Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO

Greenpoint-Williamsburg Waterfront Open Space Master Plan: Status of Development

Before the Committee on Waterfronts and the Committee on Parks and Recreation

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Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, President and CEO of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance. The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA) is a coalition of over 640 businesses, community and recreational groups, educational institutions, and other stakeholders committed to transforming the New York and New Jersey Harbor and its waterways to make them cleaner and more accessible, a vibrant place to play, learn and work with great parks, great jobs and great transportation for all.

The Greenpoint-Williamsburg waterfront open space master plan has begun to re-open up the waterfront to the public and has incorporated good design and expanded ferry service; however, there are still many opportunities to expand open public access to the waterfront and on the water.

Development and design along the Greenpoint-Williamsburg waterfront should continue to follow the principles, vision and design guidelines set forth in the New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program and the Vision 2020: Comprehensive Waterfront Plan. These guidelines are the starting point for great upland connection and good design, but should only be a baseline. We should strive to provide excellent waterfront design that will last for generations to come as well as ample and varied open space for the enjoyment of all.
In order to fulfill the promises the City made in the Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning, it is critical that the City keep its commitment to building a park at Bushwick Inlet and completing its other open space commitments in the area. It is critical that the park at Bushwick Inlet include opportunities for on-water recreation and is accessible through adequate paths and connections to upland areas.

In order to expand public access and to provide for much needed economic development in this area, ferry service must continue to be expanded. The East River Ferry service has proven to be a great success on both of these fronts. The East River Ferry pier at India Street not only provides the necessary infrastructure for the ferry, but also provides easy access to the waterfront and a place for community interaction that enlivens the waterfront as well as the adjacent upland areas. The ferry service brings increased traffic to the area and allows for retail and commercial efforts to thrive. MWA continues to advocate for expanded ferry service in New York City because of the great benefits that it provides.

As water quality has vastly improved, more and more people are interested in getting not only to the water’s edge, but onto and into the water. The investment in structures to allow for recreational boating and maritime education through Community Eco Docks is a great way to increase community cohesiveness, to enliven the water, and to provide great public access. Maritime and environmental education that can be integrated into structures such as Community Eco Docks fosters a great interest in the waters that surround our city and encourages individuals to be environmental stewards.

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