

PROGRAMMING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Concessions | 5.2 |
| Programming | 5.4 |
| Greenway as a Catalyst for Economic Development | 5.6 |
| The Greenway and the Revitalization of Watershed Communities | 5.9 |
| Potential Roles for the Bronx River Alliance | 5.10 |

CHAPTER FIVE: PROGRAMMING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Bronx River Greenway is much more than just a bike path. It is:

- a sustainable transportation resource
- a vehicle for the ecological restoration of the river and its banks
- a catalyst for ecological restoration of the wider watershed
- a catalyst for the revitalization of the communities along the river
- an educational resource
- a “blueway,” that is, a means of access to the river for boating
- a resource for a wide variety of recreation

While each of the many actors involved in planning and realizing the greenway might prioritize some of its aspects over others, the Bronx River Alliance views them holistically and provides a forum in which it is possible to understand the trade-offs and synergies among them.

This chapter surveys a range of ways that the Alliance can maximize the greenway’s recreational and economic benefits to watershed residents. We also recognize that the increase in land values that the greenway is likely to engender has some negative implications for some residents, and this chapter lays out principles for actions by the Alliance to minimize or mitigate those impacts. Finally, we explore ways that the Alliance might influence, plan, or take part in future development within the watershed, beyond the projects encompassed in the construction of the eight-mile route described in this document.



Ruben Aristy, a Bronx River Conservation Crew Member, teaches youth about the flora and fauna of the Bronx River corridor.

Specifically, this chapter examines:

Concessions and the greenway: identification of opportunities for businesses that will support both greenway / blueway use, and local entrepreneurship and employment

- Alliance programming to support greenway and blueway use: ways that the Alliance can support activities that will connect new groups of users with the greenway and the river
- The greenway as a catalyst for economic development: identification of strategies to help local residents benefit economically from the greenway
- The greenway and revitalization of watershed communities: identification of strategies to minimize or mitigate commercial and residential displacement
- Planning principles for greenway-related economic development programs
- Ways that the Alliance could and should seek to influence public and private development in the watershed

CONCESSIONS TO SUPPORT GREENWAY AND BLUEWAY USE

To take full advantage of the opportunities the greenway creates for outdoor activity—for fun, fitness, and for the enjoyment of the natural environment—watershed residents will want access to equipment such as bikes, in-line skates, canoes, and kayaks. They will also need access to information and programming that encourages trying out new activities, at little or no cost and in settings that feel comfortable and safe.

People's experience of the greenway and the river will also be enhanced by amenities along and near by the greenway. There is enormous potential for food of every type and in every kind of setting—from vendor carts to sit-down restaurants—to contribute to usership and enjoyment, and to create economic opportunity.

The potential benefits of concessions on the greenway offering food, equipment rental, and other activities or services appear obvious, but defining optimal roles for the Alliance in their establishment and operation has required some analysis. The Alliance has been assisted in thinking these issues through by a team from the Robert J. Milano Graduate School of Management and Urban Policy, who summarized their findings in a paper presented to the Alliance in March 2005.¹

The Milano School Team was initially asked to explore whether the Alliance should acquire the necessary licenses and either operate food and/or canoeing concessions on its own, or sublicense operations to either individual concessionaires or a master sublicensee. We also asked the team to examine the potential of the Alliance's canoeing program as a revenue-generating activity for the Alliance.

The team's research included an analysis of NYC Parks regulations and policies governing concessions, interviews with the staff of NYC Parks concessions division, with administrators of other parks in which concessions operate, and with operators of nonprofit boating programs in and near New York City, as well as a tour of the Bronx River Greenway.

The report evaluated concession options against criteria that included: compatibility with Alliance mission and values; implementation timeframe and demands; and monetary costs, financial risk, and feasibility. Judged against these criteria, and taking into account NYC Parks requirements and policies for the awarding of concessions licenses, the team strongly recommended that the Alliance **not** seek to license, sublicense, or operate concessions itself. Rather, the report concluded that the Alliance is well-positioned to attract and support private entrepreneurs to develop the types of concessions we hope to encourage. Ways in which the Alliance might do this are described below.

