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## **Urban Parks and Their Necessity in the Future of Urban Design: *An Analytical Exploration of Green Space in New York City***

*Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine. (Thoreau, Walden, 2014, p. 3).*

My initial instinct on where to start my research was to build a factual foundation via historical research on Central Park. I found a great book, Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar's *The Park and the People* and was reading it side by side with Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White's *The Elements of Style*. I was just about ready to get deep into my research and writing when I realized I was missing the most important aspect for my paper: The reason I was driven to choose this topic. Any student can easily spout off two or three ideas for a research paper, but what I truly believe separates the meaningful from the not, is *passion*. A passion that says "I truly believe that this is a problem and my solution is so heart felt that if I had the resources, I would put it into action!" I knew I felt powerfully about my passion to utilize empty lots for parks instead of buildings, but I felt I needed to address myself to see what it was that led me to this idea for a research topic. I needed to build a foundation of reason that I knew in and out in order to execute the perfect research paper.

This leads me to my quote. I felt *Walden* would be a perfect fit for a topic exploring the need for a stronger connection between nature and urban environments. In all of my years as an avid fiction reader, I had never actually read the book. I owned it and had been recommended it by many peers but never found "the right time". Upon reading the first chapter I realized that Thoreau had a harsher opinion than I had expected; I was thrown off. I started the book over and took a different approach at analyzing what he meant and noticed one central theme: Simplicity In Life. This quote, as wordy as it is, screams one thing to me, and it is the final sentence in the paragraph that affirms my belief: "He has no time to be anything

but a machine" (*Thoreau, Walden, 2014, p. 3*). Wouldn't 90 out of 100 people agree that most men don't have time to be anything but a machine? With our iPhones attached to our hands and our iPods plugged into our ears, we're halfway to being robots when we're walking on the street.

"...It's finer fruits cannot be plucked by them" was the primary reason I chose this quote though. It evoked a visual of picking fruit outdoors on a sunny day but more importantly, I felt a visceral reaction. It was this gut feeling I felt again when typing the quote out to begin this paper on Saturday. So on Sunday I decided to do some field research for this paper and I set out to ride my bike around the loop in Prospect Park and stop to sit for some time observing the area and people around me.

After a few attempts and erasures, I just can't put into words exactly what it is that I felt. I asked myself, "Is it the way the blue sky surrounds the green of a tree?", "Is it the smile on the dogs' faces?", "Is it the couples holding hands?", "Is it the baby seeing a duck swim in water for the first time?". I thought long and I thought hard about this. Why did I feel so much happiness and serenity? I could find no other explanation than the fact that **I believe there exists a primal urge, a primal need, to be in nature and amongst trees and lakes and grass and dirt; To breath clean air as close to the source as possible; To feel earth on our bare feet; To be able to have open space to run around and play games in.**

Having enjoyed sitting in the park and seeing firsthand the happiness that it brought to the flocks of people from surrounding neighborhoods and even beyond, I began to understand this visceral reaction. As much as I believe in progress and utilizing technology, **we are what we were**. We cannot forget that our ancestors lived on the land and that there is not just a want to have fun and play outdoors, but a physiological need. We need the vitamin D the sun provides us, the oxygen that the trees supply us, the water that the rivers and lakes offer us, and the nourishment from food that the soil provides us with.

My argument for why parks are important could easily be countered by an economically driven "machine," as Thoreau would say. The amount of profit that an apartment building can bring with its tenants and the money they will spend at surrounding establishments... the jobs that a hospital or school would create... the amount of jobs and profit another restaurant or bar will bring... They are all great points. But something we commonly overlook is the amount of open space in comparison to population. Just reading the first few pages of *The Park and the People*, I can already tell that the population to open space ratio was exponentially larger and in an extreme manner. Central Park's eight hundred acres were more than enough in 1857 and probably even in 1940, but the people of New York need more nature and less concrete. Neighborhoods are becoming more and more saturated and in some parts of the city you need to take a subway or bus just to see some grass. I'm not saying we need to knock down buildings to create a grassy hill, but we need to start

proactively approaching some of these many open lots we often see as a potential public park space. It is imperative that we address this problem head on before we have no more space left. We need to take a step back and isolate the fact that technology and the demand for immediacy is taking us away from our bodies' most simple need: the great outdoors!

In 2014 in the five boroughs of New York City, should we be utilizing empty lots and open spaces to create more utilitarian buildings such as apartments, offices, hospitals, and schools or do we need to find new ways to build more parks that will not only curb pollution in the city via oxygen addition, but make citygoers happier, and possibly create new and different ways to generate income within a public space?

In this paper I will investigate from several angles why it is crucial that we invest in more public outdoor green spaces that incorporate a variety of uses for many different groups and find modern solutions that help us immerse ourselves in nature within an urban setting. With that, my research is ever-evolving, particularly when it comes to the solution. This paper does not necessarily take a scientific and/or engineering approach to the resolution but I do scratch the surface by proposing what I believe could be the future of urban parks : vertical parks.

