



Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO

**On Intro. 809 – A Comprehensive Waterfront Plan
THE METROPOLITAN WATERFRONT ALLIANCE**

Before the New York City Waterfront Committee

Thursday, September 25, 2008

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, president of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, a coalition of over 250 organizations working together to transform the New York Harbor and its waterways into a world class resource for work, play, transit and education.

The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance strongly supports Intro No. 809. This bill is a great step toward a well planned waterfront for the City of New York. It will create a disciplined, predictable and comprehensive land use planning process for our waterfront. As circumstance change, New York will be able to update its waterfront plans to protect the environment, promote a diversified economy and help create an accessible waterfront. Intro 809 calls for a revised waterfront plan to comport with the Coastal Zone Management Plan to be created every 10 years by the City Planning Commission.

In preparation of this plan we encourage the adopted bill to require the City Planning Commission to actively seek the advice of those active in the waterfront community including maritime businesses, environmental advocates, recreational groups and others. Using the rich and knowledgeable set of activists and experts that regularly engage with the waterfront will only strengthen the waterfront work of the commission.

The City's comprehensive waterfront land use plan, last adopted in 1992, is now overdue for a revision. With a timely revised waterfront plan land use errors could be avoided. A recent example is in Red Hook, where at the same time that the Economic Development Corporation issued a report stating that we needed more repair facilities for our growing maritime industry, an active graving dock was paved over for a parking lot for a store. A more frequently revised waterfront plan would also take into account changes in land use and climate. In 1992 very few thought about global climate change. Now we recognize that the rise in sea levels and the threat of storm surge are profoundly important waterfront issues for the New York metropolitan area.

Other cities around the nation take waterfront planning very seriously and have made it the centerpiece of revitalization efforts. The River Renaissance Program in Portland Oregon is a great example. Over the last twenty years Portland took the time to plan and think out what they needed in a waterfront and, by consulting with all parties involved, they created an accessible, environmentally friendly, and working waterfront. New York can do the same and Intro 809 is a very good start.

In addition, Intro 809 will help further the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance's Action Agenda. For nearly a year our organization has worked to put together an action agenda representing the views and needs of hundreds of organizations with stakes in the waterfront. This agenda outlines the prime initiatives and goals we need to achieve to create a working and accessible waterfront. Virtually half of these recommendations are linked to City Planning's purview of the waterfront. They include

- 1) Sustaining and growing our working waterfront by strengthening maritime and industrial zoning districts, preventing lawsuits by providing residential deed restrictions that recognize nearby industrial and maritime, transferring development rights to preserve maritime use and to ensure future water dependant use, and allowing maritime easements to ensure maritime use in perpetuity.
- 2) The creation of a "One-stop-shop" for waterfront permitting. The confusing miasma of bureaucracy that is our current permitting system has been an impediment to rationale land use planning on our waterfront.
- 3) Providing a healthy harbor for fish and for humans. Its time we cleaned up our harbor, a goal we can reach with several innovative new ideas such as the restoration our harbors oyster beds. Nearly wiped out by pollution in the early 1900's, we now have a healthy enough harbor to reintroduce these natural water filters back into our waterfront. This combined with CSO abatement and a commitment to using clean boat fuel will help restore our harbor's heath to levels none of us could have imagined because it hasn't been seen in generations.

- 4) The development of a vibrant public waterfront with destinations and access routes that bring everybody to the shore.
- 5) A plan for the rising tide. We have all seen the terrifying images of Manhattan flooded by rising sea levels and potential natural disasters. Only by having a unified vision and a well maintained and monitored waterfront will we be prepared to face the environmental challenges looming on the horizon.

In order for these waterfront goals and projects to be realized the support of the legislature and the city is necessary and would be helped immeasurably with the enlightened planning that Intro. 809 would foster.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.