

Boerum Hill Bulletin

THE BOERUM HILL ASSOCIATION IS A VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION OF RESIDENTS OF BOERUM HILL. WE SEEK TO PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE UNIQUE QUALITIES OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD THROUGH ADVOCACY, EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING. VISIT US ON THE WEB AT WWW.BOERUMHILLBROOKLYN.ORG

HOUSE OF DETENTION UPDATE

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD:

Sue Wolfe, President
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 Anders Thomsen
 Boaz Weinstein
 Chuck Wells
 Sarah Wikenczy
 (*non-board member)

Board meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month from September through June at 7:00pm in the Mugavero Center.

Good news! On March 19th a State Supreme Court judge ruled that the city must conduct environmental reviews (SEQRA), fair share analysis and a land use review (ULURP) before taking any steps to expand the jail. This includes the \$31 million architectural design contract that the Department of Corrections was seeking for the expansion – money the City will hopefully now spend in a much more productive manner.

Not so good news: The decision did not block the reopening. The Judge held that the City had compelling reasons to reopen the jail, separate and apart from the planned expansion.

Many of our elected officials

stand against the jail reopening and expansion. Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr. had previously rejected the City's plan for the \$31 million contract. The Comptroller cited the rapidly expanding costs of this project, where the cost of construction has ballooned \$440M, especially when viewed in the context of the city's current fiscal distress.

Council Members Letitia James and David Yassky, State Senators Marty Connor and Velmanette Montgomery and State Assembly Member Joan Millman have consistently opposed the jail expansion and stressed the need to redirect the capital spending to more urgent needs, such as schools, parks, roads and

bridges. David Yassky suggested funding programs for rehabilitation instead of incarceration.

Stop BHOD and a large group of local organizations including the Atlantic Avenue Betterment Association, Atlantic Avenue LDC, Cobble Hill Association, Boerum Hill Association, Brooklyn Vision and the Boulevard East Board of Managers have been diligently working together, so they welcomed the judge's decision against the expansion.

Expect to hear more about this battle in the local papers and for more information as well as continuing updates go to www.brooklynjail.org and www.STOPBHOD.org.

FROM THE BOARD

Each year the BHA Board Members gather for a full day to focus their thoughts and their energies. This year's Retreat was wonderfully facilitated by Boerum Hiller Melissa Gradel.

We discovered that many Board members moved to Boerum Hill for *brownstone living* that included space, diversity, proximity to "the

city", family feel and a balance of big city and neighborhood.

While a variety of issues drew us to join the Board, every one of us dreams of keeping BH the same and better. Our vision of the future includes vibrant shops, more trees and parks, thriving schools, safe and clean streets, roof top gardens, solar heating and brownstone preservation.

Much the same, yet smarter.

We hope you share these feelings and our vision. Boerum Hill is a great place to live because residents have a tradition of caring for people and place.

We look forward to working on our goals - one of which is to have more Association members and more Board members. Please join us!

NEVINS STREET HISTORY

The buildings we see today at the head of Nevins and Fulton Streets are a peculiar jumble of businesses crowned by what looks like a truncated seven story square castle turret with communications gear on top of it. These actually are just two buildings – the remnants of the once proud Johnston Building at 8-16 Nevins and the Smith-Gray Building at 2-6 Nevins.

The builders recognized that



2 - 6 Nevins St. Today

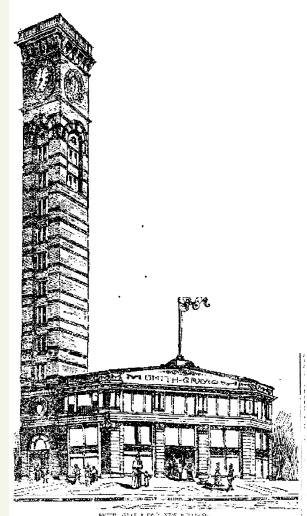
the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 and the opening of the Fulton Street "El" in 1888 had pushed the center of Brooklyn shopping further up Fulton Street, away from the Fulton Ferry. The buildings were modified after a series of dramatic fires over a 50 year period.

