

# TRANSFORMING THE EAST RIVER WATERFRONT

THE CITY OF NEW YORK



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## LETTER FROM DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

The Department of City Planning is proud to present this concept study of the East River Waterfront in Lower Manhattan. With the generous support of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the City was able to initiate a one-year planning study for this crucial component of the redevelopment of the Manhattan Waterfront. This study comes as a direct result of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's Vision for Lower Manhattan, released in December 2002. Working closely with the local community, area elected officials, City and State agencies, and civic associations, we have developed a waterfront concept plan which we believe is as inspired as it is pragmatic.

This study was undertaken with an extraordinary participatory and interactive planning process with the affected communities. Over 70 separate meetings have been held over the past year with the community boards, tenant associations, civic leaders, maritime experts and local elected officials. This study was led by the articulation of three major goals—to create a spectacular waterfront esplanade, to complete the Manhattan Greenway and to reconnect the communities of Lower Manhattan to the East River Waterfront. We are gratified to have received strong support from both the local community boards and civic associations who have embraced this plan as a means to reclaim this incredible resource.

The waterfront esplanade is the most important component of this project. It will stretch an entire 2-mile length of the river's edge, from historic Battery Park at the tip of the island to East River Park, the Lower East Side's principal open space. The new waterfront walkway will include traditional waterfront amenities such as seating and plantings, as well as innovative improvements such as new cladding and enhanced lighting beneath the FDR Drive. New pavilions planned for underneath the FDR viaduct may include commercial, cultural and community uses that will complement the public open space experience by bringing activity and the vitality of the city to the water's edge.

Creating connections is critical to successfully linking the waterfront to its adjacent communities. In addition to these connections, public open spaces along the waterfront will further engage these communities with the East River. Exciting and groundbreaking projects including a new plaza in front of the historic Battery Maritime Building and an expansive entrance to East River Park will ensure

completion of the Manhattan Greenway and graciously link the Battery to the East River Park and beyond.

In the Acknowledgments Section of the report, we have attempted to include the many individuals and organizations whose inspired visions of the East River Waterfront have shaped this plan. Such collaboration was essential to arriving at a proposal that responds to local needs while solving the many issues that arise when reclaiming our waterfront.

We look forward to our continued dialogue with the Lower Manhattan and maritime community to implement what we are certain will be New York's next great waterfront.

Amanda M. Burden, AICP  
*Director, NYC Department of City Planning*



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### *Elected Officials*

The Honorable, Sheldon Silver, Speaker, New York State Assembly  
The Honorable, C. Virginia Fields, Manhattan Borough President  
The Honorable, Alan J. Gerson, New York City Council, 1st District  
The Honorable, Margarita Lopez, New York City Council, 2nd District

### *Public Agencies*

New York City Department of City Planning  
New York City Economic Development Corporation  
New York City Department of Transportation  
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation  
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs  
New York City Department of Sanitation

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation  
New York State Department of Transportation  
New York State Department of State  
Metropolitan Transportation Authority

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Alliance for Downtown New York  
Asian Americans for Equality  
Community Board One  
Community Board Three  
Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance  
Two Bridges Neighborhood Council

