Prepared and submitted by the Cutoff Coalition:

Smiling Hogshead Ranch, Inc.
596 Acres, Inc.
Boyce Technologies, Inc.
Newtown Creek Alliance Incorporated
HarborLAB
The Long Island City Community Boathouse
NYC Compost Project hosted by Queens Botanical Garden
Green Map System, Inc.
NYC 2030 District Committee
Common Ground Compost
Vokashi, Inc.
Members of the biology faculty group at LaGuardia Community College (CUNY)
and independent architects, scholars, and residents.

Endorsed by:

Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer
State Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan
Citizens Committee for New York City, Inc.
Farming Concrete
Flux Factory, Inc.
Friends of Materials for the Arts
Green Top Farms, LLC
Hellgate Farms
Homestead Design Build LLC
LaGuardia Community College (CUNY)
Long Island City Cultural Alliance
Long Island City Partnership
Love Grace, Inc.

NYC Parks Department
GreenThumb Program
New York Mechanical
Gardens Bike Co-op
Organic Food Incubator, LLC
P4Q@Skillman
Palms for Life Fund, Inc.
Queens Action Council
Queens Preservation Council
Revolution Rickshaws LLC
Sculpture Center
Sierra Club
Transition NYC
Introduction:
A Ranch on Rails

The Montauk Cutoff offers the MTA and New Yorkers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to work together to create a truly unique destination in Long Island City. Our vision, the Ranch on Rails, is of a self-powered urban farm and resiliency lab, featuring innovative green infrastructure, landscaped common spaces, and economic development opportunities to form a thriving ecology that brings together nature, community, and industry.

Site History

**Montauk Cutoff**

From 1908 to early 2014, the Montauk Cutoff carried freight trains to and from the factories, warehouses and transload facilities of Long Island City. The Cutoff was a crucial piece of infrastructure for the industries in Long Island City, connecting them to the national economy. Freight traffic slowly declined as industries relocated outside of the city and the LIRR ceased using the waterfront “float bridge” gantries to move freight between Long Island and New Jersey. In the spring of 2014 the last of the freight customers were relocated to the nearby former Wheelspur Yard, thus ending rail service over the Cutoff.
The Ranch on Rails will bring a new ecology and new infrastructural elements to the Montauk Cutoff. Centered along a continuous path that takes advantage of the linear site’s unique attributes, the Ranch on Rails amplifies current gardening, composting, water catchment and educational programs of Smiling Hogshead Ranch through six methods:

- **Urban Agriculture:** Community farm, learning gardens, greenhouse facilities, and aquaponics
- **Composting:** Commercial-scale composting operation
- **Public Space and Education:** Visitor center, amphitheater and amenities
- **Cooperative Hub:** Cooperatively-owned business incubator and workshops/studios
- **Renewable Energy and Utilities:** On-site energy generation and utilities
- **Green Infrastructure:** On-site bioremediation and stormwater management using natural systems

**Smiling Hogshead Ranch**

Through their programming, Smiling Hogshead Ranch has brought hundreds of people to the Degnon Terminal, including elementary school students, job trainees, Girl Scout troops, corporate volunteers, college groups, walking tours, and diverse neighbors from Long Island City. These events have included workshops, skill shares, workdays, corporate in-service days, fundraisers, member meetings, biodynamic windrow building, and bike tours. Smiling Hogshead Ranch provides opportunities for people to get involved with gardening in New York City, helping people to make their neighborhood a better place to live by working together.
Adaptive Reuse Plan

A view underneath a solar pergola.

