2024 Waterfront and Resilience Platform

WATERFRONT ALLIANCE POLICY PRIORITIES

Collaborative, committed change will protect and revitalize waterfronts, coastlines, and beyond.

FEBRUARY 2024
WE HAVE THE SOLUTIONS.
Now we must continue the action, together for:

CLIMATE
To prepare for a more uncertain world and work together to keep our cities and communities protected.

FUTURE
To educate and inspire a future generation of stewards.

ACCESS
To ensure we are designing waterfronts and coastlines for generations to come.

ECONOMY
To ensure the New York-New Jersey harbor is central to the economy of the region and all who depend on it.

INTRODUCTION

The Waterfront Alliance strives to protect and revitalize everything people love along waterfronts, coastlines, and beyond, and to energize others to do the same. The places where water meets land are our most treasured and special on the planet; they inspire our work.

We achieve change through collaborations, education, our own initiatives and campaigns, and by inspiring others to become changemakers. Unlike other organizations that focus on single solutions, we energize all to join forces to achieve powerful outcomes for everyone, together.

Waterfront Alliance, with our more than 1,100 Alliance partners, builds, transforms, revitalizes, and protects accessible waterfronts for all communities. We envision waterways and coastlines that are alive with commerce and recreation and reflect the vitality and diversity of the communities that surround them. We strive for communities and a nation that are prepared for the climate crisis and committed to building excitement where water meets land.

Environmental Justice

Many communities in our region face a legacy of environmental injustice, in which historically government-sanctioned racist and anti-immigrant policies, such as redlining, have created stark differences in quality of life between neighborhoods in the same city. Consequently, neighborhoods home to primarily low-income and immigrant communities and communities of color are at the frontlines of the climate crisis, experiencing extreme heat, poor air quality, and flooding to greater degrees.

All of our program and policy priorities are dedicated to serving historically disinvested communities and neighborhoods.
Environmental Justice is not a separate policy priority for Waterfront Alliance; rather, it is embedded throughout our work and serves as the lens through which each policy priority gets viewed. We believe to improve the health of people and the environment, we must have clear leadership, approach problems holistically, and fund community- and science-based solutions in a way that is transparent and prioritizes equity and justice.

**Waterfront Alliance Policy Priorities**

Waterfront Alliance leads policy and legislative change; informs communities, elected leaders and decision makers; and educates residents, to bring forth systemic solutions. The 2024 Waterfront and Resilience Platform describes the following policy priorities and solutions for New York, New Jersey, and beyond:

1. Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation
   a. Infrastructure and Design
   b. Governance and Planning
   c. Dedicated Funding and Investment
   d. Emergency Preparedness
   e. Developing the Best Waterfronts Possible
2. Climate and Estuary Education
3. Public Access to the Waterfront
4. Maritime, Working Waterfront, and Waterborne Transportation
5. Renewable Energy
1. CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION

Waterfront Alliance believes in a holistic approach to impacts from climate change centered on a spectrum of solutions, spanning from large-scale grey infrastructure to voluntary relocation and everything in between. There is no single solution to address the climate crisis. Our priorities center on infrastructure and design, governance, dedicated funding, emergency preparedness; and includes incentives, policies, and programs to develop and restore the best waterfronts possible.

We are guided by our commitment to climate resilient solutions grounded in meaningful community engagement, dedicated to environmental justice, and driven by science.

a. Infrastructure and Design

Infrastructure and design solutions to climate change are some of the most long-lasting and effective means of achieving livable communities, cities, and regions in the Anthropocene. Waterfront Alliance embraces the “protect, accommodate, and retreat model” for climate resilience (see Figure 1). From storm surge barriers to rain gardens, from retrofitting homes to uptake in flood insurance, from limiting irresponsible development to equitable housing mobility; we push solutions that meet community needs and desires while simultaneously meeting the moment for bold climate action.

