

# SUSTAINABLE CITIES DESIGN ACADEMY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

Rail → Arts → River



## CASE STUDY

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

# Rail→Arts→River

New Brunswick, New Jersey comprises a racially, ethnically, and economically diverse population of 55,000+ that regularly doubles during the day due to employees traveling to Rutgers University, Johnson & Johnson, hospitals, and county government offices. Although these institutions integrate art and sculpture on their grounds, with the exception of art installations in community gardens, very little art exists in New Brunswick's common open and public spaces. To solve this public art deficit and to better orient citizens and visitors to the city, a multi-disciplinary team of arts, environmental, and civic professionals spearheaded Rail→Arts→River. This initiative is meant to define access to additional public spaces for culture and creativity, employing the arts to encourage playful interaction and celebration in new and unexpected venues across a wide-range of communities. Through Rail→Arts→River, the project team hopes to champion urban arts and riverfront recapture in the "Hub" City of New Brunswick, NJ, a community dynamically connected to both the Raritan River and NJ Transit's commuter rail line. The project team believes that Rail→Arts→River has the potential to nurture, encourage and invite creativity as an approach to integrated issues including economic development, social resiliency, and ecological regeneration, with the central concept focused on a two mile belt connecting a series of "zones" between the New Brunswick train station, Raritan River, Boyd Park, Lord Stirling Elementary School, and Central Business Corridor. Signature art pieces are planned for those designated zones, creating the inclusive vision of regeneration between an unseen river and a disconnected community. The streetscape surrounding and connecting these zones has the potential to be a canvas for way-finding, from rail to river, using professional and community-inspired art installations to visually breach barriers and improve human and economic access.

To best engage the community in the development process, the team's outreach approach has been multi-pronged; grounded in community engagement, but also utilizing dissemination of information through marketing (website and print materials, including building on the 250th anniversary of the founding of Rutgers University in 2016) and direct delivery of services. Additionally, once implemented, an accompanying grade school curriculum will be developed to facilitated great awareness and learning about these installations and the comprehensive project. Ultimately the project team seeks to deepen their understanding of design opportunities that marry aesthetic to functional public art and positive environmental impact installations that speak to a sustainable future for New Brunswick, including new solutions and best practices for way-finding in urban and environmental landscape design.

### Questions the Rail-Arts-River Project Team had SCDA participants consider::

- How should the New Brunswick team best craft a plan for an arts-environmental installation that garners community support and attracts financing? How can we position the Rail→Arts→River proposal for socioeconomic impact evaluations?
- How can the team best leverage art to communicate the processes of environmental impact assessment, mitigation, and environmental engineering so that the principles of sustainability are understood?
- How can the team best engage corporate, business, and other economically-minded community partners in rethinking fundamental assumptions about how we engage our public spaces and create our environments?
- Working with the diverse populations of a historically disengaged community, and on the path to community resilience, how can we engage community memory, history, and culture for reinterpretation through sustainable landscape design and environmental engineering?

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### Look for the River: Key Action Steps and Intent

- Work within New Brunswick and the surrounding Lower Raritan Watershed communities to raise awareness about the Raritan while simultaneously promoting cultural institutions in New Brunswick
- Engage community in DIY/ guerilla actions including community created rain gardens, pop-up seed bomb meadows, clean graffiti, performances related to the watershed, and ecological art interventions
- Transform the New Brunswick Waterfront from a under-used facility that perennially floods into a estuarine wetland environment that:
  - Makes “room for the river”
  - Enhances the river’s ecology
  - Acts as a living laboratory
  - Sets a regional model for regenerating and respecting the river
- Keep and enhance some park infrastructure; the existing amphitheater will overlook the new wetland with a floating stage

### Opportunities for Outreach: The Oaxacan Turtle

- Adopt this mascot to convey the comprehensive environmental message for this project; it’s a familiar symbol to the community and an historic mascot for the environmental movement



### Enact Demonstration Projects

- Rutgers Public Safety Building - use this key location of the university building on a busy thoroughfare and slope to:
  - Green the walls, roof, and ground level surfaces
- Install a rainwater capture systems store and cleanse water, ultimately cascading towards the river
- Install planting beds that can filter rainwater as well as a cistern that also functions as public art, e.g. “The Kettle of Fish”