The team also recommended that the Alliance continue operating its canoeing program on a nonprofit basis, noting that this would be consistent with our mission as advocates and educators.



Every spring, the Bronx River Alliance sponsors the Amazing Bronx River Flotilla to kick off the summer canoe season and celebrate the Bronx River.

1. *Bringing Concessions to the Bronx River Greenway*, Matthew Blitz, Joyce Friedman, Philip Silva, Arnold Son. Available by request.

Similar free- and low-cost programs offered by the Downtown Boathouse and by the Hackensack Riverkeeper have not only introduced thousands of people to their respective rivers; the Downtown Boathouse has also helped to create a market in which for-profit entities now operate successfully. The report went on to make recommendations on how the Alliance could expand its canoeing program at minimal cost and risk, and on how we might market the greenway to a variety of potential concessionaires.

The Milano report concluded that there is little potential for the Alliance to earn income from either food or boating concessions. Rather, the report suggests that our efforts to encourage the development of concessions should be guided by our desire to expand the numbers of greenway users, enhance their experience of the river and greenway, and ensure that the greenway economically benefits local residents and businesses.

The Milano team confirmed that some kinds of concessions will be harder to attract than others. While many existing local food businesses already have the capital and expertise to operate successful food concessions on the greenway, establishing sports equipment rentals will be a greater challenge. There are few commercial or noncommercial operations anywhere in New York City that offer bicycle, skate, or small boat rentals or instruction. The 2006 New York City Cycling Map lists only six bike shops in all of the Bronx, one of which is located near the river.² No Bronx shop rents bicycles or in-line skates. Conversations with the team identified the relatively large capital requirement for an equipment rental business, along with an untested market, as barriers to the establishment of equipment rentals (either as concessions on the greenway, or as freestanding businesses on private land nearby).

The Milano School report's scope did not include a market study of the river corridor, and it is unclear whether and what kinds of additional research might be most helpful. Each kind of concession has its own economics, and individual entrepreneurs are often skillful in assessing their prospects for success. The report noted that NYC Parks offers a special 30-day license that allows concessionaires to set up temporary operations to test the market in untried locations.

Parks and the Alliance could encourage entrepreneurs to develop greenway-related concessions by:

- Working through local networks to publicize the opportunities the greenway offers for food and recreation concessions³
- Identifying potential sites for various kinds of concessions (while being responsive to the savvy of the entrepreneurs themselves in selecting desirable sites)
- Providing potential concessionaires with information about Parks concession protocols and requirements, including the 30-day trial license.
- Commissioning a market study that would enable potential concessionaires and freestanding businesses to assess the economic potential for new enterprises (this could be undertaken in partnership with established economic development agencies, such as the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation)
- Most importantly, by continuing and expanding its own programming—and encouraging additional programming—to expand the base of greenway and blueway users

2. Arrow Cycle Inc., 4055 White Plains Road at East 228 Street, 718-547-2656.

3. For more information about Parks concessions protocols, visit nycgovparks.org/sub_opportunities/business_ops/opportunities_index.html.

ALLIANCE PROGRAMMING TO SUPPORT GREENWAY / BLUEWAY USE

The Alliance can help to encourage greenway-related activity by supporting:

- Organized walks / walking clubs
- Running groups / clubs / teams
- Bicycling and in-line skating
- Recreational canoeing / kayaking
- Other events and activities, including children's concerts, film series, festivals, etc.



Pedal and Paddle Day is an annual event sponsored by the Alliance, which offers a bike ride on the Bronx River Greenway and a canoe trip on the river.