Urban Agriculture
Composting
Public Space & Education
Cooperative Hub
Renewable Energy
Green Infrastructure
A view of the greenhouses at night.
CUTOFF COALITION

Urban Agriculture
Composting
Public Space & Education
Cooperative Hub
Renewable Energy
Green Infrastructure

Queens Block 100, Lot 2

- Equipment Storage
- Accessible entrance from Skillman Ave
- Rainwater collection
- Grape vineyard
- Outdoor classroom
- Compost bins
- Raised bed gardens
- Solar pergolas with integrated benches
- Rainwater collection
- Compost windrows
- Public bathrooms
- Stage, surrounds tree
- Amphitheater gathering & workshop area built into hillside
- Railcar restored as Welcome Center and Historical Museum
- Outdoor mushroom cultivation
- Solar powered wifi hotspot, charging station & lighting
- Constructed wetlands filter stormwater, along sloping grade
- Solar pergolas with integrated benches
- Terraced learning gardens, accessible entrance from school
- Accessible entrance from Skillman Ave
Queens Block 111
Lot 1

Queens Block 110
Lot 1

Urban Agriculture
Composting
Public Space & Education
Cooperative Hub
Renewable Energy
Green Infrastructure

In-Vessel composter
Composting coop
Composting windrows
Meandering walking paths & gathering
Kinetic energy generating swings
Mushroom cultivation
Mycoremediation lab
Aquaponics greenhouse

Stormwater collection below LIE overpass
Constructed wetlands filter stormwater, along sloping grade
Meandering walking paths & gathering areas
5,000sf Cooperative Hub, incubator & maker space
Accessible entrance to elevated portion of the Montauk Cutoff from 50th Ave
Urban Agriculture

Composting

Public Space & Education

Cooperative Hub

Renewable Energy

Green Infrastructure

CUTOFF COALITION

Queens Block 109
Lot 3

Queens Block 68
Lot 74

51st Ave

Borden Ave

25th St

Constructed wetlands
filter stormwater, along sloping grade

Vertical axis wind turbines

Solar pergolas with integrated benches

Solar powered wifi hotspot, changing station & security lighting

Wildflower & native pollinator gardens

Accessible entrance from street level

Special events space under solar canopy

Kinetic energy generating swings

Adopt-a-bed raised planter garden

Constructed wetlands power low voltage landscape lighting

Available space for adopting a garden bed

Urban Agriculture

Composting

Public Space & Education

Cooperative Hub

Renewable Energy

Green Infrastructure
Urban agriculture is a cornerstone of the Ranch on Rails and will be integrated throughout the Montauk Cutoff site in multiple forms. Each programmatic element, from the outdoor learning garden to greenhouses and mushroom cultivation, will serve the program’s larger goal of building community through urban agriculture. Expanding upon the success of Smiling Hogshead Ranch, these programs will bring together environmental educators, community members, school groups, and other visitors to the neighborhood. Programming will be administered by a single non-profit which will be revenue-generating and self-sustaining, in part through the sale of goods produced on site.
Composting

Smiling Hogshead Ranch has been an official NYC Compost Project Community Composting Site since 2012. This free, residential drop-off program will continue to be a free, volunteer run system at the Ranch. The new composting elements of the Ranch on Rails will work to expand existing composting operations at Smiling Hogshead Ranch. In cooperation with several local composting businesses, we will create a nexus for commercial scale processing of food waste and clean, safe, and fair jobs within this growing industry. Located at Queens Block 111, Lot 1, the site allows for drop off of organic waste on the flat edge of the lot adjacent to the street, and uses the sloped side of the Cutoff for terraced windrows where finished compost will be created.

The site will be administered by the composting operators who will be based there: Smiling Hogshead Ranch, Vokashi, and Common Ground Compost, among other potential partners.
Public Space and Education

At the heart of the Ranch on Rails is a shared desire to create vital educational and entrepreneurial resources set within a much-needed green space in Long Island City. As the Ranch on Rails expands and evolves, its ecologically progressive elements will be connected to programmatic events and educational activities tailored to attract and inform a wide range of visitors and participants. Located within Queens Community Board 2, an area with one of the lowest ratios of open space per capita in the city, the Ranch on Rails offers a unique opportunity to make a lasting contribution to the quality of public life of New York City. All New Yorkers should be able to access and enjoy our public spaces, and the Ranch on Rails’ strategy embodies an inclusive ethos. The design provides for multiple universally accessible entrances leading onto meandering walkways which pass through gardens, trees, and wildflowers. Seating and gathering areas are interspersed along the length of the site, incorporating playful street furniture.
Cooperative Hub

