

# Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk

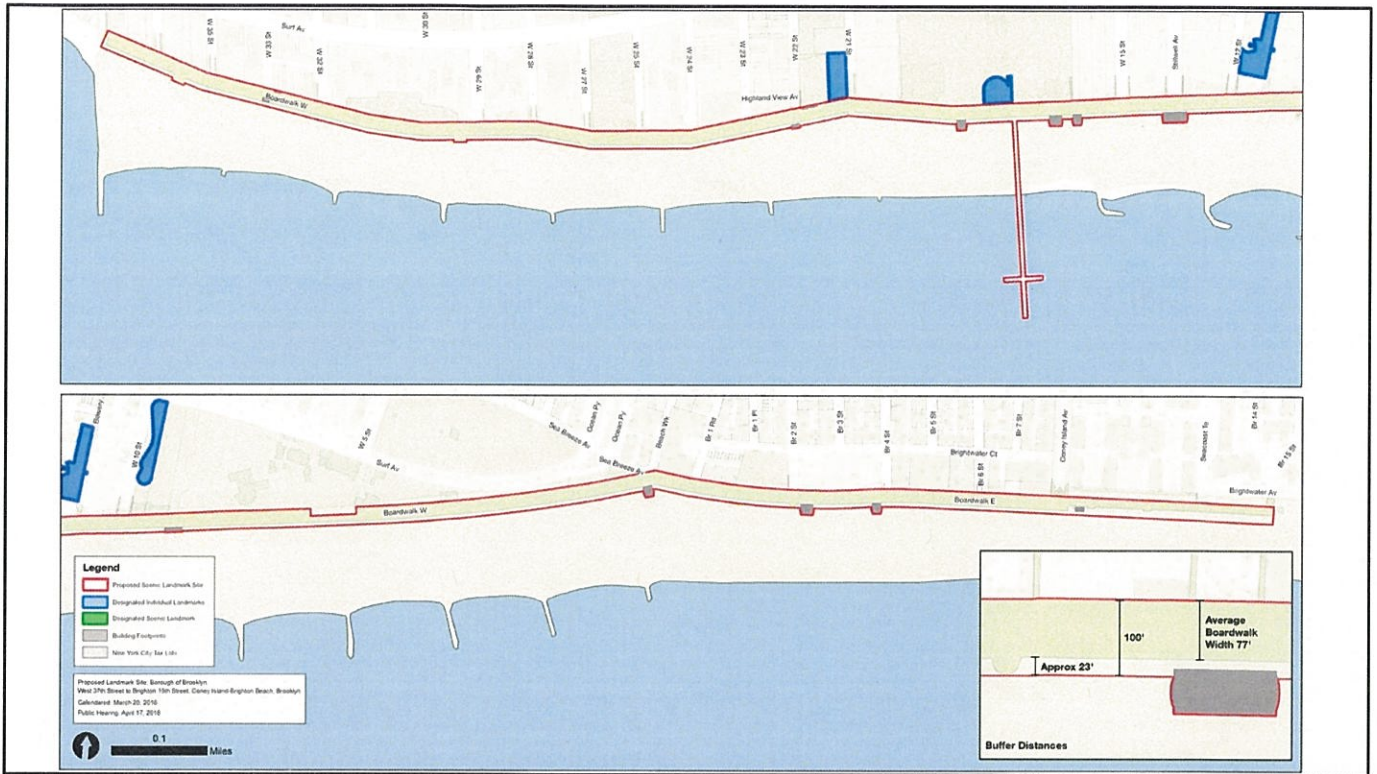
## Scenic Landmark



Good afternoon Chair Adams and Subcommittee Members, I am Lisa Kersavage, Director of Special Projects and Strategic Planning at the Landmarks Preservation Commission, I'm here to present the recent designation of the Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Coney Island's boardwalk is one of the best known waterfront promenades in the world. The 2.7-mile boardwalk has given people of all economic and social backgrounds free access to the beach and seaside since 1923.

It is a significant destination unto itself and the embodiment of Coney Island's democratic spirit.



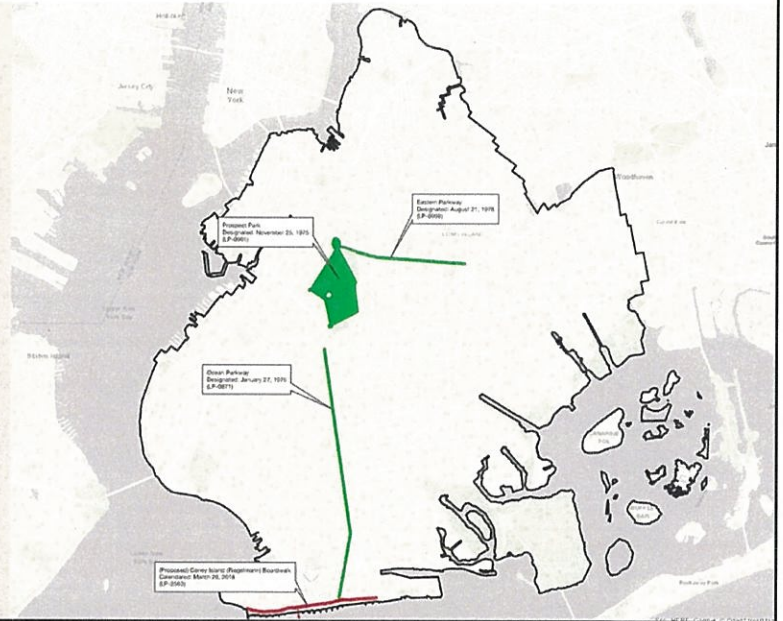
The landmark site incorporates the entire length of the 2.7-mile boardwalk, including St eepchase Pier, boardwalk comfort stations, ramps and stairs to the beach, railings, benches, and light fixtures. It also includes the sand beneath resulting in an approximately 100-foot wide corridor along the length of the boardwalk.

On May 15, 2018, the Commission voted to designate Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk as a scenic landmark, following a public hearing held on April 17, 2018. At the public hearing and in written testimony, twelve people supported designation, including City Council Member Mark Treyger, Council Member Chaim M. Deutsch, New York State Assemblyman Steven H. Cymbrowitz, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation Commissioner Mitchell J. Silver, Alliance for Coney Island, Coney-Brighton Boardwalk Alliance, Historic Districts Council, the Landmarks Conservancy, and the Society for the Architecture of the City. There were no speakers opposed to designation.

