The application of Landscape Architecture principles to transform public waterway access at a community level in New Jersey

A graduate thesis project by Kim Nuccio

Rutgers Graduate School, Department of Landscape Architecture
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PLACE

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How can the application of Landscape Architecture principles transform public waterfront access for members of a waterfront community that do not reside on the waterfront?

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Introduction

Ten years ago I moved myself and my family to Brielle, New Jersey, a small town at the southern tip of Monmouth county that sits on the Manasquan River. As I explored the community that I had just joined, I enjoyed the river and marinas within walking distance of my house. I learned about the notion of public access a few years later. I had been getting to the river in my usual ways --- walking through a condominium parking lot, to a bench at the end of a dock or from the marina that I drove to, if we were going out for a sail. These moments occurred frequently, and my family and I took advantage of our nearby waterway access.

It never occurred to me to try to get to the river in some other way, until one day, I spotted a small sign, next to a gated path across from my house, which read “Public Access”. This sign was accompanied by two other signs reading “Private Property” and “Residents Only.” My curiosity piqued, I began to investigate. In the following weeks, I learned that although my town actually had eleven public access points leading to picturesque views and easy access to the banks of the Manasquan, it seemed as if the vast majority of the 5000 residents (myself included) had no idea they existed or that these access points represented their “right” to the waterfront. To underscore this point I was not surprised when an administrator at Rutgers, also a Brielle resident, remarked when she heard of my project, “Public access in Brielle? We don’t have any public access in Brielle.”

Discovery of our shared access points, not only to the Manasquan River in Brielle, but to many waterways throughout the State of New Jersey, inspired this masters project and thesis study. It is my sense that these access points are under utilized. Can they be enhanced? Can they be further developed through application of landscape architectural principles to serve as experiential “moments” for a broader swath of the local community looking to connect to a treasured waterfront resource? Can they be used to foster environmental awareness and education while developing true stewards for our valuable waterways? And, in consideration of the recent impacts to New Jersey shore communities from Superstorm Sandy, is there a
How can the application of Landscape Architecture principles transform public waterfront access for members of a waterfront community that do not reside on the waterfront?

current opportunity to restore some of these access points in a different, perhaps better, way? I thought about all of these questions, posed many of them to other involved community members and eventually ended up with a single question that would consume me for the duration of my educational pursuits: How can the application of landscape architecture principles transform public waterfront access for members of a waterfront community that do not reside on the waterfront?

The objective of this study is to explore different mechanisms to improve, enhance and essentially transform the experience of the waterfront on a community level using Brielle, New Jersey as a case study. My hope is that this project will both inform and challenge the ongoing debate on public waterfront access in not only Brielle but in New Jersey as well. This project is also intended to act as a design aid and as an inspiration for towns with similar goals to connect their communities to their waterfronts.

Background on and barriers to the waterfront frame a historical discussion on Brielle, New Jersey. Three comparative studies and a look at current regulations that govern establishment and use of waterfront access points establish a framework for a larger and more detailed discussion on how waterfront access can be transformed.

This project:

- Establishes waterfront access point typologies, based on a review of access points within Brielle, New Jersey and neighboring towns;
- Includes an inventory and analysis of all public waterfront access points in Brielle, New Jersey through the creation of a photo journal, an amenities chart and diagrammatic assessments.
- Develops design guidance for each typology, based on a thorough understanding of typology, space, and planned usage;
- Demonstrates implementation of design principles though exploration of one Brielle, New Jersey waterfront access point;
- Develops a guidebook that identifies and describes Brielle’s waterfront access points as a resource for local residents.
Historically, public access to our waterways declined as private waterfront development increased. The inevitable conflict between public and private interests led to Federal and State legislation to both protect the waterfront and ensure public access to it. Although legislation is now in place that guarantees public access at specific points, private interests often attempt to inhibit access, hiding these access points or making them inhospitable. Private developers or individual property owners routinely install measures and signage that indicate that these public access points are private and that public use of these points constitutes trespassing.

The protection of tidal waterways and their shores is necessary for a variety of reasons. First and most importantly, it is the responsibility of the state, through the Public Trust Doctrine, to hold these lands and waters in trust for the public. Affording them special protection enables the state to provide adequate access to and use of them despite development and the tendency to limit access that occurs on adjacent sites. Environmentally, tidal waterways and their shores contain some of the most sensitive ecosystems in the state. With diversity including the open ocean, beaches and dunes, coastal wetlands and critical estuarine habitats, the coastal zone is not only enjoyed by humans, but also necessary for an abundance of marine life and for its many beneficial functions. Increased access to tidal waterways and their shores allows more people to appreciate the coast as a natural resource. This appreciation instills a sense of stewardship leading to greater environmental appreciation and protection. (Public Access in New Jersey, p. 3)

There are primarily three things that inhibit access to the waterfront:

- Obscurity;
- Privatization;
- Degradation of access sites themselves.

