



The City of New York

Manhattan Community Board 1

Catherine McVay Hughes CHAIRPERSON | Noah Pfefferblit DISTRICT MANAGER

**New York City Council
Committee on Recovery and Resiliency
Oversight Hearing: Financing of the City's Recovery from Sandy
Catherine McVay Hughes, Chairperson
Council Chambers, City Hall, New York, NY
Friday, June 3 at 10:00AM**

Thank you Chairperson Treyger and members of the Committee on Recovery and Resiliency for holding this important public hearing today and inviting our testimony. My name is Catherine McVay Hughes and I am Chairperson at Community Board 1 which includes most of Manhattan below Canal Street and south of the Brooklyn Bridge, as well as Ellis, Governors and Liberty Islands.

At a height of seven feet, Community Board 1 (CB1) experienced one of the highest inundation levels in Manhattan during Superstorm Sandy. Two people in our district drowned and we suffered extreme damage to residential and commercial property, tunnels, public transit, telecommunications and our electrical grid.

CB1 has played an active and positive role in the public process of recovery, resiliency and sustainability for over three years since Superstorm Sandy. Lower Manhattan is in immediate need of resiliency and hardening measures. It has been almost four years since Sandy and we are concerned about both the short-term and long-term time frame. Lower Manhattan remains largely unprotected while we face an increasing potential for suffering extreme weather events and subsequent damage.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released a report in May 2016 stating that climate change is fast becoming one of the most significant risks for World Heritage sites.¹ One such site is the Statue of Liberty, a CB1 landmark, which is "actually at considerable risk from some of the impacts of climate change – especially sea-level rise, increased intensity of storms and storm surges." In October 2012, flood waters from Superstorm Sandy inundated 75% of Liberty Island. The statue itself was not harmed or flooded, but extensive damage was caused to facilities and infrastructure. The impacts of Superstorm Sandy were very significantly exacerbated by local sea-level rise of more than .5 meters since records began in the 1850s, and the amplifying effects of rising sea levels means that storms of lower and lower intensity will cause more storm surge damage in the future. This information has grave implications for New York City and for Lower Manhattan specifically. Surrounded by water on three sides, our district houses critical financial, commercial, cultural

¹ United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and Union of Concerned Scientists. "World Heritage and Tourism in a Changing Climate." World Heritage Centre. UNESCO, 2016.

and historic resources that remain vulnerable to extreme weather events, such as the historic South Street Seaport which suffered an inundation of six feet during Sandy.

The City announced in 2015 that it will commit \$100 million for resiliency projects in Lower Manhattan to leverage its U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC) application. In January 2016, HUD announced that New York City will be awarded \$176 million from the NDRC. Since then, the City has told CB1 that HUD dictated the full \$176 million must be used north of the Brooklyn Bridge for resiliency projects in the Two Bridges neighborhood. We commend the City for accepting CB1's request and announcing in April 2016 that the \$100 million in City funding for resiliency be dedicated for the Manhattan Tip project. The \$100 million in dedicated City funds helps to reach the City's estimate of \$234 million needed to finance the "Manhattan Tip" hardening project, but there is a \$134 million budget shortfall.

At the May 2016 Seaport/Civic Center Committee meeting, an Office of Recovery and Resiliency (ORR) representative was unable to clarify whether this was the amount needed to secure our District's waterfront edges for sea level rise for 2050 or 2100, which is a critical distinction. The New York Times has reported that Antarctic Ice is melting more rapidly than previously thought due to continued high emissions of heat-trapping gases, and that the total rise of the sea could reach five or six feet by 2100, with the rise of the sea exceeding a pace of a foot per decade by the middle of the 22nd century.² The ORR representative also said that the "Seaport City" concept is no longer being pursued, but we would like additional confirmation.

The [Register of Community Board Budget Requests for the Preliminary Budget Fiscal Year 2017 Manhattan 1](#) does not allocate any funding to either of CB1's Capital Budget Priorities and Requests for resiliency infrastructure.

According to the City's NDRC application, the project that will be funded by the NDRC award has a benefit-cost ratio of 2.34 while the unfunded project sited in Community District 1 (CD1), Coastal Protection for Manhattan Tip, has a benefit-cost ration of 19.33. The Manhattan Tip project has the highest benefit-cost ratio of all the projects proposed in the NDRC application, but it is still not fully funded.

The City announced in a Crain's article (02/13/16) that the construction and engineering company AECOM, along with design firm Dewberry were selected to design a sprawling series of resiliency measures aimed at protecting Lower Manhattan from future flooding and rising sea levels. CB1 has worked in good faith with the City since Sandy in 2012. However, the community engagement planning process, expected to take two years, has not even begun and there is a huge funding gap for implementation.

CB1 has been working with the offices of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and Councilmember Margaret Chin to jump start the Manhattan Tip Resiliency Task Force so we can hit the ground running once the City finally begins the Community Engagement Process, which is expected to take at least two years. The Task Force will be geographically exclusive to CD1 in

² Gillis, Justin. "Climate Model Predicts West Antarctic Ice Sheet Could Melt Rapidly." The New York Times. 30 Mar. 2016.

order to reflect our specific needs and challenges, and the community engagement meetings will take place within CB1's boundary so that they are easily accessible to CD1 residents.

The City has submitted an application to the State to use FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds to provide coastal storm protection for Lower Manhattan south of the Brooklyn Bridge. In April 2016, State Senator Daniel Squadron, Congressman Jerrold Nadler, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and City Councilmember Margaret Chin issued a letter to the Office of Governor Cuomo and the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery urging the State to prioritize funding for this project, and to work with the City to explore additional avenues to secure funding and ensure Lower Manhattan's needs are met. CB1 requests a status update on the HMGP funds, and we urge that City, State and Federal governments work together to ensure that Manhattan Tip is funded, and that Lower Manhattan is protected.

We urge the Council to ensure that the Manhattan Tip project is adequately funded in a timely manner so as to protect this important residential, commercial and tourism hub from future extreme weather events. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.