

Lowline Community Engagement

Public Workshop 5 (Report Out)

Timing: 2 hours

Prepared by Karp Strategies | June 20, 2017

Workshop Date: June 12, 2017, 6:30 to 8:30 PM

Number of Attendees: Approximately 50 participants seated audience-style

Who were Attendees: A diverse mix of community members

Presenters: Meghan Joye (Task Force member), Rebecca Karp (Consultant lead), Robyn Shapiro (Lowline)

Note takers and docents: Arielle Hersh, Bri Jimenez, Neha Krishnan, Courtney Surmanek, Michael Walker

Other staff and volunteers: Oana Cercei (translator), Amy Daniel (Young Ambassador), Dennis Edemeka, Vivian Huang, Erik Kath, Mandy Lee (Young Ambassador), Sam Richman, Justin Rivera, Melanie del Rosario, Alexandra Sutherland-Brown, Evelyn Thomas, Kay Xie (translator)

Introduction

This memo is intended to provide a summary analysis of the ideas shared at the fifth and final Public Community Design Workshop conducted by Karp Strategies and the Lowline as part of the Lowline's formal community engagement process. The analysis here presents the ideas and key themes raised in the question and discussion period following a report out presentation, as well as comments captured at each of the three scenario stations that participants visited after the presentation.

This document is not intended to be representative of the views of all members of CD3 or the Lower East Side, or to draw definitive conclusions regarding the needs of the community. It is presented as part of an iterative engagement process, and will be used alongside findings from other public community design workshops and small engagement activities to form a more holistic picture.

Structure of the Workshop

Public Workshop 5 was designed as a report out to the community on the findings the Karp Strategies and Lowline team has heard over the past nine months of engagement. The workshop was also structured to capture a final round of feedback from the community to 'gut check' our conclusions.

To meet these goals, the workshop was comprised of two activities. First, the Karp Strategies and Lowline teams made a 30-minute presentation about community engagement findings, followed by a 30 minute Q&A and discussion period from the audience. These comments were collected via note taker.

Second, at the back of the room three programming scenarios were presented. These were “Learning & Discovery,” “Local Inclusion & Community Building,” and “Green & Natural.” Each of these scenarios was chosen because of previous and overwhelming feedback heard from the community throughout Karp Strategies’ engagement; they were presented as a series of images relating to the themes heard, and pasted into the depression of the 3D maps from Public Workshops 1 and 2 (see Image 1). Beside each scenario was a board with key ideas listed on it that related to the scenario in question (see Image 2). After the presentation and Q&A session, participants were asked to vote on which key ideas best described their future vision of the site, in addition to naming partners that could help to host themed programming. Participants were given 12 stickers each with which to vote, and ‘docents’ – Lowline volunteers – stood beside each station to take notes on any comments, and offer answers when available.

Image 1: Programming Scenario “Green & Natural”



Image 2: Key Ideas Board for “Green & Natural”

A key ideas board for the "Green & Natural" scenario. The board is titled "GREEN & NATURAL SCENARIO 1" and includes a section for key ideas and a section for partners. The key ideas section has a table with two columns: "KEY IDEAS" and "VOTES". The partners section asks "Which people or organizations could the Lowline partner with to put on 'green and natural' programming?".

KEY IDEAS	VOTES
"A place to just be"	
"Relaxation"	
"Get away from the hubbub of the city"	
"Living walls of vegetation"	
"Ensure seniors have a place for unrestricted activities - to just sit"	
"Have different types of gardens for different seasons and different cultures"	

PARTNERS
Which people or organizations could the Lowline partner with to put on 'green and natural' programming?

The major points of discussion after the presentation and at the scenario stations were as follows.

Questions and Comments Post-Presentation

Approximately 12 participants asked approximately 22 questions during the Q&A session. The nature of these inquiries was consistent across questioners, and can be summarized according to the following themes:

- **Operations & Management:** As heard at previous workshops, participants sought to understand how an underground space would actually function and how the Lowline will manage the future space. Specific questions related to management included: what entity currently owns the space, whether the Lowline is a 501 (c) (3), and how the NYC Parks department is involved in this project. Operational questions included: capacity, how to ensure safety, hours the Lowline will be open, and the types of businesses that could/may exist underground.
- **Financing:** A variety of questions approached one topic – how the Lowline will be financed and sustain itself financially. This community interest was also evident at the previous workshops. Inquiries at Public Workshop 5 included:
 - How will the space be financed?
 - Will we [the community] be allowed free entry?
 - Are you fundraising from a variety of sources?
 - How will the Lowline afford maintenance?
- **Tourism:** Participants were concerned about the possibility of the Lowline being overrun by tourists. There was little nuance to these inquiries; each sought to simply understand how the anticipated boom in tourists would be handled. One participant proposed charging visitors an entry fee (an idea that has arisen multiple times across other engagements). However, how one would qualify ‘visitor’ was up for debate – are those from the Upper West Side visitors? Those from Brooklyn? In the reverse, a presenter brought up another perspective the engagement team has heard previously: how can the Lowline connect tourist dollars back to local businesses, who may *benefit* from an influx of visitors? While answers to these questions remain outstanding, the concern is clear and continuously articulated, especially as some participants hope for a community-centric future space and while others in past engagements have voiced a desire for tourist dollars.