Access to the water becomes obscured when the designated spots to actually get to the water are hidden from view or physically blocked. In places that surrounding property owners claim ownership of public land, or take unlawful control of an area, public access points have become illegally privatized. Finally, degradation of the access sites themselves becomes a problem when the sites are largely neglected due to lack of interest or knowledge of their existence.
Brielle is a small town located on the southern tip of Monmouth County along the Manasquan River. The population is roughly 5,000 and the town is primarily a residential community of single homes, with a few condominiums; there are almost no undeveloped lots left. Today, there are thirteen documented public access points in Brielle plus a small public island off the south western coast known as Treasure Island.

According to the borough historian John Belding, the geographical area known as Brielle was originally a section of Shrewsbury Township founded in 1664. Settlers, primarily Dutch and English, arrived in the late 1600’s and mostly engaged in agricultural pursuits. Comfortable farm homesteads dotted the area some enjoying a sweeping view of the Manasquan River and Atlantic Ocean. Early in the 1700’s a small commercial port called Landing, later called, Union Landing, grew up on the Manasquan River. A modest ship building industry developed as did shipping activities. Sailing ships navigated the Manasquan Inlet engaged primarily in coastal trading while at the same time herds of cows grazed on pasture ending at the river. By the second half of the 1800’s a number of “cottages,” summer hotels and boarding houses were being constructed along the Manasquan River at or near Union Landing. This area was in those days referred to as “the Union.” In 1881, a group of businessmen formed the Brielle Land Association and purchased 150 acres of farm land between Longstreet (or Debbie’s) Creek and what was then known as Mud Pond, to be divided into lots for sale as vacations home sites. This land was north of Union...
Landing. They named this development “Brielle” at the suggestion by one of their members who had visited Brielle, Holland, the year before. He thought this area resembled the countryside and the coastal towns which dot Europe's lowlands on the North Sea and the English Channel. It was during this period that the area began to flourish as a resort. The railroad had been extended south along the shore and Mud Pond was quickly renamed Glimmer Glass.

The Borough of Brielle was created from a portion of Wall. It consists of the original Union Landing area, the Brielle Land Association tract, and all the property up along the river as far as Old Bridge Road. Over the years, and particularly since World War II, the town has grown into a residential community with many of its citizens commuting to the New York metropolitan area. Its prime local industry is still connected with the waterfront with more than 200 commercial and charter fishing boats plus private pleasure craft.

Brielle has no ocean frontage but has almost 4 miles of frontage on the Manasquan River, Debbie's Creek, and the Glimmer Glass. Very little vacant land remains. There are approximately 4,600 residents within 1.8 square miles, including the eight acre island. A large section of land is occupied by the nationally known 140 acre Manasquan River Golf Club, founded in 1922. The Manasquan River forms our southern bound-

Waterfront Access in Brielle

Today there are thirteen public waterfront access points in Brielle (plus Treasure Island), none of which are particularly welcoming and only a handful of which are explicitly marked. Many of these points offer potential opportunities for further development. An integral part of this study includes a thorough inventory and analysis of these sites as well as the establishment of a reference guide. This work can be found in appendix A of this document. The site that I have chosen to explore from a design perspective is at Crescent Ave. and Donnelly Place.
The rights of access to and use of tidal waterways and their shores are afforded by the common law principle known as the Public Trust Doctrine, which holds that certain resources are preserved for public use, and that government is required to maintain them for the public’s reasonable use. All levels of government, from federal to local, have the responsibility to preserve and protect our nation’s coast, ensuring adequate access to and use of our tidal waterways and their shores by the public. (Public Access in New Jersey).

A summary of applicable regulations is as follows:

Federal: Coastal Management Act

In 1972, Congress passed the Coastal Zone Management Act to create a federal framework for the development of statewide coastal management programs in an effort to protect the nation’s coastline. From this act came the Coastal Zone Management Program, which is administered at the federal level by the Coastal Programs Division within NOAA’s Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM). One of the most important functions of the OCRM is to work with state coastal programs to provide technical and financial support, undertake projects with program-wide or system-wide benefits, integrate their information to support activities at the national level and promote coastal stewardship on numerous critical coastal issues, one of which is public access (Public Access in New Jersey, pg. 31).

Local: Zoning Policies and Regulations

The Federal requirement for public access is enacted at the local municipal level, typically through zoning regulations. Local governments serve as gatekeepers for the public that seek to reach and use tidal waterways and their shores. Additionally, local governments have the responsibility to uphold the policies set by county, state and federal governments and have many opportunities to ensure that public access in their jurisdiction is ample and clearly defined. (Public Access in New Jersey, pg. 32).
There are a variety of people and interest groups who hold opposing views relative to the issue of waterfront access. Public interests, local residents, specific user groups, and the community at large are certainly primary stakeholders with their waterfront access rights guaranteed by law. Private interests would include waterfront property owners, both residential and commercial, and business interests that serve those groups such as developers. To the resident of the waterside condominiums, public access to the river through their backyard seems unreasonable, but a necessity, or a responsibility to the rest of the community who would like to share a waterfront experience within their town.

