



Recreation Task Force Meeting

May 19th, 2010

10:30-12:30 or 6:00- 8:00pm

MWA Offices
Seaman Church Institute
241 Water Street
New York, NY 10038

The Recreation Task Force Meeting was held to develop recommendations for the New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan on changes needed to address climate resilience, ecological design, improved public access, increases in population, and other challenges facing the New York City waterfront.

The results of the discussion centered on 12 basic themes:

- ✓ *Dredging as a Critical Recreational Issue*
- ✓ *Better Agency Coordination for Waterfront Construction*
- ✓ *The Need for a Department of the Waterfront*
- ✓ *Waterfront Recreational Events*
- ✓ *Infrastructure for Public Access*
- ✓ *Public Transit Equals Public Access*
- ✓ *The Critical Need of Public and User Input in Waterfront Access Designs*
- ✓ *New Waterfront Public Access Locations*
- ✓ *Safety*
- ✓ *Community Eco-Docks*
- ✓ *Mapping*
- ✓ *Agency Accountability*

Discussion regarding these topics is summarized below:

Dredging as a Critical Recreational Issue

It was explained that dredging is an important recreational issue. Boaters cannot access certain parts of the harbor by recreational vessels because of siltation. For example, the Harlem Piers aren't deep enough for certain types of bigger boats.

Planning for recreational access, including planning for dredging, is very important and all agencies should include and incorporate basic planning principles for recreational access that all agencies agree on.

Better Agency Coordination for Waterfront Construction

Current uses of the waterfront are being impacted during construction on the waterfront. Agencies are not seeking information on current waterfront programming and how their maintenance and construction schedules can impact summer educational programming,

especially at South Street Seaport. Agencies should have a goal that construction plans and schedules do not impact recreational interests.

It was explained that there is a need for harbor and waterfront communication for all waterfront users so that people know when construction and other projects at a particular waterfront locations are/will take place. Information that would be helpful includes what can be done, what is being done, where to go, how to do it, and what it is related to. It was suggested this could be a role that MWA could play. Notice to Mariners is an important document which can serve as a model. Access the Notice to Mariners [here](#).

The Need for a Department of the Waterfront

Participants talked about the need for one waterfront agency. For example, there should be one agency to manage, maintain, and construct all of the city's bulkheads instead of the current system where multiple agencies have responsibilities for different continuous sections of bulkheads. It was explained by one participant that, "If we want a world-class public waterfront, we will have to have a world-class waterfront agency." The agency should be substantially funded and should be transparent according to participants.

Participants explained the need for more coordination between city agencies to develop waterfront access. One participant specifically requested EDC pass waterfront property over more quickly to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

Waterfront Recreational Events

The red tape for public events and public activities at waterfront locations is a major issue affecting overall public access throughout the city. The current system de-incentivizes waterfront activities. The permit requirements for waterfront festivals are onerous and a better city management structure within a dedicated waterfront agency is needed to support waterfront activities. Participants explained that even established organizations with established track records for holding events have a very hard time coordinating events.

There must be financial support for even the established entities to get through the red tape. For example, the New York City Department of Building's requirements for waterfront events are not consistent with other agencies' requirements. Some Department of Buildings requirements are onerous and ridiculous according to participants. One example, are the requirements for fire marshals being present at events on concrete piers.

A Department of the Waterfront (see above) or other agency should serve as the clearinghouse of information for event permit information for recreational waterfront events. The agency must aide organizations and community groups trying to hold public events at waterfront parks.

Regarding waterfront events, participants explained that the city is able to host the biggest marathon in the country but the difficulties of permitting and logistics for a 150 person water-based event are extremely difficult. The red tape is an issue but also upland

support is lacking and is extremely important. Department of Transportation needs to provide turnarounds or other features to allow for the transportation to the waterfront for big events. For big water events you need a surface/land footprint to allow for that water-based event to take place for staging, coordination, and organization.

For the purpose of improving upland access to waterfront events but also in general, the West Side Greenway path needs to be expanded. This will accommodate growth of people coming to the waterfront. The Greenway is already crowded and it will only get worse.

Infrastructure for Public Access

Power, water, and bathrooms are the infrastructure that should be available or even required at all public spaces. Water fountains are lacking all around the waterfront. There are interesting ways to provide drinking water at waterfront areas, even temporary solutions could be useful.

We need infrastructure on piers and along the waterfront for large boats. There has to be a mind set in city agencies that we as a City want tall ships. Tall ships on their way from Boston to Baltimore do not stop here because NYC is not welcoming, because of a lack of pier and ship infrastructure, and because of red tape. Participants explained we have to have good maritime infrastructure for ships and for emergencies. The city has ignored this for too long and Hudson River Park is a very good example of this.

