



RISE TO RESILIENCE

OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR FUTURE

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Cc:

The Honorable Corey Johnson
Speaker, New York City Council
250 Broadway
NY, NY 10007

April 16, 2021

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

Our City is under threat from climate change, and we are already paying for it, with nearly one million people at risk of flooding today. These risks are not distributed equally and disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color. Nine years after the devastation of Hurricane Sandy, progress has been made, but our region is still vulnerable.

By the end of this century, climate change is projected to cost New York City nearly billions in flood damage in addition to a nearly \$40 billion loss in property values, not to mention threatening the economic solvency of our City and its residents.¹

We must ensure that climate resilience is prioritized in this year's budget to meet the challenges of climate change, but also to create good, sustainable jobs to reemploy those who lost employment during the Covid-19 crisis and to update and green the City's aging infrastructure.

It is not just needed, it is fiscally responsible, as investing in resilience can reap a return of 6:1 over time and avoid critical risks.

¹ Calvin, Ellis. 2018. [The Cost of Sea Level Rise in the New York Region](#). Regional Plan Association, using data from the Union of Concerned Scientists' "[Underwater](#)" report

The Rise to Resilience coalition and campaign spearheaded by the Waterfront Alliance has identified and is calling on the Mayor and the Council to make the following key investments in this year's budget:

- **Baseline \$6 million in annual expense funding for the Mayor's Office of Resiliency (MOR).** MOR is funded exclusively by Federal Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) dollars that were allocated to New York City following Hurricane Sandy, projected to be fully exhausted by June 2022, putting the future of MOR in jeopardy. It is essential that New York City continue to have a dedicated and central team focused on climate adaptation issues to set direction, coordinate complex efforts across every agency, develop policies and standards, and to engage with communities about their climate risks.

The role of MOR in the future is substantial. It must ensure that key City climate adaptation products and programs are delivered, including but not limited to the Convening of the New York City Panel on Climate Change, Climate Resilience Road Map, implementation of New York City Intro 2092 (Climate Design Guidelines), the Cool Neighborhoods Program, and others. **MOR is a nationally recognized department and one of the most important tools the City has in the preparation needed for climate change. The loss of MOR would be unthinkable for New York City's future.**

Further, funding is needed to ensure that key City products and programs delivered, including but not limited to the Convening of the New York City Panel on Climate Change, Climate Resilience Road Map, implementation of New York City Intro 2092 (Climate Resiliency Design Guidelines), the Cool Neighborhoods Program, and others. Baseline funding would ensure that these functions are effectively performed and could support Citywide awareness such as through the centralization of information about the City's climate adaptation efforts in one easy-to-navigate interactive website, as has been requested by Council Members. With the impacts of global warming growing more and more severe, we need to double down on our commitment to ensuring a safe, equitable, and resilient city.

- **\$5 million in expense funding for the Greener NYC Initiative.** This extraordinary funding commitment supports programs related to environmental education, community stewardship, and green-jobs training, as well as contributing to the improvement and conservation of the City's air, land, energy, open spaces, and other resources. We are calling on the Mayor and Council to restore full funds to pre-pandemic levels and catch up on the 50% that was cut in the last fiscal year budget.

Thirty environmental non-profits signed a letter emphasizing the importance of this sole environmental funding program in the Council. Environmental education programs around the City have long helped New Yorkers make meaningful connections to the natural world that is vitally embedded, but sometimes overlooked, in our urban fabric. Interactive and place-based experiences in horticulture, water quality, wildlife, climate science, and ecology, among other disciplines, enhance science and math skills, and inspire stewardship, civic engagement, and highlight career pathways.

- **\$80 million in expense funding to play fair for parks and open space.** \$80 million is needed to renew and restore the expense budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation, including \$10 million to baseline 100 park worker and 50 gardener jobs.² New Yorkers have depended on our parks, esplanades, and greenways more than ever during this pandemic.

This critical infrastructure serves to cool our city, provide space for recreation, boosts health and wellbeing, and can help manage stormwater flooding. This funding would also support natural climate resiliency through forest and wetland conservation and protections which, in turn, reduce climate and storm impacts on people and ecosystems. We must restore the funding and green jobs that support these areas throughout the City, especially in areas where there is the least access to green space.

- **\$2 billion in capital funds for NYCHA.** The current total projected costs to bring NYCHA into a state of good repair across its portfolio is \$40 billion over a 5-year period. These housing developments serve some of New York City's most vulnerable residents who are also increasingly impacted by disasters – the current Covid-19 crisis, heat waves, outages, and flooding events (nearly 20% were affected by Hurricane Sandy and more than 500 developments will be in the 2050 floodplain).^{3,4} Repairs that ensure these developments serve New Yorkers 365 days of the year will also prevent disproportionate impacts of disasters on NYCHA residents.

