MWA Research and Policy Directions

Waterfront Resiliency and Revitalization

Living With the Water Instead of Fighting It
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The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance works to transform the New York and New Jersey Harbor and 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. For more information, please visit www.waterfrontalliance.org.

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What do we do now? That’s the question many are asking now that Superstorm Sandy has come and gone, leaving our coastline in shambles and an abundance of lessons about the new future of the New York City and northern New Jersey waterfront. This is also one of the biggest issues that the next leaders of New York City must confront.

One thing is clear: The future of the New York City waterfront is informed by a simple ethos: **Live with the water instead of fighting it.** Waterfront revitalization and resiliency go hand in hand with the restoration of the harbor, protection of the natural environment, and access to the water. A resilient city embraces all waterfront uses and continues to revitalize its waterfront.

Government agencies from Federal, State, and local levels are now putting together comprehensive plans to protect our region and the financial capital of the world from the effects of climate change and sea level rise. As these plans are finalized, MWA urges that the general principles listed below be a primary part of the City’s implementation plans.

**Resiliency Policy Commitments**

MWA encourages New York City leaders to embrace and work with its government partners for a suite of complex and varied solutions that protect our waterfront while enhancing its ecology and providing access for people and for boats. Specifically MWA calls on city leadership to:

1. **Maintain the commitment to revitalizing the waterfront.** In 2011 New York City renewed its commitment to the waterfront for the first time in almost 20 years with the release of *Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan*. Thousands of New Yorkers weighed in on this award-winning and nationally recognized plan for revitalizing one of the largest and most diverse waterfronts in the world.

   New Yorkers want better ferry service, more boats, more recreational opportunities, new waterfront parks, a cleaner and healthier waterfront, and better management and improved regulations on the waterfront. And these are the goals New York City committed to and which remain the same even after the great devastation wrought by Superstorm Sandy.

   While the *New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan* recognizes the need to address sea level rise and storm surges, we need more specific strategies to make our City more resilient to major storms and flooding. We must make our waterfront resilient but we must do it without losing the vast opportunities to revitalize and restore one of the greatest waterfronts in the world.
2. **Research costs and benefits of sea gates and barriers as well as decentralized, natural protections and waterfront improvements.** Give equal weight in all analyses to protection measures that are decentralized and provide ecological benefits such as changing building codes, re-nourishing beaches, restoring wetlands, greening the waterfront, capturing and releasing water, and sealing buildings. Research all of the potential environmental, logistical, and equity issues that large scale sea gates and barriers would bring to our region.

3. **Expand and preserve maritime infrastructure and protect the maritime industry.** This includes increasing the number of ferry landings, piers and docks, and to better utilize waterborne transit as a redundant system that moves people and goods in times of emergency. It also includes ensuring New York City’s ports and working waterfront remain competitive and active.

4. **Update flood maps** for New York City to more accurately reflect current land use conditions and incorporate sea level rise projections based on projections from the New York City Panel on Climate Change.

5. **Establish new city governance for the waterfront through the establishment of a Department of the Waterfront.** A Department of the Waterfront is necessary to realize the economic benefits of a revitalize waterfront, to capture the cost savings from better coordination and planning, and to implement the city’s critical goals for protecting its waterfront.

6. **Retrofit existing waterfront infrastructure.** Seal, retrofit, and make resilient infrastructure that is close to the shoreline and vital to the functioning of the City such as subways, telecommunications, energy, and electricity infrastructure.

7. **Restore the regional waterfront and harbor.** New York City, New York State, New Jersey, and the federal government must commit to the restoration of the harbor based on the Comprehensive Restoration Plan for New York Harbor and funded through the Harbor Act to establish oyster reefs, wetlands, and other flood and wave attenuating natural features to soften the edge and help to mitigate the effects of storm surges, sea level rise, and extreme weather.

8. **Adopt neighborhood-based climate change planning strategies** based on outreach to community boards, local councils, civic organizations, and grass roots organizations to help communities plan for emergencies and to build support for infrastructure changes.

9. **Secure hazardous materials and contaminated areas.** Commit to implementing comprehensive plans and establishing regulations that require securing hazardous materials and contaminated areas to prevent the release of toxic and hazardous materials during flooding.
10. **Create and fund sufficient government budgets to protect waterfront.** Governmental budget offices such as the New York City Office of Management and Budget, the New York State Division of the Budget, and others should be required to weigh the extra costs of making resilient our vital infrastructure versus the costs required to replace that infrastructure in the event of storm surges, extreme weather, and/or other coastal hazards.

11. **Build better.** Review zoning, building codes and standards to prevent loss of life and property in the event of storm surges.

12. **Commit to a Resilient, Ecological, and Publicly Accessible Waterfront Development.** MWA calls for New York City to commit to a waterfront that is resilient, ecologically healthy, and accessible by people and boats. Some examples of these principles are:

   - Make sites floodable, allowing water to leave the site after inundation.
   - Design sites to perform flood control functions for upland areas where appropriate.
   - Protect areas or features on sites that cannot be flooded to be water-proof.
   - Design features on sites to be either easily replaceable after inundation or able to structurally withstand inundation or wave action (such as benches or public access docks in public parks or public spaces).
   - Make surfaces that touch the water such as bulkheads habitable by marine organisms where appropriate.
   - Provide access through docks, floating platforms, step-downs, or beaches for human powered and small boats.
   - Provide access for large boats by preserving existing or installing new bollards, cleats and gates.
   - Provide step-downs or stairs for humans to access the water in safe areas.

**Conclusion**

The New York–New Jersey region is poised to embark on a new path toward intelligent resilience planning. MWA urges New York City’s next set of leaders to commit to a broad vision for waterfront and revitalization that go hand in hand for our city of water.