Public Testimony
October 29, 2020
New York City Council Hearing (Committee on Resiliency and Waterfronts and Committee on Environmental Protection)

Re: Oversight – 8th Anniversary of Superstorm Sandy

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Waterfront Alliance is a non-profit civic organization and coalition of more than 1,100 community and recreational groups, educational institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders. Our mission is to inspire and enable resilient, revitalized and accessible coastlines for all communities.

Our coasts are under threat from climate change, and we’re already paying for it. Eight years after the devastation of Hurricane Sandy, some progress has been made, but our region is still vulnerable to the increasing risks brought by climate change. The City’s commitment to resiliency in the coming years and decades is critical to its future. Significant effort and funding will be needed to ensure we are prepared. This hurricane season, the City was largely spared, and yet we should assume that future hurricane seasons may not spare the City.

As the City identified in a report released just last week, thousands of residential units alone are in the floodplain today, rising to more than 100,000 residential units projected to be in the floodplain by 2050. We need a strategy for that.

Earlier this year, the Waterfront Alliance, in partnership with nearly 100 other organizations, launched Rise to Resilience, a coalition and campaign fighting for action at federal, state, and local levels on regional climate resilience. Rise to Resilience arose from a broad consensus-building effort across the region to identify the policies and investments needed.

Progress has been made in the recently released resilient zoning, and in projects in select neighborhoods in the City. But we are calling on the Council to partner with Rise to Resilience and ensure that every neighborhood has the opportunity to adapt. Much like the 2019 Climate Mobilization Act passed by the City Council set a framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from buildings, coupled with implementable sustainability measures, it is time for a framework to address climate resilience and adaptation.

While we need action at all levels of government, we propose that the City can take key actions now:

- **Develop a framework** that informs all land use and infrastructure planning, capital project development, and land use and building regulations to measurably reduce 1) the financial risks and costs to the City and taxpayers; 2) the number of individuals facing personal risks, prioritizing those that are most vulnerable; and 3) the risks faced to existing habitat, public waterfront spaces, and natural resources.
- **A suite of adaptation options** suitable to the specific risks faced by each neighborhood in all five boroughs, including potential costs and funding pathways.
- **Programs to support the climate transition**, workforce development to public and affordable housing improvements; financing and funding retrofits; technical assistance, such as the Center for NYC Neighborhoods’ Flood Help NY; voluntary buyout programs; and supporting emergency preparation and response programs.
• **Mobilize federal dollars** from stimulus funds, FEMA’s BRIC program, infrastructure bills, and other sources toward climate resilience in New York City and ensure that all new infrastructure is resilient to climate change.

• **Partner and plan regionally** across levels of government to leverage federal dollars and effect strategies that build on the strengths of different levels of government in a collaborative process. The City should reengage with the US Army Corps of Engineers, states of New York and New Jersey, and community members in a realistic and achievable project development process that emphasizes nature-based and natural solutions.

We must address climate issues holistically, keeping equity at their core, and addressing the intersections between climate and pandemics like COVID-19. In the near-term, we must ensure that these priorities are included in the upcoming Comprehensive Waterfront Plan and that there is a framework that sets the next Mayor up for success on building the City and region’s resilience to climate change. To effectively plan for this, we encourage combining climate strategy with budget reporting which leads to better-informed decision-making about investments and fund allocation, integrating an NYC Climate Budget into the annual budgetary process.