Regarding commercial interests, many businesses have long been situated along local waterfronts. More recent developments, whether residential, restaurants or marinas, can create an effective barrier to a local water body for the local community. Unfortunately, ambiguous legislation, and inconsistent enforcement have enabled many corporations to shirk their legal responsibility to maintain waterfront access to the public.

Municipalities are certainly stakeholders regarding waterfront development, shared access and selection of specific access points. Many municipalities may manage these responsibilities through an advisory group, such as a town’s environmental committee, working with a municipal division with rule-setting authority, typically the zoning board. Brielle, manages waterfront access through the environmental commission. Established in 1972, the goal of the Commission is to maintain the natural resources inventory and provide advice to the planning board regarding the use and quality of Brielle’s public open space. (Brielle Chamber of Commerce website).
With my overall goal to connect a community to its waterfront, I looked at three comparable projects with very similar goals: The first one in New Jersey, which was conducted at the state level by the Department of Environmental Protection. The second from the town of Scriba, New York which was done at the township level, but involved multiple municipalities within the Oswego Lake region and finally, one in Ann Arundel County, Maryland which focused on river access throughout the county and compared it to others on the Chesapeake Bay.

New Jersey: At the state level. “Public Access in New Jersey: the Public Trust Doctrine and Practical Steps to Enhance Public Access”

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Under Governor Jon. S. Corzine, prepared this detailed report to serve as a comprehensive reference for those who seek to learn about the Public Trust Doctrine and public access in New Jersey.

First, this booklet provides a clear interpretation of the Public Trust Doctrine and does a good job explaining exactly what is protected under it. “All lands and waters extending seaward of the mean high waterline are held in trust by the state on behalf of the public. These publicly owned lands include tidelands, shores of tidal rivers and streams, the land beneath oceans and tidal rivers and streams (submerged lands) and filled lands formerly flowed by the tide. As the Public Trust Doctrine has evolved over the years, courts have ruled that the dry sand area landward of the MHW line are also subject to certain public rights under the Public Trust Doctrine, as needed for the enjoyment of the tidal waterways and lands below the MHW.” (Public Access in New Jersey, pg. 10).

Second, this reference guide covers public rights under the Public Trust Doctrine. “In New Jersey, the Public Trust Doctrine recognizes and protects natural resources as well as recreational uses such as bathing, swimming, and walking along tidal waterways and their shores.” (Public Access in New Jersey, pg. 13). The document further explains that it is the duty of the state to not only allow and protect the public’s right to use them, but also to ensure that there is adequate access to these sites.

The Public Trust Doctrine classifies access into three types:

• Lateral access, which refers
Maryland: At the county level
Anne Arundel County Citizens Information Center & Department of Recreation and Parks

With a mission to improve public water access throughout Anne Arundel County, The County Department of Recreation & Parks established a Public Water Access Committee which first undertook its access inventory and analysis.

Anne Arundel County has 540 miles of waterfront but negligible public access on most of its rivers. Many people seek to live in Anne Arundel county because of its vast waterfront and are then surprised to find the extent to which this public resource has become privatized and unavailable to the majority of the public.

Public water access may range from thin access, such as a public waterfront view or walkable beach, to thick access, such as car top boat or trailer-able boat access. Both thin and thick public water access are remarkably limited in Anne Arundel County, as evidenced by a report issued by the National Park Service comparing Anne Arundel County to other counties on the Chesapeake Bay.

The negative consequences of such limited access include impacts to citizen recreation as well as the substantial economic loss to the county. (Department of Recreation & Parks, Anne Arundel County citizens information center website)

to access along tidal waterways and their shores.

- Perpendicular access refers to the ability of the public to reach tidal waterways by corridors across land that may or may not be publicly owned.
- Visual access which is the ability of the public to have access to views of coastal resources without these views being unreasonably obstructed.

The DEP's booklet outlines and provides explanations for opportunities for states, counties, municipalities and nonprofit organizations to provide and preserve public access, including:

- Inventory and signage
- Acquisition
- Conservation Restrictions
- Transfer of Development Rights
- Regulatory tools
- Outreach
- Shore front Management Plan
- Model Municipalities
- Design Guidelines

Of particular usefulness to this project, were certainly the clarification of the Public Trust Doctrine and how it works, but even more so were the list of ways to improve public access. These, specifically the Inventory, Outreach, Model Municipalities and Design Guidelines, informed the general processes for my case study in Brielle.
According to the Ann Arundel Committee, means by which access can be improved include:
- Property acquisitions
- Broadly defined partnerships
- Reversing current default law

Although much broader in scope, this study was particularly applicable to towns like Brielle in large part because it focused on river access, as opposed to ocean beaches. Recommendations provided by the committee, many of which can be applied to similar projects, are divided into immediate, short-term, and Long term objectives.

