

Sierra Club, New York City Group

Comments on the NYC Department of City Planning Vision 2020:NYC Comprehensive Waterfront Plan

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Respectfully Submitted by Diane D. Buxbaum, MPH, Conservation Chair, NYC Group of the
Sierra Club

As I write this I listen to Nation Public Radio reporting on the State Sea Level Rise Task Force Report talking about a possible/projected 4 foot sea level rise during this century. WHEN WILL PLANNER BEGIN TO ADDRESS THE REALITY OF OUR FUTURE? Placing our heads in the sand will not create a safer future for our citizens.

The Comprehensive Waterfront Plan (Plan) addresses the major functions of the waterfront:

The Natural Waterfront, The Public Waterfront, The Working Waterfront, The Redeveloping Waterfront.

What is not addressed in any significant way in the entire 70 plus pages of the Plan is the unacknowledged need to address climate change, more frequent and more extreme storm surges and flood events, and the inevitable sea level rise.

These changes and events are acknowledged by reasonable, highly respected scientists, journalists and environmental leaders-- to name just a few, James, Hansen, Ph.D., Cynthia Gornitz, Ph.D., Vivien Rosenzweig, Ph.D., Malcolm Bowman, Ph.D., Stephen Schneider, Ph.D., Thomas Friedman, Lester Brown, Carl Pope and more and more and more.

In a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration planning document in 2007, Envisioning the Future of Coastal Management, talked about Land Management and Acquisition including providing funding for preserving open space, build a network of protected habitats and migration corridors, collect fees on all developments that impact natural systems with money to be used for land purchase programs, incorporation of land acquisition into post-disaster hazards recovery programs, and more.

The City of New York does not address this except in the most superficial way in the Plan.

The Sierra Club has long standing policies on urban development, coastal areas and wetlands:

Conservation of Open Space: hills, coasts, wetlands,....

Protect and restore natural areas that serve as the water source for human communities and natural systems....

Remove incentives to wetland degradation, including tax benefits.....

Public incentives for wetland protection should be extended.....

Public and Private agencies and trusts should acquire wetlands for preservation, management...

A commitment to the rebuilding and restoration of wetlands should be undertaken.....

And finally Communities vulnerable to climate change (read in the case of New York City, all 5 boros) must prepare for more intense storms, droughts, fire, water shortages, rising sea levels and other inevitable consequences of global warming.

Thus, these are the recommendations for the Plan by the NYC Group of the Sierra Club:

1. Prohibit any future development on or near any shore in the City.
2. Create a protective zone on every shore/coast in order to protect the City during severe storms/flood events.
3. Catalog every area that can be designated for open space and wetlands restoration and procure these parcels for this purpose.
4. Restore existing degraded wetlands, attempt to create wetlands.
5. Offer incentives for existing shoreline structure and buildings to be moved away from the shore when feasible.
6. Create a PLAN that has as its purpose the preservation and creation of open space on the shores whether ocean or river or canal throughout New York City.

References:

Draft--- Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan; November 2010: NOAA Envisioning the Future of Coastal Management, 2007; Sierra Club Conservation Policies-Wetlands, 1987; Sierra Club Conservation Policies-Urban Environment, 1986; Sierra Club Safeguarding Communities, 2010.

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