The Alliance can encourage these activities by:

- Developing informational materials, such as walking, biking, and canoeing maps and guides⁴
- Directly sponsoring guided walks, bike rides, running events, skating events, and canoe trips (including and in addition to those on our current calendar)
- Assisting other organizations who wish to sponsor events by providing information, calendar listings, and technical assistance

These kinds of support will require some Alliance staff time, but fall well within our mission and capacity. The Alliance staff can (and does) serve as a one-stop resource for organizations wishing to sponsor greenway and river events, by sharing practical information about venues, logistics, permitting requirements, and calendar coordination. Identifying and reaching out to organizations who might want to sponsor new



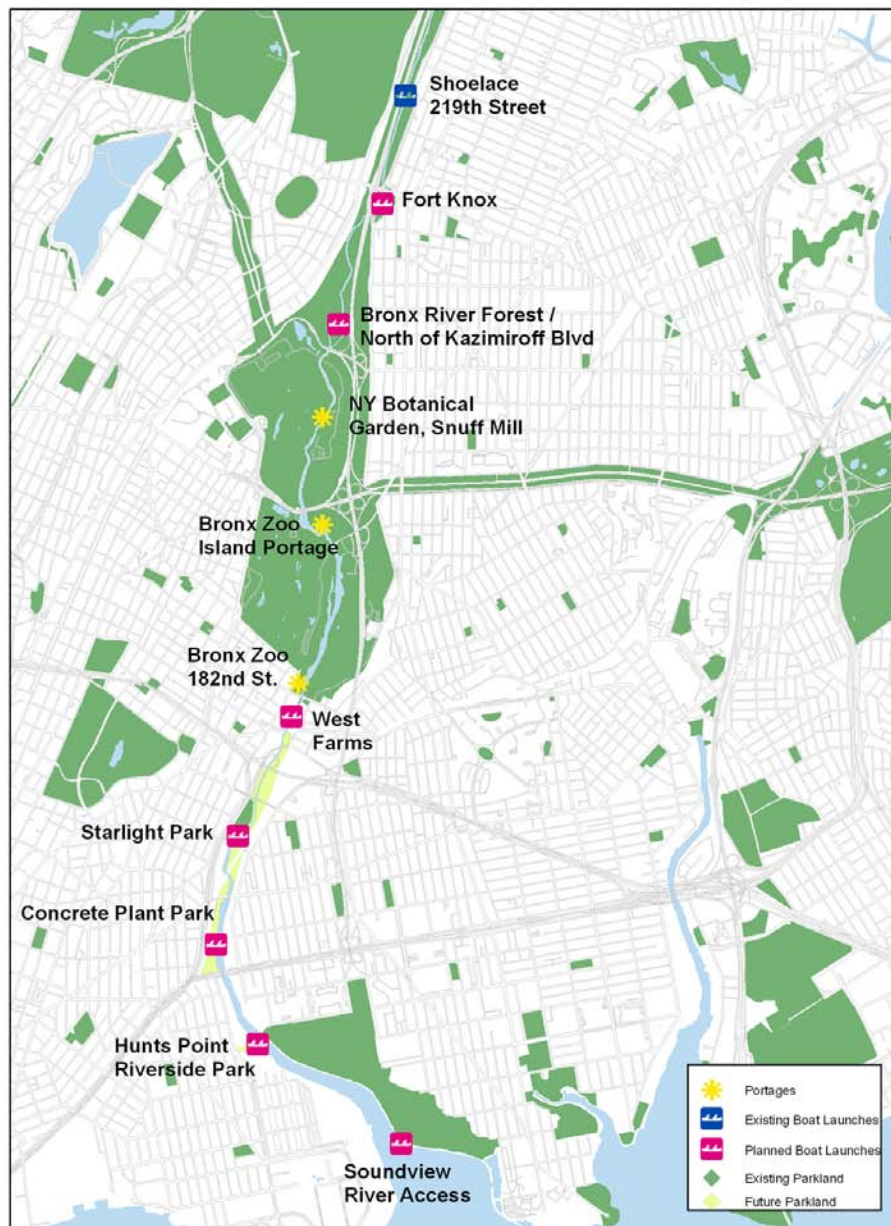
At the 2005 Family Day in the Bronx River Forest, Sonia Manzano, also known as Maria from Sesame Street, entertained youth with songs and stories.

