

OPINION

# We have waited too long for Gowanus Green



Rendering of Gowanus Green. (Marvel Architects / SCAPE Landscape Architects)



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For nearly two decades, those of us working to bring truly affordable housing to Brooklyn's Gowanus neighborhood have been asked the same question: Why hasn't [Gowanus Green](#) happened yet?

Planned for the long-contaminated “Public Place” site, along the Gowanus Canal, the project represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity: 957 100% affordable apartments, a new public school, and new public park on land that for decades symbolized environmental neglect.

That land was also home to a portion of the Citizens Gas manufactured gas plant, leaving behind layers of coal tar and hazardous waste. Like much of the Gowanus Canal corridor — [designated a federal Superfund site in 2010](#) — the site requires careful, coordinated remediation before anyone can call Gowanus Green home.

In 2024, disagreements between National Grid, a responsible party, and the [state Department of Environmental Conservation](#) halted the planning for additional environmental cleanup, freezing the project. For a city in the grip of a housing crisis, that delay was unacceptable. Now, after 18 years of planning and advocacy, we finally have a path forward.

A proposal to complete environmental remediation at the site will unlock the first phase of Gowanus Green and be coordinated with remediation of the remainder of the site. It’s a breakthrough not just for this project, but for cities across the country facing a broader question: can contaminated land be transformed into healthy, equitable communities?

The answer must be yes — and we must do it right.

As a 48-year-old nonprofit community development corporation committed to creating and maintaining inclusive, sustainable communities, [Fifth Avenue Committee \(FAC\)](#) and our Gowanus Green development partners have insisted from day one that remediation and development go hand in hand.

The health of future residents, students and parkgoers cannot be an afterthought. Cleanup and ongoing monitoring must meet rigorous state and federal standards, be transparently communicated, and designed for long-term resilience in a neighborhood already facing flooding risks and climate pressures.

That is why the current remediation proposal matters. It aligns environmental responsibility with housing urgency, ensuring that remediation is completed thoroughly so construction can proceed safely.

Some have raised concerns about the cleanup's sufficiency. Those concerns deserve to be heard. The legacy of environmental injustice in Gowanus is real, and skepticism is understandable. But the solution cannot be paralysis or unnecessary delay. It must be accountability.

Gowanus Green was finally approved as part of the [2021 Gowanus Neighborhood rezoning](#) that demanded deep affordability, public space, and investment in neighborhood infrastructure. It is not a luxury development chasing market trends, but rather one that includes apartments for families earning as little as 30% to 50% of area median income, alongside homes for a broader range of working New Yorkers.

Across Gowanus, thousands of new homes have been built and are planned, and 35% of those will be deeply and permanently affordable. Gowanus Green represents nearly a third of the 3,000 new affordable homes approved as part of the rezoning.

What makes this moment different is not just that the project is moving forward. It is that we have learned — through input over the years — how to do it better. We have stronger environmental oversight, clearer remediation plans, and a deeper understanding that housing and health are inseparable.

Eighteen years is far too long to wait for affordable housing, and many more years have passed — more than 60 — where the community has waited for the site to be remediated.

Now, the task ahead is clear: finish the cleanup, start construction, and deliver on the promise of Gowanus Green.

*Michelle de la Uz is the executive director of the Fifth Avenue Committee.*

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