Especially in a city like New York where people are constantly working and “plugged in”, all the more reason to need parks and green space as a physical and emotional break from the difficulties of the big city.

“It is a conceit of New York City... to think it is a place outside of nature, a place where humanity has completely triumphed over the forces of the natural world, where a person can do and be anything without limit or consequence” (Sanderson, 2009, p. 13). I am living proof that this quote holds true. After I moved to New York City, I almost completely forgot about nature and its importance in my life. Why would have I needed nature when I lived in a city that had access to nearly anything one can dream of 24 hours a day? Because it is nature that not only holds the key to our longevity on this planet, but provides us with what we need to survive on a daily basis. We must raise awareness within our community about the importance of parks and trees. We must get away from the idea that we need to “escape the shackles that bind us to our earthly selves” (Sanderson, 2009, p. 13).

*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live*

*deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms. (Thoreau, Walden, 2014, p. 61)*

Why is the island of Manhattan's ecological foundation important? What can the topography of 17<sup>th</sup> century Manhattan tell us about whom we are as a people? What has made New York City one of the most powerful cities of the last century? What are the reasons we need to put more focus on the land beneath our feet and the effects we have on it?

New York City was so rich in diverse ecology before Henry Hudson arrived on the shores that it actually "had more ecological communities per acre than Yellowstone, more native plant species per acre than Yosemite, and more birds than the Great Smoky Mountains National Park" (Sanderson, 2009, p. 10). New York City was just as diverse in nature then as it is with people now. Even as a neighbor and member of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden I was shocked to read this. I would venture to say that these simple facts about the island that over 1.6 million people inhabit are virtually unknown. Have we been so swept up by power and money that we have left Mother Nature in the dust?

In the last 5 or so years, we have made leaps and bounds as a society in getting away from Big Business and steering toward a more localized and regional form of consumerism. There seems to be an understanding brewing; an understanding that penetrates the subconscious and says, "We must not take, take, take, but give and take". I mean not to get so hung-up on this notion of anti-urban development or to sound like what some people would call a hippie, but I find a direct correlation between both American Consumerism Trends and our need for more parks in urban environments. Can we give back to the land we have taken so much from? Can we build more parks that will house more trees that will supply more oxygen and reduce air pollution?

What a lot of these hot-shot urban developers don't take into account is the fact that these trees can also save us money as a society. "In 1994, trees in New York City removed an estimated 1,821 metric tons of air pollution at an estimated value to society of \$9.5 million" (Nowak, 2002 p.1). It might not affect them directly and immediately, but if we don't keep this in mind we will be in trouble. "Air pollution in New York City is a significant environmental threat which contributes to an estimated 6% of annual deaths" (NYC GOV, 2007). Both urban developers and I are aware that they are not the direct cause of this pollution, with cars and sewer runoff being the true culprits, but they are enabling an environment in which these deaths are allowed.

The more 50-story buildings we erect increase population, the need for cars, the need for more bars, restaurants, hospitals, etc...

Is there a compromise to be had between the Parks People and the Urban Developers? After all, "Cities done well can be just what nature needs" (Sanderson, 2009, p. 33). Is there some way to please them with nature in mind; to facilitate progress for both mindsets? In order to do so, I think we need to take a look at and isolate exactly what it is that drives them. Not just the idea of money but the ideas within that: long term financial dividends or short-term payout?

To circle back to ecology and topography, there was another quote that really stuck out to me in *Manahatta: A Natural History of New York City*: "There was once a hill just south of Wall Street, near the bronze *Charging Bull* at Bowling Green, not far from a stream along Beaver Street. What had happened to that hill?" (Sanderson, 2009, p. 53). What *did* happen to that hill? How can we find a way to get back to the descriptions given by the initial explorers? Daniel Denton described "the sweetness of the air," while Johann de Laet described the "wonderful size of the trees". Often we are too busy to appreciate the beauty in our city and especially in our green spaces. Thoreau wonderfully explains the joy in really seeing the secret moments we can have with nature:

*If the day and the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal- that is your success. All nature is your congratulation, and you have cause momentarily to bless yourself. The greatest gains and values are farthest from being appreciated. We easily come to doubt if they exist. We soon forget them. They are the highest reality. Perhaps the facts most astounding and most real are never communicated by man to man. The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched (Thoreau, Walden, 2014, p. 151).*

Sadly, these rewarding moments will be less and less common as we continue to disrespect the natural aspects of the world.

With every day that passes, more and more Americans are gaining awareness of global warming and climate change, whether or not they believe in it is a separate issue to be left undiscussed in this paper. However, the facts remain and the climate is indeed *changing*: average temperatures are escalating, we are experiencing more

variable precipitation, our sea levels are rising at an alarming rate, and extreme weather is becoming more commonplace.

