Resilient, accessible, and ecologically-sound: Bronx Community Board 9 Waterfront Action Plan
BACKGROUND

Beginning in 2016, the Waterfront Alliance partnered with Bronx Community Board 9 (CB9) through its Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines (WEDG) program to develop a Waterfront Action Plan for the district, review projects interested in WEDG certification, and expand the use of WEDG as a tool and resource for community engagement with waterfront design and decision-making. Through interviews of community members, research, and engagement with waterfront landowners in the design process, the development of this Action Plan aims to reflect community priorities and promote more resilient, accessible, and ecologically-friendly waterfront decisions in CB9 and beyond.

For the Action Plan, the divisions used in the Community Board 9 long-term planning program report were used.
COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PRIORITIES
To date, several community-led planning initiatives have pursued analysis and recommendations for CB9 (relevant planning efforts since 2006, p. 9). The Waterfront Alliance has incorporated input from these initiatives, interviews with community members, site visits, and principles from the Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines (WEDG) program to develop a list of priorities for CB9’s waterfront. This Action Plan provides a platform for waterfront advocacy and establishes community priorities in advance of the NYC Department of City Planning’s next 10-year Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, for which preliminary outreach is expected to begin in 2019. Overall, there is a broad consensus to:

• Increase greenway connections and expand public access
• Improve facilities (security, lighting, and maintenance)
• Restore habitats (with an emphasis on water quality and green infrastructure.
• Provide and fund sustained programming of waterfront spaces (particularly for youth and seniors)

More broadly, community priorities emphasized throughout CB9 include job creation, affordable housing, maintaining a diverse community, and increasing green space. These should be considered in all waterfront decision-making.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEA LEVEL RISE
Our climate is changing, and sea level is rising, raising our vulnerability to flooding and storm surge. Predictions have risen to up to six feet or more by the end of the century. While some areas are more vulnerable than others (Harding Park, Clason Point, upper Westchester Creek), there is a comprehensive need for education and support of landowners, homeowners, and developers in the flood plain (present and future). In addition to the following area-specific recommendations, it is essential that the community board, and the City agencies that support it work together to communicate about risks as decisions are made about waterfront planning and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The following recommendations represent a synthesis of the highest priorities identified by community outreach and leadership. Also included is an approximate estimate as to their feasibility (hard, moderate, easy) and magnitude of funding (below)

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<tr>
<th>Project funding</th>
<th>Large = $1-5 million (major capital)</th>
<th>Medium = $100,000-$1 million (grant funding)</th>
<th>Small = $5,000-$100,000</th>
<th>Volunteer/leveraging = 0-$5,000</th>
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Northwest (Bronx River, Bruckner, Soundview North)
The northwest section of CB9 is in the process of large-scale changes to public access as a result of the Starlight Park expansion and the to-be demolished Sheridan Expressway in neighboring Community Boards 2 -3. Both projects will increase connections to and across the Bronx River, as well as increasing overall green space. However, there are still stretches of the waterfront on the east side of the river that have limited access. Recommendations for this area center on expanded greenway connections, zoning, and programming:

Increase greenway connections and expand public access: the expanded greenway and bridges across the river are planned as part of Starlight Park completion will help connect Soundview residents to the Bronx River and improve green infrastructure. Additional improvements are needed to connect these new public spaces to communities on east side of the river. Specifically:

- Open and enhance shoreline street end at Story Avenue to improve the visual and pedestrian access to the waterfront.
  
  Implementation: private
  
  Project funding: medium
  
  Feasibility: moderate

- Increase wayfinding signage and safe, welcoming corridors between riverfront Parks, such as safer street crossings (pedestrian-only light) underneath the Bruckner expressway and construction and programming for the “Soundview Market” underneath the Bruckner Expressway.¹ ²
  
  Implementation: New York State Dept. of Transportation
  
  Project funding: medium to high
  
  Feasibility: moderate

- Pursue exemplary public access along the riverfront between Story and Lafayette avenues, using the principles of the WEDG program - a resilient edge with natural shoreline features and direct access to the water for people and boats.
  