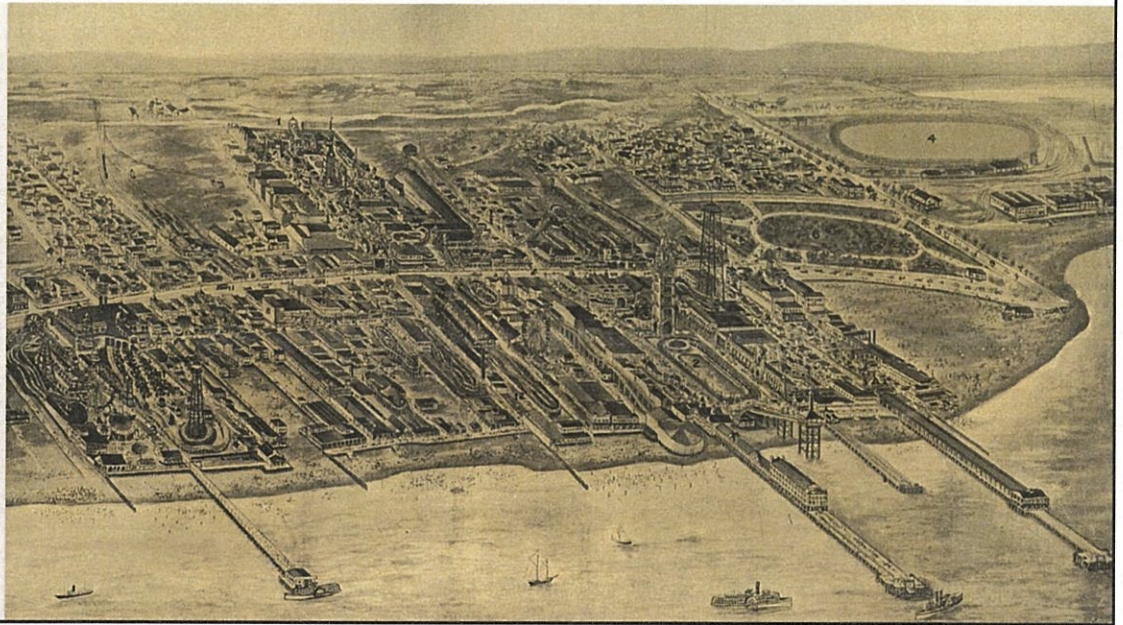
## Scenic Landmarks in Brooklyn



Ocean Parkway Scenic Landmark



There are only 10 Scenic landmarks in New York City, three of which are in Brooklyn: Prospect Park, Eastern Parkway, and Ocean Parkway. These were all designed by Frederick Law Olmstead (Ocean Parkway and Prospect Park also by Calvert Vaux) and built between 1866 and 1875. Ocean Parkway, the first road of its kind in the United States, was intended to extend from the southern entrance of Prospect Park to the sea. The proposed designation of the Coney Island Boardwalk would culminate this procession of 19th-century scenic landmarks extending from Prospect Park to the Atlantic Ocean and add a decidedly 20th century, culturally significant scenic landmark to this important collection. LPC would regulate this scenic landmark just as it does the other ten.



Coney Island Aerial  
Illustration  
1906 (NYPL)

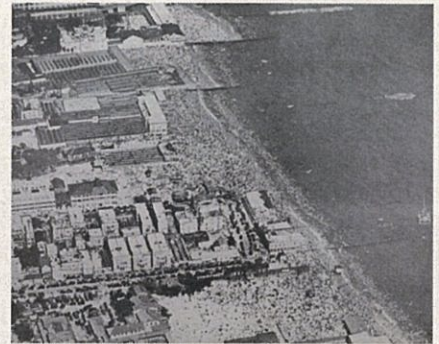
Coney Island has been a summertime destination for nearly two centuries. Named by Dutch settlers for the rabbits that reportedly flourished among the dunes, the first hotels opened in the 1820s. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were numerous hotels, bathhouses and saloons, as well as a popular amusement district that included Dreamland, Luna Park, and Steeplechase Park.



33<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Neglected Coney Island, 1913



Bowery Section  
Neglected Coney Island, 1913

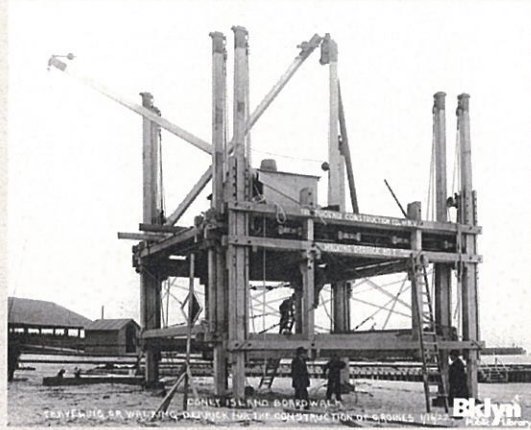


Amusement district, aerial view, c. 1920

Prior to construction of the boardwalk, most of Brooklyn's waterfront was privately owned. Not only did businesses charge admission fees to use the beach but in many places the sand had begun to wash away, leaving only a sliver of shoreline.



Edward J. Riegelmann Driving the First Stake, October 1921  
Brooklyn Public Library



Travelling or Walking Derrick, Coney Island Boardwalk, January 1922  
Brooklyn Public Library

Coney Island's boardwalk is named for Brooklyn Borough President Edward J. Riegelmann, who played a major role in its creation, and is seen at left driving the first stake. Part of an ambitious plan to rejuvenate Coney Island and the Ocean Beach, the approximately 80-foot wide boardwalk was designed by engineer Philip P. Farley.



Coney Island Boardwalk, October 1922  
NYC Parks Department Archives



Coney Island Boardwalk, November 1922  
Brooklyn Public Library

Farley described the boardwalk as an elevated highway. It consists of a plank deck supported by reinforced concrete piles and girders. Construction of the boardwalk began in 1922, in conjunction with a major expansion of the beach. Similar to other Scenic Landmarks like Central Park, Coney Island Beach was designed and engineered to create the semblance of a natural landscape for the public to enjoy. In these photos from that year, you can see the jetties before the sand was filled in, and people enjoying the beach as the boardwalk was being built.



Coney Island Boardwalk, after 1928  
New York Public Library Digital Collection



Coney Island Boardwalk, c. 1940s  
Brooklyn Public Library

The first section, between Ocean Parkway and West 37th Street, formally opened on May 15, 1923. Two years later, the boardwalk was extended 4,000-feet east, to Coney Island Avenue. The new beach and boardwalk for the first time in New York City allowed people of all economic and social backgrounds full free and public access to the beach. The boardwalk became a thoroughfare connecting the amusements, concessions, and the beach, and as Coney Island's new "Main Street", was a popular attraction unto itself.





Coney Island Boardwalk prior to realignment, late 1930s  
*Shore and Beach* magazine, 1943



Coney Island Boardwalk after realignment, c.1940  
Brooklyn Public Library

Control of the boardwalk was transferred to the NYC Parks Department in 1938. Under Commissioner Robert Moses, a 3,800 foot section, between Ocean Parkway and Stillwell Avenue, was straightened and moved almost 300 feet inland.

The reconstruction of the boardwalk began in January 1940 and was completed five months later in May 1940. As part of the project, the beach was also expanded and replenished. The following year, 1941, the boardwalk was extended an additional 1,500 feet east to Brighton 15th Street, establishing its current length of 2.7 miles.



Coney Island Boardwalk, 1946, 1947  
NYC Parks Department Archives



These incredible 1940s photographs from the Parks Department archive illustrate what had been described in a 1923 guide book as “the most densely crowded and most democratic” of New York’s seaside playgrounds. Evident in these photographs, and as remains the case today, the boardwalk is unrivaled among New York City’s waterfront attractions for its size and popularity, and one of the city’s most iconic public spaces.

**The People Play - Summer**  
1938, Benton Murdoch Spruance



**Coney Island**  
Late 1930s, Harry Roseland



**Still from the *Little Fugitive***  
1953

**Still from *The Warriors***  
1979

The boardwalk has featured prominently in popular culture throughout its history, from paintings to films.

#### SKIP

It has been depicted in fine art and photography, including in paintings shown above from the 1930s of promenading visitors and the crowded beach. It has been featured in music, as in Lou Reed's 1976 *Coney Island Baby*, as well as in television and movies. Shown here are stills from the 1953 movie *Little Fugitive*, nominated for an Oscar for its screenplay about a little boy trying to make his way among the attractions of the boardwalk, and the epic cult film *The Warriors* from 1979.

