

New York City, NY – Dumbo District (Brooklyn)

- **Street Design – ADA/Bikes**
- **Street Design - Pavers**

Background

“The DUMBO Historic District, located along the East River waterfront in Brooklyn, is one of New York City’s most significant extant industrial waterfront neighborhoods. During much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the area was home to some of the largest and most important manufacturing businesses in Brooklyn or New York City...the approximately 91 buildings in the historic district reflect important trends in the development of industrial architecture in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and embody an important era of Brooklyn and New York City history...the District is enhanced by its distinctive industrial streetscapes. Many of the streets and sidewalks retain their original granite Belgian block paving as well as the network of train tracks, running along the streets and in some cases extending into individual buildings, laid out by the Jay Street Connecting Railroad.”¹

Redevelopment History

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, “developers began to convert old warehouses into residential lofts and commercial spaces.

As DUMBO began attracting more residents, small businesses began opening in the neighborhood. In addition, artists and artisans continued to flock to the area because they viewed DUMBO as an ideal working environment; its large warehouses could provide them with remarkable studios and its scenic backdrops spur their creativity.

In 1981, David Walentas of Two Trees Management purchased the former Gair buildings, a 12-block area of 2 million square feet from Harry Helmsley. The City was at first reluctant to rezone DUMBO for residential usage because officials wanted to preserve manufacturing jobs in Brooklyn, but in 1998 when the last major manufacturer left the Gair buildings, the residential rezoning was enacted. That year, 1 Main Street became the first residential development in DUMBO. Over the course of the last decade, hundreds of units have been completed, and the neighborhood’s residential population soared.”²

“In 2006, the Dumbo Improvement District was launched by the public and private sector to help oversee the growth of the neighborhood. Today, DUMBO is home to many more than

¹ Dolkart, Andrew S. Dumbo Historic District Designation Report. Rep. New York City: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2007. Print.

² "The Reinvestment of the Private Sector." Dumbo Improvement District. Dumbo Improvement District. Web. 16 Jan. 2011.

just artists; families, young professionals, offices, small businesses, restaurants and galleries are all part of the rich mosaic.”³

Retention of Historic Street Materials

Belgian block restoration remains a top priority for The Dumbo Improvement District (a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that manages DUMBO's Business Improvement District and is dedicated to enhancing and promoting DUMBO). Dumbo Improvement District's current construction project is to repair the neighborhood's network of Belgian block streets along Water Street from Adams Street to Old Fulton Street and along Washington Street from York Street to Plymouth Street. This is a \$20 million dollar, multi-phased project that commenced in the summer of 2009 and is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2011.

As of January 2011, the majority of the historic Belgian Block was mechanically removed, roadways rebuilt, ADA accessible sidewalks constructed (using a tinted and scored concrete that complements the Belgian Block), ADA accessible PED ramps erected (leading to new granite slab crosswalks), granite curbs installed and new catch basins placed at every corner (streets with known water problems received extra 1-2 catch basins).

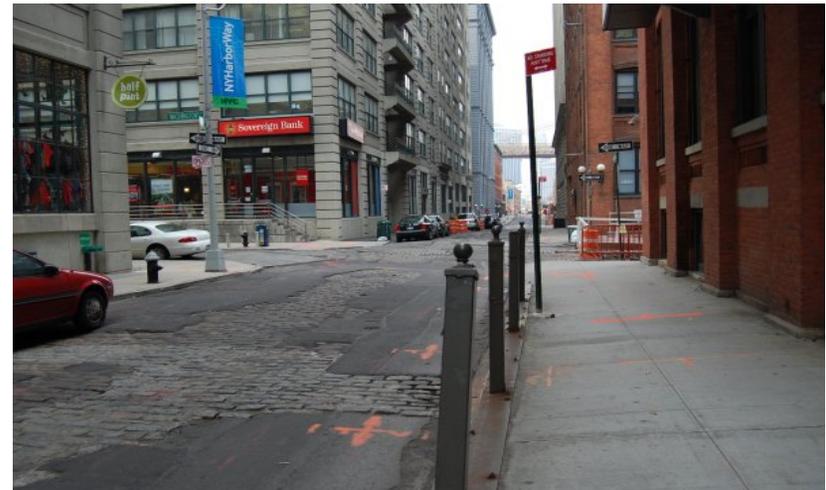
On Washington St., special pavers were laid just in the bicycle lane, with the intention of giving bicyclists a smoother ride.

³ "DUMBO Today." Dumbo Improvement District. Dumbo Improvement District. Web. 16 Jan. 2011.

Other streets, Belgian blocks were turned at a 90-degree angle in the bike lanes to visually identify Right of Way.

This project was paid for by:
New York City Department of Design and Construction (DDC)
New York Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
New York City Economic Development Corporation

The Dumbo Improvement District is now working with the City of New York to source the additional funding for the next four phases of Belgian Block Street Restoration in DUMBO District.



BEFORE reconstruction. October 2009, Water Street looking towards Washington St.



BEFORE reconstruction. January 2010, Water Street from Main, looking at Washington St.



AFTER reconstruction. October 2010.

Lessons for Minneapolis Warehouse District

- The Dumbo Improvement District has made great strides in improving the neighborhood streetscape, which in turn has vastly enhanced the quality of district life and pedestrian activity. Minneapolis should consider how similar changes could positively affect the Warehouse District.
- The pre-2009 condition of the Belgian block streets and roadways in Dumbo District appear similar to the extant historic streets in Minneapolis. It may behoove

Minneapolis to look closer at historic street restoration and the benefits drawn from this process

- The Dumbo Improvement District, an organization similar to Minneapolis' Downtown Improvement District (DID), coordinates streets and streetscapes improvements. DID may want to consider including 'Heritage Streets' (streets with historic street materials) maintenance and/or restoration in their future implementation plans.

- Slip resistant, textured granite slabs are being used to construct ADA accessible crosswalks in the DUMBO District. Granite slabs visually enhance and delineate the crosswalk, while providing an even crossing surface for mobility challenged citizens. Cobblestones turned at a 90-degree angle provide visual delineation between bike lanes and vehicular lanes. These innovative design solutions could be implemented in the Warehouse District and should be considered by the City of Minneapolis as they strive towards accessibility, delineated Right of Ways, and overall street usage.
- Some sidewalks in the Water Street/ Washington St. project were badly damaged or distressed and constructed with Bluestone Pavers, a material that can no longer be replaced in kind. Other streets in DUMBO did not have sidewalks on one or both sides of the street.

During Phase I of said project, NYDOT built ADA accessible sidewalks on both sides of project streets, using flag sized, tinted, and tooled concrete to simulate original historic sidewalk material. New concrete sidewalks visually tie the historic street pavers, granite curbs and industrial quality of the district together.

Likely street and streetscape improvements will occur in Minneapolis; if historic street materials cannot be replaced in kind or historic materials hinder ADA

accessibility, the City may want to consider using in-kind replacement material such as tinted concrete.