![Figure 1: Protect, Accommodate, Retreat Model (Source: Bay-Adapt)](image-url)
Protect and Resist

Promote Multi-Hazard, Green and Grey Infrastructure Projects
Prioritize holistic climate resilient coastal and inland flooding infrastructure, with emphasis on natural and nature-based solutions, especially those that restore floodplains and ecosystems. Following the passage of S.5186/A.5221-A, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) must strengthen guidance to encourage living shorelines as the preferred alternative for shoreline protection. This law strengthens the ability of DEC to prioritize living shorelines over hardened shorelines in project permits.

Get the New York–New Jersey Harbor and Tributaries Study (HATS) Right
Continue to advocate for a more comprehensive resilience project from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, centered on studying multiple climate hazards, greater community engagement, prioritizing natural and nature-based features and non-structural solutions, and using the best available climate projections.

Accommodate

Expand Capacity for Stormwater Management and Inland Flooding
Commit to quicker and greater investments in the NYC Cloudburst Management and Bluebelt Program to expand the City’s ability to manage extreme rainfall. Expedite expansion of drainage capacity throughout the City to prevent flooding, starting with building out stormwater sewers or retention tanks in vulnerable areas with limited drainage systems. Waterfront Alliance also supports the passage of the Water Bill Fairness Act (S.4169/A.4019), which ensures local water boards have the authority to restructure water and sewer rates to pay for climate resilience projects.

Commit to 1% of City Budget for Parks
Substantially increase funding in maintenance and operations for NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. Parks not only offer climate solutions to flooding, water quality, and extreme heat, but also quality of life benefits to New Yorkers. The waterfront facilities maintained by the NYC Parks are 77 years old, on average, which is a long stretch for infrastructure that takes constant abuse from water and weather.
**Climate-Ready Housing**
Commit to a Climate Resilience Retrofit Incentive Program that builds off successful City-funded initiatives, such as NYC Accelerator, and helps to advance retrofits passed in Zoning for Coastal Flood Resiliency. A climate resilience package of programs must incentivize and provide grants for building retrofits to match the efforts already underway on sustainability and energy retrofits. Additionally, Waterfront Alliance supports investing $2 billion annually in NYCHA capital repairs underscoring climate risk and resiliency needs.

**Retreat**

**Establish a Permanent Voluntary Buyout Program in New York City**
Create a voluntary, permanent housing mobility and land adaptation program for residents in New York City. Waterfront Alliance will continue to coordinate and collaborate with the New York City Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice (MOCEJ) and Bureau of Coastal Resilience at the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) to launch the City’s first permanent voluntary buyout program, in accordance with the latest PlaNYC commitments. In addition to the City’s ongoing work, Waterfront Alliance is working with the New York City Council to introduce and pass legislation that would require the City to commit to the long-term vitality of such a program.

**Balance Growth, Density, and Climate Risks through Land Use and Zoning**
Set limits and guidelines for new development in the floodplain. Zoning changes are needed to reconcile growth in areas at higher risk of climate change, with a particular focus on risk to housing and building stock through future decades. We support integrating design guidelines, like WEDG® (Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines) and New York City’s Climate Resilience Design Guidelines into building code and infrastructure design standards, as well as incentivize the use of best practices in resilient and ecologically sound design. We also support and contribute to the addition of waterfront codes for non-building structures over water to the NYC Construction Codes.

**b. Governance and Planning**
The New York–New Jersey region, the most densely populated region in the country, comprises multiple jurisdictions with varying responsibilities for climate resilience. Built around a vast harbor and estuary shared by two states that have nurtured life and commerce since the earliest human settlement, governance on climate resilience across the region is fragmented. Because climate change knows no boundaries, a robust governance structure, as well as comprehensive regional planning, are necessary to protect people, lives, and local economies to ensure the survival of the region.
Advance the Five Borough Climate Adaptation Plan
Commit to Local Law 122 and create a five borough climate adaptation plan that lays out an action plan for climate resilience and adaptation investments across the City, with focus on Environmental Justice and communities facing historic disinvestment. Waterfront Alliance continues to call for a unifying climate blueprint for decision making about climate resilient investments. This roadmap for making New York City more resilient will identify the greatest climate-related threats, and recommend a prioritized sequence of solutions for the short, medium, and long-term across different communities.