⁴ The Alliance updated the Walking Guide in the summer of 2006. For a hard copy version, please contact the Alliance at BronxRiver.Info@parks.nyc.gov. To download walks from our website, go to bronxriver.org/OutreachMaterials.cfm

recreational and cultural events along the river would require a relatively modest effort that could bring a substantial return in usership.

The Alliance is especially well-placed to help members of the watershed's low- and moderate-income communities—especially young people—take full advantage of the greenway and the river for recreation. Barriers to their participation include lack of equipment—boats, bikes, etc.—and also lack of exposure from childhood onward to activities that children raised in more affluent communities take for granted, like swimming lessons, canoeing at summer camp, etc. By thoughtful deployment of programs, resources, and outreach, the Alliance can do much to help users to overcome those barriers. Though New York's coastline encompasses over 800 miles of waterfront, few of those miles offer safe boating to novices. Because the relatively calm waters of the Bronx River offers a safe place for beginning boaters, the Alliance will take care that its programming gives priority to users with the least prior experience on the water. Merely providing facilities, like boat storage and launches, is likely to attract those who are already comfortable with their use – i.e., people fortunate enough to have had prior experience

Public Boat Launch and Portage Sites



with boating. As the Alliance moves to broaden access to the river, it will continue to develop programming, as well as facilities, that target people who actually live within the watershed's communities.

We might further extend our support of recreational activities by helping groups or clubs to develop facilities along the greenway. The Alliance has helped the non-profit organization Rocking the Boat secure the use of storage and launch facilities on parkland on the greenway. The Alliance will continue to identify sites along the river for additional storage and launch facilities (especially as new segments of the greenway are completed), and facilitate agreements between NYC Parks and other organizations whose focus might be recreational and/or educational. In the absence of a well-understood market for commercial canoe and kayak rental concessions, a nonprofit club model could expand recreational boating on the river and build on the interest stimulated by the Alliance's own programs.

Supporting the development of canoe clubs will require the establishment of Alliance guidelines and policies concerning what kinds of groups could participate and the resolution of issues of liability and insurance, NYC Parks policies about use of space, etc. Other organizations have resolved similar issues: the Inwood Canoe Club uses space at the Dyckman Street Marina, a Parks concession. The Sebago Canoe Club offers public kayaking in Jamaica Bay from a club facility that it operates as a concession. The Alliance could adapt these precedents to expand public access to the river at little or no direct cost to itself.

While there are a few precedents for noncommercial small boating concessions in New York, there do not appear to be any local models for cooperatives or clubs making bikes or skates available. This practice is not uncommon in Europe, in neighborhoods where (as is the case in the Bronx) many young residents cannot afford to buy their own bikes and lack safe space to store them. The Alliance could help interested community organizations experiment with bike co-ops, which could both help young people to get access to equipment, and organize riding events, provide maintenance and repair instruction, etc. Recycle a Bicycle now operates excellent youth programs from its shops in Brooklyn and Manhattan; discussions with them might explore whether the greenway could be a venue for new programming involving Recycle a Bicycle or other organizations.

THE GREENWAY AS A CATALYST FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There is no doubt that the greenway has the potential to stimulate economic development in the neighborhoods alongside the Bronx River. Demand for many goods and services will grow as people discover the river and the greenway. The Alliance can take steps to help locally-owned businesses take advantage of this new demand, to the benefit of greenway users and local entrepreneurs alike. This does not mean that the Alliance needs to directly provide businesses with access to capital, training, and technical assistance, but rather that we strengthen our existing relationships with entities whose missions are in this area, such as the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, the Bronx Tourism Council, and the Bronx Council on the Arts. The Alliance's goal would be to help these cultural and economic development institutions connect to markets within the local community that they might not otherwise reach.