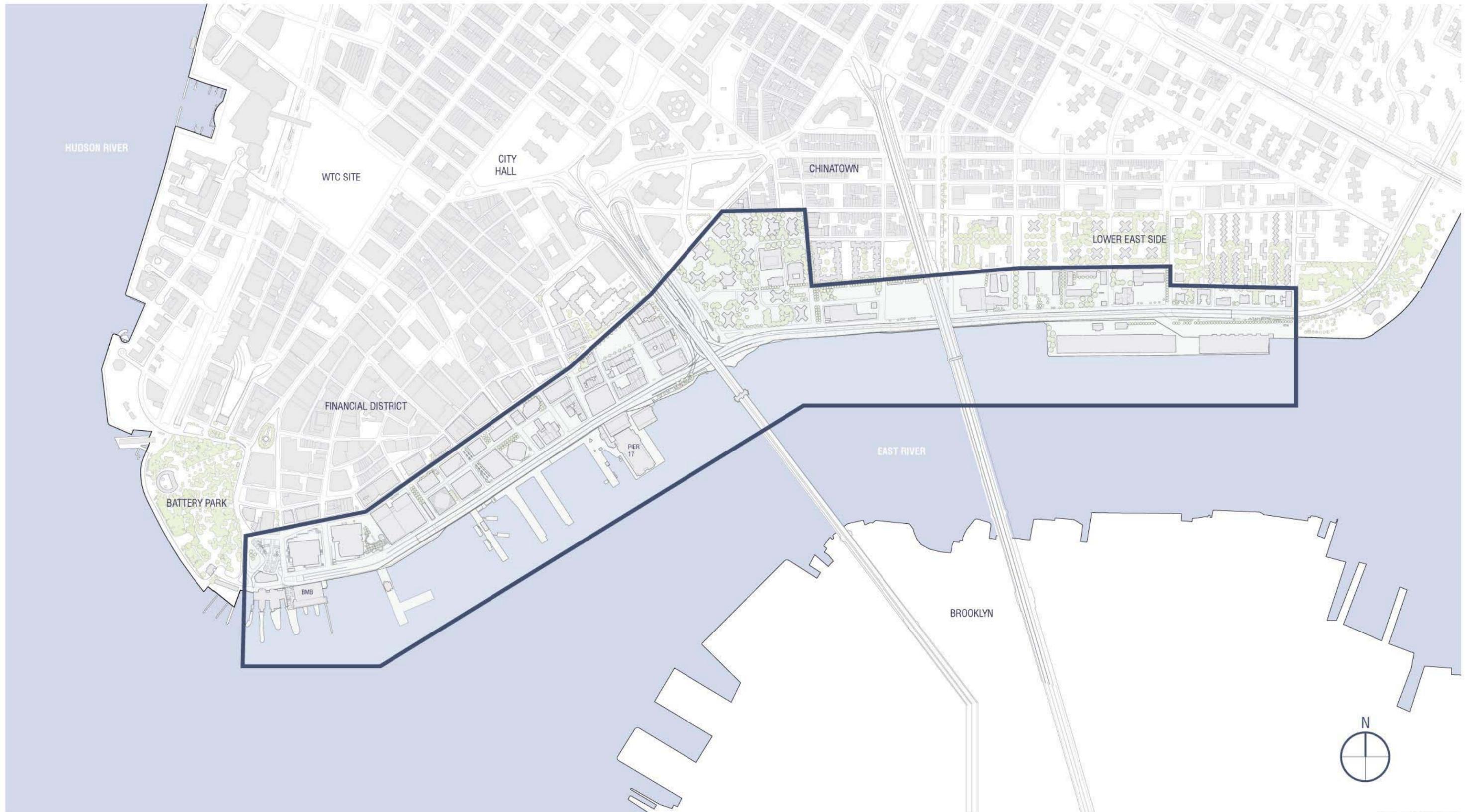


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# INTRODUCTION



STUDY AREA

GLOBAL WATERFRONT VISIONS

Across the world, great cities are regenerating, transforming and seizing new urban opportunities on their historic waterfronts. Improving urban quality and reinforcing sustainability in dynamic and changing city contexts is a challenge for urban communities everywhere. Successful results can be seen in Barcelona, Amsterdam, Sydney and London. These initiatives are reclaiming and opening waterfront ports globally for everyone to access and experience. The City of New York is no exception as it focuses on the unique waterfront of the East River in Lower Manhattan.

Though currently underutilized and poorly connected to the surrounding community, the south-facing East River waterfront of Lower Manhattan is a spectacular untapped asset. Its world renowned downtown backdrop and great vistas of historic bridges and the Brooklyn skyline provide a unique opportunity for waterfront revitalization in a world class setting.

Through the strong commitment of the City, State and the local community, a new vision has been created which is informed by strong connectivity and enhanced pedestrian access with new amenities, esplanades and landscaping. Working in partnership with the community, the SHoP/Richard Rogers/Ken Smith design team has produced a plan which responds to the needs of this diverse and dynamic community. This project will provide public access to the waterfront for the first time in decades, improve the urban design of the area, add new community amenities, and create New York's next great waterfront.



