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## **8. Conclusions**

## Conclusions and Next Steps

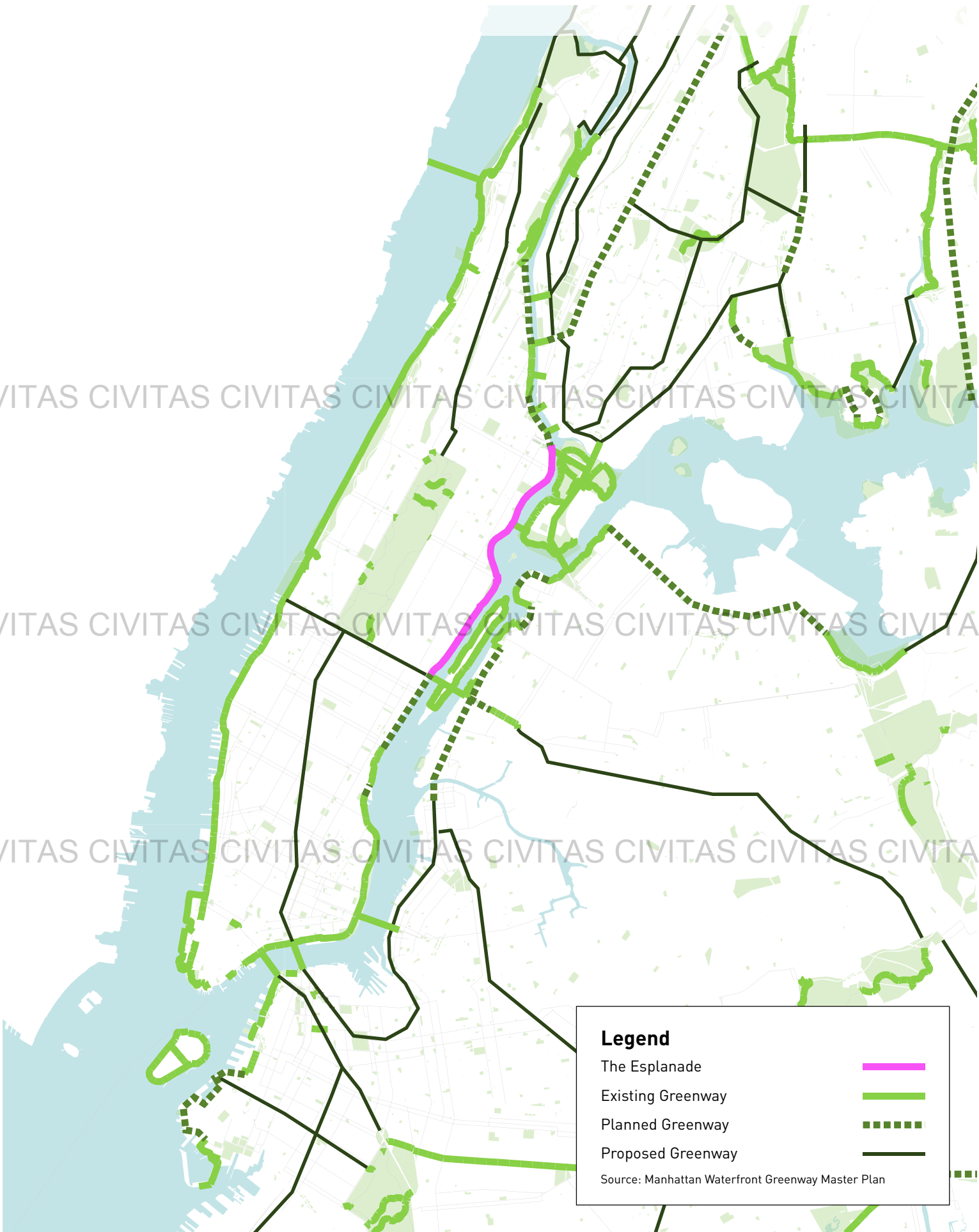
The future of the East River Esplanade can be viewed through many lenses, and differences in interpretation lead to a variety of opinions about the scope of the project and its potential timeline. Some participants invested in the outreach process felt that the immediate beautification of the Esplanade through planting and its activation through programming constituted priorities for the community. Others valued improved access to the river, Esplanade connections to the north at 125th and south at 60th Streets, and better connections to the adjacent upland neighborhoods. There were also participants who chose to consider the longer term implications of the Esplanade's potential to function both as parkland and part of a larger system of resilient infrastructure. The opinions expressed by all the groups of participants are important and there is the potential to integrate many of the ideas into a final master plan. These ideas offer opportunities for improvement in the short-term, as well as for the long-term. At this time, however, it is important to develop a long-term master plan for the Esplanade so that each incremental action builds toward a comprehensive future vision.

A long-term vision for the Esplanade must consider the impacts of climate change on both the Esplanade and the adjacent residential and commercial neighborhoods. Clearly, the Esplanade is in need of immediate repair to maintain it as a safe, functional, and stable amenity. Structural repairs alone will require significant investment, and can help to address short and medium term stability until longer-term plans can be developed. Long-term planning is needed to consider how the Esplanade will continue





to function as much needed parkland while simultaneously operating as resilient infrastructure that addresses sea level rise. This goal will require additional technical analysis, design, planning, and eventually construction. It is important to keep in mind that this undertaking will require time and patience, and the first step is to activate community support and political leadership.

The opportunities for the East River Esplanade are significant, and momentum and continued support will be needed to sustain the effort to realize goals. There are very real regulatory, technical, planning, and funding challenges that must be addressed, but the process should begin now given the current need for serious structural remediation. A comprehensive and proactive approach must be undertaken. Efforts are already underway in other parts of New York City and are addressing the impacts of sea level rise and future flooding on communities. These projects are also looking at ways to combine resilient infrastructure with parkland. With perseverance, a comprehensive planning effort can also transform the Esplanade for the Upper East Side and East Harlem communities. The Esplanade's interface with the city, the FDR, and the river will necessitate a collaborative approach at city, state, and federal levels, as well as within the community, and among agencies and political leaders. A highly collaborative process might yield a comprehensive plan that ushers in meaningful change and a new vision for the Esplanade for the Upper East Side and East Harlem Communities.

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**Legend**

- The Esplanade 
- Existing Greenway 
- Planned Greenway 
- Proposed Greenway 

Source: Manhattan Waterfront Greenway Master Plan

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