



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

November 20, 2020

**Contact:**

Cortney Koenig Worrall, President and CEO, 212.935.9831 x101, [cworrall@waterfrontalliance.org](mailto:cworrall@waterfrontalliance.org)

Aria Cochran, Communications Manager, 212.935.9831 x105, [acochran@waterfrontalliance.org](mailto:acochran@waterfrontalliance.org)

## **North Waterfront Park in Wilmington, North Carolina, is the First WEDG® Verified Project Beyond New York City for Excellence in Waterfront Design**

### **Along the Northeast Cape Fear River in Wilmington, North Carolina, Plans for North Waterfront Park Model the Intersection of Diverse Recreation, Connection to Nature, and Resilient Design**

New York, NY—Today, the [Waterfront Alliance](#) announced that North Waterfront Park achieved verification through its [WEDG®](#) (Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines) program, reaching the highest standard in resilient waterfront design in the country. It is the tenth WEDG Verified project and first project outside of the New York City region to meet the standard for excellence in waterfront design. As a rating system and set of guidelines to create resilient, ecological, and accessible waterfronts, WEDG is catalyzing better waterfront design amidst sea level rise, climate change, and ecological restoration.

North Waterfront Park transforms a 6.6-acre former industrial site into a public waterfront park with a world class performance venue for the City of Wilmington. Located on the Northeast Cape Fear River, the project goes above and beyond to restore and celebrate the native coastal ecology and illuminate the site's history as a working waterfront.

Beginning in 2014, the design was shaped by an extensive community-driven master planning process led by the City of Wilmington. The City Council approved the Master Plan in 2015 and issued a publicly funded bond in 2016 to support the development of the park. In 2018, the project's resilience was put to the test when Hurricane Florence struck the city of Wilmington during the park design process, demonstrating how the park's strategic location, directly on the River, and relatively high elevation will protect it from future flooding.

North Waterfront Park serves as a valuable case study for how waterfront open space can flexibly accommodate diverse uses—from daily respite and recreation to large-scale concerts and civic festivals—while also prioritizing urban connectivity, enhanced ecologies, and a renewed focus on water resources. The park's sculpted waterfront edge deeply engages the river, replacing decaying riprap with a living shoreline that extends the native coastal ecology into the site, while lifted lawns and plazas offer views to the stage and Cape Fear. A diverse palette of native plant communities softens the shoreline, while a broad urban tree canopy brings shade to the currently treeless and intensely sunny site.

Urban gardens, creative children's play, outdoor grass 'rooms', and a park support building are integrated along an arcing promenade, which traces the site's historic train tracks and reaches out to the river. The design seeks to encourage stewardship activities and reflection upon the City's natural and cultural heritage

with waterfront gardens that immerse visitors into the native riparian landscape, interpretive signage, and an interactive water fountain evoking a tidal spray. New boardwalks link the park to Wilmington's signature Riverwalk, and connections for a future dock will allow for direct boat access to the park.

"It is very exciting that today, North Waterfront Park sets one of the highest bars for ecology, recreation, waterfront access, and longevity in the era of climate change for a beautiful waterfront park," said **Cortney Koenig Worrall, President and CEO of the Waterfront Alliance**. "We are thrilled to announce this nationally significant project is the first to receive WEDG Verification outside of the New York region. We extend great appreciation for the City of Wilmington and design team's innovation and commitment, powerfully coupled to show that excellence in waterfront design is more than possible and has strong, multiple benefits. This project is a national model."

An award-winning program of the [Waterfront Alliance](#), WEDG Verification is the gold standard for resilient, ecologically sound, and accessible waterfront design. WEDG is a critical tool to cut through myriad challenges—complex ecosystems, overlapping regulatory jurisdictions, multiple stakeholders, sea level rise and coastal storms—providing clear guidance for excellent waterfront design. Used by design professionals and planners, government agencies, and community advocates alike, the [free WEDG manual](#) offers a common language that allows all users to work together toward the highest standards.

[Hargreaves Jones](#) led the design and engineering team for the project, working in close collaboration with the [City of Wilmington](#), [Live Nation](#), and [Clancy & Theys Construction Company](#) to address the unique challenges of designing a waterfront park and event venue on an historic brownfield site. The project maximizes re-use of brownfield soils on site, diverse opportunities for on-site stormwater infiltration, and landscape soils designed for resiliency within the context of the site's dynamic coastal hydrology.

