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## 11th Street Bridge Park



- Post Reprint: “Can D.C. build a \$45 million park for Anacostia without pushing people out?”
- Discussion Questions: What If the Bridge Has a Park?



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## MAGAZINE

# Can D.C. build a \$45 million park for Anacostia without pushing people out?

BY JONATHAN O'CONNELL

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## “DID YOU KNOW HOW HOT ANACOSTIA IS?”

began the listing for 1330 T St. SE.

The home is a recently renovated 1920s bungalow with original hardwood floors, new granite countertops and fresh coats of paint in muted tones throughout, priced at \$469,900. And as the listing pointed out, the house is walkable to the Anacostia Arts Center, a Busboys and Poets restaurant under construction and a park that, well, doesn't exist.

It may never get built. If it does, it won't be for at least three years. And yet the 11th Street Bridge Park is already a selling point in real estate listings.

In some ways this was the fear all along.

Many people have explained the concept for the 11th Street Bridge Park by comparing the idea to New York City's High Line park. This is for good reason. The High Line, a 1.5-mile landscaped trail built atop abandoned rail lines that once served Manhattan's Meatpacking District, is now the backbone of one of Manhattan's trendiest and priciest neighborhoods.



AERIAL VISUALIZATIONS BY AIRPHOTOSLIVE.COM/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**An aerial view of the 11th Street Bridge (left) and the 695 overpass. The piers to the left of the bridge would support the proposed park.**

The bridge park would be built atop four piers from the old 11th Street Bridge, which was replaced by a series of new bridges four years ago.

As work began in 2009 on the new bridges, the District's Department of Transportation proposed keeping the old piers and building river overlooks on top of them. Harriet Tregoning, who was then the city's director of planning, proposed something bolder: a privately operated, publicly owned park that would connect

neighbors on either side of what has been a deeply divisive social and economic barrier since whites fled the city in droves in the 1960s: the Anacostia River.

It seemed like an almost fanciful notion. But the idea took off and shows few signs of slowing.

The D.C. government committed to spending \$8.4 million toward the \$45 million cost to build and operate the park. A design competition attracted 41 architecture teams from around the world, with the winning design

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— which includes an environmental education center and a grove of hammocks — featured in a bevy of architecture publications. More than \$2 million from private donors has poured in, and the project’s director has appeared at Harvard University, the Aspen Institute and elsewhere to explain how he has done it.

Washington’s own version of the High Line is closer to becoming a reality than anyone could have guessed. But there is one effect of the High Line that organizers of the bridge park are trying desperately not to replicate: an immediate and explosive increase in adjacent property values.

If the same thing were to happen here, opponents and supporters of the park agree, tens of thousands of residents could be priced out of their homes by rent or tax increases, or forced to move to make way for new development. About 76,000 people live within two miles of the park site. For people who have been fighting against the advance of wealth and change in the city for years, neighborhoods east of the river are viewed as the last stand.

Jennifer Bryant is one resident who is watching the bridge project warily. The 30-year-old, who works for a nonprofit, pays \$850 a month for a one-bedroom apartment in an area near the proposed park, Congress Heights. The neighborhood of modest homes and apartment buildings hasn’t enjoyed the boom in restaurants and amenities that other neighborhoods have and suffered

a dozen homicides last year. But more than a decade ago she lived in Northwest Washington’s Shaw, and she remembers how swiftly the landscape changed there when new development started spreading into the neighborhood.

“The housing prices in Shaw went up astronomically,” she said. “I see the beginnings of that in my neighborhood, and it scares me that I won’t be able to stay.” She’s trying to buy a house nearby before it’s too late, and there are already signs of rapid property value increases: Congress Heights and Anacostia ranked Nos. 1 and 3 in the city by price appreciation last year. “It is kind of a state of panic, knowing that you have to buy or you will be displaced.”

Through an exhaustive community engagement process involving more than 200 meetings, organizers of the 11th Street Bridge Park project — even though they don’t yet have a fifth of the needed money — are simultaneously working to ensure that they won’t just be filling the pockets of house flippers.

“If the people who helped to shape this can’t afford to live there, then we will have failed,” said Scott Kratz, the project’s director.

