



## A Statement of Vision on Land Development in Western Queens

Salt Tree Art recognizes the significance of conversations happening now for the future of Western Queens -- and all of New York City -- especially in the wake of the Amazon HQ2 announcement and after the initial public meeting on master planning for Sunnyside Yard.

As a Queens-based organization focused on community-driven, environmentally informed design, we urge our neighbors and community leaders to explore and demand creative development concepts during these conversations that uphold vibrant communities and promote healthy ecosystems.

Salt Tree Art particularly encourages incorporation of the principles of regenerative design into these conversations, advocating for designs that promote resilient, livable communities that are responsive to our current and future challenges. We specifically support designs that address:

- **Climate Change Resilience:** Global climate disruption will strongly impact Western Queens neighborhoods, with the 500-year floodplain projected to extend well beyond the waterfront and into the Sunnyside Yard properties by 2050. Developers are currently disregarding this changing risk in favor of short-term property investment returns, and even sustainable development proposals using flood mitigation strategies such as land elevation will protect only new residents within these private enclaves, while ignoring their role in reducing risk to existing communities and public spaces. A regenerative approach would integrate community-level flood control into master planning with preventative mechanisms such as urban wetland mosaics that will help to protect all community members.
- **Urban Ecological Restoration:** The urban landscape of Western Queens has largely lost its pre-colonial landscape of fishable waterways, food forests, and Matinecock farming systems. The extensive property footprint whose future is currently being discussed offers an unprecedented opportunity to respect the legacy of the Matinecock peoples in restoring elements of their landscape by including an environmental corridor within master planning, which would create a commonly shared space for recreation, connection to the natural environment, and community wellness and food security. In contrast to many of the isolated, corporatized green spaces that often arise in new development in the city, an ecological commons could go beyond basic ecosystem services

-- like a reduced heat island effect and enhanced air quality -- to also link existing public lands, create space for urban agriculture to connect community members with access to garden plots, and offer a setting to restore native wild food systems.

- **Environmental Justice in Housing:** The most recent history of Western Queens has seen the growth of environmental racism. Long-standing communities like the Queensbridge Houses stand siloed from the more recently arrived, prohibitively expensive apartment high-rises. For several generations, residents of Queensbridge -- the largest public housing project in North America -- have experienced appalling rates of asthma because of their proximity to New York City's power plants, and their chronically underfunded buildings have resulted in exposures to mold, asbestos, and lead, as well as experiencing other compounding wellness determinants, such as poor access to affordable, high-quality food. Preserving Western Queens as an inclusive, livable community for all requires a genuine response against gentrification. Rather than the commodification of housing that has arisen through private development or the racial segregation in housing that has arisen through public projects, a **social housing** approach in which development occurs under the leadership of the community (such as through community-owned land trusts) would give local control to the master planning process, allowing the community to steer its development and assuring that environmental and economic injustices in housing have a chance to be addressed.

Salt Tree Art believes that a regenerative approach to our future can provide a livable environment within a vibrant and inclusive Western Queens. As members and participants in this community, we ask that you support this statement by exploring its proposals, joining conversations in crafting a better vision, and demanding a genuine role in planning for our community's future.

We, the undersigned, endorse this statement:

**Michael Hollis, LEED AP ND**

Trustee, Salt Tree Art  
Sunnyside

**Liz McCabe, PhD**

Trustee, Salt Tree Art

**Brian Soliwoda**

Founder, Salt Tree Art  
Sunnyside

**Lauren Alzos**

Board Member, Salt Tree Art

**Nicholas Enna**

Board Member, Salt Tree Art  
Astoria

**Jennifer Jurek**

Board Member, Salt Tree Art  
Founder, Hallet's Cove Theater  
Astoria

**Ashley King**

Board Member, Salt Tree Art  
Astoria

**Graham McCarty**

Board Member, Salt Tree Art  
Founder, Improv Astoria  
Astoria

**Kristen Terrana**

Board Member, Salt Tree Art  
Middle Village