There are very few boat ramps around the city. We need to identify places where ramps are an option. A ramp on the west side of Manhattan would not make sense but there are places all around the city where we can provide infrastructure that will allow for more access.

One participant explained that we should be able to accommodate boat building on the piers. This is part of our history and needs to be preserved both culturally and socially. We should have boat building in every borough.

The city should have more mooring areas or anchorages. The mooring area at 79th to 110th street is growing and is consistently full.

Public Transit Equals Public Access

We have to address transportation to get to waterfront sites. This is critical. Transportation has to be tied closely to this development. Metro cards need to be coordinated on ferries so it is easier to get from ferries to public transit.

It was suggested that the City and state look at ferry service and how to integrate it with the transportation system so there is a sustainable long term inter harbor ferry service. Ferry service should be subsidized like other transportation. Gateway and Floyd Bennett field would benefit from ferry service in addition to more city and state coordination.

Participants talked about need for a better overall city ferry system. One participant explained that the City's efforts to increase ferry service has "just been a dismal failure." It was suggested that a way for the City to reevaluate the business model to subsidize a ferry transportation system is to jumpstart waterfront development. Metrocard use on ferries is important as well as ferry routes to connect individual neighborhoods to each other. According to participants, no one takes the ferry to Long Island City because the price is \$5. Metrocard compatibility would likely increase ridership.

The Critical Need of Public and User Input in Waterfront Access Designs

There have been recent examples of poor waterfront recreational designs on the New York City waterfront. This has happened because the intended users of the facilities have not been involved during the design phase of the projects. There has to be an input process for any recreational designs on the waterfront so that users can influence the design, so that mistakes aren't made, and so that public money isn't wasted on designs that don't work. It was suggested that this needs to be formalized in writing and we have to come up with new programs and new solutions which must be tested. Using inclusive processes is extremely important for waterfront access. It was suggested that in the Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, the plan should name the groups and types of input that is needed for good designs.

There was much discussion about how final designs need to be vetted by recreational users. The new launch site at Manhattan Avenue in Greenpoint is unusable for canoe and kayaking though it was designed for this purpose. Participants explained this is a troubling waste of limited public funds for public access. One participant explained that the consultants for any project involving public access design must be willing to do an on-water visit to the site before they start designing.

The Harlem Piers are a case study on good intentions for public access leading to underutilization of an important public access resource. According to some participants there were better designs proposed for the piers developed through participatory means that would have better accommodated a variety of human powered boats and other vessels. However, there were cut backs that affected the designs that were agreed upon with no consultation about the final modified designs. There must be an effort to inform people about what the actual final designs are.

The Harlem Piers were not designed with a workable finance model. Better public input before Requests for Proposals are administered is needed to determine types of business models that are sustainable and foster public access opportunities. Participants explained that an important goal should be handing over management of the waterfront site to an entity interested in public use instead of commercial for-profit interests who may charge high fees and not have the public interest for recreational access in mind.

New Waterfront Public Access Locations

Participants explained that it makes sense to publicly acquire waterfront properties and make them as publicly accessible as soon as possible. Bike paths and locations may be the way to make new waterfront parks accessible before mass transit connections can be

established. Continuous waterfront access must be a part of the CWP. We need to understand the full diversity of uses, nature, build features, recreational features, commercial features, etc., with a holistic understanding of what we need for the waterfront.

To figure out where to put public access infrastructure such as community eco-docks, floating pools, etc, agencies must be willing to travel from neighborhood to neighborhood to build demand, to see where there is interest and gauge the level of interest. In this way, outreach is an essential part of getting people to the waterfront.

We need to evaluate how we are prioritizing public access locations to ensure that we are addressing the pent up demand that may be unspoken or unrealized. Working, lower class communities do not have the time to voice demand. We have to make sure we don't only put in public access where you hear the loudest voices. Participants explained that we should open up the waterfront as much as possible and connect those underrepresented communities.

The city should consider river and harbor swimming in pools that use river and harbor water as a way of providing public access. CSO issues have to be addressed, but there are locations in the city where pools with mesh bottoms can be used safely depending on rain events and their proximity to polluted water.

Clean water in the harbor is important, but participants explained that we have to recognize that boaters *want* to go to the "nastiest" parts of the harbor because there is value to building awareness, and because some of the nastiest areas of the harbor are the safest and calmest in the harbor, and some are the most beautiful.

Participants explained that schools close to the waterfront should be incorporating waterfront education and swimming to help connect people to the waterfront. So much can be done with schools close to the waterfront.

