



WXY designs phase one of Arverne East - 6,000 s/f Nature Preserve & Welcome Center

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Queens, NY NYC Parks commissioner Sue Donoghue joined New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) commissioner Adolfo Carrión Jr., borough president Donovan Richards, New York State assembly member Khaleel Anderson, and New York City council member Selvena Brooks-Powers in Rockaway to celebrate the opening of the new Arverne East Nature Preserve and Welcome Center.

Located within the 35-acre Arverne East Nature Preserve, the 6,000 s/f community center, designed by WXY architecture + urban design (WXY), is part of the first phase of Arverne East, New York City's first net-zero residential community. Led by HPD, the project team includes L+M Development Partners, the Bluestone Organization, Triangle Equities, Mega Contracting Group, and Urbane. Arverne East will revitalize a vacant 116-acre site within the Arverne and Edgemere neighborhoods,

creating 1,650 units of housing and set a new standard for resilient and energy-efficient oceanfront development.

The new welcome center is a flexible meeting and community space that links the surrounding neighborhoods and nearby public transit to the preserve and beach. The center will house a multipurpose community meeting room and adjacent oceanview terrace; offices for NYC Parks' Urban Park Rangers program and for The Campaign Against Hunger (TCAH), a Brooklyn-based nonprofit that operates the 1.5-acre urban farm adjacent to the building; crew bases for parks maintenance staff; storage space for parks equipment and for the local nonprofit Rockaways Initiative for Sustainability and Equity (RISE), which operates the neighboring native plant nursery and discovery garden; and gender-neutral public restrooms. The center is easily accessible from the subway at Beach 44th St. and via the 5.5-mile public Rockaway Boardwalk, which WXY also reconstructed and storm-proofed in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

The design of the building facilitates communal interaction with both other users and the surrounding landscape. The primary level – elevated above the ground to protect it from coastal flooding – is entirely encircled by a wide, sheltered porch, which serves as the main circulation space as well as a social catalyst for beach-goers and visitors. At the south side of the building, a large, ocean-facing terrace extends the community meeting room – which is open to the public for use or programming, and can be reserved online – into the covered porch, enabling open access and offering views of the coastal landscape from multiple directions.

“Arverne East represents a unique and innovative path forward for the Rockaways – one rooted in honoring local knowledge, collective power, and an ongoing practice of community stewardship,” said WXY founding principal Claire Weisz. “The sustainable and resilient architecture creates an inviting, accessible space to connect with nature – a promontory for everyone from beachgoers to community organizers to Parks department staff.”

A closed-loop geothermal system provides heating and cooling, while a rooftop solar array generates power and will eventually provide additional energy to low-income neighborhood residents. The building is clad in locally sourced, FSC-certified hardwood, which was left untreated to naturally age and gray in the beach environment. Warm timber slatting that extends to the interiors, floor-to-ceiling glazing, and generous skylights welcome visitors into the space, which is also accessible via ramps and stairs, and contains the first non-gendered public restrooms built by HPD.

WXY's long-term work in the Rockaways has focused on strengthening community resilience through public space improvements and restoration programming. In collaboration with RISE and ecologists eDesign Dynamics, the firm has developed the Greater Rockaway Coastal Resilience Plan, a community-centered plan to restore the dune ecosystem by helping local stewards to plant and maintain native ecologies. The plan proposes a model for environmental stewardship led by youth and local civic organizations in cooperation with land owners and agencies. Native grasses, sedges, and woody plants like little bluestem, seaside goldenrod, and eastern red cedar will help stabilize the sand, establish a first line of defense against storm surge and flooding, and provide a

home for native fauna.

To the east of the welcome center, RISE will operate a native plant nursery, raising locally-adapted native plant seedlings and saplings to support ongoing revegetation of the nature preserve, dunes, and other coastal areas. Also to the east, the urban farm operated by TCA will focus on combating food insecurity in the Rockaways by providing the community with local produce and workforce training programs. Together, the Greater Rockaway Coastal Resilience Plan and the Welcome Center work to provide the interconnected social and spatial infrastructure needed to prioritize local voices, grow native ecologies, and cultivate long-term community-based stewardship.

“Arverne East will provide a host of long-awaited neighborhood resources, further support the economic revitalization of the central and eastern sections of the Rockaway Peninsula, and set a new standard for sustainable and resilient development,” said Sara Levenson, managing director at L+M Development Partners. “We appreciate the unwavering efforts of our partners in helping us to bring this site to life.

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