As the greenway moves forward, the Alliance should initiate discussions with these and other actors in the arena of economic development, including public agencies such as the NYC Economic Development Corporation and the Department of Small Business Services. A first step would be to brief the staff of each agency on the greenway, and on the kinds of economic development we believe it can encourage. Then we could invite them to present to the Alliance the range of incentives and assistance they now offer. Informal discussions at this level are likely to suggest possibilities for collaborative work to encourage the development and growth of local enterprises.

Concurrently, the Alliance will need to articulate a relationship between its own values and the ways in which it responds to development initiated by others in the watershed. While there is a very broad range of enterprises that the Alliance would welcome, there may be some which we would not support or which we might even oppose.

Current statements on our values and principles suggest that we would favor:

- locally-owned enterprises
- businesses that pay living wages and/or build capital within local communities
- enterprises with environmental missions
- projects that create tangible ecological benefits to the river and the watershed
- new development projects that adopt LEED⁵ or other green building standards, incorporate green roofs or other stormwater management design elements

Alliance principles also suggest that we would oppose:

- developments that directly displace local residents
- existing and proposed land uses with significant net negative environmental impacts (generation of large volumes of vehicle traffic, air or water pollution, very large impervious paved or roofed areas, etc.)
- enterprises that do not pay living wages or that rely on other exploitative practices

The existence of the greenway will in itself catalyze many kinds of economic development that will not require any specific action by the Alliance. In these cases, there is no reason or opportunity to apply any test of consistency with the Alliance values. However, developers of some kinds of projects may seek more active help from the Alliance. Their projects may request information and advice from the Alliance, or need public approvals, subsidies, community, and political support, or all of these. In such cases, the tests for consistency with Alliance values should be commensurate with the level of support required. The chart below lays out a range of prototypical greenway-related development projects, the level of support each may seek from the Alliance, and the corresponding threshold tests to which they should be subjected before the Alliance takes actions or positions.

Public agencies will also continue to initiate development and infrastructure projects that impact the river and the watershed. While the Alliance may not choose to weigh in on every public sector project, we will certainly need to maintain lines of communication with agencies (including Alliance partners and others) whose projects might affect the river or the greenway. In these instances, we would apply the same tests that we would to private sector projects in assessing whether to take actions or positions on specific projects.

5. Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. For more information, see www.usgbc.org/LEED/.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES FOR GREENWAY-RELATED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS
(arranged from “lowest to highest” standard for receiving the endorsement or active support of the Bronx River Alliance)

| Type of project | Example | Level of support needed from Alliance | Threshold (what does it take to win the Alliance's support?) | Rationale (why would the Alliance decide to support a project) |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| Projects that take advantage of increased activity along the greenway, but are not on parkland, and don't require approval or ongoing support from the Alliance | New restaurant or bike shop on private land near the greenway | Little or none; maybe identification in walking guides and similar kinds of publicity | Very low | We generally support economic development within the watershed; there may be some kinds of projects we would oppose if they have significant negative impacts |
| Amenity concessions on parkland, generally not involving permanent construction | Food concessions | Low - Parks concessions policies will apply, but the Alliance will make information available to local businesses | Low - BxRA might identify sites but not set priorities; entrepreneurs probably know best! | These make the greenway more inviting for general recreational use and can create opportunities for local entrepreneurs |
| Activity concessions located on parkland that may or may not involve permanent construction | Boat rentals, boating clubs, bike rentals | Medium - BxRA might actively seek out operators and help them develop business plans | Medium - BxRA would identify / prioritize sites | These directly support greenway and blueway-related activities and can create opportunities for local entrepreneurs |
| Acquisition of additional sites to enhance the greenway and/or enable additional activities - perhaps to be part of the greenway | Cass Gilbert Station; Loral waterfront; development at Gun Hill Road Metro North Station | High - endorsement during planning, then decide whether to support projects, and/or to take them on as greenway components | High for projects that are to be developed independently of BxRA - very high for projects that would actually become part of the greenway | Development of complementary activities; possibly additions to the greenway, or creation of additional green space within the watershed |

THE GREENWAY AND THE REVITALIZATION OF WATERSHED COMMUNITIES

The opening of the greenway will sooner or later affect land values in the watershed's neighborhoods. This generally benefits local property owners, but it will also lead to increases in both residential and commercial rents. Most watershed residents, and most owners of small businesses, are tenants rather than property owners. What can the Bronx River Alliance do to help ensure that the greenway helps rather than harms these local stakeholders?

