



**Waterfront Alliance Mayoral Candidates Survey
Submitted by Shaun Donovan**



Question 1: As a coastal city, New York City will be hit by climate change especially hard (indeed, the effects have already started). What are your top priorities for adapting New York City (i.e. infrastructure, investments, ecology) to a future of extreme storms and sea level rise?

Together, we can make New York City more resilient, while strengthening our economy, promoting equity, and improving public access to the waterfront. My administration will take a comprehensive, five-borough approach to addressing climate threats, that prioritizes equitable, community-based, and innovative solutions. We will view the defense of our coastline as a regional issue and work with New York State, New Jersey, and Connecticut to mitigate the effects of sea level rise. While cultivating a world-class city of opportunity for all New Yorkers, we will promote an inclusive and just adaptation strategy that enhances social and economic resilience in the face of climate change.

To prepare for future conditions, we will embed resilience into all City infrastructure investments and prioritize multi-use and nature-based solutions that will enrich where New Yorkers live, work, and play. In the process, we will create well-paying and lasting jobs that will boost the economy and accelerate our recovery from COVID-19. We will take stock of existing plans that have been stalled during the current administration, and address institutional and funding barriers that have historically slowed progress.

Tackling these issues and fortifying our city against climate change requires a leader with extensive networks and relationships, skillful stakeholder engagement, and strong



management experience. I will work with Albany and Washington to secure adequate resources and draw on my experience managing the federal budget to introduce responsible, long-term funding strategies for resilience. Having led the federal response to Hurricane Sandy, I understand these issues, and have both the vision and the experience to help New York City emerge as a global leader on climate resilience.

Question 2: New York City has 520 miles of waterfront. In the last 20-30 years, waterfronts have rapidly changed. Give one example of positive change you have seen along the waterfront

Over the last decade, we have seen a shift towards more collaborative, design-focused solutions for building resilience and strengthening our waterfront communities. Rebuild By Design, an organization which I was honored to help launch, has been central to this work. Rebuild By Design reimagines the way that cities approach complex problems like climate change and has raised the bar for response, preparedness, and resilience. However, robust community planning and intelligent project design must be accompanied by strong municipal leadership and support, which the current administration has not provided. The shortcomings of the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project, which started as a visionary, community-driven effort, demonstrates this fallacy clearly.

Over several years, Rebuild By Design worked closely with local residents to propose a carefully researched project, which would build resilience and expand waterfront access for many middle- to low-income New Yorkers. Yet, when executing on the group's proposal, the City changed course significantly, reversing the commitment it had made to the community to preserve East River Park. This lack of transparency and break of public trust should not happen in our city. When I am mayor, my administration will work tirelessly to restore public confidence and ensure that community voices are central throughout all planning and development stages.

Question 3: Give one example of a shortcoming or negative aspect of New York City's 520 miles of waterfront.

Our city's vast coastline makes us especially vulnerable to the impacts of coastal storms, sea level rise, and flooding. These threats endanger all New Yorkers but disproportionately affect low-income residents and people of color, who already suffer from historic disinvestment, structural inequality, and institutional racism.

These communities are frequently at the frontline of climate disasters but often excluded from resilience and response efforts. This injustice not only harms individuals in our community but inevitably impacts all New Yorkers.



The Hunts Point peninsula in the South Bronx illustrates this threat clearly. This neighborhood houses one of the world's largest food distribution centers, which provides food to 22 million people in the northeast. Residents who work at the plant serve as critical essential workers, risking their lives during the pandemic to keep food on the table for an entire region.

Despite this sacrifice, the City has done little to show up for the community. Its residents live in one of the country's poorest congressional districts and experience adverse health effects from pollution caused by the many trucks driving to and from the distribution center. As climate change impacts the peninsula, sea level rise, coastal erosion, and flooding increasingly put homes and livelihoods at risk. While the community has developed and fought tirelessly for resilience plans, the City has taken little action to defend this coastline. This failure is an insult to local residents and one that could have widespread impact; if a severe storm hits Hunts Point, damage to the distribution center could cause catastrophic disruption to our city's food supply and exacerbate food insecurity across the Northeast.

My administration will make protecting coastline communities like Hunts Point a top priority. We will center equity and inclusion in our rebuilding and adaptation efforts and defend at-risk New Yorkers who the City has too often left behind. 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.

Question 4: Covid-19 has underscored the need for quality open space and outdoor recreation. Waterfront open space is unevenly available across the five boroughs. What are your concrete recommendations for addressing disparities in quality open space access across waterfront communities?

New York City has the least amount of green space per person of any city in the United States, and the pandemic has laid bare the equity dimensions of public space access. My administration will ensure that all New Yorkers -- regardless of age, race, or income-level -- have access to public land, both inland and on the waterfront.

