



New Rochelle
Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP)
Public Workshop #1: Meeting Summary

New Rochelle, NY

Prepared on behalf of:

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Introduction

As part of the planning process for updating its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP), the City of New Rochelle hosted the first of three public events related to the project on October 8, 2015. The workshop was attended by approximately 70 participants, many with knowledge of or involvement with the City's existing LWRP and/or other issues related to zoning, land use and access to the waterfront in New Rochelle. All of the participants provided ideas that will help to inform the planning process. In addition to the general public, four of the members of the LWRP Working Group were in attendance: Ed Ackerman, Nina Arron, Suzanne Reider and Ayanna Wayner. Councilman Tarantino was also in attendance.

Nina Arron, Director of Planning and Sustainability, opened the workshop with introductory remarks explaining the overall project. Next, the LWRP consultants, BFJ Planning, presented an overview of the program and process, the LWRP boundary and an outline of the components of the plan contents.

Following the presentation and a brief coffee break, the participants were welcomed to visit each of four open house stations which were organized around different topic areas relevant to the waterfront. At these stations, participants discussed issues and opportunities, potential project ideas, proposed land use changes and potential additional ideas that should be considered. Content from the discussions are summarized below.

The next steps in the LWRP process involve additional meetings between the BFJ team and the LWRP Working Group before developing a draft of the LWRP. Based on feedback from the second public workshop (scheduled for February 3, 2016), BFJ and the Working Group will further develop the LWRP policies and projects in order to complete a draft LWRP for submission to the New Rochelle City Council and the New York State Department of State.

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Workshop Agenda

- 1. Welcome**
- 2. Presentation**
 - Introductions
 - Overview and Process
 - LWRP Organization
 - Workshop Objectives
- 3. Open House Discussions**
 - Land Use and Zoning
 - Public Access and Recreation
 - Environmental Resources and Resiliency
 - Infrastructure

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Presentation

Below is a summary of the consultant team's presentation by Sarah Yackel.

1. Overview and Process

Sarah Yackel, Principal of BFJ Planning, provided an overview of the LWRP update process, including background on the LWRP program and reasons for conducting an update of New Rochelle's LWRP in 2015. The overview also included a description of the project timeline, which includes a public hearing before the City Council adopts the plan.

2. LWRP Organization

Ms. Yackel then described the organization of an LWRP, as dictated by New York State Department of State, including details on the eight chapters that are included in the plan document. The presentation also included examples and information on each of these components.

3. Workshop Objectives

The presentation concluded with an overview of the objectives for the discussion segment of the workshop. The agenda had called for roundtable discussions, however, due to extraordinary turnout, there were too many participants to comfortably hold roundtable discussions. Therefore, the discussion segment of the workshop was held as an open house, which allowed participants to visit each of the four stations, provide input to resource experts by talking about issues and mark the location of issues and opportunities on large scale maps. The open house stations were divided into four stations by topic area:

1. Land Use and Zoning,
2. Public Access and Recreation,
3. Environmental Resources and Resiliency, and
4. Infrastructure.

Open House Discussions

1. Land Use and Zoning

Echo Bay

Echo Bay was a key focus at the Land Use and Zoning station. Participants suggested a preference for small scale development with a waterfront walkway, retail shops and a park. The challenge of relocating City Yard was also discussed, including suggestions for potential new locations around the City.

Transportation

Issues related to transportation that were raised during the workshop generally focused on strategies to make the waterfront area safer and more accessible to pedestrians, families and bicyclists. Davenport Avenue and Pelham Road were both called out for traffic calming, sidewalks, bicycle paths and improved signage to reduce traffic speeds, provide transportation options and even improve commercial viability on Pelham.

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Housing

Housing was recognized as an important consideration on potential development sites in the LWRP area. In particular, participants advocated for small condos to attract a younger population to the City, while some participants wondered whether art lofts would be a solution for the marina site.

Dauids Island

Many participants were very familiar with the ongoing consideration for future development on Davids Island. In general, participants recognize the need to find the right balance on the island between open space with development to make sure that open space is not minimized by other uses. Brooklyn Bridge Park and Governors Island in New York City were both cited as models that combine public open space alongside privately operated retail, services and or residential to help generate funds to manage to public areas. Potential recreational uses that participants suggested for Davids Island ranged from picnic areas, beaches, kayak rental and promenades to restaurants, water parks and casinos.

Zoning

Some participants were concerned with the type of commercial uses that are currently located on East Main Street, suggesting that the zoning code be revised to prohibit car dealerships or that these auto-focused industries be encouraged to relocate to the 5th Avenue area. It was noted that the City has no ability to force private businesses to relocate, so these rezoning suggestions would not guarantee land use changes on East Main Street.

