



Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance

Meeting Summary

**MWA Aquatecture and Green Harbor Task Force Meeting
December 1, 2011; 10am-12pm
Hudson River Foundation's Offices**

1) **Welcome and Introductions - 10 minutes**

Roland Lewis, President and CEO, MWA explained the purpose of this meeting is to discuss:

- Design guidelines for waterfront development – what would make the best type of guidelines and what to include?
- What are the best processes for development?
- What stakeholders should be included?
- How to fund design guidelines, innovative funding ideas?
- Discussing New York City's Waterfront Action Agenda – Is it complete? What should be prioritized?
- Ideas for role of Waterfront Management Advisory Board?

2) **Design guidelines for in-water waterfront development - 1 hour 30 minutes**

David Burney, Commissioner, NYC Department of Design and Construction (DDC) was asked to give a presentation about DDC's experience with design guidelines. He explained:

DDC does not currently have official design guidelines. There are two caveats in the definition of what design guidelines are and what they can do. There is a tendency to assume that you are done once you have met the design guidelines -- there is an assumption of success though it may not be the case. Guidelines can stifle design and guidelines that are too comprehensive can stifle the design. Design is not a single event, it is a process. DDC therefore manages the system and the process.

In a rush to comply with economic considerations and other needs the design of a project can be disregarded. Design can be disregarded because many other significant things in the project such as schedule, budget, materials, etc. can be measured, but design is subjective and difficult to quantify. Therefore the question is -- how do we keep design at the forefront with budget and schedule?

On the DDC website there is a document detailing DQI -- Design Quality Indicators. It is a way of measuring design objectively in order to assess the quality of the design. Ensuring design and construction excellence is DDC's objective. Using DQIs Design Liaisons are designated at the start of every project to go to the stakeholder meetings and making sure in the early and ongoing project meetings that good design is not overlooked

in the entire project decision making process. Design is subjective but it does not mean there aren't thoughtful discussion or opportunities to come to an agreement. Design Liaisons start the meetings by talking about designs and coming to a common understanding of design success. The discussion on design success is very different for each project so getting a common vocabulary is important. An algorithm is used that can represent the aspects of design graphically. DDC uses this as a way of tracking design and determine where are we on the DQI. In the end it is about process management. Leave the guidelines loose and talk more about what processes are important and what must be included.

Dennis Suszkowski, HRF; Katie Axt, NYCEDC led a discussion with the following questions as the basis: What would make the best type of guidelines and what to include? What goals would design guidelines serve? What stakeholders should be included? What are the best processes for development? How to fund design guidelines, innovative funding ideas?

Dennis Suzowski, Hudson River Foundation: In terms of guidelines, we have concepts but not enough specifics for more predictable plans and vision for the harbor.

Katie Axt, EDC: The “active” design guidelines from DDC are a good model. The question we should be asking is what is the overarching goal for the guidelines. For DDC the goal was to address obesity, but what is the overarching goal and what is the concrete goal and objective that we as a waterfront community are looking towards – functionality with design, restoration, public access. Maybe this means there are separate documents or is it a combination of these. Not being too prescriptive is also very important. How can we continue to be innovative and functional as well? And how to we make sure the regulatory parts are part of this as well.

Dennis Suzowski, Hudson River Foundation: We are not starting from scratch – there are projects being built with enhancements right now and programs operating north of here that can inform the process of developing guidelines.

Betsey Blair, NYS DEC: Hudson River sustainable shorelines project offers important parallels for this discussion. The Hudson River Sustainable Shorelines Project goal is about preparing for climate change on the Upper Hudson River. How do we enhance the chances of the ecological services of the Hudson River surviving? What could we do to provide better habitat services as we design our shorelines? The project has mapped the shoreline, used this to raise money to look at tradeoffs among different shoreline options – regulators, engineers, climate change scientists. The question is -- what is the set of right answers under different energy regimes. The Carey Institute is measuring the ecological functions and what built shoreline designs are better or worse for ecological function with the question - what is going to work from an energy standpoint – to characterize the forces being brought to bear on the shoreline – ice regimes, wind, waves, temperature? Then comes looking at costs and trying to look at costs over a 70 year period of time. How do we project these shorelines will function and what will be their cost in terms of placement costs?

This is a process, a collaborative model with end users engaged in the process, federal and state regulators, municipal officials all involved and looking at the barriers to applying technologies.

The Consensus Building Institute has been used to make sure all the interests are engaged and make sure the process is working and is balanced. One of the key questions has been where are the key intervals where you can introduce innovative thinking? What is important is taking the biophysical science and matching that with social science to produce a strong end result. Also the project depends on pilot projects and monitoring these overtime to make sure that we know what is going to work.

Dennis Suzowski, Hudson River Foundation: Another important question is how to move forward? What are the next steps in stakeholder approach? How can we get the right kind of information together? The community and stakeholder process is very important because of the long term variability in conditions over the next 70 years. The design community is not coming up with projects that the regulatory community thinks of as ecologically sound. Demonstration projects are necessary.

