Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, Chairman of the Board of the New Amsterdam Market and President and CEO of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA). The MWA is a coalition of over 700 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.

After decades of virtual neglect, New York City is once again turning its attention toward its waterfront, with new parks, housing, and job centers sprouting up along the city’s 520 miles of coastline. Particularly in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, it is critical that, as Mayor Bloomberg asserted in December 2012, we do not “abandon the waterfront,” but rather develop it in a more sensible, resilient way. However, while New York’s 21st-century waterfront successfully embraces one of the city’s finest assets, it too often turns its back on its historical maritime roots. As modern parks and high-rise housing start to dominate the city’s edge, it is essential that we don’t lose sight of the city’s remaining vestiges of historical, maritime significance.
The redevelopment of Pier 17 offers a tremendous opportunity to foster waterfront economic development, tourism, and neighborhood character while simultaneously restoring a testament to New York’s rich maritime history. The Seaport allows visitors to reach the water’s edge to observe the active maritime uses our harbor still supports today. Moreover, the Seaport is home to the Clipper City Tall Ship—a restored Civil War-era cargo schooner—and New York Water Taxi, both of which serve as gateways to the magnificent New York Harbor for tourists and locals alike. However, the current redevelopment plan for Pier 17 makes no mention of either a maritime access plan or space for community events programming. This deficiency in community engagement flies in the face of the city’s waterfront access goals in that it treats the coast as a benefit for private development, rather than a publicly accessible asset. Accordingly, it is essential that the Howard Hughes Corporation take measures to maintain the Seaport’s maritime infrastructure and keep public waterfront spaces public.

In addition, rife with historic, city-owned buildings and a distinct maritime aesthetic, the South Street Seaport District represent one of the few remaining portions of the Manhattan coast that recalls the city’s roots as a center for waterfront commerce. Ample opportunity exists to restore this district to a commercial vibrancy reminiscent of its rich maritime past, rather than evocative of a suburban shopping mall. For instance, in spite of its rich history as the site of the first Brooklyn-to-Manhattan ferry and its two-century stint as a bustling fish market, the Fulton Fish Market, a spacious complex at the end of Fulton Street, has sat vacant since 2005. Since then, New York has conspicuously stood out in comparison to other waterfront cities (Seattle, London, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Barcelona, to name just a few) for its absence of a great, permanent, public food market. For the past seven years, the New Amsterdam Market has attempted to fill
this void for a few hours each week—though taking a hiatus during winter months—in the outdoor space surrounding the former Fulton Fish Market buildings. But imagine if the New Amsterdam Market found a permanent, indoor home in a newly refurbished Fulton Fish Market building. Not only would these buildings recover their historic character and function, but they would serve as an anchor for one of the city’s most historically significant waterfront communities, one that is still struggling to recuperate following the devastation of Superstorm Sandy.

We are in a critical moment for waterfront development in New York City. With New Yorkers’ attention newly reoriented toward the coast, and a historically significant district up for redevelopment, it is essential that the city utilize Pier 17 as an opportunity to set the tone for future waterfront developments to encourage the preservation of maritime infrastructure, the restoration of historic character, and the expansion of public waterfront access.