Richard Rogers

LOCAL WATERFRONT VISIONS

The East River waterfront, birthplace of trade and business for New York, has been a centerpiece of New York City for three hundred and fifty years. In the post-war decades, a dramatic shift occurred which has rendered it difficult to clarify and reconcile seemingly contradictory urban visions for this waterfront. The starting points for a new design are complicated and required challenging typical master planning ideas in order to create a truly inclusive design process.

Each of the six neighborhoods within our study area along the East River waterfront holds a different identity. We believe it paramount not to impose an artificial outside form upon any of them. Through meetings with dozens of community groups, neighborhood associations, city agencies, and technical advisors, we developed an understanding of these passionate (and sometimes conflicting) visions and requirements that each of the groups requested. Our solution has been to outline flexible design ideas that can adjust to and satisfy each local condition.

The design team met with each group, drew concept sketches in response to their requests, and explained how and why each component of a master plan could come together to create one unified whole. This research-intensive process allowed for a successful reconciliation of various visions of the waterfront. As the neighborhoods of Lower Manhattan continue to shift to a more diverse mix of land uses the residents require new open space. The plan responds to this need by reinterpreting the FDR Drive as a canopy that will provide new cultural, commercial, recreational, and community spaces along its entire length, activating the waterfront year round. Newly safe places to cross South Street will increase access to open space for residents and workers alike. In addition, new upland open spaces, bring the river into the city at every slip and introducing the city into the river at every pier. The plan provides places to sit and read, fish and play, spend time with family and friends, or quietly watch the ships sail by.

We are greatly honored to have been involved with this plan; borne out of a truly collaborative process, filled with exciting ideas.

SHoP Architects



# WHAT KIND OF TEAM IS NEEDED TO ENVISION A NEW WATERFRONT?

## DESIGN TEAM METHODOLOGY

From the outset, the design team, the Department of City Planning and the Economic Development Corporation worked to recover this area for the community. The team involved as many opinions as possible by consulting with the local community and City officials with the intent that a successful project is created from an informed collective approach to the problem.

Over a twelve month period, through extensive public involvement, a brief was established for a new program of uses. A selection of small, medium and large scale interventions were reviewed, discussed, modified and in some instances discounted. A consensus of agreement was reached which has formed the basis of the scheme now called the 'The Foundation Projects'. The Foundation Projects set out to establish sound beginnings that will encourage the reshaping of this historic waterfront environment and support a richness and variety of uses for the future.

The project process has involved an in-depth brief from City agencies and the visions and aspirations of community groups from early consultations. An extensive process proceeded taking the following into account: research and data collection on physical infrastructure constraints of the waterfront, the extensive traffic and transportation constraints and imperatives, the identification of urban linkage opportunities, removal of waterfront barriers, the constraints of pier structures an existing riverside uses and the marine an ecological constraints of the two mile long waterfront. The design team developed three different approaches to the problem from the modest and practical through the exploratory and bold. Evaluation of these options with the authorities and stakeholder groups narrowed down the options in parallel with economics and constructability studies. As a consequence of following these consultations, the team focused on an option which was both realistic and deliverable not precluding the development of a later generation of bolder visions and aspirations.