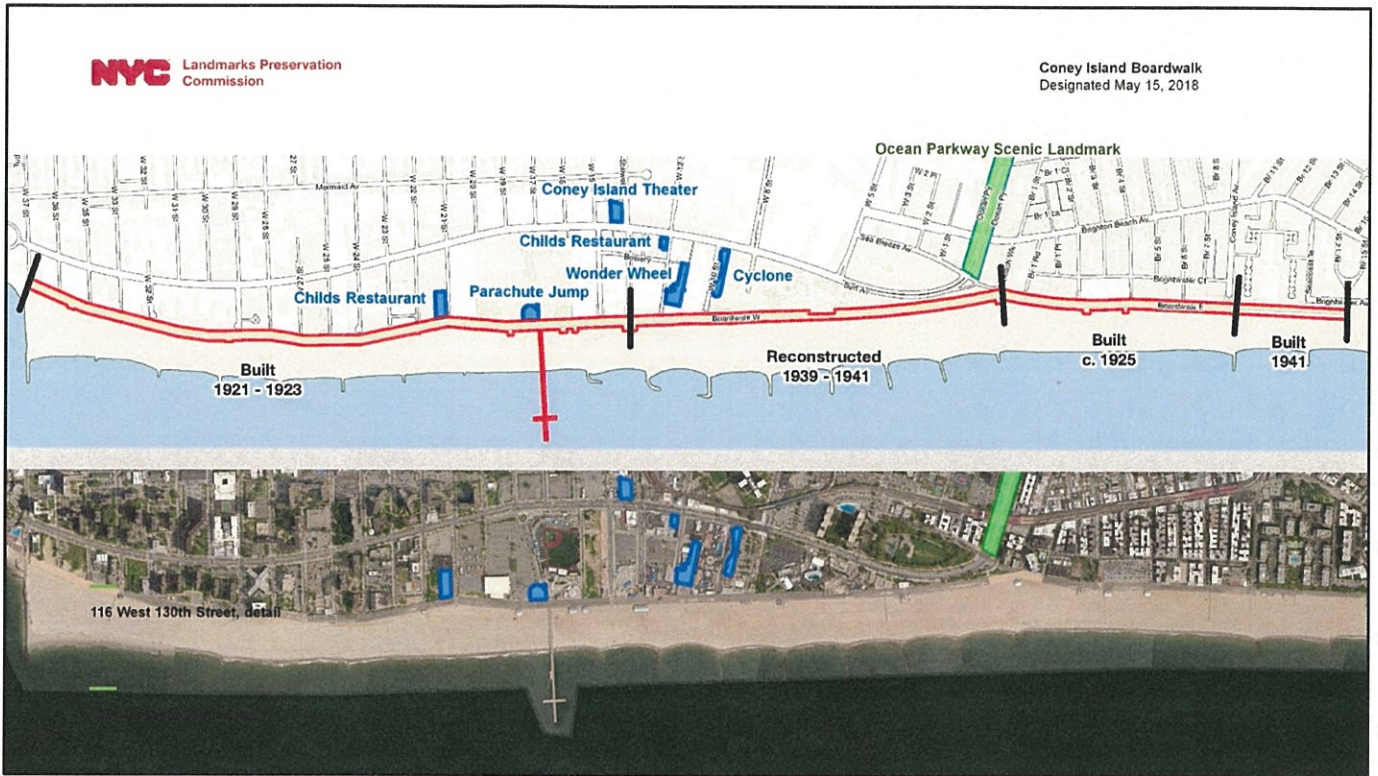


Scenes from the Mermaid Parade  
2017. Brian Spillane, Flickr



Salsa Dance on the Boardwalk of Coney  
Island, 2012. japp1967, Flickr

In addition to annual events such as the Mermaid Parade, and smaller cultural events that take place on the Boardwalk throughout the summer.



It boardwalk connects physically and historically to several other individual landmarks in Coney Island, including the Wonder Wheel, the Cyclone, the Parachute Jump, and Childs Restaurant.



1920s Photograph  
105-109 West 130th Street



2018 Photograph  
LPC

Since the 1920s, changes have been made to the boardwalk and beach, largely in response to their coastal environment at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. The scenic landmark designation seeks to recognize that the boardwalk must continue to meet city, state, and federal goals and requirements for resiliency and safety within a coastal flood zone.

Changes since original construction are part of the boardwalk's history as a publically accessible seaside structure, and do not diminish its cultural significance. As you can see in this slide, the level of the beach has been raised substantially from its original elevation, and along the length of the boardwalk its relationship to the beach has changed since original construction. The walkway's planking and paving have been replaced many times in this seaside location, and no historic fabric remains. In addition, light fixtures, seating and comfort stations have changed over time.

## Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk

c. 1952 aerial photograph  
NYC Parks Department Archives



The Coney Island Riegelmann Boardwalk was designated as a Scenic Landmark in recognition of its cultural and social significance. The boardwalk has given all New Yorkers and visitors free access to the beach and seaside for almost a century, and is one of the best known boardwalks in the world. It remains an iconic place, a significant feature of the beachfront landscape, and the embodiment of Coney Island's egalitarian spirit. Given the significance of the Coney Island Boardwalk, we recommend that the City Council uphold this designation.