While there are a multitude of causes for the climate changing, scientists and studies have led us to believe that increased CO<sub>2</sub> is an exceptionally threatening factor. Not only is it largely threatening, but we as a society are also only making it worse. “Humans have increased atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration by a third since the Industrial Revolution began. This is the most important long-lived ‘forcing’ of climate change” (Jenkins). As a result of the heightening of CO<sub>2</sub> in our earth’s atmosphere, I have become particularly interested in Bloomberg’s MillionTrees initiative in New York City as a way to begin to combat this issue amongst others.

Too often we see trees dying in NYC that fail to be restored or replanted; Thoreau’s notion of nature as “your congratulations” is being lost. This is extremely unfortunate and if nothing else, makes a beautiful park or city block look desolate. But The Million Trees Initiative will help re-grow and re-energize those spaces while also providing long-term environmental effects. MillionTrees is a public-private program that aims to plant, you guessed it, one million trees, over the next decade. This ambitious goal will be extremely beneficial for what is one of the most densely-packed urban spaces in the world - New York City.

According to MillionTrees research. “...healthy trees can lessen impacts associated with storm water runoff, energy consumption, and *air pollutants*. Trees improve urban life.... While mitigating the city’s environmental impact” (MillionTrees 1). The research further discusses specifically how trees can help greatly reduce CO<sub>2</sub>, namely by sequestering CO<sub>2</sub> as they grow, but also by providing shade to buildings during the warm months and harboring heat during the cold months, helping buildings regulate their heating and cooling systems, thus lessening the use for heating and air conditioning (MillionTrees 20-21). Bloomberg’s plan has a long list of favorable outcomes, all of which plan to contribute to the health of our Earth and, in turn, our city.

Bloomberg, of course, also breaks down the issue economically to appeal to a wider population of New Yorker residents. The research estimates “a total *energy cost savings* of \$27.8 million or \$47.63 per tree” (MillionTrees 2). In 2007, at the start of MillionTrees, NYC had a total of 592,130 publicly managed trees. Those alone counted for a “Net CO<sub>2</sub> reduction of 113,016 tons, valued at \$754,947” (MillionTrees 2)! These listed facts are barely scraping the surface of the overabundance of benefits for more trees in NYC. After calculating the savings from air pollutants removed, storm water runoff aid, aesthetic and property value, the annual benefits total \$121,900,000 and average two hundred and nine **dollars per tree!** Not only do we save money with every tree, we can also estimate a return on investment with a benefit cost ratio of 5.6, which exceeds all other cities studied to date (MillionTrees 3).

I expanded my research to books concerning Urban Design to see what the opinion was on the urban planners' side of the spectrum. In a recently published book titled *The Nature of Urban Design: a New York Perspective on Resilience*, author Alexandros Washburn states, "Parks are ideal projects to mitigate the city's effect on climate, to adapt the city to climate change, and to educate the citizens on the benefits of conceiving of the city and nature as one" (Washburn, 2013, p.126). Honestly, I couldn't have worded it better myself and I wish I had written it! He goes on to acknowledge that a renewed sense of purpose for the urban park has been reintroduced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Washburn, 2013, p.126). It was extremely refreshing to see my personal opinions about this topic written and published in a new book that the NYPL had invested in at least seven copies of at their 5<sup>th</sup> avenue location. It is proof that we need to change as a society but also that the awareness is slowly making its way from the outspoken activists mouths and creeping towards the mainstream population and media.

I refer back to my Thoreau quote and what inspired me to choose it. With all of the benefits we as humans obtain from trees alone, just one single aspect of the nature that surrounds us, can we not let all of nature be our congratulation? Can we not acknowledge the momentary bliss that is experienced among the blanket of stars covering our lush trees?

In order to honor Thoreau's thoughts on man's intimate connection with nature, it is imperative we ensure New Yorkers have access to nearby public parks and open spaces.

*I, who cannot stay in my chamber for a single day without acquiring some rust, and when sometimes I have stolen forth for a walk at the eleventh hour, or four o'clock in the afternoon, too late to redeem the day, when the shades of night were already beginning to be mingled with the daylight, have felt as if I had committed some sin to be atoned for—I confess that I am astonished at the power of endurance, to say nothing of the moral insensibility, of my neighbors who confine themselves to shops and offices the whole day for weeks and months, aye, and years almost together. I know not what manner of stuff they are of, sitting there now at three o'clock in the afternoon, as if it were three o'clock in the morning.  
(Henry David Thoreau, "Walking", 1862)*

As New Yorkers, we often find ourselves sitting in our homes or offices at 3PM, as Thoreau points out, without a place to take a proper walk or exercise outdoors.

