Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, President and CEO of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA). The MWA is a coalition of over 750 community and recreational groups, educational institutions, businesses, 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 MWA supports Two Trees’ vision for improving public access to the South Williamsburg waterfront and creating a 21st century waterfront. We believe this proposal follows many of the principles of our Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines (WEDG) program, which seeks to ensure that development along the water’s edge provides equitable public access, promotes resiliency, enhances ecology, and encourages maritime use. This unique collaboration between government, non-profit groups, consultants, and other stakeholders has resulted in a set of guiding principles, or core values, for best design practices for the waterfront edge.

We believe Two Trees’ current proposal provides a valuable “public good” by connecting the esplanade to the existing street grid and Grand Ferry Park to the north, creating a contiguous, multi-use public waterfront. MWA recognizes we will not turn our back on the waterfront, and provides various recommendations for more responsible development and resilient design features within our changing environment. The proposal for the Domino site incorporates...
resilient design strategies that will help fortify the area against storm surge, such as raising the platform along the water’s edge, setting back buildings as appropriate and improving storm water management. We also welcome Two Trees’ acknowledgement that this site may be well suited to accommodate future ferry service, which would relieve pressure from nearby overcrowded subway lines and provide emergency access as needed. The current proposal also includes a shuttle service to better connect users to key transportation nodes.

Two Trees have followed some of WEDG’s preliminary recommendations for public access by exceeding the DCP’s waterfront zoning access requirements, and restoring visual corridors and the street grid for better circulation and access by the public. A more permeable edge and interface with the upland community creates a more welcoming environment and avoids the psychological barrier that often characterizes many waterfront developments.

Two Trees will meet another WEDG-related recommendation through incorporating historical and cultural elements into the site, as by salvaging and preserving various refinery elements as part of a planned “artifact walk”. We are also encouraged that during preliminary conversations with Two Trees Management, they have responded favorably to building infrastructure for maritime use, a key part of WEDG’s guiding principles. For example, the simple and cost-effective provision of bollards, cleats and gates along existing bulkheads or newly constructed piers can unlock miles of waterfront to communities and provide safe egress points for mariners in distress in case of emergencies.

Two Trees have demonstrated a commitment to engaging stakeholders at every level throughout this process. We are pleased that the project will incorporate maritime infrastructure that can accommodate moorings and temporary visits by historic and educational ships into the conceptual design for the waterfront esplanade. MWA is eager to see the inclusion of such
infrastructure, which can provide numerous public benefits and facilitate programs that “unlock” the East River and New York Harbor for the community. We look forward to working with Two Trees to convene qualified maritime engineers, boat captains, and other experts to ensure that the design is adequate for all types of people and vessels. A cornerstone and prerequisite of our design guidelines program is to incorporate community and user-based feedback in the early stages of a project’s design phase and Two Trees has continued to engage in robust community feedback.

The proposed community center and public school would benefit from the opportunity to utilize these facilities for environmental stewardship programs, such as aquatic habitat monitoring, water quality testing, and learn-to-fish demonstrations. These facilities will be a crucial link in the growing network of harbor education programs, which serve to deepen the next generation’s connection with the waterways and ecology that surround us. We look forward to working with Two Trees as they begin to identify community partners for ensuring an activated use of the water’s edge. Perhaps most importantly, this maritime infrastructure would be able to accommodate the delivery of essential goods and services or waterborne evacuation during emergencies that cripple the transit network, keeping the roadways clear and keeping New Yorkers safe and hard at work.

We are pleased that Two Trees’ proposal includes a commitment to improving – and, crucially, maintaining – public access to the East River, creates new waterfront jobs, and provides infrastructure for emergency relief. We welcome continued discussion about how this development can best suit the needs of this community, and thank you for your time.