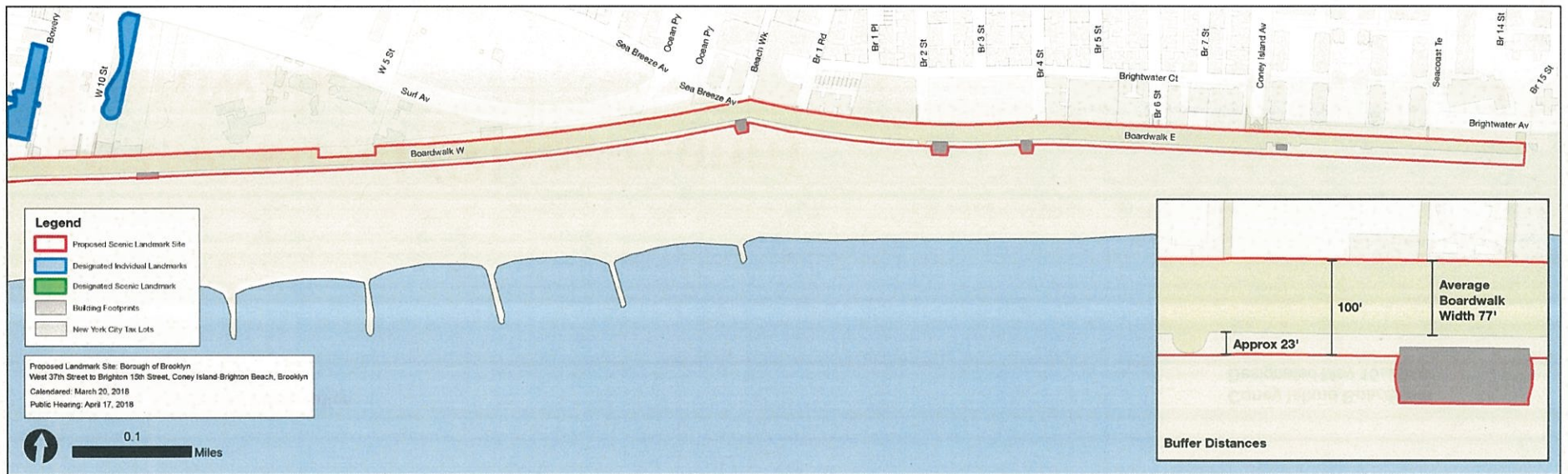
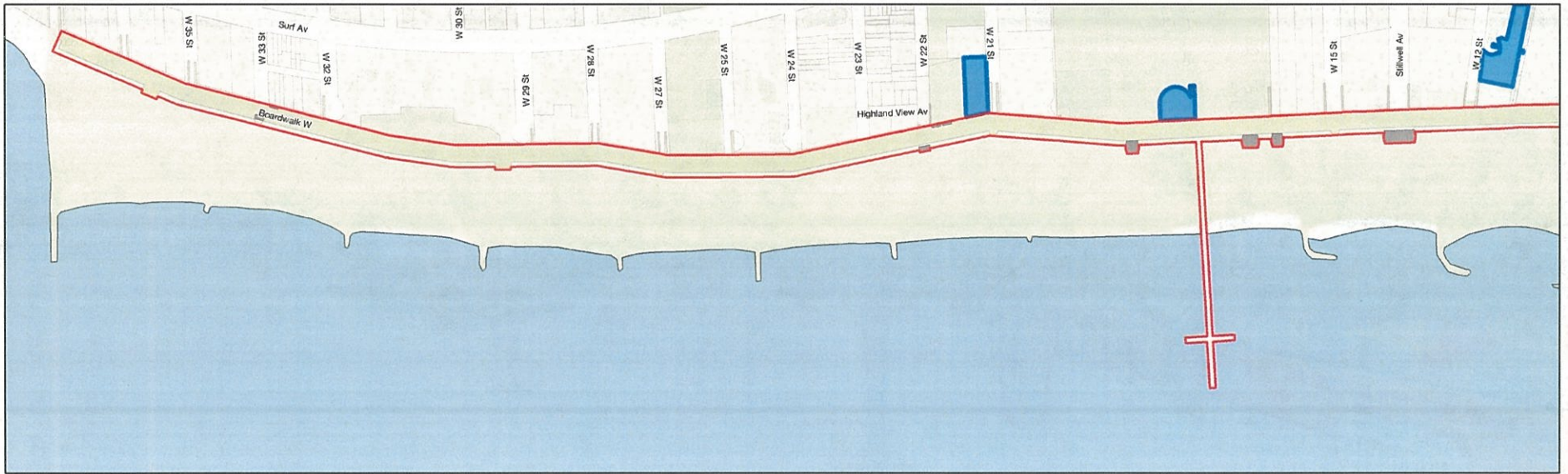
I want to quickly conclude by saying this designation would have not been possible without the support of the administration, including, Mayor de Blasio, and Commissioner Silver. I'd like to thank our dedicated elected officials -- Council Members (Mark) Treyger and (Chaim) Deutsch, and Assembly Member (Steven) Cymbrowitz, and the Coney Island community for their overwhelming support throughout the designation process.

# Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk

## Scenic Landmark

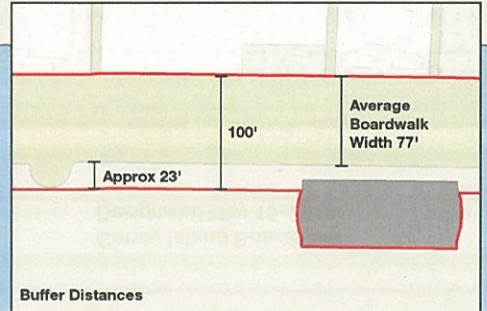
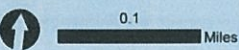






- Legend**
- Proposed Scenic Landmark Site
  - Designated Individual Landmarks
  - Designated Scenic Landmark
  - Building Footprints
  - New York City Tax Lots

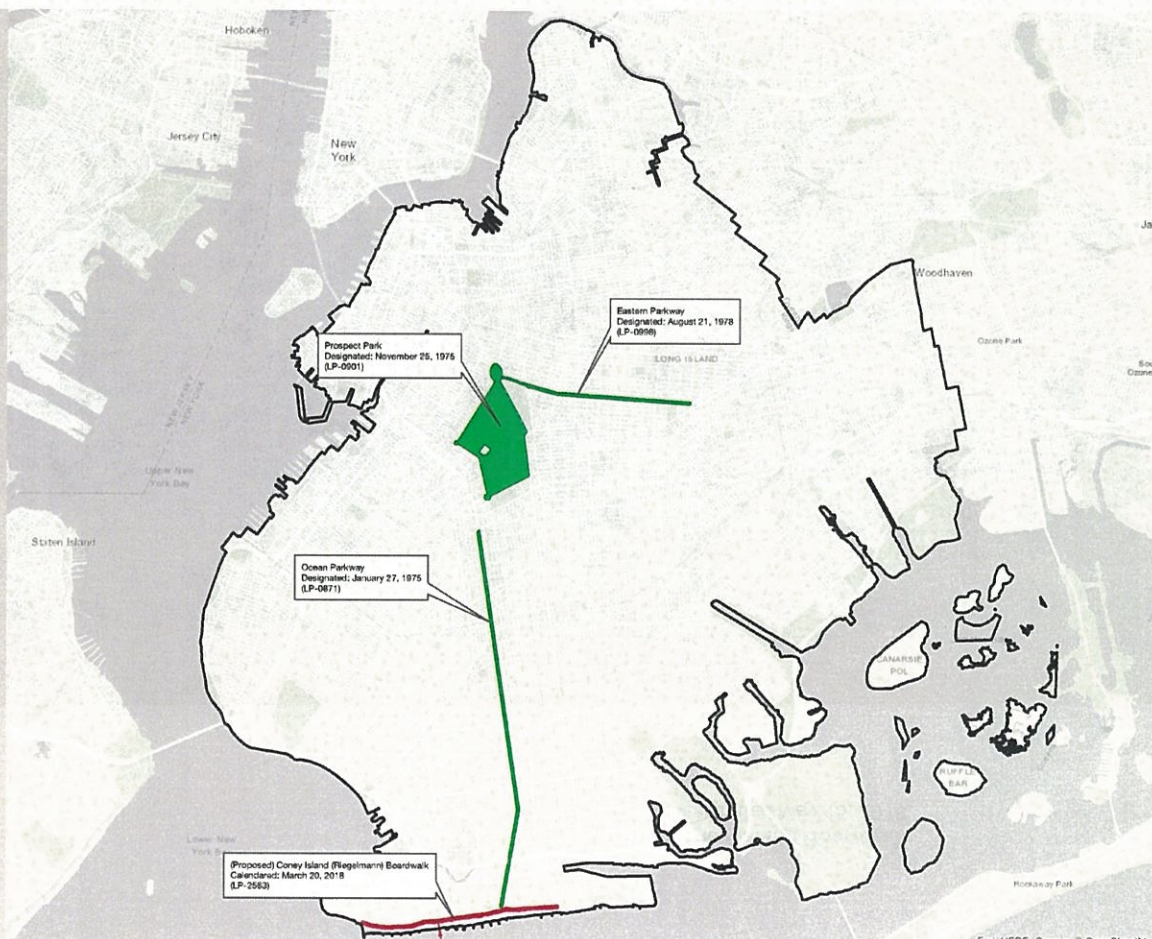
Proposed Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn  
 West 37th Street to Brighton 15th Street, Coney Island Brighton Beach, Brooklyn  
 Calendered: March 20, 2018  
 Public Hearing: April 17, 2018

