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The High Line Isn't Just a Sight to See; It's Also an Economic Dynamo

By PATRICK MCGEEHAN
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A decade ago, so many moneyed interests were united against saving the elevated freight tracks that cut through the West Side of Manhattan that the idea appeared to be doomed. Owners of land and buildings throughout Chelsea wanted the decaying [High Line](#) viaduct razed, and the administration of Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani supported their feelings.

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Robert Caplin for The New York Times
Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and the City Council speaker, Christine C. Quinn, on Friday touring Segment 2 of the High Line, which is to open this week. [More Photos](#) >

But on Friday afternoon, there was Mr. Giuliani's successor, [Michael R. Bloomberg](#), proclaiming that preserving the High Line as a public park revitalized a swath of the city and generated \$2 billion in private investment surrounding the park.

The mayor pointed to the deluxe apartment buildings whose glass walls press up against the High Line and the hundreds of art galleries, restaurants and boutiques it overlooks. All of that commerce more than makes up for the \$115 million the city has spent on the park and the deals it has made to encourage developers to build along the High Line without blocking out the sun, Mr. Bloomberg said. On top of the 8,000 construction jobs those projects required, the redevelopment has added about 12,000 jobs in the area, the mayor said.

Indeed, what started out as a community-based campaign to convert an eyesore into an asset evolved into one of the most successful economic-development projects of the mayor's nine years in office. The co-founders of Friends of the High Line, a group that operates the city-owned park, said the mayor and his staff deserved credit for having embraced the park and rezoned the neighborhoods it passes through to help it flourish.

Robert Hammond, one of the founders, said the organization commissioned a study of the potential economic benefits of the project in 2002. "We talked about a High Line district and that it would be good for the local economy," Mr. Hammond recalled. But, he added, "we had

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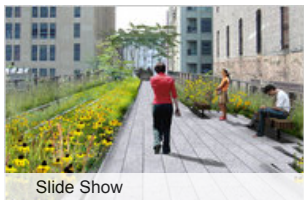
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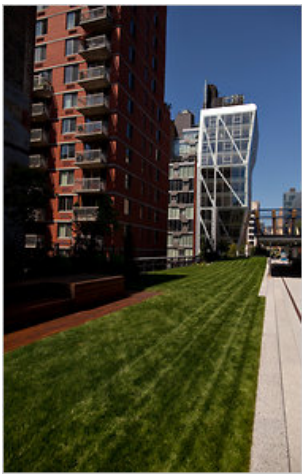
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Robert Caplin for The New York Times

In one building along Segment 1, the price of apartments has doubled since the park opened. [More Photos »](#)

no idea that it would happen this fast. If you had said then that 10th Avenue would be a location for some of the world's best chefs, it would just be ludicrous."

Amanda Burden, the city's planning director, emphasized the boost to property values, saying that in one building that abuts the lower section of the High Line, the price of apartments had doubled since the park opened, to about \$2,000 a square foot. Ms. Burden called the area "Architects Row" as she ticked off the roster of designers of nearby buildings, including Jean Nouvel, Annabelle Selldorf and Neil Denari.

Yet those exclusive accommodations are wedged in within a block of huge brick complexes of public housing, where sheets serve as curtains and dented air-conditioners list toward the earth. A seating area on the second half-mile segment of the High Line, which is to open this week, offers visitors a pigeon's-eye view of a Firestone auto-repair shop on 26th Street.

The second segment bisects the blocks between 10th and 11th Avenues from 20th Street to 30th Street. If the third section is completed, it will end near the terminus of the extended No. 7 subway line, said Robert K. Steel, the deputy mayor for economic development. People could ride the subway from Queens, then walk the High Line through Chelsea to the meatpacking district, said Mr. Steel, who recently became a resident of Chelsea, just a block from the High Line.

In a way, the High Line has done for those neighborhoods what new subway lines have done in other parts of the city, Mr. Hammond said. "Normally, the farther you get from the subway the less expensive the housing is," said Mr. Hammond, who confessed that he rents an apartment in the West Village. "But the closer you are to the High Line, the farther you are from the subway, and still, the closer the apartments are to the High Line, the more expensive they get."

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