Increasing the budget to \$2 billion annually (additional \$5.2 billion over the next four years) will help to close this critical funding gap and could fund green jobs. It has been estimated by the Climate Works for All coalition that an investment of \$132 million in replacement of NYCHA boilers damaged during Superstorm Sandy with combined heat and power systems would create 1,900 jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40,000 metric tons per year.⁵

- **\$100 million expense funding for a retrofits and green jobs program:** to meet the City's climate goals (both greenhouse gas reduction and resiliency), tremendous, coordinated action to retrofit public and private buildings alike. As the Biden Administration has done with the American Jobs Plan, the City can also take such a visionary approach to climate action and job creation through resiliency retrofits (energy, flood, and heat). It was estimated by ALIGN that investing \$50 million in a family home retrofit program for energy efficiency alone in New York City would attract upwards of \$500 million in private capital, lead to the retrofitting of 60,000 homes, and create over 9,000 good jobs over the next 10 years, while reducing annual greenhouse gas

² Play Fair Coalition. 2021. <http://www.ny4p.org/what-we-do/play-fair#4710>

³ Rush, Elizabeth. 2014. [The Storm That Will Be: Protecting Public Housing in the New 100-Year Floodplain](#). Urban Omnibus

⁴ Regional Plan Association. 2018. NYCHA's Crisis. <https://rpa.org/work/reports/nychas-crisis>

⁵ Calculated using estimated 14.4 total construction, installation, and manufacturing jobs per \$1 million invested in CHP, from BlueGreen Alliance. Combined Heat and Power: An Opportunity for U.S. Workers (unpublished paper), 2014. In Climate Works for All. 2015. https://alignny.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ClimateWorks_Report_R5_LowerRes.pdf

emissions.⁶ Through doubling this estimate we can also ensure provision of resiliency retrofits simultaneously for those homes that are in the floodplain.

New York City can accomplish these improvements to the safety and efficiency of homes and small businesses while also actively hiring local, underemployed workers and women and minority-owned businesses through expanding and integrating workforce development across all of the following programs:

- **NYC Cool Roofs:** provides New Yorkers with paid training and work experience installing energy-saving reflective rooftops.
 - **NYC Accelerator:** provides free, personalized guidance to make cost-saving, energy-efficiency upgrades and reduce carbon emissions. This program could also be leveraged to support resiliency retrofits. (Mayor's Office of Sustainability).
 - **HomeFix:** provides affordable, no-interest, and forgivable loans to low-income homeowners. With a doubling or more of funds and connections to other sources of financing, this program could become a "Green New Deal" job creator in the service of meeting NYC's climate goals. The program could be expanded to support retrofits for efficiency and resiliency, especially for low- and moderate-income homeowners. A limited suite of resiliency measures is currently applicable (mechanical elevation, backflow prevention), but could be expanded and integrated with efficiency programs to provide a one-stop shop for home retrofits. (HPD and the Center for New York City Neighborhoods).
 - **FloodHelpNY:** currently only available in some neighborhoods, this program provides technical assistance and counseling (elevation certificate provision, home inspection, insurance assistance) to home and small business owners in the floodplain. (HPD and the Center for New York City Neighborhoods).
 - **Grants and partnerships:** there are many workforce development programs led by nonprofit organizations embedded in communities across the City. Grants and partnerships can help to ensure that retrofit programs led by the City lead to local hires and serve those most in need. (Mayors Office of Sustainability or Office of Workforce Development).
- **\$10 billion in the 10-year capital budget for coastal flood resiliency projects, and at least \$100 million in expense funding for maintenance within that time-frame.** The Mayor's preliminary FY2022-FY2031 10-year capital budget proposed just under \$2 billion in funding for coastal resiliency, primarily focused on projects in lower Manhattan. We need significant investments now to protect communities before it is too late, and these investments will reap returns of 6:1 or more in the longer-term. It is therefore imperative and wise to commit a significant percentage of capital funds now to avoid losses later. As a reference, the City of Boston has done just that, committing 10% of its

⁶ ALIGN. 2015. Climate Works for All. https://alignny.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ClimateWorks_Report_R5_LowerRes.pdf

capital budget to climate resiliency measures. With nearly 10% of residents living in the combined floodplain today and few areas protected, New York City's investments are tremendously insufficient.⁷

Further, new financing sources can be explored to abate these costs, such as a surcharge on certain types of insurance, resiliency districts, and other means. At commitment of the equivalent of at least \$2 billion in every neighborhood of resiliency investments are needed to jump start building toward a resilient, thriving City for generations to come. The Lower Manhattan Coastal Resiliency Project alone is projected to cost \$10 billion. Other neighborhoods, from Hunts Point to Red Hook, Coney Island to Rockaway need significant resiliency measures.

Accompanying this investment, \$10 million in expense funding annually is needed to support long-term maintenance and staff as well as staff to reduce the unmet need for planning, design, and construction in the five boroughs. An ongoing annual commitment to advance projects could not only chip away at the risks we face but help position the City to receive federal and state matching funds for shovel-ready projects.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Cortney Worrall
President and CEO
Waterfront Alliance

###

Rise to Resilience is a campaign and coalition spearheaded by the Waterfront Alliance. We represent residents, leaders in business, labor community and justice, volunteer organizations, scientists, environmental advocates, and design professionals collectively calling on our federal, state, and local governments to make building climate resilience an urgent priority.

⁷ New York City Planning. 2021. Floodplain by the Numbers