The Smith, Gray & Company started in 1833 and became the most successful children's ready-made clothing business in Brooklyn. Its flagship location was at the southwest corner of Fulton and Nevins. Johnston Brothers was a cash dealer in groceries after the Civil War. They advertised themselves as "Brooklyn's Popular Grocers" with several Brooklyn locations. In 1888, when it was built of light red sandstone, brick, and brownstone, the new Smith-Gray Building was to be the "king of the hill". Smith, Gray & Company had a great success in their supposedly fireproof building until it burned to the ground in a spectacular fire on Feb-

ruary 28, 1892. The 210-foot English clock tower collapsed and destroyed the El station on the corner. Nevertheless, Smith, Gray decided to rebuild on the site and the Johnston Brothers elected to build their grand flagship building next to the new Smith Gray Building. When the buildings were completed in 1893, the Johnston was nine stories tall and the Smith-Gray was three stories of "fireproof" stone topped by a 225-foot, 14-story clock tower with elevator to the observation deck. However, competition and change would put both companies out of business by World War One.

Smaller fires in tenant businesses pestered the buildings almost from the start. Fireproof materials are a hindrance when building contents are very flammable!

By 1927, the 37-story Williamsburgh Bank clock tower nearby dominated the area sky.



The new Smith, Gray Building on Nevins Street seen in the *Brooklyn Eagle* April 25, 1893, page 8

2 - 6 Nevins St.

1893

In late 1940, another spectacular fire in the Johnston Building spread to the upper stories of both structures resulting in the damaged portions being deconstructed to their present heights.

The humbled buildings fell into their present obscurity shortly thereafter.

84TH PRECINCT NEWS

Robberies of IPODS and Blackberries have become considerable crime problems.

The 84th Precinct has instituted a program for registering these items. This is a free service of the NYPD. Call the 84th Crime Prevention officer John Kenny at 718-875-6363 for an appointment or you can register at the next

84th Precinct Community Council Meeting on April 21st.

Once your electronic item is stolen, it becomes part of a central NYPD file looked at by all detectives when arrests are made for any reason, and at that time, they can identify your property.

84TH PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING

APRIL 21ST-7:00PM

BOROUGH HALL

209 JORALEMON STREET

SHARE YOUR CONCERNS WITH
POLICE CAPTAIN MARK DIPAOLO

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Neighbors,

I have enjoyed being the president of the BHA for these past six years but it is time for me to step down.

We have seen many changes in the Boerum Hill community - with more to come!

The BHA enjoys the support of our elected officials, especially Borough President Marty Markowitz, Assemblywoman Joan Millman and Councilman David Yassky and their hardworking staffs. We have fostered this cooperation and been the recipient of their wise council.

I look back on our successful house tours, holiday pot-luck dinners, the continued 'greening' of Boerum Hill, our work on issues such as the Brooklyn House of Detention, Atlantic Yards, the BHA General Meetings where we brought interesting issues to the community and the interaction with so many community-minded neighbors.

Boerum Hill is now 'on the map' as a wonderful place to live and work. Whether one is a renter, an owner of a house, co-op or condo - we enjoy the terrific restaurants and great shops that have blossomed here. I, along with the Board, have sug-

gested that Board member, Howard Kolins consider taking on the role of President in our next election. We are also considering increasing the vice presidential offices from one to two to be sure the neighborhood meetings held on weekdays are covered. The BHA will continue to be an advocate for your voices in Boerum Hill.

In community, Sue Wolfe



PLANT SALE AND GREENING DAY

Keep Boerum Hill green by joining the following events:

The annual Hoyt Street Association Plant Sale is almost here! This year's sale will be held on **Saturday, May 2nd, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday, May 3rd, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the garage behind 110 Hoyt Street, at the corner of Pacific.** The sale, whose origins go back more than 25 years, is an eagerly awaited neighborhood event for customers and volunteers alike. Profits from the sale support the Hoyt Street Garden, neighborhood beautification and the Hoyt Street Association Community Funding Project which benefits all of Boerum Hill.