The real estate market in the Bronx is dynamic. The population and market collapses that ravaged the South Bronx from the 1970s into the 90s have given way to a robust private market in most neighborhoods, including the watershed. The area's resurgence is welcome—but it also creates challenges:

- Housing prices, both for rental and ownership, are escalating rapidly, while resident incomes fail to keep pace. For example, while the median household incomes rose in the Bronx River watershed nearly 18% from 1990 to 2000, the median monthly rent rose nearly 38%.
- Growth in population and demand for housing in many Bronx neighborhoods have resulted in apartment buildings and units being illegally subdivided, creating overcrowded and unsafe conditions for tenants who have few other housing options.
- In some areas, including parts of Community Districts 9 and 11, one-to-four family homes are being replaced by multiple dwellings. The newer and larger buildings are perceived by some residents to be out-of-scale with existing neighborhoods and to place increasing demands on open space and services. Some communities are pressuring the City Planning Department to downzone, preserving existing scale, but foreclosing opportunities to develop much-needed housing.
- Inappropriate development in some areas. The path of least resistance (lowest capital requirements and fewest regulatory issues) for many private developers, both on and away from the waterfront, has been the construction of 1- & 2-family townhouses that create car-dependent, single-use neighborhoods and in-city sprawl.

In a highly competitive housing market, Bronx River watershed residents face major disadvantages.

| | Bronx portion of Bronx River Watershed ⁶ | | Bronx | | NYC | | NYC Metropolitan Statistical Area | |
|--|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 |
| Renter-occupied housing units | 87% | 86% | 82% | 80% | 71% | 70% | 51% | 47% |
| Owner-occupied housing units | 13% | 14% | 18% | 20% | 29% | 30% | 49% | 53% |
| Median household income⁷ | \$21,649 | \$25,514 | \$23,349 | \$27,611 | \$31,716 | \$42,060 | \$38,445 | \$50,795 |
| Median gross rent/month | \$434 | \$597 | \$435 | \$620 | \$515 | \$705 | \$545 | \$740 |

6. Bronx River watershed - all Bronx census tracts falling within the area drained by the river

7. Dollar figures in census year actual dollars, i.e., figures not adjusted for inflation

Housing costs are rising much more quickly than household incomes. This means that many watershed residents bear unsustainably high rents, and also face either displacement (being forced to relocate away from the neighborhood to seek housing in more affordable, but less desirable locations), or declining housing standards, especially more overcrowding, as families double up, and extended families share small apartments.

POTENTIAL ROLES FOR THE BRONX RIVER ALLIANCE

The Alliance's status as a public-private partnership means that it can have unique opportunities to influence decisionmaking on land use. In this way, the Alliance can help to ensure that the people who have worked to reclaim the river and build the greenway can enjoy the fruits of their efforts, rather than being displaced as a result of them.

The wave of abandonment that swept the South Bronx in the 1970s and 1980s made New York City the inadvertent owner of thousands of acres of land and buildings. City ownership of land allowed nonprofit housing developers to build and rehabilitate tens of thousands of apartment units in the Bronx. The city's commitment to direct capital funding of housing and its large stock of property taken *in rem*⁸ meant that land prices could be set to ensure the affordability of the completed housing units. More importantly control of development sites could be maintained during the time required to engage local stakeholders in planning, assemble project financing, and obtain regulatory approvals. In today's market, most land and building sales are transactions between private sellers and buyers. Under current law, all new housing built in the Bronx is entitled to real estate tax abatements. The only regulatory mechanisms governing development in most cases are zoning and building code regulations, neither of which ordinarily restricts the price of housing units. Most private development in the Bronx are built as-of-right (i.e., in conformance with existing zoning and thus with no requirement for public review) precisely because developers want to move quickly and minimize risk. In fact, many developers will forego a higher return on a project (e.g., from additional density) to avoid the potential for delay and uncertainty that a public review process often entails.

