

Workshop Summary Notes

As part of the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) **NYC Comprehensive Waterfront Plan Public Workshops**, DCP hosted a meeting focused on **Brooklyn: North Brooklyn**. There were more than 40 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

The conversation primarily focused on themes related to economic activity and public access. On economic activity, participants advocated for strategies in the plan that focus on providing jobs on the working waterfront to those with limited educational attainment. The group also discussed the potential for multi-modal interchanges between rail and marine freight, noting that freight rail near Newtown Creek is underutilized. More broadly, the group discussed how to preserve Newtown Creek as a working waterfront, identifying a need to align land use, zoning, infrastructure investments, and policy decisions and better coordinate among city agencies to get this work done. Participants noted some tension between the working waterfront and providing public access, but suggested there are potential synergies between public access and economic development. On moonshot ideas, the group discussed better physical connections between boroughs, focused on pedestrian/bike bridges. The group also discussed the design of waterfront public spaces, with participants calling for updated waterfront design standards that discourage promenades that are up and away from the water, and instead encourage designs that get people close to and into the water.

Additional highlights included:

- NYC waterbodies are our largest public spaces. There is an opportunity to consider parallels between the ‘open streets’ program, and how the City utilizes waterways.
- Participants were interested in parks that are designed for close interactions with the water.
- Some participants advocated for waterfront wilderness areas, not beautified or intended for public use.

Group 2

The conversation primarily focused on public access, the working waterfront, and economic activity. Participants were interested in making sure that New York City is positioned to be a leader in offshore wind infrastructure and other renewable energy. Participants suggested that this would not only lead to the environmental benefits of cleaner energy but also direct and secondary jobs that such industries would create. In order to set the stage for jobs in the green energy sector, participants recommended establishing workforce development programs through local institutions and giving residents in waterfront communities where this infrastructure would be assembled, repaired, and make landfall priority access to such jobs. In terms of public access and raising awareness of New York City's waterfront, participants suggested improving connections between waterfront parks and upland communities through better wayfinding systems and improvements to the pedestrian and bicyclist network.

Additional highlights included:

- It was noted that designing park spaces can be very difficult and expensive due to historic contamination, engineering challenges, and lengthy permitting processes. It was recommended that coordination between agencies be improved to make this process easier and faster.

Group 3

The conversation primarily focused on public access, the working waterfront, and resiliency and climate change. Some participants were interested in mixed use development along the waterfront, including how to work with existing maritime uses. Participants were also interested in preserving and supporting the City's Significant Maritime Industrial Areas (SMIAs). The importance of working with community members that live adjacent to waterfront industrial areas to ensure that their voices are heard in planning processes was also discussed. While many were interested in increasing public access to the waterfront, there was an acknowledgement that access should be compatible and aligned with water dependent uses.

Additional highlights included:

- Private development is a vehicle for facilitating waterfront access, but the City can influence the process and design, and should use this discretion to improve the outcome.
- Shoreline edges should be treated with intentionality and there could be ways to make them more engaging with public art and signage.
- There are unique challenges to consider when making resiliency improvements to working waterfront areas due to the potential presence of toxic material.

Group 4

Participants primarily discussed resiliency and climate change, public access and water quality & natural resources. Participants raised concerns on continued development in flood prone areas, and suggested a focus on long-term sustainability. Some participants discussed the language that is used throughout the Resiliency theme, suggesting that ‘Resiliency’ has brought back the need to ‘protect’ and ‘wall-off’ the waterfront, negating the opportunity of more natural/softer approaches to adapting to climate change. Participants discussed the need for consistent and continuous community engagement, citing Williamsburg and Greenpoint rezoning as an example of the City coming in at the beginning of the process and not showing up again until 15 years later. In terms of Water Quality and Natural Resources, participants discussed the need for more investments in stormwater management, acknowledging that the City needs to have a plan/source for funding these investments. Some participants also noted some of the goals in terms of stormwater management are not good enough, or are setting the bar too low. In terms of public access, participants suggested that the City think of creative ways to encourage public access in underutilized and/or industrial areas, citing sites along Newtown Creek as examples. Participants also raised the opportunity to rethink planning and engagement processes with quasi-government organizations, that are not required to go through the traditional processes that private developers do.

Additional highlights included:

- The City should invest in more green infrastructure, and not rely on private developers to provide it. Similarly, FAR should not be the main tool for negotiation, and encouraged the City to think of ways in which it could encourage sustainable practices into development.
- State and Federal agencies/regulations should be more receptive to new ideas in the permitting process.
- Encourage city agencies to be creative in the design of public spaces and shoreline projects- how would projects change if agencies didn’t feel the need to avoid permitting processes to rethink better shoreline designs (hard/soft, as well as shape/location) to envision that area’s future ecological conditions. There should be more engagement and less avoidance from city agencies to think creatively about these spaces.
- Better coordination between climate change policies and everyday operation and maintenance in the City. For example, re-examining what the purpose of a street is, so when DOT routinely paves a street, it should include green infrastructure, contribute to the local ecosystem and increase the area’s stormwater retention capabilities.
- Work with local community groups, by providing grants and other resources, for these groups to manage/operate local spaces, rain gardens, and combine educational and green infrastructure projects in neighborhoods.



NYC Comprehensive Waterfront Plan – Public Workshop

Brooklyn | North Brooklyn

October 26, 2020

4 PM – 5:30 PM

Virtual – Zoom