



**CITY COUNCIL ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE
BUDGET HEARING TESTIMONY
KAREN IMAS, VP OF PROGRAMS, WATERFRONT ALLIANCE
MARCH 8, 2021**

The Waterfront Alliance is a coalition of more than 1,100 organizations working together to inspire and effect resilient, revitalized, and accessible coastlines for all communities.

The New York City Council has taken important steps in recent years to address the threat of climate change, from passing the Climate Mobilization Act - setting a bold target for reducing citywide greenhouse gas emissions - to the recent Renewable Rikers Act. While our City has a long road to a Covid-19 recovery, climate initiatives should remain front and center as part of an equitable recovery strategy that will reduce risks across our communities.

One tool that the City Council has at its disposal is the “A Greener NYC Initiative,” which was established in 2015 to provide environmental education, nature-based programs, and ecological community services directly to New Yorkers. This extraordinary funding commitment supports programs related to environmental education, community stewardship, and green-jobs training, as well as contributing to the improvement and conservation of the City’s air, land, energy, open spaces, and other resources.

Attached to this testimony is letter signed by more than 20 groups that are all committed environmental and educational advocates funded by A Greener NYC. Waterfront Alliance, along with these groups, is calling attention to the importance of this Initiative and the restoration of funding to pre-pandemic levels. In FY 2020, A Greener NYC was funded at \$4.08m, and was cut by 50% in FY 2021.

Environmental education programs around the City, like Waterfront Alliance’s Estuary Explorers program, have long helped New Yorkers make meaningful connections to the natural world that’s vitally embedded, but sometimes overlooked in our urban fabric. Combining interactive and place-based experiences in horticulture, water quality, wildlife, climate science, and ecology, among other disciplines, these

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efforts enhance science and math skills, and inspire stewardship, civic engagement, and career pathways.

The climate crisis we are currently experiencing makes this kind of environmental literacy and advocacy even more critical. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to be prepared for future climate risks and to be educated about climate science, as well as reinforces the need for quality open space and nature in the City. The future of our harbor City depends on climate solutions and a creative pool of thinkers and experts working to improve and conserve the city's air, land, energy, water, open space, and other vital resources.

Another significant budget priority related to climate is institutionalizing funding for the Mayor's Office of Resiliency beyond September 2022, when the federal money allotted after Hurricane Sandy will be exhausted. The Mayor's Office of Resiliency and its knowledgeable staff have played a critical role in preparing neighborhoods for a future of extreme storms and sea level rise. The Agency guides the City in strengthening coastal defenses, upgrading buildings, protecting infrastructure and critical services, and making homes, businesses, and neighborhoods safer. MOR developed the City's Climate Design Guidelines which direct planners, engineers, architects, and others involved in project delivery on how to use regionally-specific future climate projections in the design of city facilities. The guidelines aim to ensure that resilient design becomes an integral part of the project planning process for City agencies and designers.

Currently, efforts are underway through legislation to codify these important guidelines which Waterfront Alliance supports.

For large-scale and complicated resilience infrastructure projects, MOR is responsible for interagency coordination and integration into the City's multi-layered citywide resiliency strategy. This is an important role that should be sustained through future administrations.

Thank you.

New York City Council
Speaker Corey Johnson
City Hall Office
New York, NY 10007

March 2, 2021

Re: A Greener NYC

Dear Speaker Johnson and Honorable Council Members,



The New York City Council has taken important steps in recent years to address the threat of climate change, from passing the Climate Mobilization Act - setting a bold target for reducing citywide greenhouse gas emissions - to the recent Renewable Rikers Act. Among these important steps in the fight against climate change is A Greener NYC, a City Council initiative established in 2015 providing environmental education, nature-based programs, and ecological community services directly to New Yorkers. This extraordinary funding commitment supports programs related to environmental education, advocacy, community service; and green-job training, contributing to the improvement and conservation of the City's air, land, energy, open spaces, and other resources.

The undersigned are all committed environmental and educational advocates who are calling attention to the importance of this Initiative and calling for the restoration of funding to pre-pandemic levels. In FY 2020, A Greener NYC was funded at \$4.08m, and was cut by 50% in FY 2021.

Environmental education programs and organizations around the City have long helped New Yorkers make meaningful connections to the natural world that's vitally embedded, but sometimes overlooked, in our urban fabric. Combining interactive and place-based experiences in horticulture, water quality, wildlife, climate science, and ecology, among other disciplines, these efforts enhance science and math skills, and inspire stewardship, civic engagement, and career pathways.

The climate crisis we are currently experiencing makes this kind of environmental literacy and advocacy even more critical. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to be prepared for future climate risks and to be educated about climate science, as well as reinforced the need for quality open space and nature in the City. The program providers funded through A Greener NYC are already proven experts in this work, have continued delivering on the initiative through the pandemic, and are ready to continue providing essential resources and pathways for developing a climate ready citizenry and creating the next generation of conservation stewards.