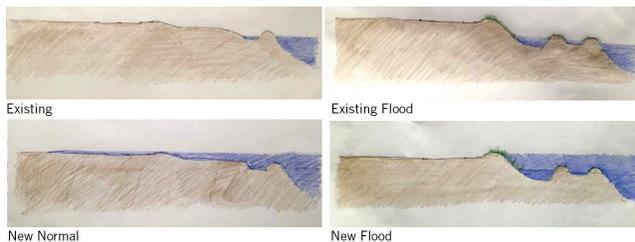
- Pedestrian Access and the Enhancement of Route 27
  - Treat road easement with planted beds for slowing of rainwater and capture and cleaning on site
  - Create a better pedestrian experience and perceived safety with the landscape buffer between the road and the sidewalk
  - Light the underside of the highway viaduct with expressive and functional displays that enhance the pedestrian or driver experience and signify the connection to the river
- Wetland Intervention at the Park
  - Redesign the park as wetland to enhance ecology, absorb (some) and embrace future flooding
  - Remediate the canal and adjacent walkway
  - Improve the boardwalk and canal crossings
  - incorporate ADA access into the new design
  - Create an observation deck using the existing paved ramp system
  - Give the amphitheater a setting that can accommodate flooding (floating stage when water is high)
  - Screen the amphitheater with a vine wall and canopy to buffer the parkway noise and create a more welcoming atmosphere

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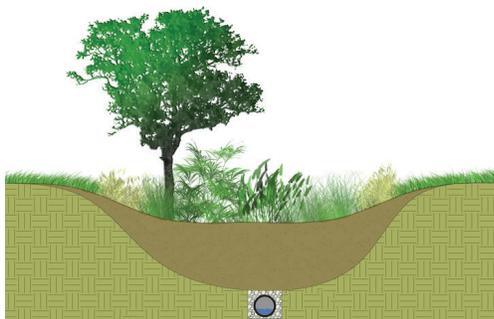
### To Flood Wall or Not to Flood Wall

- Avoid having to install a flood wall and set a model for the region in avoiding floodwalls and other “intensive” flooding interventions
- Create a berm that is the height of Memorial Parkway that acts as a natural levee during flooding
- Cut away land that is currently used in the park and fill the land adjacent to the Parkway, creating Room for the River



### Best Practices

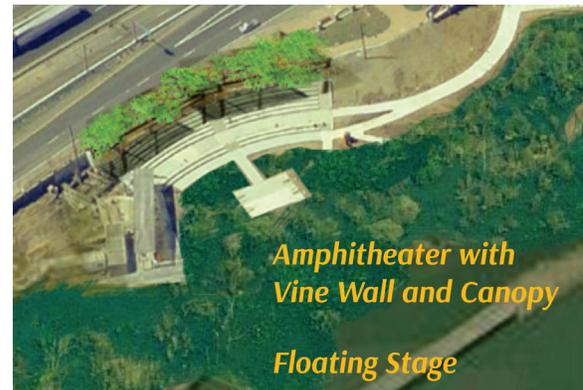
- Seed Bombs: An alternative method of sowing seeds through different forms and methods. (<http://www.guerrillagardening.org/ggseedbombs.html>)
- Rain Gardens / Bioretention: Landscape features placed strategically in areas where on-site treatment of stormwater is paramount. (<http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/npdes/swbmp/Bioretention-Rain-Gardens.cfm>)



- “Clean River is a Fun River” public art (Milwaukee): A unique and graphic display that provides for public advocacy around clean urban waters and separated storm and sewer waters from Milwaukee Riverkeeper. (<http://charlestonwaterkeeper.org/2008/11/07/a-clean-river-is-a-fun-river/>)



- River-Evoking Wayfinding / Street Art: Pasadena Museum of California Art (<http://blog.calarts.edu/2010/10/01/sustainable-design-discussion-at-the-pasadena-museum-of-california-art/>)
- Floating Stage: Modeled by Bargemusic, a barge-based floating performance venue moored near the Brooklyn Bridge (<http://www.bargemusic.org/>)



- Wetland / Riparian Parkland Environmental Design: Trinity Lakes Park Design by WRT (<http://www.wrtedesign.com/projects/detail/trinity-lakes-park-design/117>)

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