New York is unique among cities in that we have nearly 600 miles of coastline. However, this land has not always been accessible to the public or developed for the purpose of providing recreation and public space. My administration will maintain the existing waterfront open space and will work to require that all new waterfront projects have public access. To facilitate public accessibility of these spaces, I pledge to create a network of pedestrian and micro-mobility corridors that **better connect greenways**



with each other, which will better allow New Yorkers to traverse our city's beautiful waterfront. The open space that New Yorkers enjoy for recreation can also serve the purpose of mitigating the effects of sea level rise, coastal flooding, and to bolster the **city's stormwater management policies** and plan.

I am committed to restructuring funding to ensure equitable quality, maintenance, and access to open spaces across all five boroughs. In doing so, I will work to prioritize waterfront communities as well as environmental justice communities for funding and resources.

I believe that outdoor education can and should also play a role in facilitating waterfront open space access for New Yorkers. In my climate plan, I have pledged to make sustainability a hallmark of K-12 education through a variety of initiatives. One way we can do this is by expanding the model provided by the **Science and Resilience Institute at Jamaica Bay, housed at Brooklyn College and founded in the wake of Hurricane Sandy**. In doing so, we can facilitate waterfront restoration and access for recreational and educational purposes while also working to create real-time solutions for communities most at risk from climate change.

Question 5: Historically, many neighborhoods have suffered from environmentally racist policies from power plant siting to housing in the floodplain to industrial waste in communities and waterways. What are your concrete recommendations for policies that will turn the tide and provide climate just solutions to our City's most vulnerable populations?

Climate change and equity are inseparable. These issues must be thought of in an integrated manner so that New York supports long-term health and sustainability in an equitable way - one that addresses past harms to our communities and creates new power structures accountable to their future, committing us irreversibly to a just transition.

In planning for climate justice, I believe in empowering neighborhoods to reimagine their communities. One of my campaign's signature climate and environmental justice commitments is to turn the Rikers Island Prison Complex into a physical manifestation of environmental justice. My administration will work with stakeholders citywide“ including community members that have been impacted by the Rikers system and residents that have historically been left out of planning processes “ to ensure this island becomes a cornerstone of community development and a just transition for uses like green energy, composting, wastewater treatment to provide clean water, and possibly even new public space. Already, the City Council has passed the Renewable Rikers Act to facilitate this transformation. These are concrete steps towards attaining long-



overdue environmental justice in our city. I understand it will take even more courage, commitment, and work as Mayor to keep moving towards these goals. Translating goals into funded and implemented projects requires someone with skills in stakeholder engagement and consensus-building, development and financing, and in understanding how to update outdated codes, regulations and laws.

Achieving this vision could also promote creative, win-win-win solutions for communities, the economy, and the environment in places citywide by facilitating the permanent dismantling of carbon or waste infrastructure elsewhere. I will leverage the convening power of the Mayor's office to work with community residents and stakeholders to drive just outcomes, including in waterfront communities where we have active peaker plant infrastructure, industrial waste sites, and other environmental harms. I will be relentless in coordinating a whole new government planning approach to achieve the most just and equitable community outcomes in all cases.

Question 6: How do you see the harbor and the maritime sector playing a central role in the City's economy and recovery in the years ahead?

The harbor and maritime industry is integral to our City's recovery in the years ahead. The waterfront is central to the city's identity and can be a vehicle for innovation and job creation. Investing in green and blue jobs will spur economic growth, while creating the tools and solutions to address climate change.

I believe that rebuilding our economy requires ensuring a fair playing field for everyone, where each New Yorker has an opportunity at a life with dignity; where anyone can earn a decent wage, build a business, and test their talents and ambitions; and where businesses and families have a chance to thrive in every neighborhood and every borough.

The City's economic recovery will inevitably include major infrastructure investments, and I will ensure that these funds support the City's waterfront resilience for the long-term, such as by investing in stormwater management and renewable energy. My plans for a Clean Power Accelerator will support private investment in offshore wind and create green job opportunities at the waterfront. We will also establish an NYC Climate Corps, which employs young people to work on clean energy and resilience projects through nonprofit and local government grants. This will build on local service and educational programs, such as the CUNY Service Corps and CUNY's existing, high-quality environmental, sustainability, and energy management degree and credentialing programs.



My strong relationships with President Biden, Vice President Harris, and members of Congress puts me in a unique position to get the federal support that New Yorkers need and have been cruelly denied. I will work to ensure we receive the necessary business and infrastructure aid to rebuild and reimagine our economy as one that works for all New Yorkers.