Anne Arundel Immediate Objectives
- Establish a Public Water Access Commission, including adequate staff support to provide effective ongoing oversight and direction.
- Compile a comprehensive inventory of all public waterfront land in Anne Arundel county
- Evaluate the feasibility of providing additional access
- Welcome the public to waterfront lands under management of the Department of Recreation and Parks through improved signage and policies that make access simple and convenient.
- Encourage the Center for the Study of Local issues to provide survey data on the percentage of county residents who belong to a community association with the following types of water access:
  - View of water
  - Walk along the water’s edge
  - Fishing or crabbing
  - Launch a kayak, canoe or other car-top boat
  - Launch a trailer-ed boat.

For those lacking these opportunities, ask if the County should provide such access.

Anne Arundel Short Term Objectives
- Create a permit system, to generate dedicated funds for operation of thick access to public waterfront
- Modify the Recreation and Parks website and produce a brochure to provide a listing of all access points and encourage use of public waterfront.
- Ensure that all public rights of way are re-opened to the public and dissuade local attempts to privatize or otherwise block general access to the water.

Anne Arundel Long Term Objectives
- Provide at least one location for meaningful thin and thick public water access on each side, preferably near the middle or near major transportation arteries, of each major river in Anne Arundel County.
- Create strategies for acquisition and development of additional facilities.
- Establish partnerships with businesses and other governments to create additional public access.
New York: At the town level

The town of Scriba commissioned a Public Waterfront Access study to develop an inventory and evaluation of public waterfront access sites within portions of Oswego County. The Scriba project encompasses the waterfront sites situated on Lake Ontario, and major tributaries within one mile of the lakeshore, and sites along the Oswego River from the lake to the southern boundary of the Town of Minetto on the west side of the Oswego River and the northern boundary of the Town of Volney on the east side of the river.

The purpose of the study is to serve as a guide for Oswego County and the municipalities included in the study area for future consideration of expanding public access to the waterfront and to provide valuable data for future funding applications.

This study involved the inventory and analysis of 59 publicly owned waterfront parcels in eight municipalities. Data was collected for each parcel and summarized in an attribute table. Each site was then considered in regards to the adequacy of:
  • existing public access;
  • conditions that restrict access;
  • general opportunities for improving public access.

Public outreach was included in the development of this study consisting of two Public Information Meetings (PIMs). Data was collected by several means: GIS based sources, site observation at each property and from solicited input from affected municipalities. The analysis of the parcels was used to determine
  • the existing level of access
  • the potential for improvements to public access, started during the site visits.
Programming: Siting, Design, Outreach

All of this brings us back to my original question: How can the application of Landscape Architecture principles transform public waterfront access for members of a waterfront community that do not reside on the waterfront?

The answer is multifaceted and stems from the notion that access, awareness and stewardship are inextricably linked. Water is a natural draw. People will come, if they know how to get there. Once they do, isn’t it part of our job as landscape architects is to foster a relationship between the user and the landscape? How do we enhance the experience, encourage use and inspire stewardship? We start with programming.

Programming is a general concept regarding how we most effectively develop a specific public resource to best serve the intended end user. The programming of our community waterfront space consists of three primary components - siting, design and outreach.

Siting
Siting strategies include:

- Provide high quality places that encourage both active and passive recreation and allow people to learn about the river and its ecology.
- Create a variety of water recreation opportunities at different scales.
- Appropriate site selection. Among other things, location determines options to access existing infrastructure and restore degraded ecosystems. (Calkins, p. 33).

Design
Design focuses enhancement of existing access points, providing new amenities for diverse types of recreation for all ages and types of users. Generally, design interventions at public access points address the primary barriers to waterfront described above: obscurity, privatization, and degradation. Standardizing design components is important. Public access addressed on a township, borough, or county wide level assumes that the public access points themselves are part of system connecting the community to the waterfront.

Design issues common to most sites would be vegetation, seating, surfacing and storm water management. These can be addressed with well-documented best management practices. For example, vegetation should be addressed as follows:
Many design challenges are common to all types, but others are specific and are what differentiate one type from another.

In an “Access Point Typology,” public access points are broadly categorized into types, based on potential user experience, site characteristics, access, location and size. Ultimately, this typology is used as a basis for design guidelines intended to aid in the restoration of sites by municipalities, civic organizations and other involved parties.

Brielle’s public waterfront access point typology includes:

- River Beach
- Island Oasis
- Waterfront Park
- Viewpoint
- Secret Spot
- Bluff

This typology is particularly useful because it is coupled with developed symbology used in the categorization of the sites. It also provides a visual connection to the actual sites of a particular type and clearly denotes specific recreational opportunities at each.