A Greener NYC also significantly supports equity in environmental education and advocacy, and in economic potential. The vast majority of funded programs are run by nonprofits, which are guided by missions to address community needs. The programs and stewardship developed by the organizations signed on to this letter generate advocacy organically within neighborhoods, empowering people across communities to advocate for green solutions.

With our economy pivoting to green and blue jobs, such as in renewable energy, sustainable building systems, landscape architecture, and coastal engineering, the program providers of A Greener NYC are also enabling those opportunities to be

attainable in environmental justice communities. By providing the relevant educational background and/or career awareness, and in some cases, even targeted training, A Greener NYC also makes a more equitable NYC.

Through the challenges of the pandemic, the program providers of A Greener NYC have adapted to deliver virtual services, including programs created by youth benefitting from this support, at-home educational activity toolkits, engaging video presentations, live streams with experts, and public zoom workshops. These activities provide authentic and exciting options for teachers, families, and the public to continue to help build a sustainable city and contribute actively to that goal, while remaining isolated or distant. Yet while filling this need to high acclaim, the organizations involved continue to struggle with questions of funding reliability for the initiative, which can ultimately undermine capacity much better spent on community-based environmental programming.

The Waterfront Alliance and the undersigned call on the New York City Council to commit to annual funding for the initiative, A Greener NYC, and to restore FY 2022 funding of the initiative to pre-pandemic levels. Together, we can achieve the important work of education, advocacy, community service, and green-job training contributing to the improvement and conservation of the city's air, land, energy, open space, and other vital resources, and create an equitable and sustainable future.

Sincerely,



Cortney Worrall, Waterfront Alliance
Irene V. Scheid, Alley Pond Environmental Center, Inc.
Peter Malinowski, Billion Oyster Project
Sawdayah Brownlee, Brooklyn-Queens Land Trust
Heather Lubov, City Parks Foundation
Mac Levine, MPH, Concrete Safaris Inc.
Evie Hantzopoulos, Global Kids
Andrea Parker, Gowanus Canal Conservancy
Dorothy Browne, Greater New York Councils, Boy Scouts of America
Sarah McCollum Williams, Green Guerillas
Christine Datz-Romero, LES Ecology Center
Lynn Kelly, New York Restoration Project
Willis Elkins, Newtown Creek Alliance
Katie Denny Horowitz, North Brooklyn Parks Alliance
Manuela Zamora, NY Sun Works
Juan M Carrion, OSS Project
Christopher J. Collins, Solar One
Jennifer, Beaugrand, The Bronx is Blooming
Melony Samuels, The Campaign Against Hunger
Jennifer Mitchell, The HOPE Program
Stephanie Ehrlich, Christina Taylor, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance
Peggy Shepard, WE ACT For Environmental Justice
John F. Calvelli, Wildlife Conservation Society, New York Aquarium



In the words of participating New Yorkers, the benefits of A Greener NYC:

"Being able to test our own local water allowed students to have the real-world connection that they need and they were super excited." Teacher from PS 124, Yung Wing School, participating in Waterfront Alliance's Estuary Explorers program.

"I was never big on nature, I really never liked it! But when I was part of the Green Team, I started appreciating nature more. I started appreciating the surroundings in New York more." Gowanus Green Team Apprentice, 2020.

"NY Sun Works has steered my passion for the sustainability sciences, now I advocate for environmental justice for mine and future generations." Eva, high school senior.
"The community of NY Sun Works is ever so motivated and resilient to share their work and shed light on educating others about environmental issues and more." Winnie, high school sophomore.

"Lower East Side Ecology Center's enthusiastic and well-informed staff do a great job explaining the complex topics of marine ecology and municipal composting to our predominantly international students who often don't have much background in the environmental issues NYC has to face. Observing the living marine organisms we pull up in oyster cages and watching compost get made from food scraps are experiences my students remember and they form the basis for subsequent class discussions on sustainable design strategies for life on this planet. LESEC's location in the East River Park makes it a great venue from where to discuss the challenges faced by coastal communities in the face of climate change and rising sea levels. I would highly recommend LESEC's educational programs to instructors at all levels and to anyone else interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the urban environment." Oliver Kellhammer, Parsons The New School for Design

For additional information about the impactful programs supported by A Greener NYC, we invite you to explore these web pages:

www.waterfrontalliance.org/what-we-do/education

www.BQLT.org

www.concretesafaris.org

www.globalkids.org

www.gowanuscanalconservancy.org/green-team

www.lesecologycenter.org

www.nysunworks.org

www.outerseedshadow.org

www.bronxisblooming.org

www.tcahnyc.org

www.thehopeprogram.org

www.vancortlandt.org/programs-overview/community-stewardship

www.weact.org

www.nyaquarium.com/learn