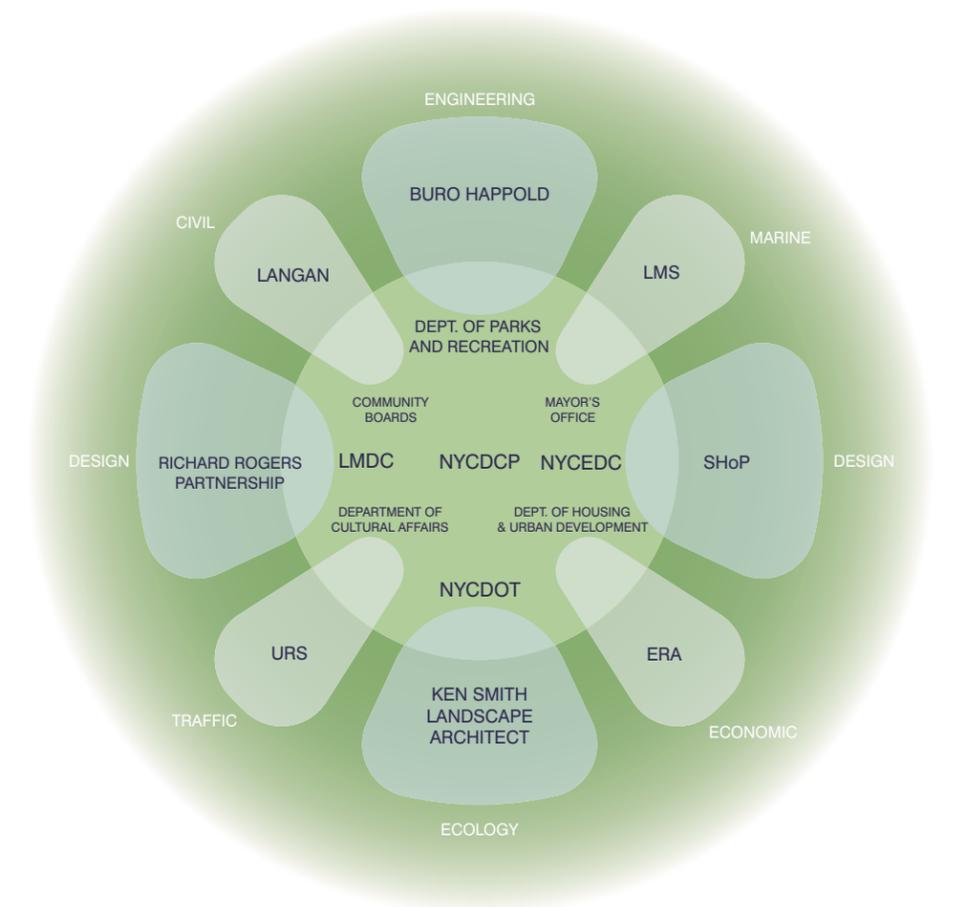
The team then refined and developed the foundation projects in greater detail, ensuring a range of interventions. A continuous esplanade linking Battery Park at one end to East River Park at the other, completes the green ribbon around the southern tip of the island.