Develop a New York State Climate Resilience Plan and Appoint a Chief Resilience Officer
Establish a Statewide Climate Resilience Plan for New York that ensures a coordinated approach to the State’s coastal and inland resilience. Such a plan would require the appointment of a Chief Resilience Officer by the Governor, as well as an inter-agency task force. Waterfront Alliance supports the Climate Resilient New York Act of 2024 (S.8158) to create and coordinate this plan.

Advance Resilient NJ Engagement into Action Plans
Develop Action Plans from Resilient NJ engagement. Resilient NJ is an assistance program that supports local and regional climate resilience planning in New Jersey. Following robust community engagement, led by New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), local and regional organizations, and municipalities, Waterfront Alliance seeks to take the engagements a step further by coordinating Action Plans for how to swiftly advance recommendations into actions.

Codify a Bureau of Coastal Resilience within New York City’s Department of Environmental Protection
Draft and pass legislation to create a permanent home for the Bureau of Coastal Resilience within the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. In 2023, New York City created a new Bureau of Coastal Resilience, as part of commitments made in the latest PlaNYC. Waterfront Alliance supports legislation to codify this office into permanent existence, and to lead the governance of coastal resilience for the City at large.
Develop a National Climate Resilience Strategy
Pass the National Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy Act (S.3531 / H.R.6461), which would develop a national resilience strategy that streamlines federal support, leads with science, puts nature to work, and addresses historical inequities. Following the historic federal investments in resilience planning and projects, it is critical to break down the federal government’s siloed approaches to disaster preparedness that often create inefficiencies and challenges for state and local partners.

c. Dedicated Funding and Investment
Across the Harbor region, communities have developed and led resilience plans for their neighborhoods. Municipalities and state agencies, too, have spent decades conducting research and planning efforts. In many cases, solutions exist and are ready to be implemented. Funding for climate resilience and adaptation must be sustained. This funding must exist as a line item every year. We can no longer continue to rely on post-disaster funding, which results in ad-hoc and uncoordinated planning and project construction.

Leverage Federal Funding for Climate Resilience and Adaptation
Ensure the New York—New Jersey harbor region fights for federal funding directed to climate resilience. Tight state and municipal budgets should not hamper our region’s ability to withstand the effects of the climate crisis. Waterfront Alliance recommends that municipalities across both states begin to commit capital investments to projects in FY25 and beyond to help secure federal funding. We encourage agencies to partner together on funding applications to address overlapping climate hazards.
Strategically Allocate Environmental Bond Act Funding
Increase Bond Act investment in environmental justice communities. New Yorkers overwhelmingly approved a ballot proposition to make $4.2 billion available for environmental and community projects. At least 35 percent of funding will be directed to environmental justice communities. Waterfront Alliance urges the State to raise funds for environmental justice communities to 40 percent, in line with the Justice40 Initiative. Additionally, $250 million is dedicated to voluntary home buyouts. We encourage the State to thoroughly evaluate how buyout funding is allocated, with priority toward towns and municipalities seeking to establish a permanent program.

Remove Caps on New York City’s Funding Eligibility
Provide New York City a fair share of federal funding. New York State excludes municipalities with more than 300,000 people from the vast majority of funding for clean water infrastructure. New York City is the only city in the state with more than 300,000 people. Because of these State funding rules, last year, New York City received just 2 percent of available water infrastructure grant funds. Waterfront Alliance calls on New York State to remove these caps on New York City’s funding eligibility, especially considering 59 percent of New York State’s disadvantaged communities are in New York City.

d. Emergency Preparedness
Communities on the frontlines of climate change often lack access to the necessary tools and resources to adapt and prepare for extreme weather. Accessing such resources is especially critical as it can take years—even decades—before climate-resilient infrastructure is constructed.

