



Nancy Smith, Executive Director of the Western New York Land Conservancy, with Dennis Bowen, former President of the Seneca Nation, and Dean Seneca, CEO and Founder of Seneca Scientific Solutions. Photo: Courtesy of Western New York Land Conservancy

HIGH LINE NETWORK CASE STUDY

Listening Leads to Trust

Organization: Western New York Land Conservancy

Park: [The Riverline](#)

Location: Buffalo, NY

Infrastructure type: Railway

Theme: Community Engagement

Project phase: Advocacy & Design

The High Line made a strategic decision in 2020 to deepen its community engagement and reactivate the Neighbors Council. This was an intentional move, stemming from the desire to reimagine the role of public space, to improve the neighborhood and the city with community feedback, and to strengthen its hyperlocal relationships.

How to go about doing this? The High Line applied an equity-based approach: to prioritize those who have not benefited from these resources in the past. Among the goals of the Neighbors

Council, the High Line is hoping to develop and stEarly in developing a vision and design for The Riverline, a Buffalo, New York nature trail, the Western New York Land Conservancy committed to centering the current residents of the surrounding communities. And they started with an approach that any organization, whatever the budget, can do: *They listened.*

The Riverline is located along the Buffalo River, on ancestral and unceded land of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, in an area that was once Buffalo Creek Reservation. For centuries it was a place of refuge; a place where resources were rich for indigenous communities; and where the ground was fertile and water was abundant and pure. For the Land Conservancy's first listening session, which was virtual, they invited attendance through outreach to Native American service providers, academics, tribal nation representatives, and people prominent in environmental movements. Land Conservancy leadership and the involved design firms were there to hear the community's response to questions such as "What are your aspirations for this project?" and "What other resources should we explore/and people would you recommend we develop relationships with?"

"As a next step in this process, the Land Conservancy focused its annual board and staff retreat around discussions with two local indigenous leaders who are Seneca Indians," says Executive Director Nancy Smith. "It was important to respect the timeline and customs of the Nations represented, and to be flexible and adaptable where those were not immediately aligned with the assumed process and trajectory of the project."

This engagement has prompted the Land Conservancy to center the design of The Riverline around the concept of creating a refuge and to explore ways to protect land important to the Haudenosaunee.

Related Resources:

[CFT Case Study: Listening Leads to Trust](#)

WHO WE ARE

Presented by the High Line, the High Line Network is a group of infrastructure reuse projects—and the people who help them come to life. As cities become denser and land for traditional parks becomes more scarce, residents are finding creative ways to bring greenspace to their neighborhoods. Projects in the High Line Network transform underutilized infrastructure into new urban landscapes. Redefining what a park can be, these hybrid spaces are also public squares, open-air museums, botanical gardens, social service organizations, walkways, transit corridors, and more. For more information about the High Line Network, please visit network.thehighline.org