In other communities, the types might be different. It depends on, among other things, the character of the waterfront, potential user groups and expected activity. Environmentally sensitive areas, like wetlands and estuaries, would likely drive other categories in a typology.

Other BMPs (best management practices) for designing sustainable sites include:

- Address storm water such that run-off is minimized or intercepted into an area that allows infiltration and recharge. This includes enhanced retention basis and rain gardens;
- Integrate soils into the design process. Long-term sustainability of landscapes is dependant on a healthy environment for plants. Healthy growing conditions start with quality soil that is biologically healthy. Sustainable site preparation uses on-site soils when possible. Soils high in sand tend to be well aerated but prone to drought, whereas soils high in clay tend to be fertile but prone to compaction and poor water movement. Both extremes of soil types can be amended with organic matter prior to planting to enhance performance after planting. (VanDerZanden and Cook, pg. 130);
- Utilize materials or products that minimize resource use. (Calkins, p. 325);
- Encourage the use of environmentally sensitive maintenance of dirt and gravel roads, using natural systems and innovative technologies to reduce erosion, sediment and dust pollution.

Outreach

Outreach components can be diverse and could include:

- Signage
- A community map
- A brochure for local distribution
- Town meeting presentations
- Educational programs
- Community events

A primary component of programming a space is understanding its context, appropriate uses and limitations in order to develop a framework for design interventions. This can be done with a typology.

Why categorize? Why characterize? Why typology? As Cecilia Searle so eloquently stated, “The natural lay of the land establishes an undeniable base for all of man’s actions. This natural setting provides a framework within which all land use decisions must be cast. It is therefore imperative the characteristics of the land be fully understood.” (Searle, pg. 5)

The character of each of access point in Brielle is illustrated in cross section with attributes and opportunities represented in collage style renderings. Typologies help us understand the character and the unique challenges of each type of site and ultimately meet those challenges with the skills and tools we have as landscape architects. Many design challenges are common to all types, but others are specific and are what differentiate one type from another.
The Waterfront Park is accessed by a broad range of users including families seeking a place for young children to play, teens and tweens on skateboards and in sneakers, to mature adults just out walking. With its unique ecological functions, the waterfront park is rich with habitat. Size, location and non-motorized boat storage differentiate the waterfront park from the River Beach. Similar to the River Beach, vegetation is native, topography slopes gently toward the tidal river and paths are defined.

Quigley Cove is much larger than all the other sites, with approximately 500 feet of waterfront and “thick” access from the street (100+ feet). Any site of this scale has challenges that differ from similar but much smaller sites. Specifically,

- How to accommodate multiple user groups simultaneously;
- Circulation within the park for both pedestrians and in some cases, cyclists;
- Making the park accessible to all community members, including those with disabilities;
- Incorporating park facilities, like parking and restrooms;
- Locating storage for non-motorized boats;
- Incorporating informational signage;
- How to deal with long-term maintenance;
- How to control the ecological impacts of a design intervention on an environmentally sensitive area such as this.

WATERFRONT PARK
What defines a waterfront park and what challenges does this type of site present?

Most certainly location and size. Of the 13 public access points in Brielle, only one, Quigley Cove, has been classified as a potential waterfront park. And it’s a good thing. As per the Coastal Management Act, noted above in the regulatory framework section, every waterfront municipality is REQUIRED, to have at least one waterfront park.
Access to the Island is by boat only and the experience is largely naturalized and secluded. Informational signage explaining environmental sensitivity and unique ecological functions is a critical component on the island. Similar to the other waterfront access types, vegetation is native, topography slopes gently toward the tidal river and paths are defined.

Among the challenges on an uninhabited island would certainly be maintenance, safety measures for users and, as in all types balancing recreational opportunities with ecological sensitivity.

VIEWPOINT, SECRET SPOT AND BLUFF
Picturesque views to the water are a key component for all types of access points, but at the Viewpoint, Secret Spot and the Bluff, views are the primary attribute of the space. All three types provide seating and opportunities for passive activities like strolling, bird watching and quiet contemplation. The Viewpoint is often simply a clear and unobstructed view of the water, often from an accessible rooftop for public enjoyment. The Bluff, typically abutting then end of a dead end street, offers commanding views of the river from a platform and provides safety from a steep and potentially dangerous slope. Railings and stable surfacing are incredibly important here. The Secret Spot is characterized by it’s remote location; often adjacent to a little known tributary. The Secret Spot is a little different in terms of location and accessibility but similar to the viewpoint and bluff in size and function.

Most of the secret spots in Brielle have degrading bulkheads where there is a dangerous drop off to the water to accompany the beautiful views. Upkeep of these bulkheads, to ensure the safety of users and mitigating the risks to small children are important concerns for the designer to consider.

Protecting and developing these smaller spaces is important because so many of our public access points fall into these categories. If we focus all of our energy on the larger spots, fewer and fewer community members will be walking distance from an accessible spot on the water, which, with very limited parking, will greatly reduce the likely hood of use for those community members.