Scenario Stations: Voting, Discussion, and Partners

A summary of voting results is presented in Table 1 below. Elements of the “Green & Natural” scenario received the most number of total votes, followed closely by those in “Learning & Discovery.”

Table 1: Total Votes By Scenario

SCENARIO	TOTAL VOTES
Green & Natural	111
Learning & Discovery	105
Local Inclusion & Community Building	75

For all scenarios, Table 2 summarizes how many votes each key idea received in each scenario. Finally, Table 3 pulls out the top five key ideas across scenarios.

Table 2: Votes by Key Idea

SCENARIO	KEY IDEAS	VOTES
Green & Natural	"Have different types of gardens for different seasons, and different cultures"	30
Green & Natural	"Living walls of vegetation"	29
Green & Natural	"Ensure seniors have a place for unstructured activities - to just sit"	19
Green & Natural	"Get away from the hubub of the city"	12
Green & Natural	"Relaxation"	11
Green & Natural	"A place to just be"	10
Learning & Discovery	"Utilize solar collection technology as a learning tool"	31
Learning & Discovery	"Workshops about everything from botancy to engineering"	22
Learning & Discovery	"Plants and technology are fundamental to the Lowline"	21
Learning & Discovery	"All-ages approach to education"	19
Learning & Discovery	"The Lowline as a classroom in and of itself"	8
Learning & Discovery	"Digital sketchpads to integrate technology and art"	4
Local Inclusion & Community Building	"Provide services to help local residents, like job training"	21
Local Inclusion & Community Building	"Make the Lowline a place where everyone feels welcome"	20
Local Inclusion & Community Building	"Community is changing; celebrate its history"	12
Local Inclusion & Community Building	"Make sure artists have a space to stay on the LES"	8
Local Inclusion & Community Building	"Have local, affordable food"	7
Local Inclusion & Community Building	"What if people could see how artists make their work"	7

Table 3: Top Five Key Ideas

#	SCENARIO	KEY IDEA	VOTES
1	Learning & Discovery	"Utilize solar collection technology as a learning tool"	31
2	Green & Natural	"Have different types of gardens for different seasons, and different cultures"	30
3	Green & Natural	"Living walls of vegetation"	29
4	Learning & Discovery	"Workshops about everything from botancy to engineering"	22
5	Learning & Discovery	"Plants and technology are fundamental to the Lowline"	21 (Tie)
5	Local Inclusion & Community Building	"Provide services to help local residents, like job training"	21 (Tie)

Comments on each scenario were received at each station, and varied widely. Ideas for partnership were offered at two scenario stations. At "Learning & Discovery," the suggestions were:

- VertiCulture - an aquaponic production facility company; and
- GreenThumb - a community gardening program run by NYC Parks & Recreation.

At this station, participants also asked many questions about future Lowline technology and operations like, “When will the Lowline be completed?” and “Won’t the Essex Crossing buildings block the light?” Overall, the tenor of the questions received at “Learning & Discovery” echo the community’s overall interest in having the Lowline be a space of education, with a focus on ecology and technology.

At “Local Inclusion & Community Building,” the partnership suggestions were:

- Economy Candy – a local sweets store;
- El Castillo – a Dominican-Caribbean diner in the neighborhood; and
- The Chinese-American Planning Council – a social services agency serving Chinese, immigrant, and low-income communities in NYC.

Economy Candy and El Castillo were suggested as restaurants that the Lowline could partner with to lead job-training workshops. In the reverse, another comment was received at the “Local Inclusion” station that corporate food stores, like Starbucks, should *not* be included at the future site. Another participant expressed an opinion about what the Lowline should *not* have: dedicated space for artists’ use; as this person put it, ‘The neighborhood already has lots of artist space, and artists lead to gentrification.’

Though “Green & Natural” received no partnership suggestions, comments were received about the exact nature of the ‘green’ to come. One participant emphasized that relaxation would be important; another hoped that the Lowline included both general seating, and seating that could easily accommodate seniors. Finally, one participant suggested that the columns be used to build up greenery, and instead of trees, that this ‘jungle’ should have lush columns of vegetation.