vision for the new park and building and puts forward a pathway for executing this work.



BRIDGEPORT | NEW HAVEN,

## **BUILDING ON A VISION**

Manresa Island Park builds on decades of community advocacy, carrying forward the shared vision of the island as a public destination and reinvigorating its historic legacy as a place of recreation and retreat.

While Manresa's old power plant sits tall on the horizon, the island was not always defined by its industry. In the 1890s, the island was home to the Manresa Institute—a Jesuit retreat that invited both priests and laypeople to visit the island to engage in recreation and spiritual reflection. This vision stuck in the minds of many Norwalk residents, who fought against the construction of the power plant, advocating instead for the creation of a public park. Manresa Island Park is an attempt to finally realize this vision.

Offering world-class recreation and outdoor play facilities, immersive nature experiences, and miles of public shoreline, Manresa Island Park promises to be a destination like no other in the region.



**SAVE MANRESA PARK** A 1957 newspaper ad calling for the island to be turned to a public park.



A PUBLIC RETREAT A postcard depicting the Manresa Institute, a Jesuit retreat founded on the island in the 1890s.



#### MANRESA ISLAND THROUGH THE YEARS

1600 1700

Pattern of 1884.

MAR AND

1640

The Siwanoys migrated seasonally, living by the Sound in warmer months to harvest shellfish and moving inland in winter for shelter from the more exposed coast. They traveled long distances for trade using bark canoes and dugouts carved from logs.

**Seasonal Journeys** 

#### **Historical Innovation**

In its industrial heyday, Norwalk was home to over 45 hat factories, earning it a reputation as a hub for hat manufacturing. But it wasn't just hats—Norwalk's Ironworks developed a groundbreaking air compressor used for ship steering, refrigeration, and explosives production. This innovation became vital during WWI, with the U.S. relying entirely on Norwalk's supply.

#### **A Park Pioneer**

John H. Keyser was the first known person to envision the Island as a park- filling it with rare plants, building a greenhouse, and connecting the island to the mainland with a causeway wide enough for carriages.

#### KEY

The timeline colors symbolically reflect the overall character of each era.



#### **PRE-1600s**

Early Inhabitants Manresa is inhabited

sea.

by the Norwaake, part of the Siwanoy of the Wappinger Confederacy, who sustain themselves through the land and

#### 1779

**Dutch Settlement** The Burning of Dutch settlers Daniel Norwalk and Fairfield Patrick and Roger British forces burn Ludlow acquire land Connecticut towns to from Norwaake chief the ground for Mahackemo. By 1664, supplying the colonial the Island is known as rebels in the Boutons, with settlers Revolutionary War. cultivating grains and raising cattle.

#### 1800s

Norwalk Industry

Norwalk shifts toward industrialization. with the rise of factories producing hats, locks, and iron parts.

#### 1849

Rail Connection The New York and New Haven Railroad begins passenger service through Norwalk, boosting connectivity.

#### 1861

Keyser Island John H. Keyser builds a causeway to his estate, as well as draining marshland and constructing new buildings.

#### 08 MANRESA ISLAND PARK

#### Manresa: A Retreat for All

In 1889, the Jesuits founded the Manresa Institute on Keyser Island. the only U.S. facility dedicated solely to hosting retreats, and welcomed people regardless of status or wealth. Named after a spiritually significant city in Spain, Manresa served as a peaceful sanctuary for reflection until the Jesuits relocated to Staten Island in 1911.



### 1874

**Oyster Town** Norwalk leads the oyster industry by pioneering steam-powered dredging.

#### 1880s

#### **Coastal Retreat**

Connecticut's coastal areas grow popular as retreats from urban life.

#### 1890s

#### Manresa Institute

The Society of Jesus acquires the island, establishing "The Manresa Institute," a retreat center for workers from all walks of life.

 $\mathsf{FUTURE} \mathsf{FUTURE} \mathsf{FU$ 

#### The Shift to Oil

In 1972, oil replaced coal at the plant, but air quality and water contamination continued to concern Norwalk residents. By the 80s and 90s, environmental groups targeted the facility for its pollution and ecological damage.

#### 1950s

Civic Action Norwalk residents petition for Manresa to become a city park to prevent takeover by power companies.

### 1953

5.4 tons OF ASH IN YOUR AIL EVERY DAY

**Zoning Approved** The Norwalk Zoning Commission approves power generation on Manresa Island. fill.

1960

#### 1969

Power Plant Built The **Oil Spill** A major fuel Norwalk Harbor oil spill damages Village Creek beach Generating Station is built, expanding the and surrounding tidal Island with coal ash flats.

#### 1972

**Oil Conversion** The plant switches from coal to oil as its primary fuel source.

#### 1980

Hazardous Waste Designated a TSD Facility, Manresa triggers the RCRA Corrective Action process for hazardous waste management.

