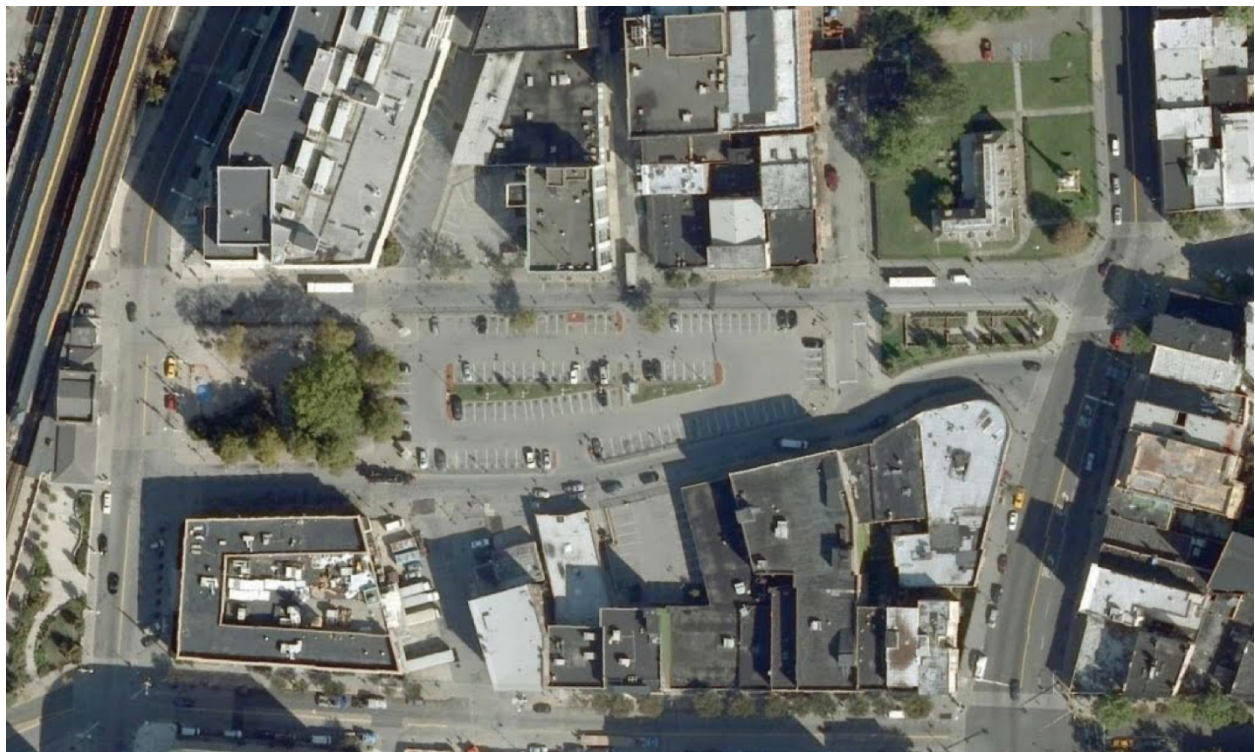


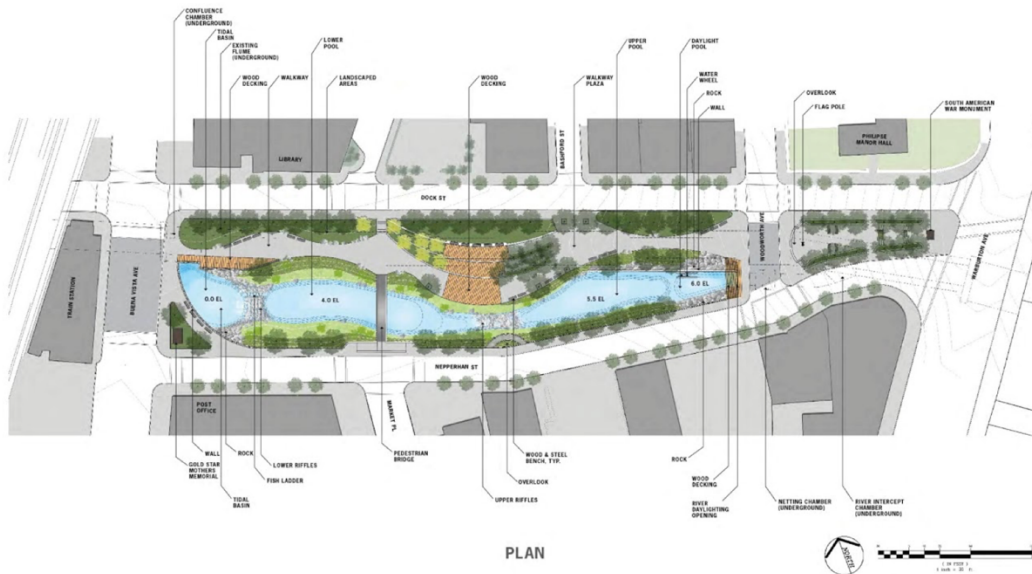
The Saw Mill River Comes Back to Light – and Life – in Yonkers

by Charles L. Kerr

Expanding the use of native plants as supporting habitats for pollinators has become an important part of environmental planning. This effort, however, is not limited to suburban backyards – it is also an essential part of re-thinking urban centers where access to open space and local parks is sometimes more limited. A wonderful example of how these ideas can help transform an inner-city landscape is the native plant gardens that are part of the daylighting of the Saw Mill River in downtown Yonkers.

The Saw Mill River is a tributary of the Hudson River and flows from a pond north of Chappaqua in northern Westchester County to Getty Square in Yonkers, at which point it empties into the Hudson. It drains an area of 26.5 miles, with much of this watershed heavily developed suburbia. Because of the growth of industry along the river in the 1800s, the Saw Mill watershed became heavily polluted, especially in the parts of the river flowing through the City of Yonkers. Rather than clean up the river, in the early 1920s the City of Yonkers buried the river in a flume under the Getty Square neighborhood in an effort to halt the river's frequent floods and restrict access to its unsanitary water. The covered portion of the river in downtown Yonkers became Larkin Plaza, a concrete covered parking lot just east of the Yonkers train station.





plantings. Initially, the City of Yonkers provided a large number of annuals from its greenhouses that quickly demonstrated for City residents the improvements in the Park. Shades of Green then worked on systematically planting and incorporating new native plants that would bloom through the growing season and support a wide range of pollinators. They also dedicated sections of the gardens for butterfly habitat and encouraged birds to feed on the seed heads by spreading a range of plants across the area. These efforts created a living, breathing and ever changing tableau of color, scents and beauty that reflected the original design intent for the Park.



The daylighting of the Saw Mill River has provided not only a tremendous boost to Yonkers' economy, it has transformed a concrete, barren landscape into an open, urban civic environment for city dwellers, while supporting a range of pollinators and other wildlife.

Photos courtesy of Groundwork Hudson Valley