Programming Strategy
Provide high quality places that encourage both passive and active recreation and allow people to learn about the river and it’s ecology.

- kayaking
- birdwatching
- fishing
- hiking / walking
- picnicking
- resting
Existing Public Access Points

1. Forrest Avenue
2. Brainard Avenue
3. Osprey Point South
4. Osprey Point North
5. Jordan Avenue
6. Laurel Avenue
7. Riverview Lane
8. Ashley Avenue
9. Hoffman’s Marina
10. Crescent Avenue
11. Drawbridge West
12. Woodland East Ave.
13. Quigley Cove
14. Treasure Island
OUTREACH+EXPOSURE
Outreach campaigns provide excellent opportunities to involve and educate the public. When people know their rights and benefits of public access, they will be more likely to support regulatory changes such as new ordinances and will also demand consideration from their local and state decision makers. “ (Public Access in New Jersey, p. 35)

For Brielle, this means making a detailed inventory map accessible and known to residents, as well as providing information on amenities, access, and the extent of public properties at each place the river can be accessed. User-based typology guidelines, along with standardized signage offer implementable solutions at a community level.

See Appendix A for the reference guide created for Brielle’s environmental committee. See Appendix B for the map brochure intended for distribution to Brielle’s residents.

Walkability
Brielle is less than 2 square miles, which makes almost any point in town no more than a twenty minute walk from the waterfront, and many points within a ten minute walk. The walkability of these spots is not in question. People do not walk to them because either they don’t know about them or the spots themselves have fallen into disrepair. Public use will activate the sites and likely encourage stewardship. People tend to care about amenities they value and feel a connection to.

Connectability
Six primary connector streets bring people to the waterfront: Forrest Avenue, Osprey Point, Jordan Avenue, Laurel Avenue, Crescent Avenue, and Brielle Avenue. Signage at the major crossroads of these streets will go a long way to help residents find their way to the water.
seven connector streets identified

guiding principles

awareness + access = stewardship
walk + connect = activate
Armed with a typology, design guidelines for each type and an understanding of both the background and the barriers to the waterfront, transformation through site specific design can occur one point at a time. Site specific designs produce appropriate plans and specifications for the individual locations and enable the township, borough or county to authorize work or move specific projects forward.

The ideas presented here are grounded tested with a site specific design at the public access point off Crescent Avenue in Brielle (number 8 on the above context map). Crescent is a relatively small site with approximately 150 feet of waterfront along Crabtown Creek (a tributary of the Manasquan River.)

Crescent was selected not only for its location and easy access from surrounding neighborhoods, but also for its size; this site, categorized above as a "River Beach" is large enough to accommodate more than a handful of people, yet small enough for the project to have short term attainable goals--the perfect pilot project.

The site itself, sits at the end of a dead end street technically known as Donnelly Place (formerly a private driveway, whose status is now a municipal road.) Although there is no parking permitted on Donnelly, there is limited street parking on Crescent. Pedestrian and bicycle access are preferred and recommended.

The approach to this site would stimulate any designer to address its apparent needs. The site presents as a neglected and abandoned plot of overgrown land situated on the waterfront. Sandwiched between two very large well kept private residences, its entrance is masked with a vine covered and failing chain link fence,
miscellaneous shrubbery and three 4 x 4s acting as bollards spaced about 24” apart. Several signs, all compromised, read, “Private Property”, “No Parking” and “Public Access.” Beyond the fence and bollards, the site reveals captivating views of the river and wetlands. Before the space opens up to an ample beach front, there is a dilapidated bulkhead that demarcates the wetland boundary as well as considerable upland vegetation. Evidence of use includes miscellaneous beer cans, a broken bench and other debris.

The Manasquan River Watershed, in which this site lies, provides habitat for a suite of breeding birds that utilize mixed upland forest and forested wetlands. These habitats also support hundreds of species of migrating landbirds during spring and fall migration and abundant waterfowl in the winter and spring months. State-endangered Bald Eagles and state-threatened Ospreys nest at the Manasquan Reservoir. The salt marsh of the river’s lower reaches provides important foraging habitat for colonial waterbirds, including several species of terns and herons. (New Jersey Audubon Society website.)

(VENN from Calkins, p. 3)
The urgency for stewardship on this site is not in question. The surrounding residents have expressed concern and local civic organizations have proposed potential clean up and restorative efforts. The challenge, is to identify specific needs, and address them spatially with a viable and sustainable design. Sustainable, a loaded term these days is eloquently defined by Meg Calkins as a project that is socially equitable, economically feasible, and environmentally sound.
DONELLY PLACE AT CRESCENT AVE.