#### 1997

Wetland Concern The Norwalk Harbor Management Plan highlights Manresa's wetlands as critical areas of concern.

1990

Power landing

Filthy Five Manresa is named one of Connecticut's "Filthy Five" by the CT Coalition for Clean Air.

Tel autorative

or hoppy to an probe and dealer from hot, in proper the process for analytically have been indefined in the probe of the analytical sectors been and a part in. In one provide a sector is been and a part in.

Save Manresa Park VOTE YES for pure health and happ

#### **A Post-Industrial Haven**

The decline and closure of the power plant in 2013 coincided with the resurgence of ospreys in Connecticut, following the banning of DDT in 1972. From just 10 nests at that time, the osprey nest numbers have now surpassed 1,000 across the state. Manresa is also home to many other species, including minks, raccoons, and turtles.

he Filthy Five have got to go!

#### 2013

#### Hurricane Inundation

Hurricane Sandy floods nearly the entire Manresa property. The plant is closed by 2013, allowing post-industrial ecology to take root.

#### 2024

#### Manresa Island Park

The establishment of Manresa Island Corp and development of a masterplan marks a new chapter for the area.

### A PLACE LIKE NO OTHER

Manresa Island Park offers a world-class destination that celebrates the beauty of Norwalk's coastal context while offering experiences found nowhere else in the area. Bridging between community park and regional destination, the site welcomes daily visitors with its extensive trails and outdoor spaces, while offering world-class spaces for play and recreation that will attract visitors from across the region.



### AN ISLAND FOR ALL

Manresa Island Park seeks to expand access to Norwalk's public shoreline, providing a rich diversity of waterfront activities to people of all ages and backgrounds. A public beach on the site's southern shore connects to a large waterfront promenade, lined with food vendors and other amenities. A pavilion and boat launch at the end of the berth offers kayak rentals and opportunities to practice with various watercraft, as well as a launching point to explore the rest of the Norwalk Islands. On the eastern edge of the site, tidepools offer unique opportunities for swimming, tidal exploration and ecological education. A network of elevated boardwalks allow visitors to immerse themselves in the expansive salt marsh on the site's western edge.

PROTECTIVE HEADLAND

PUBLIC BEACH AT MANRESA ISLAND PARK

**EXISTING MARSH** 

SCRUB SCRAMBLE

MULTIMODAL TRAIL



### AN ACCESSIBLE SHORELINE

Fenced off from the public for decades, Manresa Island exists within a broader legacy of waterfront residential and industrial development which has eroded public access along the Connecticut shoreline. Manresa Island Park offers a unique opportunity to expand access to Norwalk's waterfront and help connect the community back to the Long Island Sound.

Equitable, accessible shorelines and open spaces provide communities with opportunities to relax, recreate, and connect with one another, reducing stress and improving overall health. They also provide essential environmental benefits—such as wildlife habitat and coastal protection—while connecting people to the ecosystems where they live.

Despite being a vital part of Norwalk's culture and history, the majority of the region's shoreline is privatized and inaccessible to the public. Except for places like Veteran's Memorial Park and Calf Pasture Beach, the majority of the city's public shoreline exists on the Norwalk Islands and is only accessible by boat. With nearly two miles of linear coastline, Manresa Island Park represents an opportunity to not only expand and connect the local network of public shorelines, but to diversify the types of waterfront activities available to the local community.

**SHORELINE ACCESS** Map depicting public and private shoreline access in Norwalk (*Image Source: SCAPE*)



### A HUB FOR LEARNING & DISCOVERY

The legacy of the Manresa Power Station and its surrounding landscapes provide a canvas for exploration and learning about the processes that once generated power, and showcase new processes might heal and regenerate our planet.

The Manresa Island Park and Plant will be activated with educational programming and natural spaces for people of all ages, abilities and interests. Visitors can explore a revived ecological habitat with multiple access points to the water, as well as year-round spaces for nature, play, education, and university-led research while they explore the labyrinthine spaces of the former plant.



### A REVITALIZED ECOLOGY

The masterplan works to heal and enhance Manresa's ecosystems, providing critical wildlife habitat as well as safe, healthy access to nature. High-quality habitats, such as the large salt marsh on the site's western edge, are preserved to maintain their critical ecological value. Meanwhile, post-industrial wilds—such as the site's expansive birch forest—will undergo a process of enhancement to improve biodiversity and ensure long-term resilience. Finally, a variety of restoration efforts will work to restore natural ecosystem functions across the site and create space for the establishment of new coastal ecosystems important to the region. A new urban ecology center, nestled near the park's Atlantic white cedar swamp, will serve as a launching point for learning about the ecosystems of the region.