Now, we can't all leave our hectic New-York-Style workplaces in the middle of a weekday-workday to saunter amongst the trees, but I'd venture to guess that 80% of New Yorkers don't have a proper walking path within three quarters of a mile of their homes. We have the East and Hudson River parks, but if I recall correctly, the walking paths are often shared with the bike paths. I don't mean to speak negatively of some of the better walking paths we have available to us, but attention needs to be given to the fact that they are not ideal.

Creating a walking path today in a city as populous, compact, and developed as New York City, seems nearly impossible. Where would the path go? Would we shut down Broadway forever and build a wide path with trees just for us "progressives" to enjoy?! Well, as crazy as it sounds... maybe. In Eric Sanderson's *Mannahatta*, there are two pictures placed side by side of current 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and his future 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The current 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue has an endless line of cars, and cabs, and tour buses. The future 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue has a row of electric streetcars and large paths for walking and even an elevated path for bicycles. The caption reads, "By 2409 Manhattan will have reinvented street life. While today 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is dedicated to cars and trucks, in four hundred years, streetcars, bicycles, pedestrians, and streams will all flow through quiet streetscapes designed for people" (Sanderson, 2009, p. 238.).

I am proud to say, personally and as a spokesperson for my city, that I have often utilized The High Line to walk for exercise and/or an alternate method of commuting. Are 16 city blocks long enough to fulfill this substantial void I ambiguously reference? Maybe; maybe not. But either way, it is a large feat and a massive hurdle we had to push hard to get past. It is a start, and it is a great representation of being able to create something so in tune with nature that can also possibly create profit from the businesses that operate with and within it.

Thoreau's mention of "acquiring rust" in the first sentence of the quote that I pulled from his essay, *Walking*, speaks to me metaphorically and brings to the surface a sensitive subject: obesity in America. Obesity is a serious problem, an epidemic, in America. An article published by Harvard Health Publications states, "In less than 40 years, the prevalence of obesity in the U.S. has increased by over 50 percent, so that two of every three American adults are now overweight or obese. Even worse, the obesity epidemic is rapidly spreading to our children" ("Obesity in America: What's driving the epidemic?", 2012).

There are too many speculative causes (genes, modern foods, etc...) for why we have become dangerously obese, but I'd like to focus on how obesity relates to parks and how parks can act as a catalyst for progression in our society's health. The article explains that with the advancement of electronics, we have gone from over 50% of jobs in the private sector requiring moderate physical labor to less than 20%. Surprisingly, "...the fraction of Americans who say they meet national guidelines for leisure-time exercise has remained stable at 25 percent — but objective measurements suggest the



actual percentage of adults who get enough exercise is closer to 5 percent" ("Obesity in America: What's driving the epidemic?", 2012). The article continues with my favorite research find: "And all you have to do to get the leisure-time exercise you need is to walk for 30 minutes a day" ("Obesity in America: What's driving the epidemic?", 2012).

That is all! Walk for 30 minutes a day according to Harvard. But we, as a society, need to create more places for people to walk...for people to **want** to walk in. I am extremely lucky to not only have Prospect Park about .2 miles from my home, but also Mount Prospect Park directly across the street. Prospect park features a 3.7 mile loop with a wide lane for walkers, another for bicyclists, and yet another for cars (which I sometimes don't see for my 2 loops). Mount Prospect Park is a 7.79 acre park with a very large track-like walking area, a playground, ample benches spread throughout, and a surprising amount of trees to make you feel like you've found a serene place to walk in.

"Research finds that youth without access to opportunities for physical activity during non-school hours are less likely to be as physically active as their peers, and at least one study shows that by increasing access to places for physical activity, youth not only have higher levels of activity, but are less likely to be overweight or obese" (Liebert, "Let's Go to the Park Today: The Role of Parks in Obesity Prevention and Improving the Public's Health", 2012). This is just the tip of the iceberg when beginning to research how parks relate to obesity in both children and adults. The park acts as a subconscious incentive to lead a healthier lifestyle with people being more inclined to utilize an active mode of transportation or visit a farmer's market or community garden. The article goes on to mention the mental health benefits that parks, or "green-lungs' of the city" as they refer to them, offer: reduction in attentional fatigue, more psychological restoration when compared to running / walking in an urban environment, acting as a buffer for children's life stress and increasing their self-worth, and improved concentration (Liebert, "Let's Go to the Park Today: The Role of Parks in Obesity Prevention and Improving the Public's Health", 2012).

How can we as a collective urban society utilize synergy to combat the bevy of problems I've mentioned: Pollution, The Urban Development Takeover, lack of public and green space, and obesity. I guess we'll have to take a page out of the urban developer's page and begin to look up...