Cliff McMillan, ARUP: Guidelines alone will not create good designs. Where do guidelines fit in and for what factors -- public safety, risk mitigation, maintenance, and longevity. Longevity is one of the key issues. The spectrum of issues could be the use of materials, use of kinds of surfaces, the question of the practicalities of climate change and flood levels.

Mike Ludwig, Ocean and Coastal Consultants: What can we do to make the design environmentally compatible and beneficial? The first question is – is it a hardened shoreline? What are you going to do that is going to be beneficial to the resource? There is a project in New Jersey to create a harbor heron habitat and shallows. The Comprehensive Restoration Plan was used as a guide to take what is there in terms of habitat and ecology and take those environmental attributes to come up with designs that are maintenance free, long lived, and not dependent on climate change. You have to design for what is there and take advantage of what is there. You can take a wall and replace it but what is it doing to serve the environment and the public? Look at that to determine your goals and objectives. You must serve multiple communities – industrial, public, and ecological – these need to be in the thought process.

Mark Minkely, AECOM: Guidelines can serve as a starter kit, a tool kit – different typologies as a starting point for design guidelines.

David Burney, Commissioner, NYC Department of Design and Construction: Think of design guidelines as best practices – if something worked, it gets in the DDC publications so that the wheel is not reinvented. This frees up designers to think of the design at hand and not go back to the guidelines.

Mr. Richard Toussaint, Harlem River Park Task Force: There are different designs going north and south in Harlem River Park. These are models right here in the City that we can be looking at now to monitor. Hurricane Irene was an opportunity to see the how the height of the river played against the height of the park along the river. After the storm we noticed that the park was lying too low and must be raised. This is the kind of follow up and adjustment that I am suggesting. The stakeholders must be included as always.

Regulator: Adding predictability to the regulatory process is a goal. The existing regulatory framework is not prescriptive. The regulations have a threshold that those ideas have to meet and they can't be worse than the status quo. The big change that the regulators can bring is to look at the threshold – to now look at the bulkhead and say there are ways to get ecological benefit. But where is the inspiration going to come from? What is the spark and the vision that has to go out to there to get the good designs to the regulators. They are getting boutique projects instead of innovations.

Mike Ludwig, Ocean and Coastal Consultants: There is no monitoring going on. This is the huge problem because we don't know what is working. There should be monitoring and pilot projects to determine what is success? We need to get these monitoring projects funded.

Lisa Baron, USACE – NY: We are thinking of how to compile all of the designs that have an ecological component or restoration component and give examples for advancing and implementing these good ideas. This could be a compendium in the Comprehensive Restoration Plan. The Corp wants to advance this. Is everyone receptive to getting this information to the Corp? How are we going to get that data? They are working with the Harbor Estuary Program now on how to get information on where the projects are, what monitoring data there is. This info is going to be on OASIS. The goal is to see what didn't work for adaptive management and lessons learned. It would be good to do an intensive search on designs.

Dennis Suzowski, Hudson River Foundation: An amendment to this is – what are you trying to do? A compendium is good but we also need to come to grips with what it is we are trying to do. Pilot projects, the future of NYC and the region is not dependent on the federal government for fixing or redesigning the waterfront. It is the City that has to design the waterfront but the design has to be done in the most environmental way. There have to be incentives for the projects and adaptive management techniques.

Mark Minkely, AECOM: Monitoring should go beyond the ecology but we should also look at how well a design functions for historic ships, for examples, and other uses. 'Did you get to the ultimate purpose of the project?' is the question at hand.

John Doswell: We are losing opportunities for tall ships, and all sorts of boats and vessels in the harbor because of designs that don't take maritime infrastructure or maritime design into consideration. We spend a lot of money on the piers and it is not rocket science to get them designed and good for accommodating vessels.

Katie Axt, EDC: Do we need separate documents?

Rachel Gruzen, Great Ecology: We need to think of this in an integrated way and therefore separate documents may not be the right way to go.

Jennifer Curran, HDR Inc: Anytime you put anything in the water you should consider the ecological aspects.

Katie Axt, EDC: What is the goal of the document that would be produced?

Ms. Adina Taylor, Floating the Apple: Demonstration projects are necessary and investments.

Katie Axt, EDC: We need to look at a best practices model.

Cliff McMillan, ARUP: What is needed is the interaction between the designers and the ecologists.

Dennis Suzowski, Hudson River Foundation: In conclusion it is important to ask, do we have the tools and knowledge to design in the water – we have it for the land but not water. A complete agreement that a dialogue among a variety of stakeholders is needed, guidelines would be helpful, a variety of types of guidelines. I encourage those in room to give this final thoughts and stay tuned.

The meeting was concluded with a presentation about Implementation of the NYC Comprehensive Waterfront Plan and the NYC Waterfront Action Agenda led by Roland Lewis, MWA. We need to be looking at these plans with an eye toward, what is missing, what is good, what should be added, and what are your ideas for role of Waterfront Management Advisory Board?

A short update was given about the Harbor Coalition, Public access design guidelines, MWA 2012 Waterfront Conference.