#### MARSH LOOKOUT

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT Nannopterum auritum

A State of the second

SALT MARSH BOARDWALK AT MANRESA ISLAND PARK

OSPREY Pandion haliaetus

SMOOTH CORDGRASS Spartina alterniflora

## A MODEL FOR FUTURE FORWARD THINKING

Manresa Island Park represents a new model for sustainability and resilience in the region, weaving together building and landscape functions to create a circulation system of water and energy that operates in direct contrast to the site's coal-fired past. Wastewater will be treated onsite and recycled back into use, while rainwater and stormwater runoff are captured and used to feed the site's constructed wetlands. Geothermal pumps provide a renewable source of energy for the park and building and are used to heat the site's various programmatic elements. The site's construction and remediation efforts are aligned to lift the site and transform its coastal edges to provide resilience from storm surge and rising sea levels. Finally, the site's various ecological assets are protected to provide habitat, water filtration, and carbon capture.



### LEGEND

- POTABLE WATER
- TREATED WATER
- GREY WATER
- RAIN & STORMWATER
- GROUND SOURCE HEAT
- CARBON CAPTURE
  - ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

### SITE MASTER PLAN

Manresa Island Park will be an incredible asset for the City of Norwalk and the greater region, providing much-needed public waterfront access for all. The vision presents an ambitious, innovative, and resilient design that draws on the sites complex history and fosters environmental stewardship and education building lifelong advocates and creating a space for the community to engage in a site that has long been off limits to the people of Norwalk.

- 10 Harbor
- **(11)** Shade Structure + Kayak Rentals

12 Play

(13) Artifact Plaza

14 Forest Parking

**15** Nature Play

(16) Urban Ecology Center

(17) Cedar Swamp

(18) Nursery + Maintenance

(19) Canopy Walk

20 Forest Pockets

21 Tide Pools

- 22 Additional Parking
- (23) Marsh Boardwalks

(24) Revitalized Marsh + Bridge

(25) Wild Jetty

Thermal Pools + Pine Barren

1

2

3

(4)

5

6

 $\overline{7}$ 

8

9

21

11

25

20

(22)

23

Lawn

**Power Plant** 

Arrival Plaza

Meadow

Beach

Marina

Scrub Scramble

Pier + Field Station



## CORE LANDSCAPE CONCEPTS

The park's design follows a three-part logic: concentrate civic programming around the building, diversify the experience along the waterfront, and protect the health and function of Manresa's post-industrial wilds.

This approach centers active programming near building amenities, and within the footprint of historical disturbance on the site's southern end. The site's pre- and post-industrial habitats, such as the salt marsh and fly ash forest to the north, are opened to the public through curated access, in order to protect these ecosystems while providing a diverse and immersive experience in nature, separated from the intensity at the southern end. Weaving through both of these areas, the site's coastline transforms to provide a range of experiences that enrich the possibilities along Norwalk's public shore. CONCENTRATE ACTIVE PROGRAMMING AT THE CORE



+

CREATE A DIVERSE AND IMMERSIVE WATERFRONT



+

ENHANCE MANRESA'S WILD PLACES







FRESHWATEF WETLAND

### A DIVERSE LANDSCAPE EXPERIENCE



**A WELCOMING ARRIVAL TO THE BUILDING** A grove of birch trees line the arrival plaza, guiding the entrance into the building and surrounding landscape.



**AN URBAN ECOLOGY CENTER** The park will be a hub for ecological education in the region, anchored by an urban ecology center adjacent to an Atlantic white cedar swamp.



**A COMMUNITY GREEN** The central lawn provides a civic space for gathering, relaxing, and events.



**A REMEDIATED FOREST** The existing fly ash forest will be remediated, allowing visitors to explore beneath the canopy via a system of trails and elevated boardwalks.

# AN ANCHOR FOR THE ISLAND

As an extension of the resettling of the island for the enjoyment of human life, among many other forms of life, the Plant extends that resettlement into its cavernous spaces within. Boilers, coal bins, and turbine halls are post-industrial cathedrals awaiting exploration and reinterpretation. The Plant complex anchors the Island through inclusive, all-weather programming of these spaces, becoming a hub of year-round activation for the island.



## CORE ARCHITECTURE CONCEPTS

Organized in multiple distinct volumes, the Plant complex is re-purposed to accommodate **gathering, playing, learning, lodging, and more,** supporting the park's mission to create a destination like no other with highly inclusive, all-weather programming.

The design of each building takes inventory of existing assets, including orientation, volume, structural capacity, and existing machinery, and leverages these assets for new benefit – reinforcing the diversity of each to create an **all-weather hub within the park**.