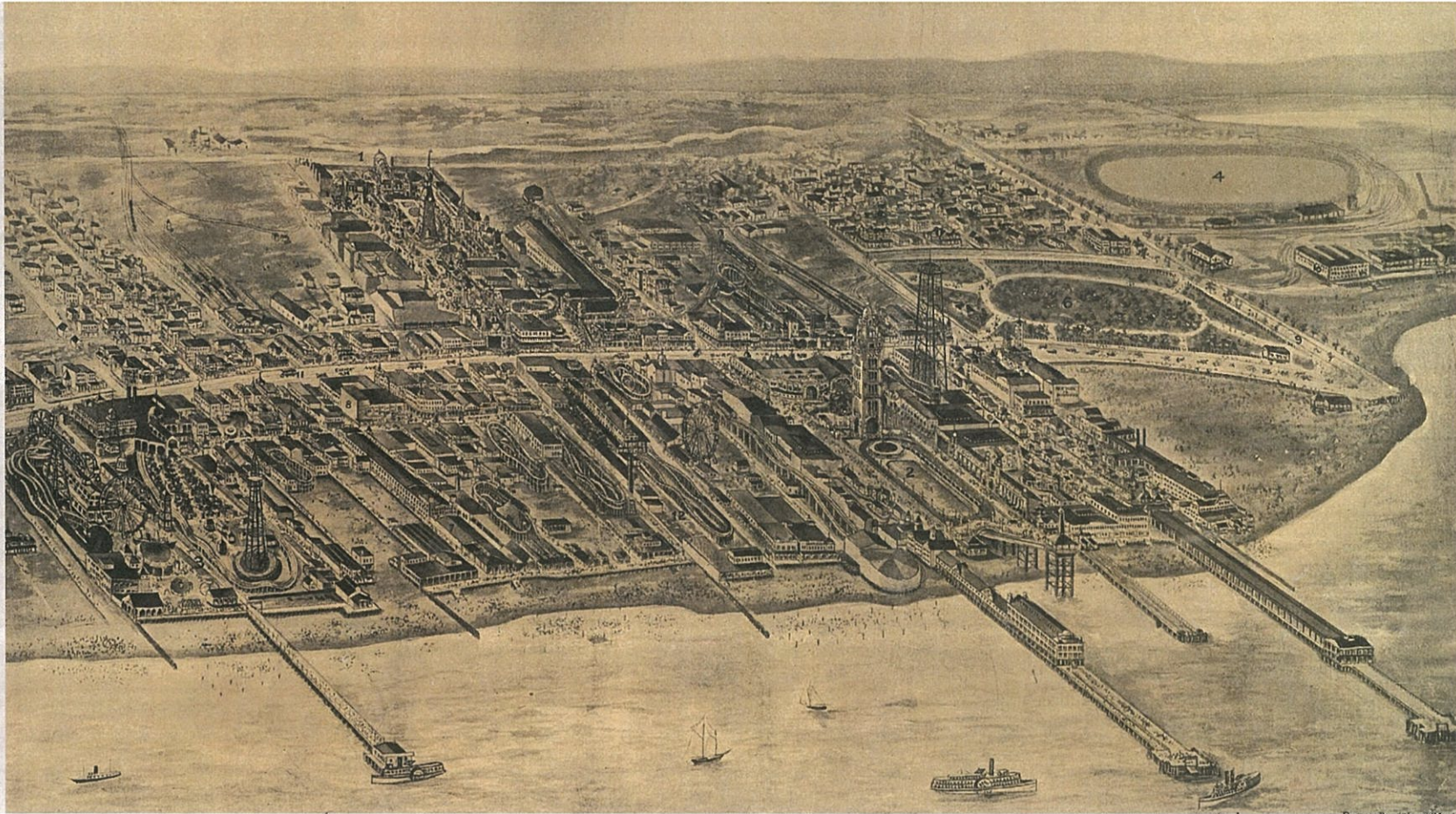


# Scenic Landmarks in Brooklyn



Ocean Parkway Scenic Landmark





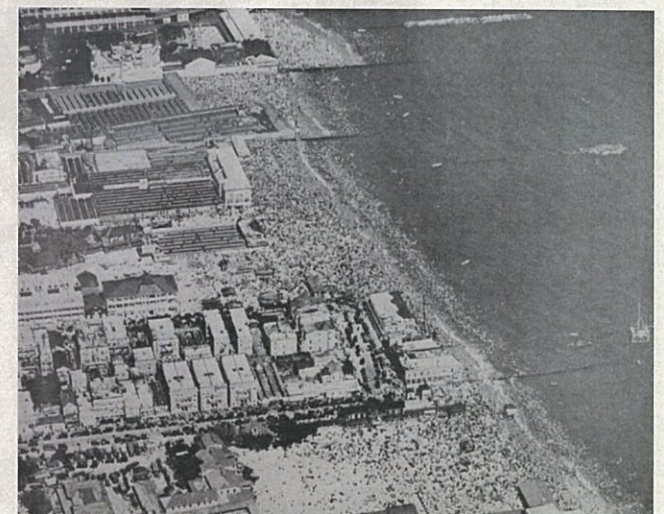
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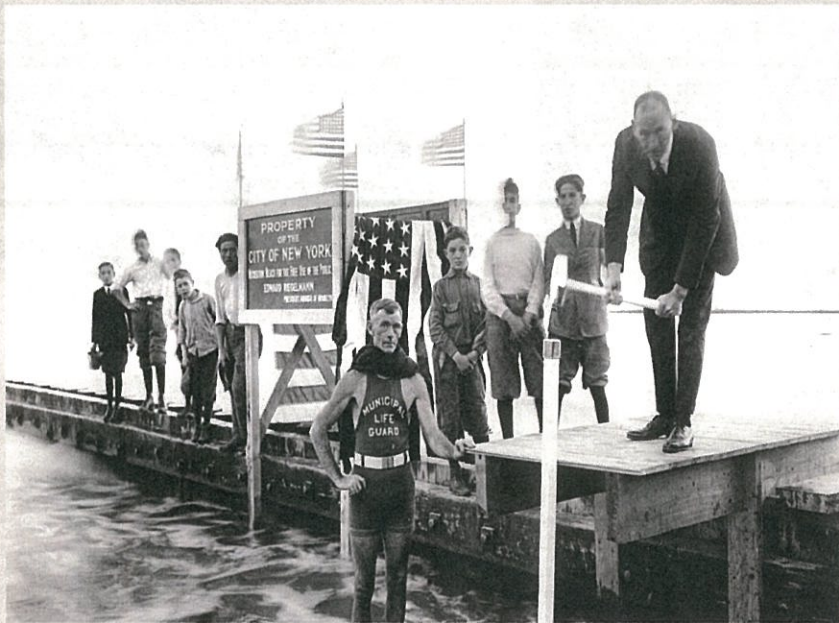
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Neglected Coney Island, 1913



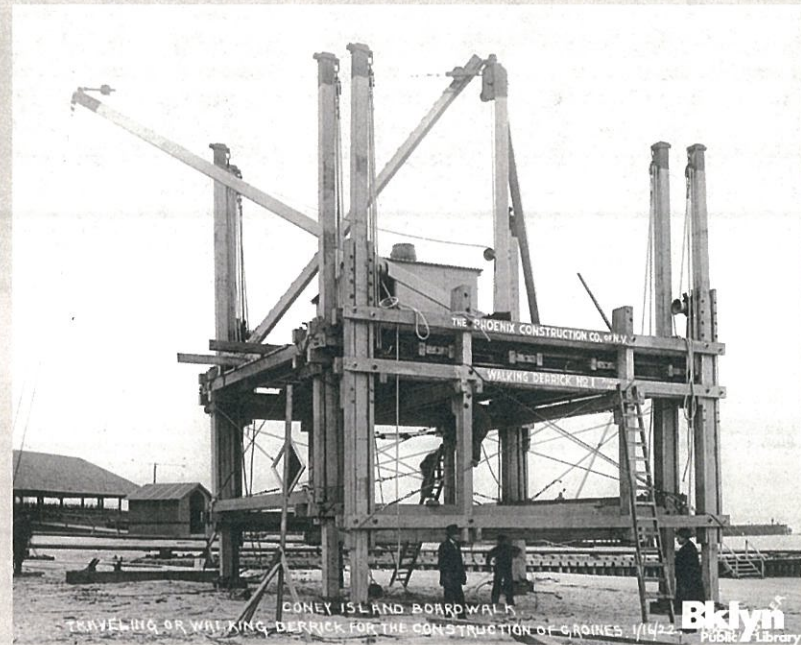
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**Amusement district, aerial view, c. 1920**