But preventing such a fate may be harder than building the park itself.

**THE GROWTH OF THE DISTRICT DURING THE PAST 30 YEARS IS THE STORY OF ONE** mega-project after another. The

MCI Center (now Verizon) opened in Chinatown in 1997. The new convention center opened in 2003. Nationals Park by the Navy Yard and a Target-anchored mall in Columbia Heights opened in 2008. In the past five years, a series of large-scale mixed-use projects have opened in Brookland and Shaw, with another under construction on the Southwest waterfront.

Economic development boosters argue that many of the projects were built on land where no one lived at the time. But each provided ample opportunity for speculators and flippers to buy up nearby homes and storefronts at depressed prices, giving them the chance to cash in once the paint dried on the city’s latest economic development venture.

This led to massive turnover of neighborhoods. While the District’s overall population boomed from 2000 to 2010, its black population dropped by 39,000, prompting the current mayor to create the first-ever position of African American affairs director. There are only 300 Chinese Americans left in what remains of Chinatown, and half of them are battling a development project that would force them out.

Relatedly, from 2002 to 2013 the number of apartments in the District renting for less than \$800 a month fell by 42 percent.

None of the city’s projects, however, even approaches the force of the economic hurricane the High Line, with its children’s play

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GREG KAHN/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Scott Kratz, director of the 11th Street Bridge Park project, wants to avoid displacing people in Anacostia.**



BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS THE RIVER AT THEARC

**A rendering of the park includes a plaza, a boat launch and an amphitheater.**

areas, art exhibits, gelato stands and manicured landscapes, helped bring to Lower Manhattan.

Four years ago, then-New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg estimated

that the High Line had generated \$2 billion in real estate investment and 12,000 jobs in the neighborhood.

The park is now at the center of what is billed as “the largest private real

estate development in the history of the United States.” Called Hudson Yards, it will feature a skyscraper headquarters for Time Warner.

No one expects the 11th Street Bridge Park, connecting a riverbank southeast of Capitol Hill to one northwest of Anacostia, to have an effect of that magnitude. But the project has rapidly gone from a pipe dream to a model for planners and architects elsewhere.

The goal is much larger than adding a civic space. The 11th Street Bridge Park seeks to connect communities on each side of a river that has always represented a stark economic gap between the haves and have-nots, perhaps now more than ever.

On one side, Good Hope Road and Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue are rife with vacant buildings and lots surrounded by barbed wire. On the other side, a short walk from the walled-off Navy Yard, is Barracks Row, a booming restaurant and commercial district featuring Rose’s Luxury, named the best new restaurant in America for 2014 by Bon Appétit magazine.

That side of the river still has far higher home values, by an average of \$300,000, than the east side. It has more homeowners: 73 percent vs. 50 percent. The unemployment rate is three times as low as on the east side. Structurally, the bridge park can work because the Anacostia isn’t very wide. Nine hundred feet — the length of the park — isn’t too far to walk. But the distance in other ways is much greater.

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GREG KAHN/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Tre Smith cuts 2-year-old Jaiden Newland's hair at PJ's Barbers Stylists and Nails on Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue in Anacostia.**

## MUCH OF THE BRIDGE PARK PROJECT'S

success can be attributed to Kratz, who championed the park on a volunteer basis for two years, attending community meetings and making presentations outside of his day job running education programming at the National Building Museum.

After the park idea picked up momentum, Kratz decided that the opportunity to build something lasting for his community was too great to pass up. So he left his job and runs the project from a nonprofit in Ward 8 named Building Bridges Across the River at THEARC.

A 45-year-old Northern California native, Kratz says he has attended nearly 600 meetings — chronicled in his journal at home. Despite being the face of the project, he listens to every single voice at meetings and

passes credit to others whenever possible.

Yet when he organized a competition for architects interested in designing a 1.45-mile elevated park, 82 firms from North America and Europe submitted proposals. Residents and a committee of experts selected a flashy plan featuring a central plaza, an enclosed cafe, an amphitheater, public art, a boat launch, a vegetable garden and the environmental educational center and hammock grove. The design, by firms OMA and Olin from the Netherlands and Philadelphia, was highlighted in *Wired*, *Fast Company*, *Gizmodo* and architecture and planning publications across the country.