The massive **Boiler Building**, originally built in two separate stages, is conceived as two buildings in one, with its twin massive boilers removed to reveal large voids hosting a destination climbing facility and indoor trail to the east, and an aquatics center, and other spaces for learning, exhibition, and play to the west.

Within the impressive open volume of the **Turbine Hall,** a large, flexible space for events is created, enjoying sunlight from it's generous eastern window-wall.

At the **Administrative Building**, a cellular series of workspaces becomes a unique guest lodge for visitors who might want to stay the night, supporting events and other activities in the park.



EXISTING



REMOVALS





**ADDITIONS** 



### **DIVERSE DESTINATIONS**

The Plant will provide an inclusive set of destinations to return to year-yound.



A ROOFTOP DESTINATION Panoramic Views at the Boiler Building Roof



ALL-WEATHER PLAY AND DISCOVERY Indoor Trails, Clmbing, and Play at the Boiler Building Playtrium



A FLEXIBLE COMMUNITY VENUE Main Event Space at Turbine Hall



A WELCOMING ARRIVAL Main Entrance at Turbine Hall

### A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Manresa Island Park aims to provide a unique array of open space amenities while respecting its surrounding neighbors. This begins with the required clean-up and remediation of the site. Active programming will be concentrated to the southeast to direct noise and views out to the harbor, while the natural areas to the south and west will be conserved with a focus on light, passive programming and recreational trails. Activities will be screened by dense buffers of planting and the main entry road will be pulled deeper into the forest to minimize disturbance from traffic. Access to the site will be controlled via an entry gate and a sizeable portion of the parking for daily visitors will be placed beneath the building. The building itself will employ bird safe design and dark sky lighting to prevent visual disturbance to both wildlife and surrounding communities.



**ENTRY GATE + CONTROLLED ACCESS** 

THROUGH FOREST

FOREST REMEDIATION + **PASSIVE PROGRAMMING** 

#### **CLEAN-UP + REMEDIATION THROUGHOUT THE SITE**

NORTH SIDE

FOREST BUFFER

## MANRESA AS CATALYST

Manresa Island's transformation into a public park and its focus on ecological restoration and remediation offers a groundbreaking model for repurposing decommissioned power plants throughout the region and beyond. With more than 100 such sites in the area, the project proposal underscores the potential for innovative waterfront access and expansion and environmental education. In addition to remediating the site, the Park's design emphasizes restoring native habitats, creating recreational spaces, establishing waterfront resiliency, and providing valuable opportunities for education and ecological stewardship.

#### LEGEND

- RETIRED POWER PLANTS
- FUTURE RETIREMENT

A MODEL FOR POST-INDUSTRIAL SITES A map showing decommissioned power plants in the New England region. (Image Source: SCAPE, Data Source: US Energy Information Administration)



## CREDITS

#### This document was prepared for Manresa Island Corporation (MIC) by the following:

#### SCAPE - MASTERPLAN LEAD AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

#### **EDESIGN DYNAMICS - ECOLOGY**

Kate Orff Gena Wirth Alexis Landes John Donnelly Kaleen Juarez Kirk Gordon Shira Grosman Nathalie Mitchell Caz Gagne Grace Suthata Jiranuntarat Ryan Pryandana

#### **BIG - ARCHITECTURE**

Daniel Sundlin Douglass Alligood Jeremy Alain Siegel Rita Sio Ryan Harvey Thomas McMurtrie Danna Lei Victoire Talien Schemestre Daniela Morin Alvaro Velsoa Aya Muawia Mohamed Elhassan Foad Sarsangi Seung Hyo Chang Sungmin Kim Tom Lasbrey Yijun Yan Yuno Cho Karen Chuen

#### **AKRF - ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING**

Marc Godick Bryan Zieroff Colleen Griffiths Greg Baird

#### HRA - ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Connie Chung Claire Summers Eddie Joe Antonio Eric Rothstein Elsa Loehmann Nicholas Parisi Amanda Bayley

#### TIGHE & BOND - CIVIL, COASTAL AND TRANSPORTATION ENGINEERING

Chuck Croce John Block Dan Ciaramicoli Chris Granatini

#### **TYLIN SILMAN - STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING**

Sara Steele Tom Reynolds Rose Battey Taehoo Kim Sarah Hultman

#### **ATELIER 10 - SUSTAINABILITY**

Jessica Zofchak Liz Lessig Devanshi Dadia Nathan Pharr

#### **KOHLER RONAN - MEP ENGINEERING**

Christopher Vahlsing Renato Martins James Hurley Kaitlyn Nelson David Kenndedy Kevin Czarnecki

#### **CCI - CODE CONSULTING**

Kevin Morin Alexandra Scariati

SCAPE BIG @AKRF Tighe&Bond Separations HRA TYLin K atelier ten cci