Edward J. Riegelmann Driving the First Stake, October 1921  
Brooklyn Public Library



Travelling or Walking Derrick, Coney Island Boardwalk, January 1922  
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**Coney Island Boardwalk, after 1928**  
New York Public Library Digital Collection



**Coney Island Boardwalk, c. 1940s**  
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**Coney Island Boardwalk prior to realignment, late 1930s**  
*Shore and Beach* magazine, 1943



**Coney Island Boardwalk after realignment, c.1940**  
Brooklyn Public Library

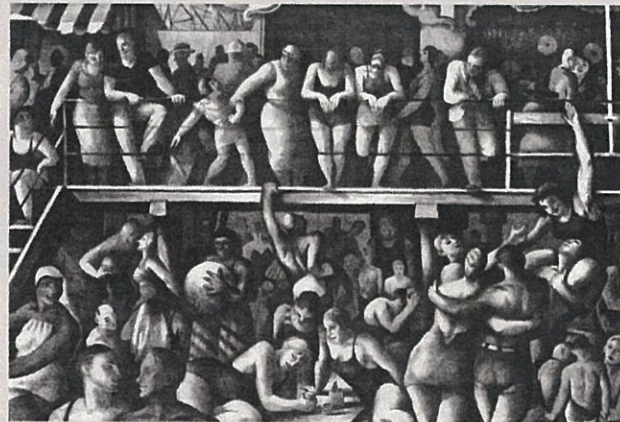




Coney Island Boardwalk, 1946, 1947  
NYC Parks Department Archives



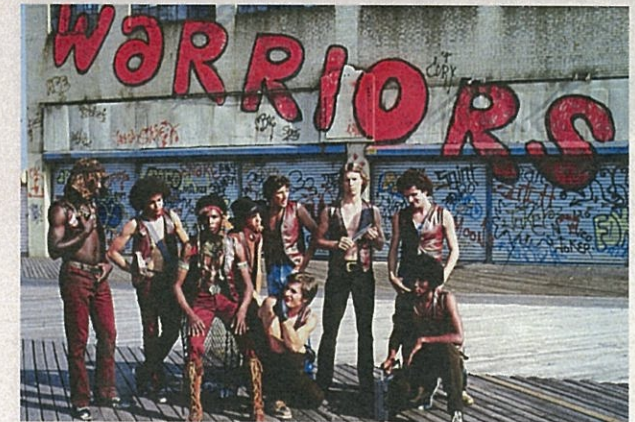
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1953



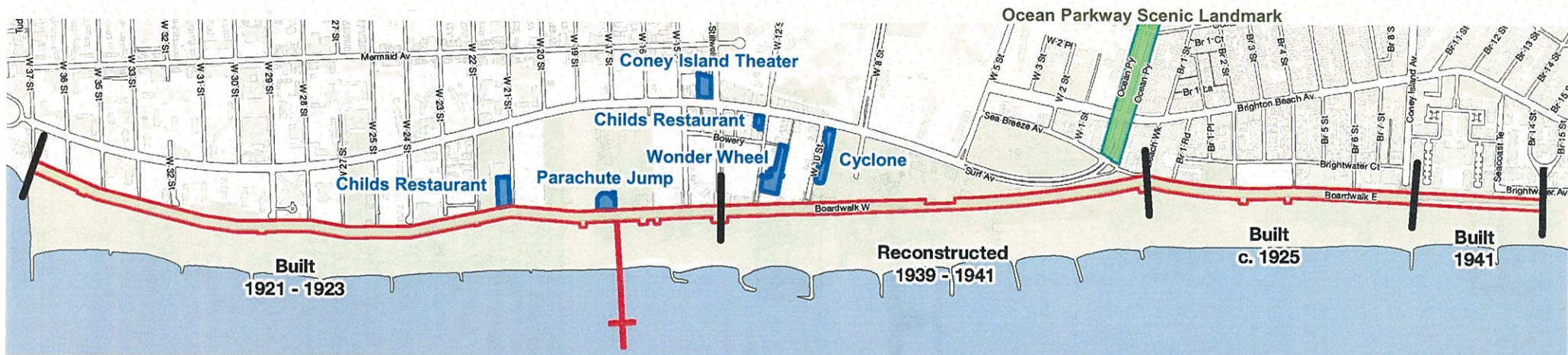
**Still from *The Warriors***  
1979



Scenes from the Mermaid Parade  
2017, Brian Spillane, Flickr



Salsa Dance on the Boardwalk of Coney  
Island, 2012, japp1967, Flickr





West 130th Street, detail

1920s Photograph

105-109 West 130th Street



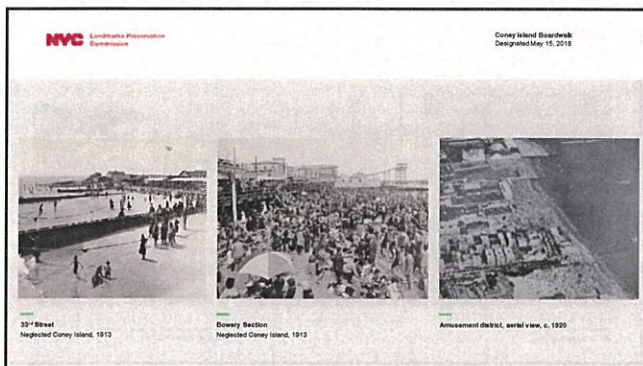
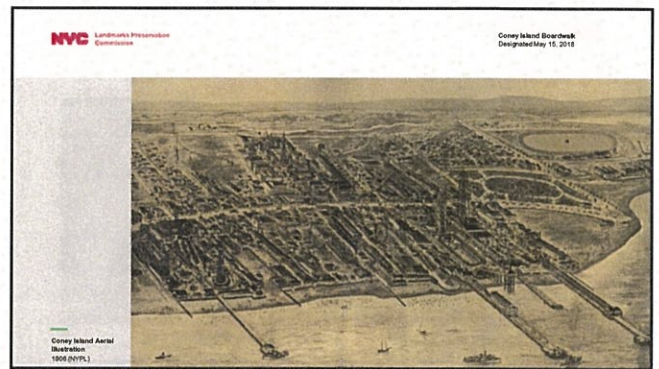
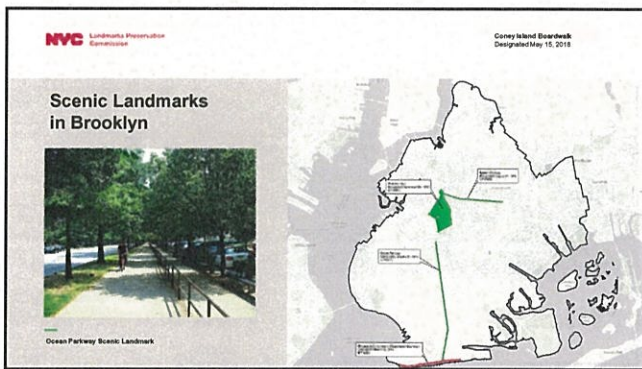
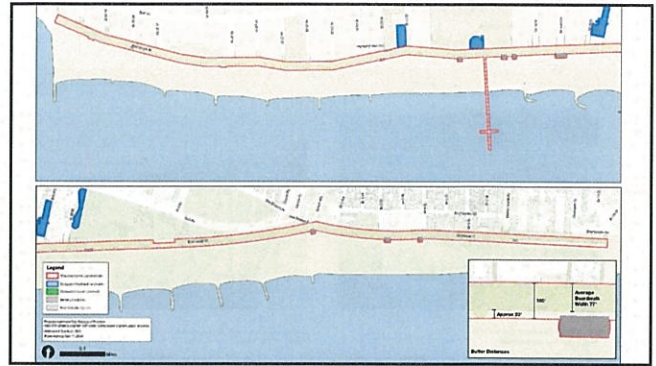
2018 Photograph