Waterfront Alliance works directly with community-based organizations and individuals to ensure a baseline awareness of emergency preparedness tools. These tools include weather notifications, hurricane evacuation zone information, preparation of go-bags, shelter location information, and more.
Expand Funding for Cooling Assistance HEAP Program
Immediately increase [HEAP Cooling Assistance Program] funding to New York State to provide cooling services to New York residents. As each summer continues to break record high temperatures, the demand for cooling assistance will increase, and it is critical to have tools in place to keep residents safe. Waterfront Alliance strongly advocates for additional federal and state funding for HEAP. With this additional funding, Waterfront Alliance further advocates for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to subsidize summer utility bills in addition to expanding eligibility for the program.

Establish Resilience Hubs
Introduce resilience hubs in the region to better support and protect communities adversely affected by extreme weather. Resilience hubs are public spaces where residents can obtain direct services, use free amenities, and shelter from the outside. Contrary to the current system for cooling centers, resilience hubs are open year-round and provide multiple resources and benefits. To confront extreme conditions, protect vulnerable residents, and enhance community development, dozens of cities across the United States are deploying resilience hubs.

Improving Disaster Preparedness Communication
Increase the accessibility of communication related to disaster preparedness during climate related hazards to communities in New York and New Jersey. It is critical that city, state, and federal governments and agencies provide useful and vital disaster preparedness information that is accessible in multiple languages and easily understandable. Waterfront Alliance strongly advocates for this communication to be accessed through media sources that are easily navigable and meet communities where they are.

e. Developing the Best Waterfronts Possible
From intricate ecosystems to overlapping jurisdictions and land use policies, waterfront design is complex. Much in the way LEED® brought energy efficiency to countless projects across the country, WEDG® (Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines) brings climate resilience and adaptation, social and health benefits for people, and ecosystem integrity to coastal areas and freshwater systems in the United States—nearly any place where water meets land. WEDG is a tool for government, design teams, developers, agency officials, risk and financial professionals, students and educators, and community advocates.
Codify WEDG

Require WEDG® (Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines) Verification for waterfront projects funded with public dollars. Waterfront Alliance advocates for WEDG to be codified in local and state land use policies in New York and New Jersey. Following the lead of communities like New Rochelle where WEDG is a zoning requirement or Miami where two ordinances name WEDG, communities can create incentives and requirements that projects be built to WEDG standards.

Build Connections to State and Federal Programs

Embed WEDG in state and federal programs that support resilience and flood protection. The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Community Rating System (CRS) and various state and federal grant programs including Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC), the Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP), and the New York State Waterfront Revitalization Program have goals well-aligned with WEDG. Those programs should create incentives for communities to codify WEDG and for individual sites to build to WEDG standards.
2. CLIMATE AND ESTUARY EDUCATION

The climate crisis is also an education crisis. It is critical that younger generations are provided with the basics of climate education in order to participate in developing solutions. Climate and waterfront education gives students the tools and resources to understand the causes and consequences of climate change and prepares them, and thereby their communities, to live with the impacts of climate change. Helping young people understand coastal resilience and having them explore their local waterfront is a critical component of climate change education.

**Mandate Climate Change Curriculum in Public Schools**

Pass the Climate Education Bill (S.278A/A.1559A). Waterfront Alliance and the Climate & Resilience Education Task Force (CRETF) are advocating for a state climate education bill that includes new P-12 learning standards and courses of instruction across all grades and content areas, a professional learning resource hub for teachers, funding for green workforce development, and the creation of an office of climate education and workforce development.

