

## Patrick Burke: GardenAerial can bring beauty to industrial past

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In 1999, Robert Hammond and Joshua David decided it was time to fight City Hall and stood against the proposed demolition of ramshackle elevated railroad tracks that once served a bustling economic and residential section of the city.

After a three-year fight, and the support of a newly elected mayor with exceptional entrepreneurial instincts, the railroad tracks were saved and a plan was developed to convert them into the country's most progressive urban open space and park. A decade later, the once forgotten section of the city has responded with an explosion of economic and residential vitality.

The city is New York, and the project is the [High Line](#), which runs from the Meatpacking District in the lower west side of Manhattan, to the West 30s. Adopted and spearheaded by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the economic impact has been in excess of \$3 billion, with the restoration costing less than \$200 million. It was accomplished through the use of a private-public partnership.

So why is this marriage between ecology and economics important to Rochestarians? Well because we have, on a smaller scale, much of the same opportunity. Our Hammond and David are Lewis Stess and Michael Philipson, and the project is [GardenAerial](#).

If you have been to the new Genesee Brew House, look toward City Center. For the first time you may see one of Rochester's ecological treasures, a spectacular 75-foot waterfall, framed by the skyline. Unfortunately, the banks of the mighty Genesee below the falls are scarred with more than a century of heavy industrial use that has since gone away.

On top of the high banks is a collection of areas — some developed, others fallow — without a common thread or identity. The Ponte de Rennes bridge, which is dressed up for two weeks a year during the Greentopia Festival, reflects our industrial past; it gets you across the river, but lacks any sense of place.

Stess and Philipson “see a place where preservation of natural beauty and ecology is in harmony with sensitive, sustainable development,” to quote their website. Their plans call for converting the existing bridge into a “garden in the sky,” adding a new cantilevered pedestrian bridge over the falls, and constructing a trail around the rim of the gorge. Finally, the plan calls for the construction of a grand public “Winter Garden,” with a stunning panoramic view of the falls. The lower gorge would become a park including the restoration of existing art deco buildings.

Ambitious, yes, but big ideas don't come in small packages. The High Line was built over eight years in three phases. The community involvement was enormous with “Friends of the High Line” numbering in the tens of thousands. Hammond and David, are assisting Stess and Philipson in the creation of “Friends of GardenAerial,” a public-private partnership.

Bold ideas can be overwhelming, but complacency is not a solution. Rochester's legacy of the importance of transformative public spaces goes back 100 years with the creative influence of Frederick Law Olmsted. It's time we set our politics aside and recapture the beauty that once was, and can be again, while launching an economic renaissance. So let's get to work.