  Implementation: private, NYC Dept. of Transportation
  
  Project funding: large/major capital
  
  Feasibility: moderate

- Fund maintenance and programming of Waterwash park/stormwater garden
  
  Implementation: private, Rocking the Boat
  
  Project funding: small, ongoing
  
  Feasibility: easy

- Pursue re-zoning to accommodate more residential and commercial properties along Bronx River Avenue: as recommended in “Envisioning a Future for Our Community,” the findings of the Bronx CB9 long-term planning program, the currently industrial-zoned region is shifting to more residential/commercial uses. Soundview and its neighbor Hunts Point are growing at a high pace. Zoning shifts would allow for land use to keep up with these changes, increase the possibility of expanded connections to the riverfront, and have potential

¹ A project of the Youth Ministries of Peace and Justice
² Safer street conditions, much needed in this area, are associated with increased walking, running, biking, and outside play.
implications for job creation and housing.

Implementation: NYC Dept. of City Planning, Bronx Community Board 9
Project funding: medium
Feasibility: moderate

Increase funding for programming in Starlight Park:
currently, the Bronx River Alliance and Rocking the Boat provide free community canoeing, environmental education programming, and stewardship of waterfront resources. Increased support is needed to accommodate stewardship of expanded greenway areas and a growing population.

Implementation: Bronx River Alliance, Rocking the Boat, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation
Project funding: medium
Feasibility: easy
Support resilient shoreline development/restoration: as landowners and developers re-develop the waterfront, encourage resilient features and engineering strategies for low wave-energy zones as detailed in the Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines. Implementation: Community Board 9, Waterfront Alliance
Project funding: Volunteer/leveraging Feasibility: high for landowner education and variable for implementation (lower for retrofits due to limited shoreline width).

Southwest (Soundview South, Clason Point, Harding Park)
The southwest quadrant of CB9, is characterized by a large portion of public park, as well as 1-4 unit homes, many of which are vulnerable to sea level rise due to their low elevation. In this region, recommendations center on increasing public access amenities and resilience:

Improve amenities, maintenance and programming at Soundview Park: residents have identified a need to increase funding for these elements, as well as security at Soundview Park. Implementation: NYC Dept of Parks and Recreation, Friends of Soundview Park
Project funding: medium
Feasibility: easy

Increase transportation connections to the new Soundview Ferry service: the success of the upcoming ferry service in fully serving residents in an equitable manner depends on continuous connections to the transportation system. Closing the connection gap by extending the Bx27 and Bx39 bus, and establishing way-finding signage is critical to achieving this aim. Additional connections to other boroughs through water-based transport (a La Guardia Airport connection has been discussed by community members) should also be studied. Implementation: NYC Dept. of Transportation, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation, NYC Economic Development Corporation
Project funding: medium-large
Feasibility: moderate

Improve amenities at Clason Point Park: as part of the new ferry service, Clason Point Park will receive an increased number of users. Improvements to existing amenities have been identified, ranging from improved landscaping and maintenance (increased plantings and trees) to amenities for fishing (washing/scaling stations, designated fishing areas, etc.), as the park is currently a destination for fishermen. Implementation: NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation
Project funding: medium
Feasibility: moderate

Expand the resilience of Harding Park: at least 80 homes are vulnerable to flooding under a 100-year storm event given current sea level, with more expected to be vulnerable in the future as sea level rises. Many are regularly affected by precipitation-based flooding due to lack of stormwater
systems or drainage. Funding is needed to support implementation of the measures recommended in the Resilient Neighborhoods Harding Park study conducted by the NYC Dept, of City Planning. In addition to larger capital projects suggested in the plan (wetlands restoration, green infrastructure implementation), support of individual landowner solutions is needed, and could include expansion of the free Home Resilience Audit program offered by the Center for NYC Neighborhoods, expansion of low-interest loans for resilience retrofits to the region, and more broadly – education about climate change and expected future sea levels.

Implementation: NYC Dept. of Transportation, NYC Dept. of City Planning, Harding Park Homeowner’s Association, private homeowners, Flood Help NY/Center for NYC Neighborhoods

Project funding: varied/large – solutions are a mixture of larger capital projects and medium-range cost solutions

Feasibility: hard, due to need for significant funding to assist and high percentage of private land and infrastructure ownership.
Southeast (Unionport South, Castle Hill, Zerega)
The southeastern side of the peninsula is characterized by a mixture of park, single-family residential buildings, shifting to more manufacturing/industrial heading north on Westchester Creek. In this region, recommendations center on programming and increased access for people and boats:

**Increase support for water-based and environmental education programs in Castle Hill and Pugsley Creek Park:** residents and land-owners on the eastern side of the peninsula have identified multiple programming needs to increase connections with, and enjoyment of, the waterfront. In particular, the Bronx YMCA is located on the waterfront adjacent to Castle Hill Park and hosts 400 youth every summer. The YMCA's proximity to the waterfront provides a unique opportunity to connect a large number of youth to the waterfront in their back yard and is piloting a water-based and environmental education program with the Waterfront Alliance in 2017. This is also an opportunity to promote stewardship and awareness about climate change and sea level rise in a community affected by these issues. Residents have also identified a particular need for support of stewardship in Castle Hill and Pugsley Creek Park. Programs such as the City Parks Foundation's Catalyst Program could assist in strengthening stewardship in these locations.