The *New York Times* reported that the park “could be developmentally parallel to the razing of the Cabrini-

Green public housing project, economically boosting an area of Chicago long ignored by commerce.”

The Netherlands Embassy crowed about OMA's selection. A Mexican newspaper praised the park as an example of innovative public placemaking. Shortly after winning the mayoral election — before entering office — Mayor Muriel E. Bowser traveled with Kratz to visit the High Line.

Overnight, Kratz became a must-have speaker at urban development and planning symposiums. Last spring, he appeared at both the Harvard Graduate School of Design and the Aspen Institute. He has since traveled to New York, Detroit, Louisville, Seattle, Denver, Philadelphia and elsewhere pitching the idea to funders and learning about similar work.

Without the hype, he said, “I never would have been able to raise the money for it. We needed that, to capture the imagination of not just the funders but also the public.”

Survey people on the streets of Anacostia, Fairlawn, Penn Branch and other neighborhoods on the east side of the park site, and many say they haven't heard of the project. But real estate investors and dealers immediately took notice. The median sales price for Congress Heights homes rose 37 percent last year, from \$155,000 to \$212,000, and Anacostia's rose 26.6 percent to \$264,212, according to one metric. In Congress Heights 110 homes were sold and 37 percent were all-cash buys, according to RealEstate Busi-

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ness Intelligence, indicating investors were likely behind many of the deals.

Lauren Donnelly, the real estate agent who listed the renovated Anacostia bungalow, shared a common sentiment: Housing in the city is getting too expensive for everyone.

“It would be a game changer to connect the Hill to Anacostia, which frankly is why we envisioned people being interested in this property,” she said. “Who can afford the Hill anymore? I’m in real estate and I still can’t understand how people can afford these million-dollar homes. I think the wealth gap is really just widening.”

Donnelly was hardly the only real estate pro playing up the bridge park. In May, when the commercial real estate brokerage firm Marcus & Millichap touted its sale of a 15-unit apartment complex on 15th Street SE, east of the Anacostia, it issued a press release with a rendering of the winning bridge park proposal.

“The recent focus on the historic Anacostia neighborhood as one of the next D.C. neighborhoods to ‘pop’ is a real phenomenon,” said the firm’s Marty Zupancic. “Many real estate investors are realizing that ‘day one’ returns are great and the long-term appreciation possibilities are even greater.”

At the same time, critics began to question the project. The city has more homeless residents and less housing, while existing bridges, roads and parks east of the Anacostia are poorly cared for and in need of upgrades, they pointed out. Aren’t there more important things to spend

money on than another mega-project?

City officials also found some reason for concern. When budget time rolled around, the D.C. Council passed a rule prohibiting public spending on construction of the park until half those costs had been raised from private sources. The council said no public money would be spent to operate the park.

Because the project has \$2 million and counting committed from private sources, Kratz isn’t worried about public funding so much as he is about getting ahead of the real estate market.

### IN FALL 2014,

Kratz brought together experts in housing, job training and economics to form what he called the “equitable development task force.”

Over the following year, the group met regularly to discuss the best ways to prepare residents to benefit from

the park. Then they expanded their membership to include residents and civic leaders from both sides of the river.

At a meeting in June, held in a community room on the campus of the former St. Elizabeths hospital, groups of eight to 12 people huddled around tables and jotted ideas on large sheets of paper. In the conversations around the tables, the park itself was barely mentioned.

“If you look at the city in recent years, you can see it: If you can pay, you can stay,” said David Smith, a Ward 7 resident who works with area youth. His focus was helping African American residents build equity and receive preference for business opportunities after being passed over for other D.C. projects.

“I think some of [who gets hired] has to do with class, but let’s be honest, some of it is racist,” Smith said. “If you don’t force changes



**Jennifer Bryant is a Congress Heights resident who worries that she’ll be priced out of her neighborhood.**

GREG KAHN/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

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through protesting and the law, America has shown over and over again that it's not going to happen."

Arnehl Lyon, who has lived in Anacostia for 31 years, said she was looking forward to improvements coming to the neighborhood. She was confident Kratz and other organizers were making sufficient efforts to prevent displacement.

