



Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO

THE METROPOLITAN WATERFRONT ALLIANCE

Before the New York City Council Land Use Committee

Monday, January 26, 2009

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 370 organizations working together to transform the New York Harbor and its waterways into a world class resource for work, play, transit and education.

PlaNYC calls for 90% of the waterways in New York City to be suitable and accessible for recreation. The Bronx Kill should surely be one of them. It is a nearly forgotten quiet stretch of water bordered by train track and semi-active industrial sites on the Bronx side and Parks of Wards Island on the South. It has the potential to be one of the most viable recreational waterways in the metropolitan area. However, there are currently two big problems with it. You can't get to it and, once there, this supposedly navigable waterway is completely cut off by a cement covered conduit operated by Con Edison. This great natural resource is even more needed because it borders the South Bronx, which is home

to the poorest congressional district in the nation. This neighborhood, filled with young people, is park and recreation starved and needs access to the Bronx Kill.

In the development of public projects in a densely urban area such as New York, there is this notion that a choice must be made between suiting the utilitarian needs of the metropolis and preserving the natural environment for the purpose of recreation and environmental health. This is a false notion and it must be rejected in projects such as this. It is absolutely possible to transform our city into one that both serves its people and embraces its natural resources. And, in order to face head on the environmental challenges of the 21st century it is not just possible, it is necessary.

In MWA's recently released *Waterfront Action Agenda* we call for a great increase in the number of places such as this, where New Yorkers can hop into a canoe or a kayak and celebrate both the gifts of nature and the feats of man. These are the areas that make the Metropolitan area so special and, for New York to finally fully utilize its natural resources, making them accessible one development project at a time must become a priority.

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