"We are thrilled to see North Waterfront Park recognized as one of the nation's best examples of resilient waterfront design," stated **Mary Margaret Jones, FASLA, FAAR, President of Hargreaves Jones**. "Understanding the site's greatest asset, the park is oriented to the stunning Cape Fear River, maximizing how proximity makes evident the deep connection of people, culture, and performance to the natural systems of a waterbody. North Waterfront Park capitalizes on exposing and expressing riparian ecologies to enhance the park experience, while simultaneously embedding resiliency into an evolving waterfront landscape."

"As people look for outdoor activities in Wilmington, they will appreciate a new attraction that adds to the overall transformation of the waterfront, while also celebrating the historic shipping industry that helped shape this City," said **Anne Ballweg, LEED AP, Project Manager for the City of Wilmington**. "I'm personally excited to be part of this project that connects diverse communities to the waterfront, while safely cleaning up and sustainably reusing the industrial site."

"Receiving the first WEDG designation outside of New York is an incredible, and important, honor," said **Amy Beatty, Director of Community Services, City of Wilmington**. "It's a great achievement to be recognized for repurposing this former industrial site into an accessible, recreational destination that protects the Cape Fear River. Key objectives including an inclusive planning process, City Council and public support and engaging a talented, thoughtful design consultant got us to this place where we now have the honor of being an example to other communities across the country on best practices for revitalizing coastlines."

**Mary Lydecker, RLA, LEED AP, Principal at Hargreaves Jones** said: "North Waterfront Park is a remarkable civic achievement, the culmination of many years of effort by the City and local community to realize a much-anticipated addition to Wilmington's iconic downtown waterfront. The project required a rigorous and sustained multi-disciplinary collaboration, in the context of dynamic coastal forces – balancing diverse waterfront programming, with the complexities of brownfield remediation on an historic industrial site and the dramatic expansion of upland and riparian ecologies. From initial community visioning and master planning efforts through final design and construction, the City has been committed to creating a vibrant, resilient, and enduring waterfront park for all. We were honored to be part of the process – and look forward to seeing the park grow and evolve within the life of the City."

“Resiliency is always a core component of our design process—at North Waterfront Park, we chose materials based on long term durability and resistance to flood damage,” said **Jennifer Sage, FAIA, LEED AP, Partner at Sage and Coombe Architects**. “Steel, brick, and concrete contrast with locally-harvested southern cypress—creating architecture that is robust while remaining warm and welcoming. Buildings are elevated at least two feet above the base flood elevation, meaning the park and its facilities will be a valuable community resource for years to come.”

“The architecture at North Waterfront Park can be both a centerpiece and a backdrop”, continued Sage. “Each building serves the needs of the amphitheater while also becoming part of the passive landscape when the venue is not in use: the stage provides shading and passive seating areas, the park support building’s canopy becomes a place for parents to watch their children play, and for special events the stage support building’s terraced roof becomes a gathering place above the park. All buildings are carefully sited to enhance the park’s connection to the water, often framing views. Using the natural beauty of the brick in patterns to create texture and a play of shadow and light as the sun moves across the sky and glass that carries a ceramic frit that not only reduces solar gain but tells the story of the place allows each visitor to discover a new each time they visit the park.”

“North Waterfront Park utilizes a suite of stormwater control measures to detain the water-quality storm on-site and provide protection for the Cape Fear River,” said **Natalie Carmen, PE, Project Engineer at Stewart**. “The site’s natural ability to infiltrate water was prioritized during the site design to promote infiltration through the use of permeable pavement systems, infiltration gallery in the great lawn, and below-ground infiltration systems. Planned programmatic elements were married with the stormwater design approach to maximize the public’s use of the site, and go beyond minimum regulatory requirements, to incorporate many passive stormwater treatment elements that support the overall narrative of the park serving the broader community.”

To gain a deeper, technical understanding of the WEDG standard and the design team’s approach on this project, please [join us for a webinar on December 14, 2020](#).

##

The Waterfront Alliance inspires and effects resilient, revitalized, and accessible coastlines for all communities.