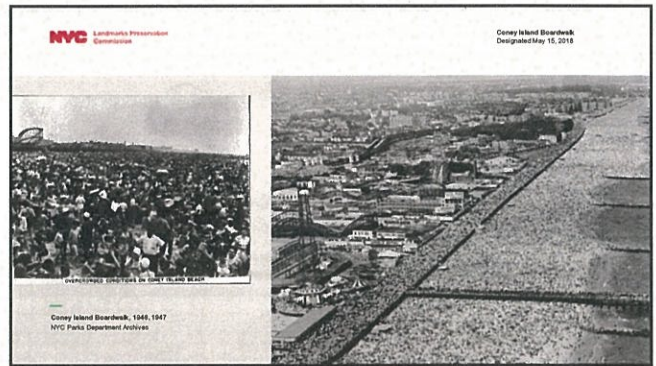
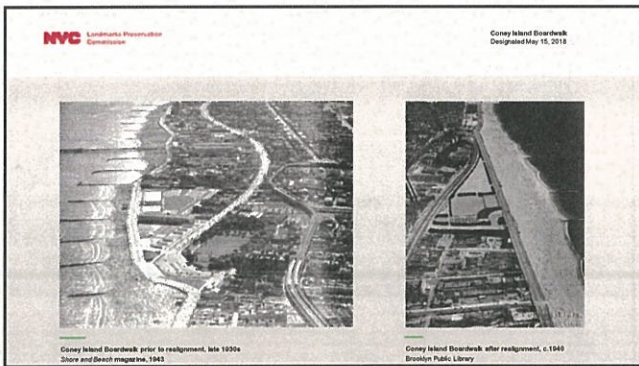
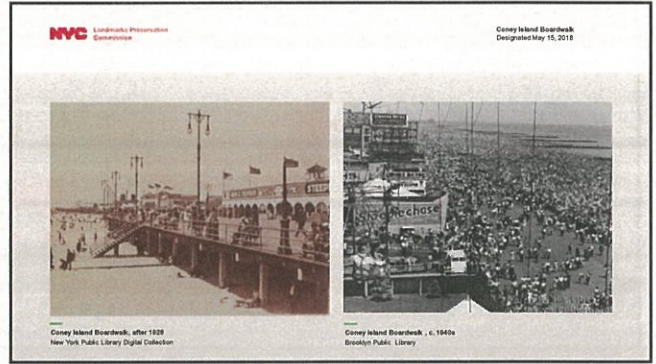
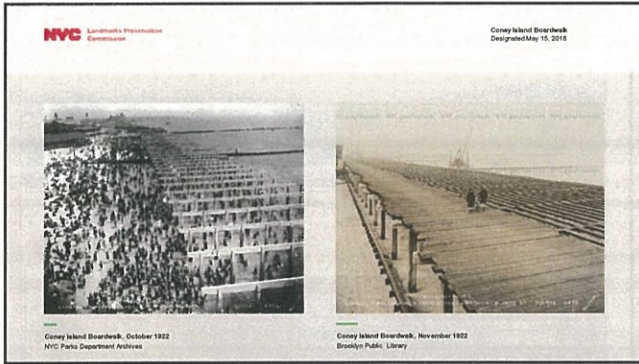
LPC

# Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk

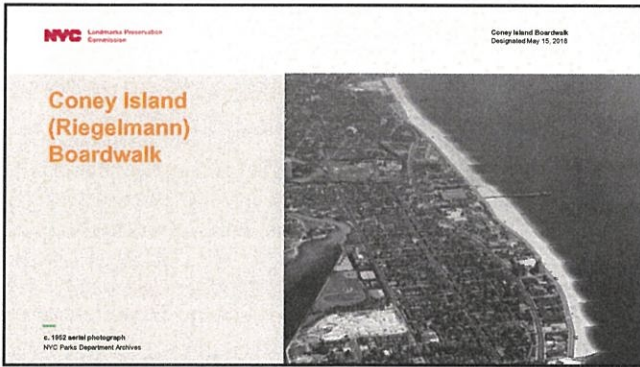
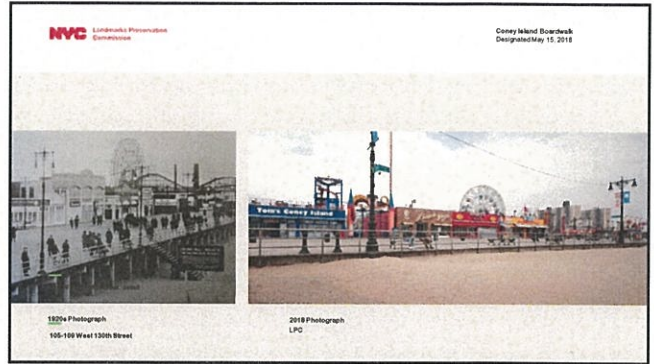
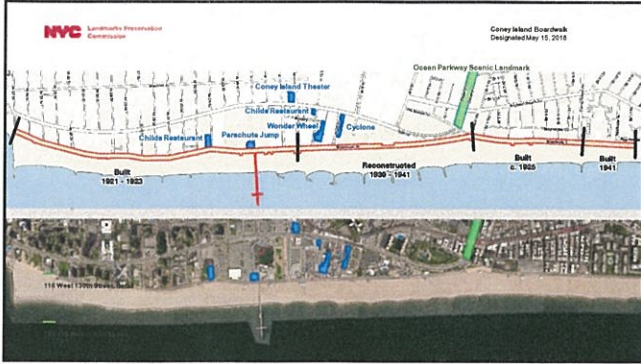
c. 1952 aerial photograph  
NYC Parks Department Archives











July 17, 2018

**Testimony before the New York City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks Public Siting and Maritime Uses regarding LU 0154-2018**

***Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk (LP-2583), Brooklyn.***

Good afternoon Chair Adams and Subcommittee Members. I am Lisa Kersavage, Director of Special Projects and Strategic Planning at the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and I'm here to present the recent designation of the Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Coney Island's boardwalk is one of the best known waterfront promenades in the world. The 2.7-mile boardwalk has given people of all economic and social backgrounds free access to the beach and seaside since 1923. It is a significant destination unto itself and the embodiment of Coney Island's democratic spirit.

The landmark site incorporates the entire length of the 2.7-mile boardwalk, including Steeplechase Pier, boardwalk comfort stations, ramps and stairs to the beach, railings, benches, and light fixtures. It also includes the sand beneath resulting in an approximately 100-foot wide corridor along the length of the boardwalk.