An enormous range of ideas has been generated by the team, City agencies and the

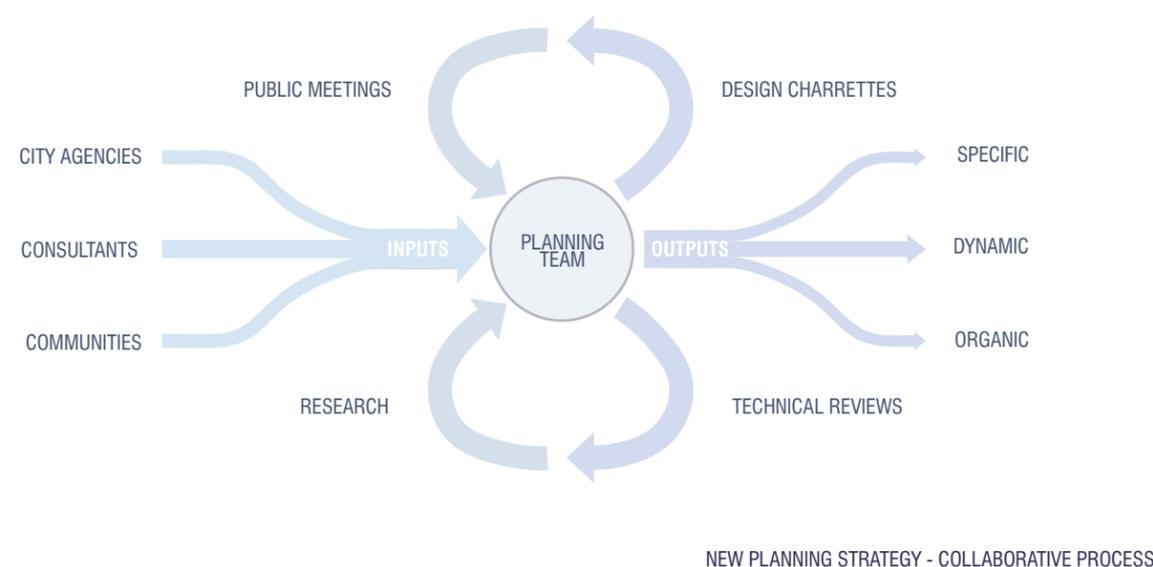
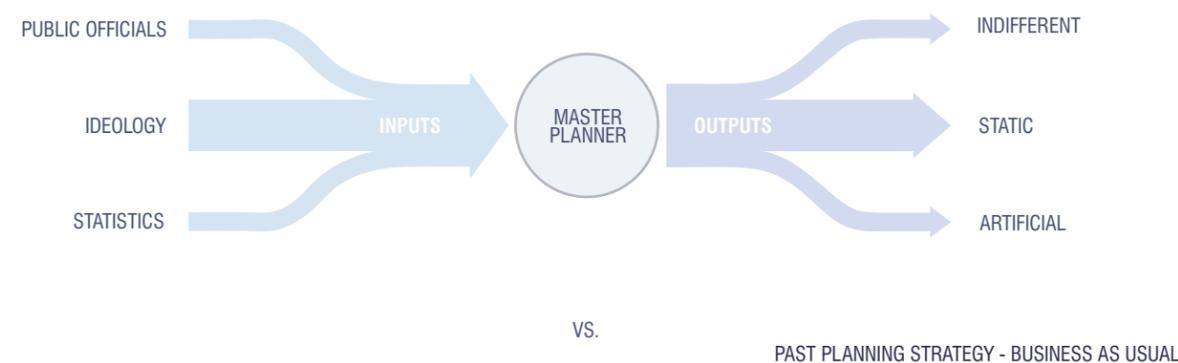
communities involved in the project. Seeds of many future projects are imbedded in the plan.

The foundation projects provide a springboard for a wide range of facilities by delivering the basic amenity of a new esplanade. This is supported by a range of facilities including hard and soft landscape, new pedestrian realm and greenway connection, linkage back into the existing communities and new water related parks and public realm.

These projects, rooted in local and metropolitan aspirations, are reflective of the energy and excitement that a healthy downtown can draw from for an accessible and sensitively designed waterfront.



# HOW DOES THE PUBLIC ENVISION ITS WATERFRONT?



## PUBLIC PROCESS

The East River Waterfront Study public involvement program began in early 2004 with the goal of quickly establishing good relationships with stakeholders in the study area. Meetings about the public involvement process, interviews, briefings, and workshops allowed the study team to get valuable input from interested parties. This helped shape the design and planning process as well as aided in the development of concepts and preliminary schematic options.

Because of the unique design challenges posed by the areas north and south of the Brooklyn Bridge, Manhattan Community Boards 1 and 3 played an integral role in the public outreach process. Each community board was invited to be a co-sponsor of the public involvement process through their respective waterfront committees/task forces. The cooperation between the community boards and the urban design team led to a productive and trusting dialogue.

Public meetings with the Community Boards provided an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss their aspirations and ideas, to ask questions, to learn about and become comfortable with the public involvement process. Smaller, informal meetings with Community Board officials allowed the study team to produce preliminary proposals for presentation at larger public meetings, which elicited additional feedback from the community.

The intent of the meetings and public process was to create a waterfront plan based on a collaboration between the community and design team. From these meetings a list of community criteria was assembled from questionnaires to consider what activities and design elements would best benefit the area.

In addition to Community Boards, participation by neighborhood groups, city agencies, and elected officials was proactively encouraged. Local elected officials were involved to get their support and seek their guidance about local issues. Interviews with organizations such as the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA), Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE), the Two Bridges Neighborhood Council were important to help the project team maintain impartiality that was crucial to preserving the community's trust.