The Cooperative Hub will house and support worker owned cooperatives, local artists, and non-profits focused on community wealth building programs. The Hub will help incubate these businesses and non-profits by providing affordable leases, the revenue from which will support the other activities on the Ranch on Rails. It will serve as one of the main attractors, drawing visitors to the site, providing jobs through new economic activity, and forging stronger ties with the broader community. Tenant selection will balance a mix of worker cooperatives, artists and artisans, and non-profit organizations that build community wealth through inclusion, collaboration, and reliance on local assets.

Above:
The Cooperative Hub will provide space for incubating small businesses, makers, and artists.

Above:
Prefabricated units create a three-leveled terraced structure that connects the street level to the top of the Montauk Cutoff.

1 Cooperative Hub Building
2 Large Solar Pergola Event Space
3 Fencing and secured entry
4 ADA accessible path
5 Stormwater retention tanks
Renewable Energy and Utilities

As a model of sustainable urban planning practices for the 21st century, the Ranch on Rails will incorporate cost effective, cutting edge renewable energy sources, in addition to the necessary conventional grid connections.

With energy efficiency built into all lighting, operations, and communications, a significant portion of onsite energy demands will be met through carefully selected renewable energy sources along the Montauk Cutoff including solar photovoltaics, vertical axis wind turbines and energy generating kinetic furniture and fitness equipment. The potential to cooperatively fund and benefit from the sun will be extended to neighboring businesses and the MTA, particularly for backup power during a grid outage.

Above: The southern tip of the Montauk Cutoff (Queens Block 68, Lot 74) will host several energy generating installations, including solar pergolas with built-in seating, wind turbines, and solar charging stations.

Above: Located throughout the site, solar pergolas offer shade and a comfortable place to sit, while simultaneously producing energy. Solar lighting and charging stations provide illumination at night and electricity for outdoor use.
**Green Infrastructure**

The Ranch on Rails integrates ecological restoration efforts with the development of public space in the heart of Long Island City. It promotes the healthy coexistence of natural and human ecologies by introducing green infrastructure techniques including fungi and compost tea, bioremediation, constructed wetlands, native grass and flower species, an on-site mycoremediation lab and migratory bird habitats. Ranch on Rails will be a model for sustainable post-industrial redevelopment for communities in New York City and beyond.

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Above: Retaining tanks store water from the LIE and filter it into artificial wetlands constructed on the sloped sides of the Montauk Cutoff.

Above: The artificial wetlands area under the LIE overpass.
Implementation Plan

The implementation phase of the Cutoff Coalition’s bold vision will draw upon the support generated by the Smiling Hogshead Ranch and the dozens of professionals, organizations, and agencies already actively involved. It is our intention to continue to work collaboratively to make the Ranch on Rails a material reality.

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Conclusion

The Ranch on Rails will generate a thriving social economy and natural ecology in the heart of Long Island City.

Our vision for the Ranch on Rails is representative of how we see our community: diverse, creative, cooperative, and committed to the future of New York.

The voices of our neighbors, local businesses, and community leaders have come together through months of transparent and collaborative working sessions to develop this initial vision of the Ranch on Rails. Listening to and learning from each other, we have drawn upon our individual areas of expertise and practiced the difficult and valuable art of cooperation. Represented here as a cohesive whole are our many visions for building a better future for our local community.

We look forward to working with the MTA to ensure that future.

Appendix: Press Mentions for Smiling Hogshead Ranch and Ranch on Rails


“An urban oasis filled with gardens, a vineyard, houses for birds and bats and a self-sustaining power grid to support WiFi and charging stations is among the visions being floated for a 4-acre stretch of old railroad tracks in Queens”

“In a neighborhood known for its industrial feel and growing number of towers, Long Island City’s Smiling Hogshead Ranch, with the help of other community groups, is trying to preserve its vision for an urban garden as a community organizing tool.”