2. Public Access and Recreation

Waterfront Access

The need for waterfront access was a commonly repeated theme at all four stations. Limited public access and compartmentalization of the City's waterfront were identified as key concerns. In general, participants noted that there are too many barriers to visit the waterfront in New Rochelle, ranging from physical barriers of existing private development, parking regulations and early closing times at parks, among others.

Priorities noted by meeting attendees included the need to identify diverse ways for residents and visitors to get to the water, including a public beachfront, a waterfront destination with cafes, restaurants, open space and active access to the water for non-motorized boats. Specific locations identified as important focal points of the LWRP include Hudson Park, Echo Bay and Davids Island. Five Islands Park was singled out as an area where the City should not allow commercial or residential development. Manor Park in Larchmont, Harborfront Park in Port Jefferson and Danfords Hotel and Marina were noted as examples of waterfront parks that New Rochelle could look to as models for providing public access to the waterfront. One participant also identified Glen Island Park as a local standard for all parks in the City.

The Municipal Marina was another asset that received much attention. The site has great potential due to its location and views but is currently underutilized due to the large, unattractive parking structure. Participants suggested a pop-up market or other waterfront concessions, in combination with developing strategies to make foot traffic more viable, as a way to maximize use of the marina site.

Several participants also called for a continuous waterfront walkway providing connections between the City's various waterfront parks and with neighboring municipalities. In addition, providing opportunities

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for a variety of waterfront activities was also a high priority, including kayaking, fishing and repair of the rowing club, which has been demolished due to damage from Hurricane Sandy.

Boating

One of the primary issues related to boating that was raised was the lack of kayaking facilities in the City. The New Rochelle Rowing Club previously served as a place for members to access the waterfront with non-motorized boats. Participants noted that the City would now be better served by a number of locations for residents and visitors to access additional boating opportunities with kayak racks, public park connections and locations in the offshore islands such as Davids Island and Five Islands Park.

Better access for visiting boaters was also a recurring theme as a strategy to bring revenue to the City. This would require providing a greater number of transient boat slips along the waterfront, whether at the Municipal Marina or other locations. This amenity at the marina may also work in conjunction with other types of mixed-use development, such as restaurants, a hotel and/or retail stores.

3. Environmental Resources and Resiliency

Coastal Flooding

Meeting attendees noted their observation that Superstorm Sandy caused substantial damage to the City's waterfront infrastructure, including perceived damage to marina slips and bulkheads, erosion and sedimentation. One suggestion was that the City construct a seawall to protect the harbor. Participants noted their belief that very little clean up or landscaping was done in Neptune Park after Superstorm Sandy and that Fort Slocum Road needs a plan to address flooding impacts.

4. Infrastructure:

Dredging

Several meeting attendees identified the need to control sedimentation and siltation through dredging in Echo Bay and New Rochelle Creek. One participant noted that New Rochelle Creek has not been dredged in approximately 50 years. Deeper waterways would help to provide access for a greater variety of boats and vessels. For example, currently some marinas cannot accommodate sailboats because of the shallow depth in New Rochelle Creek, which places a financial burden on marina operators by limiting the type of boats that can access their facilities.

Stormwater/Wastewater/Water Quality

The Westchester County Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) was a common topic of conversation at the Infrastructure station and at other stations. Participants noted that some of the issues caused by the WWTP, notably odors, are not feasible to mitigate. Odors from the Wright Island pump station were also noted as an issue. Participants also urged that pollution of the waterways be a focus of the LWRP, including locating storm sewer overflows, collecting and posting water quality data for the City's waterways and the WWTP, a belief that there is dumping/runoff from City Yard, runoff from the car dealerships and upland roadways and a need for cleanup after the geese at Davenport Park.

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Conclusion

The first public workshop was extremely helpful in gathering public opinion on the issues facing the New Rochelle waterfront, and some of the potential opportunities that should be addressed in the LWRP. While many ideas were brought up, impacting water quality, boating, transportation and waterfront parks, many of the issues raised by participants were in some way related to barriers to accessing the waterfront. These barriers could be the result of existing land uses, transportation infrastructure, regulatory issues, limited access for non-motorized boats or simply the relatively few locations for residents and visitors to get to the water.

The next step in the process of developing the LWRP will be for the LWRP Working Group to discuss outcomes from the first public workshop, and develop a preliminary list of projects and policies that should be discussed at future public workshops. The BFJ team will continue to refine the “Inventory and Analysis” section of the LWRP based on feedback from this meeting, and will begin to outline drafts of the sections related to policies and projects in preparation for the second workshop.

The second public workshop is scheduled to be held on February 3, 2016.