



**RISE TO  
RESILIENCE**

## **TESTIMONY**

**Cortney, Worrall, CEO and President, Waterfront Alliance**

**(presented at hearing by Tyler Taba, Fellow, Waterfront Alliance)**

**September 14, 2021**

**Oversight Hearing: City and MTA Resiliency Efforts and Preparation for Storms**

Thank you. My name is Tyler Taba, Fellow at Waterfront Alliance, the leader in waterfront revitalization, climate resilience, and advocacy for the New York-New Jersey Harbor region.

The Waterfront Alliance is committed to sustainability and to mitigating the effects of climate change across the region's hundreds of miles of waterfront. We've spearheaded the Rise to Resilience coalition of 100+ groups advocating for policy related to climate resilience and we run the Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines program for promoting innovation in climate design.

Superstorm Sandy exposed New York City's coastal vulnerability as catastrophic flooding flowed deep into waterfront neighborhoods across all five boroughs. Hurricanes Ida and Henri were different. Their destructive power came not from the sea but from torrential, devastating, unprecedented rainfall. That rainfall went beyond submerging homes, streets, and vehicles. It overwhelmed our 20<sup>th</sup> century stormwater infrastructure, sending water and sewage shooting out through drains and fixtures.

**Recent storms, particularly Ida, demonstrated the importance of resilience across the boroughs.** We urge the next Mayor to expedite the forthcoming **Climate Adaptation Roadmap**, a new initiative being developed by the Mayor's Office of Climate Resiliency (MOCR) that will consider citywide climate risks through 2100 and provide a framework for NYC's next generation of climate adaptation efforts.

This Roadmap will identify the greatest climate-related threats facing New York City, and recommend a prioritized sequence of climate adaptation measures for the short,



medium, and long-term, with a particular focus on climate justice and the most vulnerable residents and neighborhoods.

While large-scale government-led infrastructure upgrades are in dire need, the city also requires a network of smaller-scale solutions at the building and neighborhood-level.

**New York City has options for small-scale interventions to retrofit buildings and properties for higher resiliency.** At an individual building level, critical mechanical and electrical systems can be moved to higher floors and potential penetration points for water like utility hook ups can be sealed. Investments in green infrastructure, at the building scale, can reduce the burden on the stormwater system. Green roofs, holding tanks, porous surfaces and landscaping, as well as filtration systems can reduce or eliminate runoff that would otherwise flow into traditional stormwater infrastructure.

There is substantial value in a city-wide **climate resilience retrofit incentive program** to facilitate meaningful change at-scale. The city and state's climate responses must include incentives, grants, and loans that support resilience retrofitting by property owners. This would enable individual building owners to enact changes that benefit not only their property, but their neighborhood more broadly. This adaptation policy would also provide new green construction jobs and workforce opportunities, along with critical flood protection.

The incentive program has precedent. With the recent enacting of Local Law 97, the City created loan programs and technical assistance to incentive property owners to install solar panels and other energy efficient adaptations. NYSERDA's Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program provides financing for renewable energy upgrades for commercial properties and the NYC Accelerator provides guidance to building owners for compliance with Local Law 97. Expanding programs like these to include flood resilience and residential properties creates a toolkit that will increase tactical uptake of resilience projects. Addressing environmental injustices and past disinvestment should be central to any program's funding structure to ensure protection in the most vulnerable communities.



## RISE TO RESILIENCE

The Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines (WEDG) developed by the Waterfront Alliance are a powerful tool for communities and landowners alike to build resilience into projects. While designed for the waterfront, WEDG's strategies for reducing stormwater quantity, improving stormwater discharge quality, establishing preparedness plans, and reducing the risks brought on by climate change are applicable across the city. **Credits in WEDG reward designs that use green infrastructure to manage the additional stormwater runoff expected with increased and more intense episodes of precipitation.** For example, high on-site precipitation capture in the form of backflow prevention devices or retention basins for stormwater capture and infiltration or re-use. WEDG offers best practice design solutions that go beyond municipal code to protect neighborhoods. The guidelines offer a blueprint for resilience solutions that can apply across a broad swath of the city.

We also call for the Mayor to immediately commit resources to New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to ensure not one more New Yorker is caught and killed by floodwaters in their own home. Prioritize funding for a **comprehensive citywide initiative to expand drain capacity throughout the city to prevent flooding, starting with building out stormwater sewers or retention tanks in vulnerable areas with limited drainage systems.** Further, more immediate actions on implementing city infrastructure for greener and more sustainable solutions, such as Bluebelt systems, are essential. Ensure that DEP and OEM are funded in the FY23 budget with resources and staffing, including more robust systems that communicate directly with residents who are at greatest risk in advance of large storms.

Finally, we call on the Mayor to create a public information campaign for homeowners on **flood insurance enrollment** and expand communications to New Yorkers about flood insurance through advertising on subway, bus and ferry routes. [qs](#) insurance rates are likely to go up once FEMA updates their currently out-of-date flood maps. Also, as they update the maps, they are likely to include more homes in high-risk areas, meaning that an increased number of New Yorkers will be facing these higher costs for flood insurance.



# RISE TO RESILIENCE

Recent storms brought the city's vulnerabilities to the forefront. The technical solutions, whether they are capacity upgrades to the City's stormwater system or resilience retrofits for buildings, exist. The challenge is not about technology, but about policy and priorities.