



U.S. Representative • 9<sup>TH</sup> CD, New York • Brooklyn-Queens

**ANTHONY D. WEINER**

Report

## **GATEWAY OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

### **Improvements to the Gateway National Recreation Area**

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**Presented by  
Congressman Anthony D. Weiner**

**Earth Day -- April 22, 2003**

#### **Introduction:**

Gateway is one of New York's crown jewels. Encompassing 26,607 acres, 8,955,609 people visited Gateway last year.

It's easy to explain Gateway's popularity.

It's a place to explore historic Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn's first municipal airport, and an aerial hub for fighter planes during World War II. Or to stroll along the beautiful beaches and sandy shorelines in Riis Park, Breezy Point and the Rockaway. Or to experience the natural wonders of Jamaica Bay and its fragile marshland, which is home to over 9,000 acres of waterways, and is one of the largest urban bird sanctuaries in the United States.

The Jamaica Bay and Breezy Point units of the Gateway National Park, which are the focus of this report, fall primarily in Brooklyn and Queens. Extending from Sheepshead Bay to Jamaica Bay, from Howard Beach to Rockaway, they comprise a remarkable natural resource, and a place where families can come to learn, experience the great outdoors, or just relax and have fun.

For the past several years, Rep. Weiner has made sustaining Gateway, and improving its facilities a top priority. In fact, Weiner has helped secure over \$34 million dollars for projects currently underway in Gateway. Projects include:

- Construction of a multi-use family sports complex at Floyd Bennett Field.
- Refurbishment of the Riis Park bathhouse.
- Renovation of the Gateway marina.

- Construction of a new visitor center in the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, and saving its fragile salt marshes.
- New golf and other recreational facilities.
- Renovated and rehabilitated tennis and basketball courts, playing fields, walking paths, and picnic areas.

In the next several pages, you will find more detailed overviews of some of the projects under way in Gateway. It's a glimpse of the many improvements that will carry Gateway into the 21st Century.

### **Floyd Bennett Field -- Sports Complex, Picnic Areas and Playing Fields:**

Historic Floyd Bennet Field was New York City's first municipal airport, serving as a launching point for Navy warplanes on their way to the front during World War II. Located along Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn, today it is one of Gateway's staple attractions.

Currently, Floyd Bennett play host to a variety of activities. The volunteers of the Historic Aircraft Restoration Project work in Hangar B to renovate old airplanes. The Floyd Bennett Garden Association maintains a garden growing plants and vegetables on the field. And the Gateway Environmental Center provides area teachers with environmental training.

Coming soon: Floyd Bennett Field's crown jewel: a multi purpose family sports complex!

#### **Sports Complex:**

During World War II, Gateway's eight hangars provided storage space for warplanes being readied for combat. But in the years since then, Weiner and Gateway have looked for ways to better use the cavernous space contained in the hangars. Realizing that they were the perfect size and in the perfect location for a brand new family sports complex, Gateway began accepting bids in May of 2001.

Now, that vision is set to become a reality. By the Fall of next year, Aviator Sports, a New York City based concessionaire who has contracted with the National Parks Service, will transform hangars five through eight into a \$15 million state of the art sports complex, with:

- Hockey rink and pro shop.
- All purpose fitness center, equipped with weights and aerobics facilities.
- Indoor soccer, volley ball and all purpose gym.
- Food court and café.

*Status: To be completed Fall of 2005. (A formal unveiling of the \$15 million project will occur early next month.)*

### Picnic Areas and Playing Fields:

Floyd Bennett is more than a repository of some of New York City's most unique history, and the site of coming soon sports complex. It's also a wide open space that features great outdoor locations for parents and their kids to relax. Over the last two years Gateway, with Rep. Weiner's help, has undertaken to improve it's outdoor facilities, and is in the process of completing a \$300,000 rehabilitation and expansion of its playing fields and picnic areas.

*Status: To be completed in 2005.*

### Gateway Golf Center on Flatbush Avenue:

The family sports complex isn't the only exciting athletic and recreational improvement project underway on Flatbush Avenue. The Gateway Golf Center is scheduled for construction right across the street! The Golf Center will bring a \$450,000 state of the art, full service facility to Brooklyn, including a 75 tee driving range and food service.

Other possible amenities still in the planning stage include:

- Tennis court.
- Pro shop.
- Golf training center, including putting greens and sand traps.
- Club house facility.
- Heated tees.
- Indoor simulated golf practice system.

*Status: To be completed in the Spring of 2004.*

### Gateway Marina:

Just next door to the Golf Center is the Gateway Marina, another area undergoing extensive renovations. The Marina is one of the economic and recreational staples of Jamaica Bay. A secure location for residents of Queens and Brooklyn to dock up to 500 sail or motor boats, it also features vendors and equipment sales.