We will have a very wide variety of annual bedding plants (impatiens, petunias, marigolds and many, many others), houseplants, container/window box plants (geraniums, vinca vine, etc), perennials (hostas, ferns, bleeding hearts, etc.), selected small shrubs, tomato plants and herbs. Some plants prefer lots of sun, some like shade, and others could care less. We will have plants of all kinds!

Order forms will be available on the neighborhood bulletin boards, at the reception desk of the Mugavero Center (corner of Hoyt and Dean Streets) and also distributed door-to-door (two per building) throughout Boerum Hill in April. If you submitted an order form in the last three years you'll automatically receive one in the mail. Anyone else wishing to receive one by mail can contact Margaret Cusack - see below for details. (The order form covers standard annuals and container plants, but there will be lots of additional plants at the sale). You need not order in advance via an order form--you can just stop by on the weekend. However, by ordering, *you will save money* and also be assured of getting what you want. You may purchase additional plants on the Plant Sale days.

Plant Sale Volunteers:

Volunteers are needed to distribute flyers in April and to perform other tasks from Thursday, April 30th to Sunday, May 3rd. Have fun and make new friends! Contact: Margaret Cusack at 718-237-0145 or email at cusackart@aol.com.



Hoyt Street Association President, Margaret Cusack, with past volunteers. Why not join them this year?

Look for BHA flyers - "General Meeting on Greening" April 23rd

BHA "Greening Day" - May 2nd, free compost and mulch

Brooklyn Botanical Gardens Members (only) Plant Sale - May 5th

Brooklyn Botanical Gardens Plant Sale - May 6th & 7th

Deadline to enter "Greenest Block in Brooklyn" contest - June 1st
[For information & applications visit http://www.bbg.org/](http://www.bbg.org/)
 or phone 718-623-7250



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Growing a better Boerum Hill

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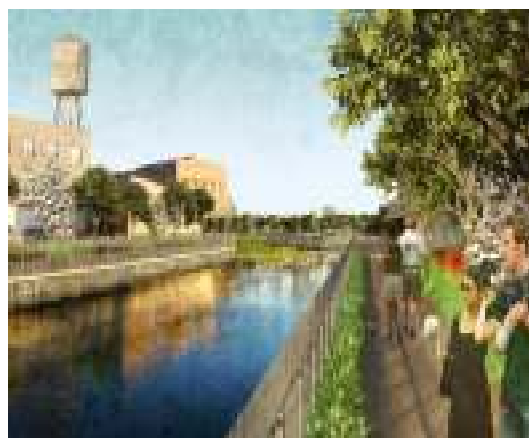
SPONGE PARK ON THE GOWANUS CANAL?

At the BHA's winter General Meeting that was held on Tuesday, January 27th, local Landscape Architect Susannah Drake ASLA, presented a fascinating plan to improve the Gowanus Canal and surrounding areas. Ms. Drake's landscape architecture firm, *dlandstudio*, and Gowanus Canal Conservancy previously presented the Sponge Park™ plan to community members, local agencies and elected officials and was enthusiastically received.

Her proposal would address the problems that arise when street runoff from a rain storm combines with domestic, industrial and commercial sewage causing the combined sewer and storm water to overflow into the canal.

The plan envisions an artificial wetland system around the canal and creates planted areas to collect the street runoff to prevent overflowing of combined sewer and storm water into the canal. Imagine a 40 foot wide esplanade comprised of plantings and boardwalks in, around and over this landscape that trap and filter the street runoff. A variety of trees, shrubs, grasses and perennials would be planted to along and even *in* the canal to create an environment that is both beautiful and beneficial.

Ms. Drake's design includes open recreational space, play areas, nature walks, community gardens as well as connections to local parks such as the Thomas Greene Park and Double D pool.



Needless to say, the plan received rave reviews from the crowd at the Belarusan Church and the BHA Board intends to support her efforts in the future.

Gowanus Canal Sponge Park™ project is made possible with public funds from the New