“In the heart of a desolate, industrialized section of Skillman Avenue, along a stretch of abandoned Long Island Rail Road tracks, a community garden continues to thrive against all odds.”
'Ranch on Rails' Floated as Plan to Reuse Old Tracks in LIC

@jeanmarieevelly (http://twitter.com/jeanmarieevelly)

LONG ISLAND CITY — An urban oasis filled with gardens, a vineyard, houses for birds and bats and a self-sustaining power grid to support WiFi and charging stations is among the visions being floated for a 4-acre stretch of old railroad tracks in Queens.

The so-called “Ranch on Rails,” proposed by a group of locals and advocates, is among the proposals for the future of the Montauk Cutoff, a raised rail line about a third of a mile long that stretches from Skillman Avenue near Sunnyside Yards (https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/places/sunnyside-yard) to the Dutch Kills tributary, passing over 49th, 50th, 51st and Borden Avenues.

Though the MTA no longer uses the line, it wants to keep it in case it’s needed again in the future — and so is considering leasing the land to a business or community group to use in the meantime, according to a "Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI)" that the agency released this fall.

All submissions are due by next week, and the MTA will use them to determine who's interested in potentially reusing the Montauk Cutoff and what the public would like to see the space used for, according to MTA spokesman Aaron Donovan.

"[To] identify that there is a desire in the community to activate the space, and have it be used in some way, as opposed it just remaining forlorn and derelict," he said.

The "Ranch on Rails" was conceived by the Cutoff Coalition, an informal group of residents and organizations that met several times this fall and winter to come up with their vision for the Montauk Cutoff.

The group includes members of the Newtown Creek Alliance (http://www.newtowncreekalliance.org/), land access advocates 596 Acres (http://596acres.org/) and the Smiling Hogshead Ranch (http://smiling-hogshead-ranch.tumblr.com/), an urban farm near (https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20140905/long-island-city/community-farm-on-mta-owned-land-inks-deal-officially-use-space)the Montauk Cutoff that's located within the area the RFEI covers.

Their concept would expand upon many of the activities the Smiling Hogshead Ranch uses — among the visions being floated for a 4-acre stretch of old railroad tracks in Queens.

Under the group’s vision, the Montauk Cutoff would be home to two greenhouses where farmers could grow vegetables, as well as an outdoor learning garden that could host school groups.

There would be a grape vineyard, areas for mushroom cultivation as well as a wildflower garden with houses for birds and bats, according to the plans.

“Ranch on Rails floated as Plan to Reuse Old Track in LIC”, Jeanmarie Evelly, DNA Info, February 17, 2016
Acknowledgments

The creation of this proposal was facilitated by Smiling Hogshead Ranch and 596 Acres.

Groups of committed individuals developed detailed proposals for specific portions of the Ranch on Rails adaptive reuse plan, based on input from the Cutoff Coalition:

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Project management by Paula Z. Segal, 596 Acres, Inc.

Design and Production by Interval Projects

Icons were based on designs from the Green Map System
Photographs courtesy of Smiling Hogshead Ranch and Mitch Waxman unless otherwise noted
This vision for the adaptive reuse of the Montauk Cutoff is supported by:

- 596 Acres
- Smiling Hogshead Ranch
- Boyce Technologies
- Long Island City
- NYC Parks Green Thumb
- LaGuardia Community College
- LINS
- FLUX Factory
- Sierra Club
- Queens Botanical Garden
- Boro 2
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- love grace.
- PALMS For Life Fund
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- Organic Food Incubator
- Vokashi
- NYU 2030 Districts
- Mechanical Fingers
- SMITH TOWER RESIDENCE
- Think Global, Map Local!
- NCA Newtown Creek Alliance
- Jimmy Van Bramer
- Energy Committee
- NYC Bays/Urban Outdoors
- Dan Blumenthal
- Diane Buxbaum
- Antuan Cannon
- Suzanne Mattei
- Bonnie Webber
- Allison Tupper
- Katie Frusti
- John Kolp
- Irene Van Slyke