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Leading Mayoral Candidates Assert the Waterfront is Key to Economic Recovery and Climate Change Adaptation

Waterfront Alliance Surveys Reveal Coastal Resilience, Environmental Justice, and Maritime Commitments are at the Forefront of Campaign Agendas

New York, NY—[Waterfront Alliance](#) surveys of leading candidates for the office of Mayor of New York City reveal widespread agreement that the City's 520 miles of waterfront along New York Harbor and its many tributaries play a critical role in the region's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the City's response to climate change, and emergence from the economic downturn.

In survey results released today, eight mayoral candidates—[Eric Adams](#), [Shaun Donovan](#), [Kathryn Garcia](#), [Raymond McGuire](#), [Dianne Morales](#), [Scott Stringer](#), [Maya Wiley](#), and [Andrew Yang](#)—describe the projects that they would champion to adapt New York City to a future of extreme storms and sea level rise. Commitments range from retrofitting affordable housing units, to strengthening the shoreline with gray and green infrastructure, to promoting job growth in green and blue economic sectors in tandem with climate investments.

In a year that will result in sweeping changes in elected office throughout New York City, the Waterfront Alliance is calling on the next Mayor to prioritize the region's waterfront and waterways. Earlier this year, in tandem with its partners and the [Rise to Resilience](#) coalition, the Waterfront Alliance issued the [Waterfront and Resilience Platform for the Next Mayor of New York City](#), and surveyed mayoral candidates. On May 14, the third day of the annual [Waterfront Conference](#), mayoral candidates will participate in the Waterfront Alliance's Mayoral Town Hall moderated by Errol Louis, Political Anchor for NY1 News. In June, informed citizens will go to the polls to vote in the primaries.

"We want New Yorkers to know where candidates stand on critical, sometimes overlooked priorities such as coastal resilience, equitable public access, and a maritime industry that is adopting new industries like offshore wind. We encourage candidates to communicate their strategies, commit to action and solutions, and embrace this moment as unlike any other the City has faced due to climate change," said **Cortney Koenig Worrall**, president and CEO of the Waterfront Alliance. "COVID-19 and the climate disasters that the country endured in just the last 12 months show us that business as usual is no longer an option. We all need to be informed, and the next Mayor committed, so that together we can steer New York City and the region to a healthier, more equitable, and prosperous future."

A series of recent Waterfront Alliance Twitter polls found that New Yorkers want to see more climate resilient infrastructure at the water's edge. Respondents placed a high value on waterfront recreation, even calling for more urban beaches. The intersection of climate resilience and waterfront open space access is an opportunity for the next Mayor to marry the response to the climate crisis with projects that make for a more livable and greener city.

Across-the-board themes from the mayoral candidates surveys include:

- **the understanding that waterfront access is vital**, especially to historically marginalized communities, underscoring that we cannot rely on private development to create quality green waterfront spaces;
- **innovative plans for revitalizing and reinventing working ports** that include offshore wind development, support for local and regional hiring for the quality jobs that come with it, and investments in renewable energy;
- **consensus to expedite major resiliency infrastructure projects** through a comprehensive, five-borough approach that places equity at the center, ensuring all neighborhoods are protected, and fostering community voices that must be central throughout planning and decision-making;
- **concern that vulnerable communities are not receiving appropriate resiliency investments**, from Hunts Point to the Rockaways to Coney Island;
- **acknowledgement that substantial investment in green infrastructure and job creation** is part of the regional recovery strategy and the way to meet equity, sustainability, and resiliency goals.

Candidates comment on pressing issues

“We cannot pretend to be making progress on building a more resilient city if we allow projects like the redevelopment of **Staten Island’s Graniteville wetlands** to go ahead,” **Mr. Stringer** criticized. “I stood with the Graniteville community to oppose a City-sanctioned project that would pave over the naturally resilient wetland that helped buffer the North Shore of Staten Island from the worst of Sandy. I am dismayed the project is going ahead and as a result Staten Island will be more exposed to the next storm, less able to cope with intense rainfall, and all the poorer for losing an area of great beauty.”

Ms. Wiley and Mr. Donovan both zeroed in on the lack of flood protection for Hunts Point, the City’s food distribution center.

“East Harlem and Hunts Point, both major flood zones, have seen almost no investment in flood protection,” **Ms. Wiley** wrote, and noted that the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project will protect part of lower Manhattan for an estimated \$1.45 billion. She also proposes to build a **network of community-driven mutual aid organizations** “that the City can work with to provide timely relief and urgent communication in the wake of climate disasters.”

Using the Hunts Point peninsula as an example, **Mr. Donovan** promised, “We will expand our use of **tools like physical and social vulnerability mapping** to further understand how factors like income and race play into climate risk, and prioritize investment in communities that need it most.” He also promised infrastructure upgrades that will support the long term resilience, such as “investing in stormwater management and renewable energy.”

Ms. Garcia called attention to green infrastructure solutions and neighborhood-based strategies. “We will produce a real framework for all 520 miles of City coastline, with the same focus on the Rockaways and Red Hook as the southern tip of Manhattan,” she wrote. “We will **expand bluebelt stormwater management strategies to other flood-prone parts of the City**, including southeast Queens, and restore wetlands to serve as a natural buffer to protect our waterfront communities.”

Mr. McGuire reminded New Yorkers of critical infrastructure at the water’s edge. “With airports, marine transfer facilities, and transportation hubs all close to the water, a major storm surge could wreak havoc on the City’s infrastructure, so I will advocate for enhanced preparedness,” he wrote. Honing in on transportation, he proposed to **overhaul NYC Ferry**. “The ferry system has not been effectively serving residents and has been increasingly more expensive to manage,” he wrote. “NYC Ferry has consistently lagged in ridership due to bad scheduling and routes. Diverting people to the ferries, a clean form of transportation, would have beneficial environmental effects.”

Mr. Adams focused on historic injustices in waterfront access and infrastructure. “Over the long-term we must recapture lost land from Robert Moses era highway projects that have cut off communities from the waterfront,” he said. “Projects like the West Side Highway, which was not rebuilt when it collapsed, and the **re-envisioning of the Sheridan Expressway** are projects that should be modeled across New York City to bring communities back to the shoreline.”

Ms. Morales listed her ideas for adapting New York City to sea level rise, tying green solutions to infrastructure needs in NYCHA and affordable housing: “Structural measures such as ecosystem-based approaches using natural infrastructure like urban forestry, parks, and green spaces, and conventional infrastructure like sea-walls, circular economy and waste reduction systems... and **accelerated decarbonization and electrification of our existing infrastructure including our Green NYCHA policy program.**”

Mr. Yang would invest in “new flood protection projects along the city’s waterfront” and support “rapid completion of existing efforts like the **construction of dunes in the Far Rockaways**.” He would address heat islands by improving accessibility of the city’s cooling centers and ensuring that NYCHA residents have air conditioners.

Complete survey responses are [here](#).

Watch these mayoral candidates delve into and defend their ideas at the Waterfront Alliance Mayoral Town Hall on May 14, featured at the 2021 [Waterfront Conference](#). The annual conference will take place this year online May 10, 12, and 14, with three afternoons of critical discussions and presentations on climate, design, renewable energy, community, New York-New Jersey Harbor, the maritime industry, and ecological conservation. View the schedule and speakers [here](#). Tickets and sponsorships are available [here](#).

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The Waterfront Alliance inspires and effects resilient, revitalized, and accessible coastlines for all communities.