*I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least...sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements....When sometimes I am reminded that the mechanics and shopkeepers stay in their shops not only all the forenoon, but all the afternoon too, sitting with crossed legs, so many of them—as if the*

*legs were made to sit upon, and not to stand or walk upon—I think that they deserve some credit for not having all committed suicide long ago (Henry David Thoreau, “Walking”, 1862).*

Urban Development. What is it? When I searched “Urban development” on Google, the first result from the search was a link to the Wikipedia page on “Urban Planning”. “**Urban Planning** is a technical and political process concerned with the use of land and design of the urban environment, including air and water and infrastructure passing into and out of urban areas such as transportation and distribution networks” (“Urban Planning”, .n.d.). Now to: “**Urban Development** is the social, cultural, economic and physical development of cities, as well as the underlying causes of these processes.” It is more than ironic to me that *urban planning* is the initial result for a search on *urban development*. Why have we gotten away from the idea that we need to develop our cities socially and culturally, and moved towards the idea that skipping development is fine and getting straight to planning is better? Why doesn’t a definition or link to the philosophy of *urban development* come up when you search it? Because we have been blinded by the dividends that *urban planning* has created.

Take a walk down any major street or avenue in Manhattan, and even most parts of Brooklyn now, and you will see *urban planning* on every other corner. Every one of those empty lots has “political process” written all over it. Even the population of people who would oppose my liberal views would most likely think, “Wow, this must cost a lot of money” or “Wow, this place is going to make a lot of money”. I digress, this isn’t meant to be about money. It is meant to be about how the foundation of New York City’s parks and public spaces were indirectly developed.

In the book *The Nature of Urban Design: a New York Perspective on Resilience*, Alexandros Washburn often mentions how important public space is: “The final Urban Design challenge for NYC is to succeed at the first two agenda items while simultaneously improving the quality of life in the city. The technical solutions we find would be wasted if they failed to improve public life, which we equate to improving public space” and ““To succeed in our twenty first-century urban design agenda, which is to grow our population, to become more resilient, and above all to improve the quality of public life...”. (Washburn, 2013, p.41). Even as an Urban Designer in one of the fastest growing cities in the world, he still values public space above all other goals.

Washburn also sheds a tremendous amount of light when discussing the history of New York City’s urban planners: “The commissioners did not anticipate a need for public open space. ‘It may, to many, be a matter of surprise that so few vacant spaces have been left, and those so small,’” the commissioners wrote in the report accompanying their plan. But when the price of land is “so uncommonly great,” why set aside room for “vacant” spaces? The commissioners wanted as much land as possible for the tax rolls and suggested that the public could satisfy its need for open space by

visiting Manhattan's shores instead,..." (Washburn, 2013, p.33-36) Please mind that this quote stretches back all the way to the 19<sup>th</sup> century! This was before Central Park was maybe even an idea.

To make the history look even more embarrassing and to strengthen my foundation, Washburn goes on to explain that one of the two shores cited by the commissioners was taken over by businessman Cornelius Vanderbilt: "Not having anticipated the steamship, the commissioners did not map the waterfront as public and so protect it by law. As a result, the latter half of the nineteenth century, industrial development became most intense along the shore and made recreation impossible" and to make matters worse "A smoke-belching locomotive slowly pulled freight down Commodore Vanderbilt's Tenth Avenue railroad preceded by a cowboy on a nag to shoo away pedestrians. The entire public realm appeared to be a factory." (Washburn, 2013, p.36) If it weren't for Frederick Law Olmsted, Manhattan might not have any large public parks with open space besides the Hudson River Park, which is already very narrow for the most part.

Personally, I imagine the urban environment of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to have quite an open feel; I can only assume it was almost the opposite of large urban cities today with little to no roads, what sounds like 10% of the buildings which were much smaller at that. So for Henry David Thoreau to write about the, in his terms life and death, importance of walking in the woods at a time like that, only makes me think we are suffocating our *natural* selves and our connection to nature. But the more I research the topic, the more I come to the understanding of the widespread significance of these open spaces and public parks: a place for children to play - especially for lower class areas, a place for adults and society in general to exercise and help battle our obesity crises, and a place where people can breathe clean air and trees can in turn help combat our pollution problem.

With a little, or maybe a lot, of ingenuity, I think numerous solutions can be found. Will some of them sound utterly crazy at first? Yes. But so did the idea of a steam-powered boat, which is why the aforementioned commissioners did not even bother to protect the intended public shores from private business. Further, this underground movement of pocket parks and the importance of urban space is not brand new. William Whyte was writing books on open spaces and the social life within them over 50 years ago. There is a solution and we must isolate it before we lose the prospect of having any open lots to work on!

