Creating value and appeal: Putting public and culture first

Lessons learned from Governors Island, New York City
The Basics...
70 hectares island in the middle of New York Harbor, only 244 meters from Financial District, Manhattan and 91.5 meters from Brooklyn
Former military base, first opened to the public in 2005
Only accessible by boat.
2003 Transfer Deed

61 hectares of Island transferred to New York
Red and green on map

9 hectares of Island declared a National Monument, managed by the National Park Service (Federal)
Blue on map
Historic District

37 hectares landscape and building
  – Protected by national and local landmark laws
  – Shared jurisdiction with national government

52+ vacant landmark buildings, totaling 130,000 square meters
  – Legally required to maintain
  – In need of tenants and major investment in adaptive reuse
South Island

33 hectares of flat, featureless landfill

- Requirement to build new park on 16 hectares
- 13 hectares set aside for new tenant construction

• Closed to the public
  - Obsolete buildings posed safety hazard
  - Infrastructure out of date
Terms of Redevelopment

• Residential housing and casino development banned
• No Federal funding for infrastructure or ongoing operations
• Commercial, education and non profit uses permitted
• Expectation that Island would be self sufficient
2006: Challenges

- No residents or constituents
- No public visitation or demonstrated use
- Inaccessible due to limited boat schedule
- Most lucrative uses banned by deed
- No public funding to replace decaying infrastructure or add amenities
- Little to no credible interest from property developers
What Will Governors Island Be?
What is the Vision?
Where is the Master Plan?
Instead, we asked....

What does New York City not have?

(and does it make sense on an island?)
Why would a New Yorker come here?

How do I persuade you to come visit this weekend?

(We would worry about tourists later)
But the most important question we asked was:

What should we do first?
Our Strategic Imperatives

1. Expanded public access and early signature uses
2. Public investment in stabilization and infrastructure
3. Multi-phase, mixed-use development strategy
4. Early creation of new world-class park and public spaces
Start with public use, with culture as the **magnet**

Activate the island

Create desirable place for public, developers and political leaders

Activity instead of master plan

*Put Governors Island on the City’s map*
In the world’s cultural capital,

What was missing?
A flexible, free space for public programming.
“If you encourage it they will come.”
Our approach to programming

Open ideas + Friendly bureaucracy = Funding

a.k.a. the Noodle Strategy
OpenHouseGI

Offers 14,000 square meters of indoor space in former officers’ houses and 10 hectares of outdoor space free of charge to any organization that creates programming that is free and open to the public.
How OpenHouseGI works

• No site fees
• Simple permit process online
• No funding
• Program considered model in the United States
A citywide platform and audience
Fete Paradiso, 2013

AIDS Memorial Quilt, 2014

Jazz Age Lawn Party, 2014

Curious Invasion, 2014
Growth in organizations presenting
Growth in visitor experiences

- Theater and Dance Productions
- Indoor exhibits
- Special events
- Open rehearsals and studios
- Workshops

Growth in Governors Island’s popularity

- Total Visitation:
  - 2006: 40,000
  - 2007: 60,000
  - 2008: 100,000
  - 2009: 150,000
  - 2010: 200,000
  - 2011: 250,000
  - 2012: 300,000
  - 2013: 350,000
  - 2014: 450,000

Year:
- 2006
- 2007
- 2008
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013
- 2014
Growth in press coverage
We treat the public as our customer
76% of visitors live in New York City
We listen to people.

Solicited and collected more than 3,000 Post-It™ notes

People said:

• “Lots more hammocks!”
• “Keep it car-free”
• “Outdoor sculpture everywhere!”
• “Yay for biking!”
• “Playgrounds for big people”
We show people that what they say matters.
We learn from what they do.

- Observing is just as crucial as listening.
Design includes their ideas
We bought some hammocks...
We demolished some buildings...
To make a temporary park

PICNIC POINT
And designed “Hammock Grove”
Now it draws the public to the Island
Investment* Yields Investment
* Monetary, physical, or emotional investment
Massive public investment

$360 million program updates all Island infrastructure and creates new park

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New Park

• 30 acres of park opened 2014
• Design in response to public feedback and climate change
• Miles of pathway for biking and walking
• Hammocks, art, food, sports fields and more
The Hills

• A new landmark in New York Harbor, the Hills are culminating feature of new park

  • 4 Hills ranging in size from 7.7 meters to 22 meters will be complete in 2016

  • The Hills will offer 360 degree views of the Harbor, monumental art, and play space including slides
Tenants: New York Harbor School

- Public high school serving students from across NYC
- Unique maritime curriculum including scuba diving, boat building, marine science
- Now in its sixth year
- Yes, students come to school on the ferry every day!
Year round artist studios

- More than 40 visual artists and a dozen performing groups
- Valuable work space in city where artists priced out of studios
- 15,000 visitors attend open studios and exhibitions throughout the public season
- Now in its fifth year
In 2017, destination day spa opening

QC Terme creating 1 hectare spa campus, with 8000 square meters converted building

Over 100,000 year-round leisure and recreational clients

Tens of millions in capital and rent invested
In 2017, expansion of artist studios

- LMCC Arts Center at Governors Island expands to double its footprint on the Island
- Additional space will provide opportunities for artistic expression and public programs
- Spaceworks opens and provides affordable studio space for artists to work
Easy, frequent ferry service

Daily, year-round service to increase as tenancy increase

Schedule and vessels are funded and operated by the Trust

Island will be part of the expanding Citywide ferry network
Have these strategies yielded results?

YES
where New Yorkers encounter all forms of culture, educational, not-for-profit and commercial resources.

The Island has become a lively and loved destination . . .
where New Yorkers encounter all forms of
culture, educational, not-for-profit and commercial resources
Governors Island transformation includes extraordinary park...
... And soon New York’s newest landmark.
Increase in visitorship
Increase in relevancy
Increase in visibility
Increase in market interest
Thank you.