**Mandate Water Safety Education in Public Schools**

Pass the Water Safety Education Bill (S.2545A/A.4846). Waterfront Alliance, a member of the Water Safety Coalition, strongly believes that water safety is a fundamental right. This bill would make water safety education available and encouraged in New York State schools and require sending water safety materials home to parents.
3. PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE WATERFRONT

The New York and New Jersey harbor and its numerous waterways and coastlines bring recreation and health benefits to our region. They provide places to work, play, and thrive—and so it should for all communities. Yet, while 37 percent of our waterfronts are publicly accessible, only a handful are in neighborhoods with the highest need. Waterfront Alliance’s goal is to ensure resilient and equitable waterfront open space access is available to residents in every neighborhood.

Create Waterfront Access, Especially in Communities Cut off from the Water

Ensure underserved and historically redlined communities have a stronger voice in decisions about waterfront access and development. In recent years, progress has been made to provide better waterfront access and stewardship opportunities to the region, but physical and social barriers persist, particularly in lower-income communities of color. These physical barriers include aging infrastructure, hardened shoreline design, and lack of funding. The social barriers are ingrained in our society and systemic processes for waterfront decision-making. Since WEDG® (Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines) requires public access as part of the verification process, it can act as a driver to increase public access, even on industrial sites.

Follow Commitments to New York City’s Comprehensive Waterfront Plan

Build on commitments made in the Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, especially goals for future investments to expand waterfront access; inequities in community access and inclusive design; the effects of climate change and the role New York City’s waterfront parklands play in adapting to new realities; and advancing recreational water access opportunities to redefine waterfront access.
**Expedite Public Access for Lincoln Ave, The Bronx, and Clifton, Staten Island**

Advance priority sites for waterfront public access based on Waterfront Alliance’s Activating New York City-Owned Waterfront Sites for Recreation and Access report, including Lincoln Avenue Street End (South Bronx) and Clifton-Front Street Parking Lot (Staten Island).

**Lincoln Avenue**

Once a thriving industrial working waterfront, this site was left derelict for decades and is now facing increased impacts from climate change. Its industrial uses have left behind a legacy of hardened and non-delineated shorelines, industrial waste, and more. Waterfront Alliance and South Bronx Unite are working together to advocate for a revitalization of this site to mitigate the effects of climate change and potential flooding while providing a unique waterfront access point for environmental justice communities in the South Bronx.

**Clifton-Front Street**

Low financial investment and minor upgrades would transform this raw but useful site into a community space offering a suite of public on water programming. Waterfront Alliance and Kayak Staten Island are focusing their efforts to work with the community to develop preliminary designs for this site that will incorporate features to withstand flooding and mitigate the flood impacts on surrounding communities.

In addition to developing these sites as climate resilient waterfront access points, we will also create a blueprint for comprehensive regional planning and resilience for thousands of residents living in environmental justice communities without equitable investment infrastructure. Specifically, the projects will align with Waterfront Alliance’s national standard for resilient waterfront design, the WEDG® (Waterfront Design Guidelines) Verification.
4. MARITIME, WORKING WATERFRONT, AND WATERBORNE TRANSPORTATION

The New York—New Jersey harbor region has a longstanding maritime history that evolves with the local and global economic outlook. What remains consistent is that the maritime sector is a vital component of the region’s sustainability and its ability to maintain regional commitments to greenhouse gas emissions reduction. The maritime industry is source of good paying jobs, regional economic competitiveness, transportation, coastal resilience, and tourism. The region’s working waterfront presents tremendous growth opportunities in the renewable energy sector and the burgeoning BlueTech innovation sector.

As an ally to the maritime industry, the BlueTech sector, waterborne transportation, and associated industries, we seek to support the keystone role these sectors play in the region’s sustainability.