GENERAL NOTES:
1) INITIAL IMPRESSION IS THAT THE SITE IS NOT WELCOMING. THE ENTRYWAY AND UPLAND VEGETATION SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO ENCOURAGE USE. DELAPIDATED, VINE COVERED FENCE SHOULD BE REMOVED, AS WELL AS ANY AND ALL INVASIVE SPECIES. NATIVE BEACH GRASSES SHOULD REMAIN WHERE POSSIBLE.
2) THERE ARE MULTIPLE "NO PARKING" SIGNS BEFORE ANY INDICATION OF PUBLIC ACCESS. ARRANGEMENT OF SIGNAGE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED.
3) THE SITE IS TERMED "BEACH" ON A PUBLIC SIGN. THE TERM SHOULD BE CHANGED.
4) BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN ACCESS ARE EASY AND RECOMMENDED.
5) RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN CLIFFE, SUCH AS NON-MOTORIZED BOATING, FISHING, AND BIRDWATCHING.
6) EXCELLENT VIEWS OF THE MARSH ACROSS THE RIVER, WHICH PROVIDE HABITAT FOR MANY WETLAND SPECIES.
GATEWAY

At Crescent and Donnelly
GATEWAY
A garden with a purpose

With only storm drains at the intersection of Crescent and Donnelly Place, 100% of the storm water runoff from Donnelly flows freely onto the public access site at the end of Donnelly, heavily contributing to the site’s degradation and ongoing erosion. This Gateway garden celebrates access, while at the same time accepts and recharges this storm water in an expansive, two-part rain garden, generously sized to handle it. With native grasses on a dune-like berm, tactile river birches, big leafed bayberry and long blooming shrub roses, this garden offers a high-impact, well-designed sense of welcome.

The inside edge of the arched rain garden defines a seating area with three benches positioned for the best views of the river, wetlands and fireworks. Paths are delineated with wooden beach mats that allow for ADA accessibility, a bike rack is placed at the entrance and all invasive species are removed.

Standardized signage is an important component in addressing the overall issue of obscurity. Signage here, like at all sites to be developed in Briele, will place the site in the larger context of waterfront access points in town and show them both as part of a system and individually at each location. Signage includes classification of the site, in this case a River Beach, and all recreation opportunities. Other information on environmental sensitivity, local ecology, and historical relevance are included to enrich the experience of the user.
DONNELLY PLACE AT CRESCENT

existing conditions
GATEWAY
A Garden With A Purpose

GATEWAY RAIN GARDEN
1. AMERICAN HOLLY
2. RIVER BIRCH
3. BAYBERRY
4. CREEPING JUNIPER
5. PANIC GRASS (ON BERM)
6. VIRGINIA ROSE
7. LITTLE BLUE STEM
8. BLACK EYED SUSAN
9. DRY STONE BED
Conclusions and Recommendations

My original question asked how the application of landscape architecture principles could transform public waterfront access on a community level. Through programming (siting, outreach and design) this transformation is accomplished.

Siting, including taking stock of what a town already has as designated access points is a logical first step. An accurate and thorough inventory and analysis is a strong foundation on which an effective public waterfront access point transformation effort can be built.

This study includes a detailed inventory and analysis of Brielle, including photo essays, categorization sketches, location maps, potential and existing amenities and a place for future record keeping.

The recommendation for Brielle, is to utilize the attached inventory and analysis to better understand both the assets and the needs of the town and as a tool to manage waterfront access point projects, progress, changes and recommendations.

Outreach is critical. Access, awareness and stewardship are closely linked and at present, that fact that so many residents don’t know how to access the water or even that it is their right to do so is a big part of the problem. So few people utilize the public access points in Brielle in large part because they simply don’t know about them. Sites that are activated by use will promote care and stewardship of those very same sites.

For Brielle, this means using components of this study to create and distribute a usable map, including recreation opportunities at each site. Capitalizing on the walk-connect-activate concept because Brielle is almost entirely walkable and engaging the public through local advertisements, street fare posters and word of mouth efforts.

Regarding site specific design, standardization is key. It is recommended that a set of waterfront design standards be established and used as a guide for all access point projects, no matter how small. Specific standards include:
• Signage: Design, install and standardize all waterfront signage in conjunction with any restoration effort.

• Plantings: Utilize Plant Communities of New Jersey, by Beryl Robichaud Collins and Karl H. Anderson to establish a list of appropriate native plants to use at all of the different zones present at each location. In Brielle this means plants for: dunes, upland beaches, berms, rain gardens, upland coastal vegetation and steep slopes.

• Structures: Benches, tables, racks and railings should be consistent from site to site.

Finally, it is recommended to use this study as tool to get grant funding for waterfront enhancement projects necessary to meet the public access requirements in the Coastal Zone Management Act, specifically to have at least one waterfront park.

Hopefully, with the presentation of this project, engaged community members will be encouraged to participate with town entities to create pedestrian-friendly, well designed access points that support the walkability of the waterfront and it’s strong connection to the community.

My hope is that this study will become a resource for Brielle, and a reference guide for other shore towns as they seek to transform the experience of the waterfront for members of their communities.
References


Kerrigan, Jennifer, Chair, Brielle Environmental Committee. Personal conversations.