Over the past three years, the marina has undergone a significant overhaul, including over \$3.6 million in renovations. Now Gateway has begun soliciting bids for a concessionaire who will operate the site until 2013, and who will invest another \$3.6 million in the next phase of renovations.

Planned renovations include:

- Installation of new docks and pilings to replace old ones and possibly increase marina capacity.

- Upgrades for showers, restrooms and laundry facilities.
- New navigational aides to assist boaters entering and existing the marina.
- New fire suppression system.
- New video surveillance security equipment.

*Status: To be completed in 2006.*

### **Riis Landing:**

The transportation needs of the Rockaways' 1 million residents have long been under served. With two overburdened bridges, limited train access and an aging fleet of buses, its imperative that we explore innovative transportation alternatives.

Over the past three years, Rep. Weiner has secured \$1,198,000 to renovate the ferry dock at Riis Landing, located at the old Coast Guard Station across from Fort Tilden. This year, Weiner secured a \$400,000 installment in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill.

The site is already being used for recreation cruises during the summer, as well as ecological tours of Jamaica Bay. When construction is complete, the landing will serve as the hub for ferry and water taxi service between the Rockaway peninsula, southern Brooklyn and Queens, and points throughout New York City.

*Status: Construction set to begin in summer of 2003.*

### **Jacob Riis Park–Bathhouse, Pitch & Putt, Tot Lot and Recreation Areas:**

Jacob Riis Park, named for the famed New York photographer, is located within the Breezy Point Unit of Gateway. It spans 220 acres, with one mile of ocean beach, and diverse recreational resources.

Developed in the 1930's, it remains a remarkable outdoor resource, but one in need of some significant maintenance and upkeep. Over the past decade, it has received extensive repairs, including to its visitor facilities at the crescent shaped Mall, its playgrounds and popular tot lot.

#### **The Bathhouse:**

The Riis Park Bathhouse is located on the lip of the Atlantic ocean, just above the sandy beaches of Breezy Point. One of the City's most popular beach destinations since 1932, its visited by over 2 million people a year.

But over the years, the passage of time and harsh Atlantic weather have taken their toll. That's why Rep. Weiner has worked with Gateway, and Senators Clinton and Schumer to restore the bathhouse to its former splendor. Already completed are projects to restore the bathhouse exterior, replace the windows, and rehab the lifeguard offices, lockers and showers.

Current renovations, funded by \$4.1 million secured by Weiner, Schumer, and Clinton, include:

- Demolition and rehabilitation of the courtyard area.
- Renovation of the first floor on the beach side.
- Restoration of the entry pavilion.
- Upgrade of utilities.

*Status: To be completed in Spring of 2005.*

#### Pitch and Putt:

Riis Park is also home to a popular par 3 golf course: the Riis Park Pitch and Putt. Just the right size for golfers of all ages and abilities, it is set to undergo \$450,000 of renovations. Other possible improvements include a batting cage and mini golf facilities. The Pitch and Putt will be operated in conjunction with the Golf Center on Flatbush Avenue.

*Status: To be completed in Spring of 2005.*

#### Fort Tilden Playing Fields:

Historic Fort Tilden is a 317 acre parcel of land, located on the Rockaway Peninsula. Established as a military installation in 1917, it became a part of Gateway in 1974. Once an instrument of war, it's now the home to basketball courts and playing fields, all of which have undergone a \$150,000 renovation thanks to Weiner secured funds.

*Status: Done.*

#### Picnic Areas:

Riis Park's location on Breezy Point affords its patrons unique access to the Atlantic on one side, and Jamaica Bay on the other. It's a wonderful location for families to get out and enjoy the fresh sea air and ocean views. Over the past three years, Rep. Weiner and Gateway have initiated a program to rehabilitate and expand the park's picnic areas, to the tune of \$300,000.

*Status: 1/3 of the project completed in 2002; remaining work scheduled for completion in 2004.*

#### Tot Lot:

The Riis Park Tot Lot has become a favorite haunt for kids all over Rockaway. To make it even better, Rep. Weiner secured \$100,000 to install new four new playground sets, new swings, five new picnic tables, new fencing, landscaping, and a brand new safety surface. The project was completed last July.

*Status: Done.*

### **Rockaway Gateway Greenway**

New York City has long awaited the construction of the Greenway—a multi-purpose path for walkers, runners and bicycle riders to take in the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge's beautiful views. But the project's been delayed by environmental or financial concerns.

