

**DCP Waterfront Public Workshop Notes
Upper & East Manhattan
October 27th 2020**

As part of the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) **NYC Comprehensive Waterfront Plan Public Workshops**, DCP hosted a meeting focused on Upper & East Manhattan. There were more than 50 attendees at this meeting.

The workshop kicked off with a presentation by Michael Marrella, Director of Waterfront and Open Space Division at DCP, to introduce the preliminary issues and goals that the next plan will address. The group then broke into small groups for discussion for everyone to share their thoughts for the future of the waterfront. The main questions asked were: Which of the goals resonate the most with you? Which ones can we improve? What is missing? After this discussion, everyone returned to the main group to share their top highlights from each breakout room.

Breakout Discussion Highlights:Group 1

Group 1 discussed a range of topics, including public access, water quality, resiliency, and ferries. On ferries, participants spoke about the environmental impact of ferry wakes (and jet ski wakes) as well as impact to human powered boaters. The group also talked about aging infrastructure in upper and east Manhattan, identifying a need to salvage and restore piers in danger of being lost. On water quality, the group emphasized a need to consider water quality more holistically, including upland impacts to water quality and inland flooding. Regarding public access, the group focused on the need for more meaningful access to and into the water and the infrastructure and amenities needed to support such access, including more boat storage and boat houses. Participants also noted the variety of jurisdictional challenges associated with regulating on-water activities such as human-powered boating. Additional highlights included:

- Eating fish from the river can be problematic, the City should find a way to balance how to promote recreational fishing with an awareness about health
- Dilapidated piers (like at 107th St) should be refurbished and activated for uses like fishing; should also have public restrooms

Group 2

Participants in Group 2 discussed public access and ferries. On ferries, participants were supportive of the current ferry operation and expressed interest in expanding the ferry network along the Hudson River to northern Manhattan. On public access, the group spoke about issues related to water safety and enforcement, as well as the need to repair and maintain existing public access areas while pursuing opportunities to expand public access to and into the water elsewhere. One participant cited the esplanade along the East River as an example of an existing public access area in need of immediate repair. Other key highlights included:

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- One participant cited the Bronx River Alliance as an example of an organization that has had success in bringing different community groups and waterfront interests together to achieve common goals and suggested forming a similar organization for the Harlem River.
- To achieve public access goals #2 and #4 for human-powered boaters, special consideration is needed for the spatial and infrastructural requirement for launching boats, including ramps and boat storage facilities.
- Docks and piers are currently not serving to their maximum potential, forcing kayakers and rowers to take dangerous docking routes, and preventing users from fully utilizing the water.
- Expanding recreational boating can help create a long-lasting relationship with the water and jobs related to the operation of launch facilities.

Group 3

Group 3 focused on the topics of public access and accessibility on the waterfront, as well as resiliency and climate change. Participants advocated for finding opportunities for public access along constrained waterfront areas, especially along the Harlem River and near Inwood. Where public access does exist, the group identified a need to establish better continuity between those public areas and ensure waterfront development doesn't sacrifice the need for sufficient waterfront space and in-water access. In addition to physical connections, the group discussed the importance of community capacity and connections to the water to build more stewardship of the waterfront. The group also spoke about water quality, noting that while wastewater treatment plant capacity is very important, water quality issues are also reflective of decisions made inland, necessitating a more holistic focus on water quality improvements. Additional highlights included:

- There is an urgent need for more funding for maintenance for publicly owned infrastructure on the waterfront
- The City should explore new kinds of public-private models and financing to pay for improvements to the waterfront (for example, a tax of increased land values)
- Low-lying waterfront property must also consider sea level rise threats to open space and new development.

Group 4

Participants in Group 4 discussed the topics of public access and resiliency. The group noted that there can't be a conversation about design, maintenance or stewardship of waterfront spaces without having access to the waterfront. Therefore, public access should really be the first priority goal. That said, stewardship is crucial and should be supported, and stewardship of these spaces should involve all New Yorkers taking responsibility for our waterfront. The group talked about the need for more access points and natural edges, and how to promote more equitable access to the waterfront across the city. The group brainstormed some ideas like "Adapt a waterfront" and the need to think creatively about funding and partnerships with organizations big and small. The group spoke about frustrations about permitting issues, how it takes a long time to repair and maintain infrastructure, highlighting how this is tied to having more access to the waterfront. Participants also noted tradeoffs between hard and soft infrastructure, and encouraged the City to think beyond seawalls, as well as underscored the relationship of these spaces with environmental justice concerns. In a broader note about land use,

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participants advocated for thinking about retreat, the need to understand flood risk and prepare the city and all New Yorkers for that future, as well as understand that short-term decision making based on low-budget or low-maintenance might exacerbate the impacts of climate change in the future.

Other key highlights included:

- Some of the access points that exist for human powered boating are often not open to the public, responsibilities get passed from private agents to public agencies, and maintenance concerns often exacerbate these issue.
- There are tradeoffs between hard and soft edges in terms of resilience to sea level rise and coastal storms; participants advocated for softer edges wherever possible.
- Most of our water quality issues are land-based and have to do with Combined Sewer Overflows. This is where the solutions should be focused rather than just focusing on shoreline issues.