*Primroses and landscapes, he pointed out, have one grave defect: they are gratuitous. A love of nature keeps no factories busy. It was decided to abolish the love of nature, at any rate among the lower classes; to abolish the love of nature but not the tendency to consume transport. For of*

*course it was essential that they should keep going to the country, even though they hated it. The problem was to find an economically sounder reason for consuming transport than a mere affection for primroses and landscapes. It was duly found. 'We condition the masses to hate the country,' concluded the Director. 'But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport. Hence those electric shocks'*  
(Huxley, *Brave New World*, 1946, pp. 14-15).

There is no place like New York City – “The City that Never Sleeps”. We have access to nearly anything we desire at our fingertips. We are known as one of the most booming mega cities in the world. But we did not get here by chance. And we did not get here with that good old California attitude. We got here because we mean business. We got here because we are a city of Workaholics.

**Workaholic** - *a person who works compulsively at the expense of other pursuits.* We all know what a workaholic is. Most of us New Yorkers are at least amateur workaholics in denial. Others of us are aware and working towards a happy medium. I'd venture to say that many have acknowledged their status as a workaholic and are not doing anything to curb it. Now... do we have to worry about what will happen to us? Not necessarily as there is no direct or calculable effect; we cannot categorize this as a medical illness or even begin to measure it.

But why do we all work so much? Why are the average hours of work in NYC at least an hour longer than most jobs or careers around the country? There are many reasons: yearning for success, career advancement, money, nothing else to do. My thought is that we work this much to be able to afford the ridiculous and lavishly stimulating lifestyles that you can have in this megacity we all live in. Every extracurricular and non-work activity is another expense. A Broadway show for \$100, another high-end but casual restaurant expense of \$100, an outfit for the show \$100, drinks after the show \$100, cab to and from \$40.

There's also another type of workaholic that I would classify myself under - The type that works because I haven't learned how to balance this crazy New York lifestyle. Do I have to work harder because it costs money to live and play here? Yes. But I am also someone who appreciates the great outdoors and just need more opportunities to immerse myself in them. I need to be able to leave my phone at home and walk to a park where I can partake in an activity whether it's active or passive. There needs to be a separation between work and life and parks can help facilitate that.

It's a viscous cycle. We work harder to play harder and by playing harder, we are creating more work for people who are working harder to play harder. From a neutral point of view, it's a thing of beauty; capitalism at it's finest. Man gets job. Man works hard. Man makes money. Man spends most of his money on activities that provide more jobs. Life goes on.... But how many people do you know who complain about their workload in NYC? Every single one of my friends who has a career in NYC has at least said this once to me.

How can we fix this? Well... honestly, I hesitate to use the word fix as I don't think it's that black and white. We can't fix something that isn't a problem to most people. But we can address it indirectly and attempt to foster an environment where people have more of a choice to be workaholics by being able to have somewhere to go and something to do that might not cost them money; something that can not only benefit them mentally, physically, maybe even socially, but can also benefit the city itself.

We need to generate some ideas, some ideas that might seem crazy at first, to attempt to enable these environments. In a perfect world, we could create a volunteer program that plants trees or helps build the parks themselves. I actually remember an episode from a TV show called *Parks and Recreation*, which had an episode all about a company that built a park in two days. The company was called something crazy like KABOOM and they went from town to town every two - three days, and in partnership with the parks department and volunteers, erected a public park. It sounds like a crazy idea, but it might be one that works. I understand there are going to be challenges with politics and policy and funding and space, but we have to aim high and "throw it all against the wall and see what sticks". It is our only chance to have a reasonable outcome.

*I would give the greatest sunset in the world for one sight of New York's skyline. Particularly when one can't see the details. Just the shapes. The shapes and the thought that made them. The sky over New York and the will of man made visible. What other religion do we need? And then people tell me about pilgrimages to some dank pesthole in a jungle where they go to do homage to a crumbling temple, to a leering stone monster with a pot belly, created by some leprous savage. Is it beauty and genius they want to see? Do they seek a sense of the sublime? Let them come to New York, stand on the shore of the Hudson, look and kneel. When I see the city from my window - no, I don't feel how small I am - but I feel that if a war came to threaten this, I would throw myself into space, over the*

*city, and protect these buildings with my body  
(Rand, The Fountainhead, 1943).*

The American Dream: the idea of starting anew; the idea that you can go bigger and get bolder. There is beauty in this notion and America is a great representation of the power in capitalism and the idea of dreaming big. Go big or go home! ... they say. A city built on parks like Chico, California has no American Dream left in it – it is urban sprawl for all the rest of the country is concerned. Their sixth largest employer is a brewery who employs 325 people! There is no easy way to create new economical growth within that area. This is why America's population is trending towards the city lifestyle. This is why I cannot say that all urban development is negative. This is the other side. This is why the urban development of New York City can be beneficial.

Urban development undoubtedly has the potential to help a city, any city, even a lot of parts of New York City. If it is done in coordination with the community, and space itself is taken into deep consideration, urban development can be the best thing that ever happened to a city.