"Some people have concerns of getting pushed out, and I try to tell them that that's not going to happen," she said.

Among the group are advocates for low-income residents who aren't typically found endorsing \$45 million development projects over safety-net services. Ed Lazere, executive director of the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, who was one of the most prominent opponents of the Nationals Park deal, said working with this project offered an opportunity to accomplish more than building a park.

"Why shouldn't we as a community have an economic and housing preservation plan every time there is a development, and do it simultaneously to make sure that the development doesn't push people out?" he asked.

Peter A. Tatian, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute who frequently raises red flags about the cost of housing in the District, said that east of the river there is still need for investments that will raise some home prices.

"I think it's important to have some transformative kind of investments

as well as some of the more basic investments that we need," he said. "If the vision for the bridge park was different from what it is, then I might not feel that way."

There are programs in other parts of the country that have begun preserving moderately priced housing adjacent to major new amenities. Most are expensive. Consider Atlanta, where 22 miles of a former freight rail corridor will become a \$2.8 billion series of paths, parks and transit-oriented development projects called the Atlanta BeltLine. City officials created a tax district around the project that provides funding to help drive down the cost of housing there. A 2014 study found that 985 below-market-rate units had been developed.

One of the veterans of that program, Tony Pickett, is now in Denver, where he is part of an effort to acquire land along a new mass transit route connecting downtown to the airport. After raising \$15 million from a combination of public and private sources, the Denver Transit Oriented Development Fund launched in 2010. Currently 156 units are being constructed for households making 60 percent or less of the area median income and who otherwise may not be able to afford the area as it transforms.

"I think mitigating some of the effects is achievable," said Pickett, who has advised Kratz. "You've got to be at the front end. You've actually got to have the residents in that community educated and organized

around it from the beginning. They've got to be saying to their public officials and others that they actually want that priority to be a part of constructing the project."

In November, the bridge park's equitable development group released a list of 19 strategies, many of them borrowed from projects such as those in Atlanta and Denver. Among them are setting local hiring goals for construction and operations, forming a network of local businesses, and creating a land trust that can acquire vacant and blighted properties that can be used for housing projects in the future.

The project could become a model for the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development. One of the park's first grants, \$1.2 million from the Kresge Foundation, will support the opening of a home buyers' club east of the river in partnership with nonprofit housing developer Manna, and the development of 12 affordable townhouses on Hunter Place SE.

Bryant has participated in some of Kratz's meetings, but she says that unless there is money and support to prevent displacement, she would rather not see the park built at all.

"I'm confident that they're trying to do the right thing," she said. "Whether they can actually do it is another matter."

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*Jonathan O'Connell covers development and land use for The Post's Financial staff.*

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**FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION**

# What If the Bridge Has a Park?

Jonathan O’Connell, who covers development and land use for *The Post’s* Financial staff, wrote about the proposed 11th Street Bridge Park. Read the January 21, 2016, *Post Magazine* article, “Can D.C. build a \$45 million park for Anacostia without pushing people out?”

**BEFORE READING THE ARTICLE**

1. Find the 11th Street Bridge on a map of D.C. What sections or wards does the bridge connect?
2. What do you know about these areas of D.C.? Businesses, government agencies and departments located in them? What schools? Entertainment venues?
3. The headline prepares the reader for more than one point of view. State what you think the issues are. Support with specific references to parts of the headline.

**READ THE FIRST TEN PARAGRAPHS**

4. Why would O’Connell begin his article with a real estate listing? Use the following data to inform your response.

<b>Anacostia</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>Average sale price of detached houses</b>	—	\$174,089	\$186,690*
<b>Highest-priced home sale</b>	—	\$385,000*	\$430,000
<b>Median household income</b>	\$36,356	—	—

**D.C.**

<b>Single-family home value, average</b>	—	—	622,152**
<b>Median household income</b>	\$60,057 (U.S. Census)	\$68,277 (U.S. Census)	—

\* Real estate agents attributed this to investors

\*\*Data from Black Knight Financial Services, about 53% more than in 2004.

Use Zillow.com to check zip codes (Anacostia is 20373) for current homes on sale.