So for the past two years, Rep. Weiner's worked with environmentalists and state officials to hammer out a workable deal. Last year a big hurdle was surmounted when Rep. Weiner brokered a compromise between environmentalists and state officials to ensure that the path ran adjacent to the refuge, but not so close as to upset its delicate ecosystem.

The final pieces of the cost sharing puzzle should soon be in place, allowing construction to begin. When it's off the ground, the Greenway will provide New York City residents with a great new way to get the most out of the neighborhoods tremendous natural resources. Expected cost: \$1.4 million.

Status: in the planning stages, completion Fall of 2004.

### **Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge—Visitor Center & Salt Marshes:**

In 1951, New York City Parks Department Commissioner Robert Moses envisioned a bird sanctuary in the Jamaica Bay region. Abetted by the construction of two fresh water ponds—the East and West ponds—, as well carefully landscaped trees, grasses and other vegetation, the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge has become one of the most significant urban parks in the United States.

Every year, thousands of nature lovers make their way to the refuge. Located on one of the principle migratory flyways of Northeast American birds, it contains numerous islands and nature trails, as well as over 9,000 acres of waterways. Canada Geese, Warblers, Osprey, Oystercatchers, Willets, and Herons are among the diverse birds that breed and reside in the refuge. They are joined by rare flora and fauna, as well as reptiles, amphibians, small mammals and butterflies.

#### **Visitor Center:**

One of the first stops on the way to the refuge is it's visitor center. In the center, visitors can learn about the refuge's diverse wildlife, get maps of it's breathtaking nature trails, and find out about the health of our fragile marshlands. It's also the step off point for trails that loop around both the East and West ponds.

Thanks to a \$3.3 million appropriation secured by Rep. Weiner, Gateway will be able to expand the center to accommodate the broad interest in the refuge's resources. The funding will be used to add a lecture space, refurbish the display room and make the entire center more energy efficient. The refuge's maintenance facility, which adjoins the current visitor center, will also be moved to a location away from where visitors congregate.

*Status: To be completed Winter of 2006.*

### Salt Marshes:

In November of 2000, the DEC released a study showing that Jamaica Bay's wetlands are disappearing at an alarming rate. According to the DEC, 800 acres of wetlands have been lost in Jamaica Bay in the last 18 years, 300 since 1994. The wetlands, which are home to a number of rare animals, birds and plants, may erode completely by 2020.

In April of 2001, a Blue Ribbon Panel of world class scientists convened by Rep. Weiner in response to this environmental crisis outlined a series of research and restoration goals designed to save the salt marshes, including: implementation of new salt marsh restoration measures, long-term analysis of changes in Jamaica Bay's sediment layer, field mapping of the salt marshes to identify areas of pronounced erosion, public education and technical workshops to monitor the health of the salt marshes over time, develop ongoing efforts to staunch further erosion, and keep the public informed.

In June of 2001, Rep. Weiner announced that Gateway would receive a \$598,000 grant from the Natural Resources Protection Program (NRPP) to implement the Blue Ribbon Panel's proposals. Last November, the panelists discussed their preliminary findings at a Brooklyn College conference.

*Status: ongoing.*

### **Frank M. Charles Memorial Park and West Hamilton Beach Park**

In 1905, Bill Charles purchased property at Hawtree Basin and, with the help of his son Frank, built and rented out six bungalows on the land. Frank subsequently shipped out to France during World War I, and was killed in action in 1918.

Eight years later, the Frank M. Charles post of the American Legion was established, and was headquartered in what is now the Frank M. Charles Memorial Park. Located above Jamaica Bay, the park is adjacent to the land originally purchased by Bill Charles, now known as West Hamilton Beach Park.

### Frank Charles Park Renovations:

For the past five years, Rep. Weiner and Gateway have worked together to do a top to bottom renovation of Charles Park. Investing \$850,000, renovations completed or underway include:

- An expanded and rehabilitated playground.
- 4 tennis court rehabilitated, and new lighting installed.
- 3 baseball fields rehabilitated.
- 2 rehabilitated basketball courts.
- Expanded exercise path, and lighting installed.

- Restored benches and comfort station.

Status: playground, tennis and basketball court, and baseball field renovations done. Exercise path renovations expected to be complete this summer. Comfort station rehab to be completed in 2005.

West Hamilton Beach Park Renovations:

West Hamilton Beach Park, which is right next door to Charles Park, has also undergone extensive renovations, thanks to an investment of \$150,000 in Weiner secured dollars, including:

- Renovated basketball courts.
- Rehabilitated ball fields.
- Repaired walking paths and picnic areas.

*Status: Done.*

Congressman Anthony D. Weiner

**Reports List**