My argument for more parks wouldn't exist if New York City weren't as developed as it is. The urban development within NYC has created an environment of extreme population per square mile, which is why we need more green space for the many people living within said square mile.

While I disagree with someone like Donald Trump's approach, his approach (which is widely regarded), does not speak for all other developers' methodology. The New York City Economic Development Corporation specializes in improving the quality of life in Manhattan by promoting economic growth and approaches projects with the consideration of current residents in mind. Many of their projects, like the recent restoration of the downtown Battery Maritime Building, continues the appeal of downtown NYC which was once remembered as a site of Five Points. Additionally, the NYCEDC combines both private and public sectors to achieve a result that does not simply favor corporate interests, like many development projects we see.

While I would hope that more developers approached their projects with more compassion and consideration of what the current community wants and needs, this is not typically the outcome I read about. However, I believe it is possible to approach urban development with a sociological approach. This type of approach would pair very well with my solution for vertical parks. For example, take a vertical park built next to a teen recreation center. The marriage of green parks and urban development has the potential to work together, but this all depends on the developer and his or her intentions.

There is beauty in Ayn Rand's quote whether or not you subscribe to it. There is a magnificence within this concrete jungle and nearly every resident of New York City must see this, or they shouldn't subject themselves to living here. I must confess of my appreciation for her sentence "The shapes and the thought that made them." It is an unnatural feat that we have accomplished and we must pay homage to the amenities this city provides.

*We had a remarkable sunset one day last November. I was walking in a meadow, the source of a small brook, when the sun at last, just before setting, after a cold, gray day, reached a clear stratum in the horizon, and the softest, brightest morning sunlight fell on the dry grass and on the stems of the trees in the opposite horizon and on the leaves of the shrub oaks on the hillside, while our shadows stretched long over the meadow east-ward, as if we were the only motes in its beams. It was such a light as we could not have imagined a moment before, and the air also was so warm and serene that nothing was wanting to make a paradise of that meadow. When we reflected that this was not a solitary phenomenon, never to happen again, but that it would happen forever and ever, an infinite number of evenings, and cheer and reassure the latest child that walked there, it was more glorious still (Henry David Thoreau, "Walking", 1862).*

As I sit here and watch a beautiful sunset over the Manhattan skyline from my north-facing Brooklyn apartment window, I feel nothing but gratitude; gratitude and appreciation of what brought me and this view here. Being able to see the Freedom Tower, the Empire State Building, and the Chrysler building from my window is a key talking point when people ask what I can see from the top floor of my new apartment building. These buildings are huge feats for American industrialism and that should not go overlooked. I can see thousands, maybe millions, of buildings from brownstones to projects to skyscrapers to condo buildings and so many more. If I can see all of that, what can I not see, you might ask? What is missing from this beautiful 21<sup>st</sup> century picture of New York City? The color green! In contrast, I can count the number of trees I can see on one hand, maybe two.

I need not pick apart the city and its lack of green in highly populated areas any more than I already have. What I have for you instead is a solution; a compromise of sorts. We don't have the available space to build another Central Park or even another Washington Square Park for that matter. And though there are going to come opportunities to utilize spaces that large to create parks that can span 10 square city blocks or more, they are going to be few and far between and the positive dividends we

receive will not be worth waiting for. We need to shift our current prospective viewpoint almost completely. We need to put ourselves in the mind of a developer. What do they see when they look at an empty lot, a dilapidated building, or a parking garage? They see the profit and money in an apartment or office building of course, but they see it in a different way than we Parks People see it. We view it horizontally. They interpret it vertically.

What's preventing us from seeing it the same way? Is it the hope that more space will be dedicated to parks when the soup finally hits the fan? Or is it the fact that most people would not be able to creatively understand the idea? Either way, the time has come to take action.

I spent far too much time scouring books for a mention of anything "vertical". Lynden B. Miller's *Parks, Plants, and People: Beautifying the Urban Landscape* is an amazing book for learning about public parks and the importance of horticulture within them. Yet, I did not find anything to have to do with the idea of vertical besides when she would write about barriers or walls for a park or garden. There were a few gems that strengthen my argument though, and I'd like to share a quote from the book by the former mayor of Chicago Richard M. Daley: "I believe very strongly that the cities that pay attention- really pay attention- to quality of life will be the cities that thrive in the twenty-first century...Trees, flowers, a small park, even a sidewalk bench can soften the rough edges of a city, calm your nerves and make you feel a little more in control of things.... [Parks] are essential building blocks of strong neighborhoods" (Miller, 2009, pp. 17-18). Needless to say, I strongly agree with Mayor Daley. It has been proven that parks increase quality of life; we need to find unique and interesting ways to incorporate green spaces into this already developed and growing city.

