North Waterfront Park
Wilmington, North Carolina

Along the Cape Fear River, North Waterfront Park, previously a lumber yard mill and cargo weigh station for the Port of Wilmington, has been transformed into 6.6 acres of newly-accessible, versatile, waterfront open-space as well as a 7,000-capacity performance venue. As a new cultural destination for the City of Wilmington, the site goes above and beyond a singular purpose as a concert venue. The design enhances physical connections to nature and the water by mimicking the natural shoreline and drawing coastal marshes into the site. The design also seeks to encourage stewardship activities and reflection upon the City’s past with waterfront gardens that immerse visitors into the native riparian landscape, interpretive signage, and an interactive water fountain evoking a tidal spray.

At the shoreline edge, 11,000 square feet of preserved wetland, and 35,000 square feet of coastal plantings including salt meadow cordgrass, jewelweed, and rose mallow will be introduced. Upland habitat restoration includes 40,000 square feet of new native plantings, walkable urban garden space, and the addition of over 300 trees.

The southern portion of the shoreline is stabilized using an erosion-control mat beneath the soils that supports the growth of grasses and perennial vegetation, providing ecological benefits beyond conventional stabilization methods. High-slope areas are protected with structural planted mats.

New programming opportunities include landscaped program rooms, a large central plaza with an interactive water feature, urban gardens integrated with creative play, and a 7,000-capacity performance venue and lawn for flexible uses. Public art recognizing the Insurrection of 1898, in which African American political leaders and families were violently pushed out of Wilmington, engages visitors in the site’s historical context.

Diverse public input, especially of adjacent communities, is core to the design of the park. Public outreach began early in the project process and continued well into the design phase, where additional input through public meetings and surveys modified the 2020 Master Plan to better reflect the programmatic priorities.

Several soil profiles were designed to manage the high water table, contribute to stormwater management and water availability for plants, and support diverse plant communities and programming needs. The planting soil profiles, which accommodate future fluctuating stormwater volumes, range from a deep, infiltration-encouraging profile on the lawn space, to drainage courses that economize irrigation demand for the planted areas.

The grading strategy, which utilizes remediated fill from the site and reaches eleven feet above base flood elevation at the site’s high points, allows for rain-based flooding to drain back into the river, as well as accommodate river flooding from future sea level rise.