**Implementation:** Bronx YMCA, NYC Dept of Parks and Recreation, Waterfront Alliance, neighborhood associations.

**Project funding:** medium

**Feasibility:** easy

**Increase public access (greenways and visual access) to Westchester Creek.** Potential opportunities include expanding shore public access along Westchester Creek at the Bronx YMCA, new developments along Zerega Avenue, and potentially new connections at Zerega and Randall Avenue. These efforts would help to extend the accessible greenway connection to Castle Hill and Pugsley Creek Parks, and serve a large population living in the adjacent Castle Hill Houses.

**Implementation:** Bronx YMCA, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation, Waterfront Alliance, neighborhood associations.

**Project funding:** medium

**Feasibility:** hard

**Restore wetlands and shorelines along Westchester Creek:** restored wetlands are planned in front of the Bronx YMCA, but opportunities for wetland and riparian restoration extend further north toward Watson and Commerce avenue.

**Implementation:** NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation

**Project funding:** high

**Feasibility:** moderate to high, due to the variety of private and public landownership extending north.
Northeast (Park Stratton, Parkchester, Unionport North)
The northeastern side of the peninsula, heading north from the Unionport Bridge, is characterized by industrial operations, parking, vacant lots, and a marina. The area has been studied for potential expansion to water-based transportation. Businesses currently transport approximately 49,000 tons of material per year on the waterway, and this is expected to be expanded upon repair of the dock at Castle Hill Recycling just north of the Unionport bridge. Shifting to water-based transportation from trucks provides an opportunity to reduce air pollution and support water-dependent uses in an area for which they are zoned (rather than disturbing new areas). Recommendations for this area are to:

Support water-dependent uses: maintain navigation channel: Westchester Creek is currently zoned for, and has a legacy of industrial uses. Waterfront businesses including Castle Hill Recycling, Schildwachter Oil, and marinas stand to benefit from increasing the capacity for water-dependent uses (currently 49,000 tons of material per year are transported on the creek, according to a NYC Economic Development Corporation study).

Implementation: US Army Corps of Engineers, NYC Economic Development Corporation, New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation
Project funding: large
Feasibility: medium

Expand public access and increase visual corridors along the industrial/manufacturing-zoned Westchester Creek waterfront: much of the Westchester Creek waterfront is cut off visually from the neighborhoods adjacent due to industrial/manufacturing use and closed off street ends. Ways to develop part or full-time public street-end connections to the river, or increasing visual site lines should be explored. Potential opportunities include street-ends at Watson Avenue and Chatterton Avenue.

Implementation: NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation, NYC Dept. of Transportation, private ownership.
Project funding: large
Feasibility: moderate

NEXT STEPS
Community Board 9 is in a good position to take advantage of its tremendous and growing waterfront resources. As Starlight Park expands and rezoning are explored along the Bronx River, ferry service is established at Clason Point (2018), there are many opportunities to shape what the future of the waterfront looks like. From Harding Park and further north along Westchester Creek, there remains a great need to increase access to and awareness about the creek, and to support further individual landowner action toward improving resilience. This Waterfront Action Plan and WEDG are tools that will be used by Community Board 9, the Waterfront Alliance, and partners to advocate for a more resilient, accessible, and ecologically-sound waterfront in 2017 and beyond.
Relevant planning efforts since 2006
2017  Envisioning a Future for Our Community: Long-Term Planning Program, 2015-2016 Findings & Recommendations
2016  Revitalization Strategies for the Bronx River, Soundview and Bruckner Neighborhoods in Bronx Community District 9 (NYU Wagner Capstone)
2016  Resilient Neighborhoods Harding Park (NYC Department of City Planning)
2014  East Bronx Waterfront; NY Rising Community Reconstruction Plan (Governor’s Office of Storm recovery)
2013  A Stronger, More Resilient New York (Mayors Office of Recovery and Resilience)
2011  Vision 2020 (NYC Department of City Planning)
2006 Bronx River Greenway Plan

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