Waterborne transportation, including ferries, are a critical part of the region’s sustainability strategy, helping to move the region away from the car culture that is detrimental to our environment, and serve as a back-up transportation option in times of extreme weather and emergency. In the six short years since NYC Ferry launched, it serves about 7 million annual riders at 25 landings across all five boroughs. Waterfront Alliance supports New York City’s push for sustaining, greening, and expanding the City’s ferry systems.
Move More Goods by Water
Support investments in marine highways that provide jobs, keep trucks off the road, and improve air quality. We support development of a harbor wide plan that would commit to reducing road congestion given the growth of e-commerce, consequently reducing emissions in environmental justice communities. By activating working piers, we can take trucks off the road and increase freight by barge closer to a final destination.

Commit to Green Maritime Ports and Sustainability
Invest in green operations, electrification, and related infrastructure that will support cleaner vessels, operations, and healthier communities. Rebuilding, retrofitting, and innovating for sustainability is essential for the region’s working ports, piers, and industrial warehouses from Red Hook and South Brooklyn Marine Terminal to Newtown Creek and Howland Hook.
Expand Ferry Service in Transit Deserts
Identify new routes for ferry service expansion. Waterfront Alliance envisions several new routes that would serve New Yorkers and New Jerseyans with newer, greener, and faster transit options. New routes to consider include Staten Island to Brooklyn, West Harlem to New Jersey, an extension to City Island, and an extension to Randall’s Island.

Commit to Piloting an Electric NYC Ferry
Build up infrastructure to support an all-electric NYC Ferry. The Trust for Governors Island recently announced New York City’s first public, hybrid-electric ferry. This is the first vessel of its kind within New York Harbor. Waterfront Alliance calls for greater investments in battery charging infrastructure along the waterfront to allow for NYC Ferry to pilot an electric ferry.
5. RENEWABLE ENERGY

As a new industry, offshore wind presents a historic opportunity to ensure that marginalized communities can shape their trajectory and share in the economic windfall. However, to do that will require breaking with old business habits and patterns. The White House has committed to install 30 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind by 2030, which is expected to create thousands of jobs, particularly along the waterfront. The offshore wind industry will also stimulate supply chain businesses, such as manufacturing, engineering, and logistics, as well as the maritime industries, such as vessel operators, port authorities, and marine contractors.

**Coordinate Transmission Solutions to Enable Offshore Wind Deployment**

Strengthen and expand New York State’s land-based transmission grid to service new renewable energy generation. Meeting the State’s ambitious climate goal of getting to 100 percent clean energy by 2040 requires developing at least 9,000 megawatts (MW) of offshore wind power within the next decade. It is critical to ensure that the energy from offshore wind is quickly integrated into New York City’s energy grid. Waterfront Alliance fully supports transmission solutions that are fair and equitable, include community improvements and input, and can efficiently and cost-effectively deliver at least 4,770 MW of offshore wind generation into New York City.

**Commit to Developing Resilient Port Facilities**

Develop and revitalize port facilities that are required to manufacture and handle primary components of offshore wind turbines due to scale and technology. These requirements include manufacturing facilities, staging, marshalling sites, operations, and maintenance facilities. Port facilities in the New York-New Jersey region will be developed or revitalized to serve this purpose. Waterfront Alliance strongly supports the development of these ports to ensure climate resilience for infrastructure and for the thousands of residents living in these adjacent communities. Specifically, these developments should align with and pursue WEDG® (Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines) Verification.
Enable Workforce Development in Offshore Wind
Create accessible career pathways to ensure environmental justice communities have the ability to benefit from economic growth of the offshore wind industry. Offshore wind brings significant opportunities to the region, with an expected 10,000 jobs created in New York alone.

Signing onto the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty
Stop fossil fuel exploration, stop expansion, and phase-out existing production, while supporting a just transition to renewable energy. Waterfront Alliance signed the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, and strongly advocates for federal, state, and local governments to sign the treaty and collectively work together to keep warming to below 1.5°C.

Commit to 100% Clean Energy
Codify clean energy goals and incentivize clean energy transition. Waterfront Alliance supports a just transition to 100 percent clean energy, including S2978 in New Jersey.