

Talking points

The quickie guide to
Fresh Kills park

Mayor Bloomberg has officially announced that Staten Island's Fresh Kills, the largest landfill in the country, will finally receive a makeover. The 2,200-acre garbage heap is to become a green recreational space—just don't plan on picnicking there anytime soon.

On September 29, the mayor declared the Field Operations firm the winner of the city's international design competition—and of a \$3.38-million contract—to initiate the site's redevelopment. That means for the next two years, the New York-based company will be fine-tuning its winning concept in order to create a blueprint for the "master plan" of the park. Beginning in early 2004, there will be public meetings to solicit community feedback (local leaders have already suggested including a nature preserve, golf and boating facilities, and equestrian trails), and an environmental-assessment statement will be produced.

After the master plan is finalized, and the second phase of



HANDSOME CAB
London taxis are revving up to take Manhattan.

Fare Blighty

Last week, the mayor and the Taxi and Limousine Commission introduced the city to "A Ride for All," a program to provide cab service to wheelchair- and motorized-scooter-using New Yorkers. Within two weeks, retrofitted minivan cabs will be dispatched from a Long Island City base station to whoever needs a ride. One man, though, has another solution: London cabs.

Larry Smith heads London Taxis of North America, and he's trying to bring the legendary black hacks to NYC. The boxy broughams are famous for their durability and vast amounts of passenger space. Extant features include child seats, room for five, an intercom, rear climate control—and a wheelchair ramp. While the vehicles are already cruising fares in Boston, Chicago and San Francisco, NYC's proving something of a speed bump.

"New York is a pretty rugged market," Smith says. The city has strict laws regarding taxi shelf life, making London cabs prohibitive for livery companies. A TLC spokesman explains: "After three years, a cab must be retired, unless the driver is the owner of the cab as well. Then the limit is five years." London cabs cost around \$40,000—twice as much as a yellow Crown Vic—but can easily last 500,000 miles.

While hoping for a change in the TLC rules, Smith is concentrating on getting high-end limousine and NYC-area cab services on board. He's already placed two cars with Bronxville Taxi, in Westchester. "The customers love them," Bronxville cabby Duke says. "It's easy on the gas, drives nice, and they turn on a dime, too!" Even skeptical city-dwellers were won over. "London is London and New York is New York," Manhattanite Elizabeth Smith initially remarked. But after a quick tour, she sang a different tune: "This is incredible!"

Oddly enough, rate hikes being considered by the TLC could actually help London cabs tap the New York market. Fare hikes are never popular, Smith speculates, but higher-quality cabs to counter higher prices could appease Gothamites.—*Nick Kurczewski*

What's up with that?

Q What's up with Manhattan College—why is it in the Bronx?

A Established by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1848, the college was originally located on Canal Street in lower Manhattan, when it was known as the Academy of the Holy Infancy. In 1853, the Catholic liberal-arts school moved north to the rural area of Manhattanville



(which today is the slightly less rural 131st Street and Broadway) and adopted its present-day name. The expanding college, which now has about 3,000 students, required more space, and in 1923 the campus moved to its current location, an idyllic green patch of Riverdale in the Bronx, bordered by the Hudson River and Van Cortlandt Park.—*Annie Bell*

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OUT THERE



PARK PLACE
Fresh Kills will be the city's largest park.

land-use issues have been settled, the third and last stage—actual reconstruction of the site—begins. The city isn't giving specifics, but the mayor's office says that realistically speaking, since the Fresh Kills site is almost three times as large as Central Park, it's, uh, going to take a while: It will likely be 30 to 40 years before the park is completed. But first on the agenda: Parts of the Fresh Kills area that escaped contamination will be converted into soccer fields within a few years.—*Annie Bell*

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