The only situations in which communities have the opportunity to participate in land use decisionmaking are those in which land is publicly owned, or in which a developer's need for zoning changes or public subsidy triggers ULURP review.⁹ And today, there are few opportunities for community organizations themselves to acquire and develop land for any purpose, primarily because of the difficulty in gaining control of sites in a speculative environment.

Therefore, absent intervention, most vacant or underutilized parcels are likely to be developed for market-rate housing and commercial uses, rather than for either affordable housing or green open space. The Alliance might therefore seek ways that it can encourage new development that benefits both local residents and the river itself. Though the plan of the basic greenway route is now defined, there remain additional opportunities to increase the amount of green space along the river, and to develop underutilized land in ways that are consistent with the Alliance's values. The Alliance could work with its community organization members to identify

8. During the 1970s and 80s, New York City routinely foreclosed on delinquent property tax liens, and also routinely gave or sold those properties to nonprofit organizations who agreed to rehabilitate and operate them as housing affordable to low-income residents. Changes in the economy and in city policy have shrunk that inventory from a peak of over 100,000 units in 1979, to near zero in 2005.

9. The Uniform Land Use Review Procedure is a city charter-mandated sequence of reviews beginning with the local community board, and continuing through the Borough President, the City Planning Commission, and the City Council and the Mayor. For a complete description, including definitions of actions subject to ULURP, see nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/luproc/ulpro.shtml.

sites within the watershed which have the potential to contribute to the restoration of the river, to the future expansion of the greenway, and to the creation of affordable housing.

Appropriate roles for the Alliance include:

- Weigh in where there is public review or subsidy of private development projects. Support projects that are consistent with its values, and oppose those that are not. The Alliance can potentially wield important influence both directly by testifying at public hearings, etc., and indirectly by bringing its concerns about projects to the organizations, institutions, and public agencies with whom it works.
- Where appropriate, be a partner, co-applicant, or supporter when community-based organizations seek site control and/or funding for brownfield planning, cleanup, and redevelopment in the watershed.
- Use its influence to bring public agency landowners to the table, especially when they own vacant or underutilized land that could be put to a community use.
- Work with nonprofit or for-profit developers on projects that will create public access as a component of affordable housing development projects (such as the Loral site in Soundview).
- Consider ways that the greenway can be augmented by a network of green spaces in upland neighborhoods. Work with watershed communities to plan and implement projects that will connect these neighborhoods to the river, reduce paved area, and manage stormwater. Projects such as the South Bronx Greenway, now being planned, suggest ways that existing street networks can be redesigned to create safe space for cycling and walking, while also capturing stormwater and returning it to the soil, and increasing the amount of vegetated area and tree canopy.

Taking positions on development projects, advocating for appropriate development within the watershed, or becoming directly involved in such development, all represent significant commitments of Alliance staff resources, political capital, and credibility. Any potential involvement by the Alliance would be subject to tests along lines similar to those suggested in the chart on page 5.8. That is, the higher the Alliance's stake in a given project and the greater its commitment of resources, the higher the threshold that project would have to pass for consistency with the Alliance's principles and values.

As the Bronx River Greenway is implemented—a public investment now totaling over \$120 million—the Alliance will give careful consideration to how the greenway shapes overall development in the watershed. The Alliance will also continue to bring disparate audiences—public agencies, regional non-profits, and community-based organizations—to the same table to share information, collaborate, and reach decisions.