

As part of the Public Forum series on the **NYC Comprehensive Waterfront Plan**, the Waterfront Alliance partnered with NYCDCP to host a meeting on **Water Quality and Natural Resources**. There were more than 80 attendees including representatives from local academic institutions, environmental groups, representatives from city agencies, engineers/architects and citizens with a general interest in the waterfront.

Following introductory remarks and a presentation on the Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, Angela Licota from NYCDEP and Mike Dulong from Riverkeeper each presented on the state of water quality and natural resources in NYC. Building off the last CWP, they cited examples of successes such as the Paerdegat Basin and the Staten Island Wetland Mitigation Bank. Both presenters also cited areas for improvement, including issues relating to green and gray infrastructure, as well as highlighting possibilities for further innovation in restoration of natural features.

Kate McLetchie-Sheldon, Waterfront Alliance's Chief Operation Officer, facilitated an open forum Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) exercise. The SWOT exercise enabled attendees to begin thinking collectively about major issues relating to water quality. Participants then broke out into smaller groups to discuss these issues and report back their top priorities. The ideas and themes highlighted during the open SWOT portion are listed at the end of this document.

The topics discussed during breakout groups (6-8 people) were:

- (1) **Issues related to infrastructure, planning and technology:** What issues related to infrastructure, planning and technology should we be focused on for the next 10 years? What are the related public policy areas?
- (2) **Governance & community stewardship:** Who decides? What are the governance and regulatory issues that we need to address in order to support water quality & natural resources?
- (3) **Equity:** How do we ensure all New Yorkers benefit from improvements to water quality & natural resources?
- (4) **Data & further Analysis:** Do we need further analysis, information or data to inform how we plan for the future of the waterfront?

Main Takeaways:

Greener Practices in Design and Construction

Attendees discussed the need for green practices in design and construction, as well as resilient infrastructure. Investing more in the wastewater treatment plants and reducing CSOs was a major priority. Attendees discussed ways to reduce run-off at point of source, whether by stormwater fee adjustments or overall water reduction strategies for larger buildings. Participants suggested integrating new strategies into existing NYC green buildings legislation. Specific suggestions like bioswales and tree

pits were mentioned. Suggestions also emerged to identify projects with multiple benefits (transportation and other capital works projects).

Natural Resources

Several attendees suggested the use of natural pathways as a guide for restoration. The idea of *forever wild space* and *renaturing* came up as policy and ecological priorities that the City should consider more deeply. Questions were raised about native plants and more wetlands restoration - are there local laws or requirements that developers plant native plants on the waterfront? Participants highlighted that as we find more ways to allow people to actually get down to the water and touch the water through soft edges and ecological restoration, people will increasingly care about water quality and natural resources.

Infrastructure

Major themes that emerged in relation to infrastructure included advocating for an increase in public and private partnerships (as well as balancing these interests) to drive innovation; a need to distinguish between sea level rise and extreme weather in how we build; a need for more streamlined permitting process; better carrots and sticks to meet codes and laws; avoiding the use of cookie cutter approaches; and a need to use NYC's experts more effectively.

Community Stewardship and Equity

Participants suggested that green policies should be bottom-up and community-driven. Many attendees commented on increasing experiential learning opportunities to familiarize individuals with water quality and safety; seeing fish and wildlife first hand; a need for greater outreach to underserved communities; a need for opportunities to touch the water; a need for meaningful stewardship opportunities, bringing youth and adults to the waterfront for affordable programming (youth programs, using libraries, summer programs, schools etc.); a need for citizen/science engagement; and a need to meet people where they are.

Conversation focused on intersections between infrastructure needs and inequality. This was underscored in discussions about fair share laws that should be applied to infrastructure projects and getting stakeholders that aren't paying their fair share to do so.

Data and Further Analysis

A great deal of attention was given to the concept of water quality monitoring and transparency. Attendees spoke about the need to use technology and social media, as well as other platforms, to inform people on water quality monitoring and community updates - "everyone should know when not to flush." Participants highlighted the need for better information on what the waterfront will look like in 10-20-30 years (through both climate data and planning); how to anticipate future "blue" jobs; and understanding how to break down water bills costs for the public were all cited as priorities.

The ideas and themes highlighted during the open SWOT portion were:

Strengths and opportunities

Lots of space in the waterfront, 520 miles to work with; Historically rich ecosystem and biodiversity; Economic opportunities regarding eco-tourism; Jamaica Bay Bird Sanctuary- 4th most visited in the US. - sites like this hold potential for tourism and economic benefits; Education; Workforce development; Access and safety; Local recreation - swimming, boating etc.; Re-nature; Commercial fisheries; NYC as a global capital- opportunity to set a good example for a sustainable/equitable waterfront; Soften hard edges; Creative finance; Living on the water

Weaknesses and threats

Lack of access/equity; Mismatched land use; Lack of preparedness for climate change; Hardened edges along the waterfront; High water current/wake damage; Poor public perception/awareness of the waterfront; Regulation and permitting; confusion around permitting; Lack of coordination of waterfront activities; Lack of real-time data; Toxins; Sea level rise; Loss of industrial areas; Extreme heat changes to water quality; Responsibility-bankrupt; Gentrification/displacement; Conflicting uses; Difficulties with enforcement; Lack of funding/investments

Key themes by comments (from airtable): waterfront education, emergency preparedness, equity, data, natural resources, green infrastructure, economic development, stewardship, education, greener practices, further analysis, leadership/governance, and climate change.