Safety

Participants explained that we have wake restrictions that are not being followed, especially at rush hour. Infrastructure is being destroyed because of the significant amount of wave action from wakes in the narrow waterway. The finger piers at Hudson River Park were destroyed by wake-induced wave action. How can we work closely together to make sure this is addressed?

Participants also explained that enforcement and rules of the road are what is needed in the harbor and need to be addressed and be part of the Comprehensive Waterfront Plan.

Participants explained that recreational boaters need a firm position on waterfront issues to make sure their voices are heard. Participants also explained that marinas, clubs, yacht clubs, the recreational boating business community are not organized in New York City which can put them at a disadvantage. The Department of City Planning explained that it has lists of all the marina owners but it has been hard to get in touch with marina owners.

How do we give incentives to develop the waterfront area even if the Department of City Planning has no jurisdiction?

We should be looking at the waterfront edge when designing big box stores. The City should consider requiring waterfront access for short sea shipping, deliveries to stores by barge, and other types of waterfront access at big box locations.

Community Eco-Docks

MWA spoke about its docks initiative to put in more docks around the City. Participants expressed the need for more docks for boating access around the harbor. One participant explained that he is concerned about the effects on the docks from wakes. It was suggested MWA should water tank test the docks to determine what would happen to the platform.

Participants explained that the waterfront is more than the Hudson and East River shorelines. We don't have to concentrate all of our recreational efforts on Manhattan. We need places to dock on Staten Island, in Newtown Creek, and Jamaica Bay.

Participants explained there are opportunities for public access through docks at Annable Cove, at Hunters Point Development South, and a kayaking landing at Newtown Creek.

Mapping

There should be a coordinated effort among city agencies and other institutions to consolidate the many waterfront mapping efforts around the city and region. See Appendix A for a list of current regional and local mapping efforts that have something to do with the waterfront.

Agency Accountability

A participant asked what the principles are that the task force should be thinking about in terms of accountability of the agencies, like the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC). EDC explained their work to develop the Waterfront Action Agenda and their plans for goals and metrics.

<http://www.nycedc.com/ProjectsOpportunities/CurrentProjects/Citywide/WaterfrontVisionAndEnhancementStrategy/Pages/WaterfrontVisionandEnhancementStrategy.aspx>

Appendix A:

Summary of Mapping Efforts around the Region

1. The OASIS mapping project is a joint effort of STEW-MAP and the New York New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program. This map combines multiple layers that include census data, waterfront access points, parks, recreational facilities, environmental civic groups, and environmental impact/clean up sites such as brownfields and hazardous waste sites.

- <http://www.oasisnyc.net/map.aspx>
2. The recently updated NYC Water Trails map put together by NYC Water Trail Association, Going Coastal, Dept. of Parks, DEP, HEP, and Partnership for Parks illustrates waterfront access sites as well as information about localized access hazards. The 2010 brochure is not online but the 2009 version can be accessed:
 - <http://www.goingcoastal.org/img/wtrtrl09/watertrailv.pdf>
 3. Harbor Safety Navigation Operation Committee (Harbor Ops) made up of all the members of the maritime community is working on a Harbor mapping project focusing on the transit and waterbound activities. (link forthcoming)
 4. The NYC Map created by the city of New York provides point access data from a searched address from several data layers including city and state capitol projects, park amenities, cultural and educational institutions, municipal boundaries, service centers, etc.
 - <http://gis.nyc.gov/doitt/nycitymap/>
 5. The Habitat Map is a mix of a mapping tool and social networking platform. Once users create a profile they are able to add markers that appear on the Habitat Map wiki-map and are open to edits and additions by other users. The main effort was meant to alert local residents to environmental health hazards and other on-the-ground based environmental information.
 - <http://habitatmap.org/>
 6. The Green Map is a global community-led network for green map projects. Designed for both public interaction and easy team management, OGM uses the familiar Google Map and Green Map Icons to describe 170 different kinds of green living, natural, social justice and cultural resources.
 - <http://www.greenmap.org/greenhouse/home>
 7. US Army Corps of Engineers, Port Authority of NY & NJ, HEP and others released the Hudson-Raritan Estuary Comprehensive Restoration Plan in March 2009 which includes many maps illustrating restoration opportunities, sediment contamination data and public access points.
 - <http://www.harborestuary.org/watersweshare/resources.htm#crp>
 8. NYC DEP and HEP released a Harbor-Wide Water Quality Monitoring Report for the NY-NJ Harbor Estuary in June 2008 which includes maps of all the CSO locations and water quality data throughout the city.
 - <http://www.harborestuary.org/reports/HarborWideMonitoring0608.pdf>