WATERFRONT ALLIANCE STATEMENT ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023
FLOODING IN NEW YORK CITY AND NEW JERSEY

First and foremost, we hope that you and every New York and New Jersey resident are safe after recent torrential rain that battered the region, particularly on Friday.

The flood vulnerability of our critical infrastructure, including subway lines, schools, airports, and highways was on full display yet again. On Friday, September 29, 2023, a state of emergency was declared calling for residents to avoid travel, given the disruption to roads and transportation infrastructure, and causing extensive damage to homes and communities.

Across New York City, some neighborhoods saw up to 8 inches of rainfall. Parts of New Jersey, like Long Branch, experienced up to 7.75 inches. The Brooklyn Navy Yard, at one point, saw 2.5 inches of rainfall in one hour, which is significantly beyond the 1.75 inches per hour that the NYC stormwater system was designed to handle.

These extreme rainfall events demonstrate the need for providing solutions to all of the impacts the climate crisis will bring. The risks in our region do not operate in silos, rather they are exacerbated and compounded by other climate risks. We are experiencing coastal flood risks, inland flood risks, and extreme heat risks. We must meet the moment by promoting solutions that span across the range of climate stressors in the region.

Waterfront Alliance, as a leader in climate resilience advocacy and policy, takes a "no single solution" approach to the flooding on display last week: setting guidelines for resilient waterfront design; incorporating climate change into local curriculum; and working with our partners to promote better emergency preparedness. For years, we have called on leaders in public and private sectors to join us in promoting smart policy and planning, dedicating funding for resilient infrastructure, and supporting stronger community organizing and empowerment.

Much of the flooding from last week's rainfall does not show up on a FEMA flood map, which is why the Rise to Resilience Coalition's advocacy around mandatory flood risk disclosure for New York and New Jersey was so critical.

These events are only going to occur more frequently and with greater intensity, which is why the WEDG® (Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines) standards are being adopted in projects across the nation. Communities of color and low-income households face disproportionate
risks and the ability to recover, which is why we launched our Climate Informed Communities program.

Solutions exist. We, together with our Alliance and Coalition partners, are taking action to bring those solutions to life.

In moments where so many of our neighbors grappled with flooded homes and basements, unsafe commutes, and frustration for the systems that continue to fail during extreme weather events, Waterfront Alliance remains committed and embolden to our mission to build, transform, revitalize, and protect accessible waterfronts for all communities.

“What New York City experienced last week was unfortunately not an anomaly. We all share responsibility for preparing for the future – government, non-governmental organizations, communities, elected officials, and individuals, each with different and deeply interconnected responsibilities. The Waterfront Alliance and our hundreds of partners look forward to working directly and across multiple sectors for comprehensive and effective regional solutions. We welcome you to get involved and join the movement,” said Cortney Worrall, president and CEO, Waterfront Alliance.

“As we start to see an increase in flooding due to storm surge and high precipitation rainfall events, we continue to uncover the inequities in climate resilience and access that has always existed in communities. Several of our communities have historically lacked access to the waterfront and are now living in more vulnerable conditions due to a lack of investment in climate resilient infrastructure. We need to see equitable access to climate resilient waterfronts that provide multiple benefits – cooling, absorbing, protecting, and connecting,” said Furhana Husani, director of programs and climate initiatives at Waterfront Alliance.

In a region where municipal stormwater systems are so frequently overwhelmed, every project whether public or private sector, has the opportunity and responsibility to make neighborhoods more resilient. Installing green infrastructure and upsizing grey infrastructure to retain, detain, evapotranspire, or infiltrate stormwater is critical to protecting communities. WEDG is one tool that provides guidance for this type of site and community level protection, said Joseph Sutkowi, Chief Waterfront Design Officer at Waterfront Alliance.

“At every corner, we should be searching for innovative ways to swiftly embed blue and green infrastructure to alleviate the burden on the sewer system. At the same time, we will continue to advocate for large-scale and regional infrastructure that protects our region from the full suite of climate risks, like we are for the Army Corps of Engineers’ Harbor and Tributaries Study.
There are no longer any excuses for bold action on comprehensive climate resilience,” said Tyler Taba, senior manager for climate policy at Waterfront Alliance.

“Friday’s storm was an example of how quickly extreme weather can upend our days, homes, and families. Tools like Notify NYC and Ready New York can help all of us stay aware and prepared for the increasingly strong climate stressors in our region, but we must continue to demand more resources, public spaces, and community-led plans in order to keep our communities strong and intact. It is our responsibility to prepare not only for potential disaster but for a local, climate resilient future,” said Ben Regas, community organizer at Waterfront Alliance.