Another book, *People Places: Design Guidelines for Urban Open Space*, breaches the topic of the future of neighborhood parks: "As cultural patterns of space usage are better understood, park design may be jolted out of its mass-produced institutional rut...Hayward identifies several alternatives to the conventional park that are being met with public enthusiasm – small parks and plazas for casual, daily use without the necessity of an intentional trip; botanical gardens; waterfront developments; zoological gardens; art parks, with sculpture or earthworks as a major theme; sports parks, with facilities....." (Marcus, 1990, pp. 86-87). This book was published almost 25 years ago! We have done a great job of creating such spaces in NYC with places like Herald Square, Brooklyn Bridge Waterfront Park, etc... Alas the time has come for what is the future of urban parks as of 2014: The Vertical Park.

I cannot take full credit for this genius idea; Professor Keefer and I were in a brainstorming session concerning my thesis development when we began a somewhat heated discussion. Professor Keefer was asking me thought-provoking questions and as we came across the topic of utilitarian development and its seemingly inevitable takeover, she asked, "why couldn't you do what they do?" A light bulb clicked, a siren



went off... an idea was born. I immediately had too many ideas to remember on what could and/or would be incorporated into a vertical park and have been building my list of ideas every day since. I often ask friends, more than once at that, to give me some things they would like to see in their perfect park and feel confident that I have created a great and versatile list.

Although one vertical space may not be able to accommodate every idea, I believe a living list this long will help to create a few ideal vertical parks that will garner interest from many different people and groups. It is easy to take a look at this list and think it is a pipe dream, but we must aim high in hopes of achieving a meaningful end result. I also feel very strongly about incorporating every main point I touched base on in earlier weeks: ways to help curb pollution and promote sustainability, options for people to exercise to help prevent obesity, and to create a beautiful space to help satisfy our primal need for nature and the social and mental benefits it can grant us.

***Compost Drop Off***

***Playground***

***Dog Run***

***Water Feature for noise reduction***

***Green Roof w/ community garden***

***Abundant Trees***

***Coffee Kiosk***

***Ice Cream Kiosk (Summer)***

***Pop-Up Kiosks***

***Volunteer Led Yoga Course with donations***

***Art Gallery / show for three - four weeks at a time***

***Rain water collection to help stormwater runoff and for irrigation***

***"Quiet Level" for studying***

***"Social level" for talking / chess / etc...***

***Lectures on Quiet Level***

***Classes on composting / gardening / nature maintenance / arts & crafts***

***Solar panels***

***Extra row or three of stairs that go up and around for exercise purposes***

***Stationary bikes on yoga level***

Imagine that empty lot that's been sucking up all the life around it with its hollow void: Trash littered throughout, a half broken fence guarding it, a few flowers or weeds, graffiti. Maybe it could be another Starbucks under a 10-story apartment building? It could also be another convenient three story Duane Reade. Or we could turn that same space into a vertical park that efficiently creates abundant options for recreation, promotes sustainability through action and education, and can act as a social meeting place in the outdoors. Not only can you bring your compost directly to the place where it would be utilized for the community garden, but you can also learn all about how to properly compost and what it does for our community.

I want education within the park to be a central theme. The only way to create awareness and hopefully a Domino Effect is to foster an environment with easy to read and memorable facts – even if they involve financial benefit. When you walk up to the park, there should be billboard style (much smaller, of course) facts about what the park does for our city: “The 24 trees planted here absorb X amount of carbon from the air. Without trees in NYC, we’d spend X amount of money on \_\_\_\_\_”; “The 55 gallon steel drums you see located on the NW corner are used for collecting rain water. Stormwater runoff is a big problem for pollution in our rivers in NYC and these barrels not only assist with collecting that, but the water collected accounts for 50% of the water used to irrigate the greenery at this park”.

The parks could be a hybrid public/private park to help facilitate the financial aspects of building and maintaining it. Volunteer work will be crucial in getting these up and running and creating neighborhood advocacy groups will be more than a necessity as we will need to mobilize strong, yet small and efficient groups within neighborhoods that feel as passionately about adding green space as the Friends of the High Line did. With enough different interest groups involved, a resilient assembly of zealous neighborhood activists, and some political representatives backing the idea, I think we can add lots of beneficial green space to every small neighborhood in need without hoarding too much horizontal square footage and ruffling the feathers of urban developers.

Given my research and analysis, I believe that we should be utilizing empty lots and open spaces to create new ways to build more parks that will address culturally relevant issues. Vertical parks serve as a solution to many of the current issues we face as a society: pollution / climate change and how it effects our wellbeing, obesity and our physical health, and the outdoors and how it effects our mental condition / happiness. But it doesn’t just appease the environmentally conscious and forward-thinking people, it also takes developers’ needs, explicitly their monetary needs and values, into account. This solution warrants additional scientific and structural research and development, but I strongly believe that it is a legitimate response to the issues that I have brought forth in my paper.

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