On May 15, 2018, the Commission voted to designate Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk as a scenic landmark, following a public hearing held on April 17, 2018. At the public hearing and in written testimony, twelve people supported designation, including City Council Member Mark Treyger, Council Member Chaim M. Deutsch, New York State Assemblyman Steven H. Cymbrowitz, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation Commissioner Mitchell J. Silver, Alliance for Coney Island, Coney-Brighton Boardwalk Alliance, Historic Districts Council, the Landmarks Conservancy, and the Society for the Architecture of the City. There were no speakers opposed to designation.

There are only ten Scenic landmarks in New York City, three of which are in Brooklyn: Prospect Park, Eastern Parkway, and Ocean Parkway. These were all designed by Frederick Law Olmstead (Ocean Parkway and Prospect Park also by Calvert Vaux) and built between 1866 and 1875. Ocean Parkway, the first road of its kind in the United States, was intended to extend from the southern entrance of Prospect Park to the sea. The proposed designation of the Coney Island Boardwalk would culminate this procession of 19<sup>th</sup>-century scenic landmarks extending from Prospect Park to the Atlantic Ocean and add a decidedly 20<sup>th</sup> century, culturally significant scenic landmark to this important collection. LPC would regulate this scenic landmark just as it does the other ten.

Coney Island has been a summertime destination for nearly two centuries. Named by Dutch settlers for the rabbits that reportedly flourished among the dunes, the first hotels opened in the 1820s. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were numerous hotels, bathhouses and saloons, as well as a popular amusement district that included Dreamland, Luna Park, and Steeplechase Park. Prior to construction of the boardwalk, most of Brooklyn's waterfront was privately owned. Not only did businesses charge admission fees to use the beach but in many places the sand had begun to wash away, leaving only a sliver of shoreline.

Coney Island's boardwalk is named for Brooklyn Borough President Edward J. Riegelmann, who played a major role in its creation, and is seen at left driving the first stake. Part of an ambitious plan to rejuvenate Coney Island and the Ocean Beach, the approximately 80-foot wide boardwalk was designed by engineer Philip P. Farley. Farley described the boardwalk as an elevated highway. It consists of a plank deck supported by reinforced concrete piles and girders. Construction of the boardwalk began in 1922, in conjunction with a major expansion of the beach. Similar to other Scenic Landmarks like Central Park, Coney Island Beach was designed and engineered to create the semblance of a natural landscape for the public to enjoy. The first

section, between Ocean Parkway and West 37th Street, formally opened on May 15, 1923. Two years later, the boardwalk was extended 4,000-feet east, to Coney Island Avenue. The new beach and boardwalk for the first time in New York City allowed people of all economic and social backgrounds full free and public access to the beach. The boardwalk became a thoroughfare connecting the amusements, concessions, and the beach, and as Coney Island's new "Main Street", was a popular attraction unto itself.


Control of the boardwalk was transferred to the NYC Parks Department in 1938. Under Commissioner Robert Moses, a 3,800 foot section, between Ocean Parkway and Stillwell Avenue, was straightened and moved almost 300 feet inland. The reconstruction of the boardwalk began in January 1940 and was completed five months later in May 1940. As part of the project, the beach was also expanded and replenished. The following year, 1941, the boardwalk was extended an additional 1,500 feet east to Brighton 15th Street, establishing its current length of 2.7 miles. A 1923 guidebook described the Coney Island Boardwalk as "the most densely crowded and most democratic" of New York's seaside playgrounds. Evident in these photographs, and as remains the case today, the boardwalk is unrivaled among New York City's waterfront attractions for its size and popularity, and one of the city's most iconic public spaces.

The boardwalk has featured prominently in popular culture throughout its history. It has been depicted in fine art and photography, including in paintings shown above from the 1930s of promenading visitors and the crowded beach. It has been featured in music, as in Lou Reed's 1976 Coney Island Baby, as well as in television and movies. Shown here are stills from the 1953 movie Little Fugitive, nominated for an Oscar for its screenplay about a little boy trying to make his way among the attractions of the boardwalk, and the epic cult film The Warriors from 1979. In addition to annual events such as the Mermaid Parade, and smaller cultural events that take place on the Boardwalk throughout the summer.


The boardwalk connects physically and historically to several other individual landmarks in Coney Island, including the Wonder Wheel, which predates the boardwalk, the Cyclone, which opened in 1927, the Parachute Jump which was moved from New York's World's Fair in 1939, and the Childs Restaurant built in 1923 on the Boardwalk at West 21<sup>st</sup> Street.

Since the 1920s, changes have been made to the boardwalk and beach, largely in response to their coastal environment at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. The scenic landmark designation seeks to recognize that the boardwalk must continue to meet city, state, and federal goals and requirements for resiliency and safety within a coastal flood zone. Changes since original construction are part of the boardwalk's history as a publically accessible seaside structure, and do not diminish its cultural significance. The level of the beach has been raised substantially from its original elevation, and along the length of the boardwalk its relationship to the beach has changed since original construction. The walkway's planking and paving have been replaced many times in this seaside location, and no historic fabric remains. In addition, light fixtures, seating and comfort stations have changed over time.

The Coney Island Riegelmann Boardwalk was designated as a Scenic Landmark in recognition of its cultural and social significance. The boardwalk has given all New Yorkers and visitors free access to the beach and seaside for almost a century, and is one of the best known boardwalks in the world. It remains an iconic place, a significant feature of the beachfront landscape, and the embodiment of Coney Island's egalitarian spirit. Given the significance of the Coney Island Boardwalk, we recommend that the City Council uphold this designation.



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

232 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street New York NY 10003  
tel (212) 614-9107 fax (212) 614-9127 email hdc@hdc.org

Statement of the Historic Districts Council  
Before the City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses  
Regarding the Designation of the Coney Island (Riegelmann) Boardwalk as a Scenic Landmark  
July 17, 2018

The Historic Districts Council is the citywide advocate for New York's historic buildings, sites and neighborhoods.

The Coney Island Boardwalk is arguably the most famous boardwalk on Earth and an obvious landmark. The Historic Districts Council strongly supports its designation as a New York City Scenic Landmark since by any measure, an accounting of New York City's landmarks which does not include the Boardwalk would be entirely incomplete. We applaud its designation and thank Council member Mark Treyger for being such a strong champion for this long-sought honor. We can all learn a lot from the City Council's leadership on this issue and are heartened by the Council's support for this action, which caused the LPC to reconsider its position on this property. We deeply hope that properties such as the Walt Whitman House on Ryerson Street in Brooklyn, the poet's lasting remaining New York City residence, which a number of Council members have supported for landmark status, will also be reconsidered by the LPC.

HDC does have concerns about protective power of the scenic landmark designation as it applies to the Riegelmann Boardwalk. As we understand it, current administrative interpretations of the Landmarks Commission's policing power abrogates almost all authority the agency might exercise over this property. All future changes to the actual boardwalk, in style, material or even form will be reviewed in an advisory capacity without public testimony to help guide the Commissioners' advice. The Public will have the opportunity to weigh in about existing buildings that fall within the bounds of the Scenic Landmark, but that was the case previously when the Public Design Commission had sole design review over the property. Issues of the historic context of this public property – the very Boards of the Boardwalk – still fall under the binding authority of the Public Design Commission and are ultimately controlled by the Parks Department, the very agency which replaced them with concrete in the first place. We urge the City Council to use every tool in its considerable arsenal to ensure the Boardwalk is returned to a more appropriate material. Please make the Coney Island Boardwalk wood again.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: 7-17-18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: BARBARA ZAY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

Address: 232 E. 11<sup>th</sup> St.

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: 7/17/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisa Kersavage

Address: 1 Centre Street

I represent: LPC

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