References, cont.


Searle, Cecilia, Michael Everett, and Joanna Doherty. 1976. A rural land use primer for rhode island LAND/RISD.


Appendices

appendix A
Tools for Brielle:
Inventory and analysis

Public Waterfront Access
Brielle, New Jersey
Brielle, New Jersey

Public Waterfront Access
Inventory and Analysis

2012-2013
prepared by Kim Nuccio
## Brielle Access Point Amenities
### Existing (E) and Potential (P)

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Brielle has thirteen (13) documented waterfront access points plus one uninhabited public island. The following pages include photos, location maps, amenity chart and usage diagrams for each of the following public access points:

- Forrest Avenue
- Brainard Avenue
- Osprey Point South
- Osprey Point North
- Jordan Avenue
- Laurel Avenue
- Riverview Lane
- Ashley Avenue
- Hoffman’s Marina
- Crescent Avenue
- Drawbridge West
- Woodland Avenue East
- Quigley Cove
- Treasure Island (proposed)
Public Access at Forrest Road is classified as a Bluff. With commanding views of the river and an established barrier fence (constructed by adjacent property owners) this location is ideal for bird watching and simply enjoying the view. Further development of this site is recommended.
Public Access at Brainard Place is classified as a Bluff. With no signage and all views completely obstructed, access is nonexistent.

Visual access completely obscured. Property owners of adjacent properties have landscaped this area. The only visible path is gated and leads to a private back yard.

The slope is barely visible, but is likely overrun with invasive species, as are surrounding slopes.

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OSPREY POINT SOUTH
Public Access at Osprey Point South is characterized as a Secret Spot. A slice of land between two large privately owned homes, the right of way presents as private. There is also a gate at the bulkhead that further contributes to the visual privatization of the site. Views of the river and of Treasure Island are exceptional.

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Public access at Osprey Point North is a River Beach. Access is easy but obstructed by a municipal pump station. Ideal location for kayak and canoe entry. Ample space for seating and other amenities. Views are excellent.

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Public access at Jordan Drive is a River Beach. Access from the street is through a wide right of way overgrown and littered with storm debris. Once at the water, the site offers commanding views of the river and ample space for recreation.
Public access at Laurel Avenue is a River Beach. Access is directly from the street, but the macadam is broken and difficult to traverse. Once at the water, the site offers commanding views of the river and ample space for recreation.

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Public Access at Riverview Lane is characterized as a Secret Spot. Visual access is significantly obscured and the site is degraded. A failing bulkhead creates a dangerous situation for the public.

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Public Access at Ashley Avenue is characterized as a Secret Spot. Visual access is significantly obscured by the surrounding condominium complex, gated paths and bermed white pines. Beyond the gate and confusing signage, a concrete path leads to the marina at Brielle Yacht Club and accessible finger docks.

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neighborhood character
Public Access at Hoffman’s Marina is a View Point. Atop the office building that serves the surrounding condominiums, this access point offers captivating and unobstructed views of the Manasquan river from an elevated rooftop.

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Public Access at Crescent and Donnelly is characterized as a River Beach. Access by foot and bike is easy and recommended, however the site is obstructed by a failing, vine covered chain link fence and three bollards to prevent trailer access. The site is littered with debris, overrun with invasive species and presents as abandoned. Exceptional views of river, wetlands, and weekly fireworks.

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Public Access west of the drawbridge is characterized as a Secret Spot. With a single bench, the experience of the waterfront has the potential to be a quiet and intimate one. This is the only site with designated public parking (4 spaces). The surrounding area is associated with the adjacent condominums and is well kept, but the only way to get to the bench is to walk across a lawn where there is an intimidating “stay off the grass” sign.

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WOOLDLAND EAST AVE.
Public Access at Woodland East Avenue is characterized as a Secret Spot. Two benches at the end of a dead end street, and dilapidated bulkhead, the site is in need of repair, but offers a quiet place for nearby residents, many of whom have been displaced by Hurricane Sandy.

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Quigley Cove, formerly known as Brielle Beach presents as an abandoned plot of land with broken and decaying signage, overgrown vegetation and a single modest structure, currently being used as gym for the Brielle police department. This is the largest of all the public access points and is the only one characterized as a potential Waterfront Park.

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TREASURE ISLAND
In May 1888 Robert Luis Stevenson came to Brielle. He visited the small wooded island, then commonly known as “Osborn Island” and was so impressed he whimsically re-christened it “Treasure Island” and carved his initials into a bulkhead. This took place five years after he had completed the novel. To this day, many still refer to the island as such.

This island is frequented by river traffic as a place to rest weary arms (after a long paddle), or just a nice place to relax and have a drink. The island itself offers multiple trails crisscrossing the woods, beach areas that allow anyone to come ashore, and a nice relaxing atmosphere. (crabs.com)