

A bold experiment on 80-acre Rockaways site

Four semi-finalists out of a field of 117 design firms from around the world were tapped to design a huge waterfront development that can survive the elements and please its residents.

BY [MATT CHABAN](#), [CRAINSNEWYORK.COM](#)
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A gaggle of architects from around the world has descended on the Rockaways in Queens in an effort to tackle a simple question without a simple answer: How best should the city build on the waterfront in the wake of Superstorm Sandy? Back in April, [the city and a team of developers announced a competition](#) to transform 80 acres along the beach in the Rockaways. No less than 117 design teams responded. On Thursday, the [four semi-finalists were announced](#). Among them is a prominent New York firm and the largest architecture outfit in Scandinavia.



"These are issues not only the Rockaways is dealing with, not only the East Coast is grappling with, everyone everywhere is concerned and actively seeking out the

Rendering of Seeding Office plan for the waterfront development in the Rockaways.
Photo: Courtesy of Seeding Office

best solutions," said Bomee Jung, deputy director of Enterprise Community Partners, which co-sponsored the competition with the AIA New York chapter.

The competition, dubbed FAR ROC, began when the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development approached a team of developers that had been selected in 2007 to develop a 40-block area between Beach 32nd and Beach 36th streets. The project, which called for thousands of low- and middle-income units to be built by L+M Development, the Bluestone Group and Triangle Equities, had been stalled by the recession. Work was about to begin when Sandy struck. At that point, the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development reached out to the developers and asked them if they wanted to attempt something more innovative, and the competition was born.

The developers have emphasized that they are looking for a real proposal, something that can be built. "The idea is to take this and build it," said Ron Moelis, principal of L&M. "Unlike a lot of architecture competitions that wind up in a book or a gallery, we hope to take these proposals to the site and building something, to help this communities and others on the coast."

To tackle this task, four semi-finalists and six honorable mentions were announced today, along with their preliminary plans. The top teams, who will be responsible for developing their plans through October, are among the leaders in the field in their respective countries.

Ennead Architects, formerly known as Polshek Partnership, has built everything from the Standard Hotel over the High Line to a massive waste treatment facility with its silvery onion domes in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Toronto's Lateral Office, meanwhile, has done everything

from transforming Reykjavik's airport to creating public parks along the flood-prone Mississippi. London's Seeding Office has built the UK's Museum of Architecture not to mention a shopping mall in Zagreb, Croatia. Rounding out the list, Sweden's White Arkitekter has redesign part of the harbor in Malmo, Swede, as well as a soccer stadium in Stockholm.

"We don't have a choice, we have to conquer this challenge if we are going to preserve our waterfront communities," Department of Housing Preservation and Development Commissioner Mathew Wambua said. "And I think today we're catching a glimpse of what the future holds."

The city will set aside some of the city's billions of dollars in federal Sandy aid to see that some aspect of the project gets built.

"This thing is big," said Stephen Bluestone, a partner at his family's eponymous firm. "This could be our lab for figuring out how to live on the water again."