



**RISE TO  
RESILIENCE**

## TESTIMONY

Waterfront Alliance

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Committee on Environmental Protection: Preliminary Budget Hearing

My name is Tyler Taba, Senior Manager for Climate Policy 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 (WEDG) program for promoting innovation in climate design.

I'm grateful to be able to testify in front of you today in favor of a climate resilient budget for New York City. Over the last few years, New York City has witnessed, firsthand, the risks and impacts that climate change poses to our residents, infrastructure, and natural resources. We can see the dire forecasts that experts at the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and even our own New York Panel on Climate Change (NPCC), have laid out for us. The reality is that many of the projections are slowly becoming realized. Climate risks and impacts are no longer abstract, but the solutions remain complex.

Our city has experienced several complex challenges (like Superstorm Sandy, COVID-19, and Hurricane Ida) that have each provided lessons for where our systems are highly vulnerable. We have an opportunity to address these vulnerabilities through meaningful and concentrated action. **That action starts with a climate resilient budget that lays the foundation for long-term investments in community engagement, green infrastructure, grey-infrastructure upgrades, and climate adaptation.**



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The preliminary budget proposal urges fiscal responsibility for New York City, but without proper investments in climate resilience and adaptation we will spend billions of dollars in recovery efforts following storms that we are unprepared for (like Sandy, Ida, and Henri). It is fiscally responsible and necessary to invest in protection upfront, by funding neighborhood planning through the Five Borough Climate Adaptation Plan; resiliency in NYCHA properties; and enhancing retrofits through the HomeFix program. These investments will save us money in the short and long term.

For starters, we must ensure that New York City understands where vulnerabilities exist at a hyper-local, community level through data collection, analysis, and neighborhood planning and engagement. This process has taken place in some neighborhoods already (i.e., Resilient Edgemere, East Side Coastal Resilience, Financial District and Seaport Climate Resilience Master Plan), but **a coordinated, fully funded plan for citywide adaptation and resilience that can be completed within a reasonable timeframe does not exist.** Last year, the City Council passed Intro 1620, now Local Law 122, which establishes a Five-Borough Climate Adaptation Plan to be led by the now-Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice (MOCEJ).

Local Law 122 has the potential to be the backbone for climate resiliency in New York City but only if adequately funding, sustained, and prioritized. More specifically, we strongly recommend the neighborhood planning component of this plan remain at the forefront of the city's holistic approach to advancing solutions that will allow the city to solve overlapping environmental, social and economic challenges simultaneously.

While we often hear about broad climate projections for New York City as a whole, adaptation strategies and solutions do not, and should not, look the same across the boroughs. Localized neighborhood planning is critical for New York City, where physical (built density, soil type, etc.) and social (race, income, etc.) conditions vary from neighborhood to neighborhood. Proper neighborhood planning from the bottom up requires long-term commitment and funding for community engagement processes. **The goal for this engagement should be to develop capacity within communities to guide and engage with climate resilient strategies over time.**



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**This level of engagement should be prioritized with public funding first before private philanthropy is considered.** Private philanthropy is unlikely to provide the level of funding that is needed and must be sustained over multiple years. **Long term engagements will show how history, the built environment, and demographic characteristics intersect with climate risk - all with the intention of helping New Yorkers understand how climate will affect them, allowing New Yorkers to be a part of decision-making regarding adaptation strategies and actions may be most appropriate in their neighborhoods.**

Most importantly, **strong neighborhood planning** efforts undertaken by the city, especially in high-risk areas, **can bring shovel ready climate resilient projects to reality.** **Because shovel ready projects are more likely to attract funding** this will help ensure communities are better and more quickly prepared for the impacts of climate change. From green infrastructure solutions (like bioswales) to grey or hardened infrastructure options, communities should be engaged in the development of available climate solutions and equipped to weigh in during the decision-making process. We strongly encourage the City Council to ensure Local Law 122 - the Five Borough Climate Adaptation Plan is a well-funded mandate in the FY23 budget and beyond.

On the topic of being prepared for the impacts of climate change, we point to funding concerns related to the Housing Preservation and Development Department (HPD) and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). Mayor Adams' preliminary budget shows no increase in funding for either of these agencies. On the campaign trail, Mayor Adams committed to spending \$4 billion on housing.

To ensure the city can tackle affordability, homelessness, and the threat climate impacts pose to public housing, we encourage the City Council to propose budget increases to HPD and NYCHA capital projects, as it relates to expanding resiliency, flood protections, open space, and green infrastructure across housing units. One in ten NYCHA properties are in the floodplain. Substantially more of these properties experience flooding during extreme precipitation events - mostly as a result of the poor use of open space and outdated infrastructure systems. Climate risks to housing in low-income communities and public housing must be treated as an environmental justice priority.



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For all these reasons, we are supportive of \$2.5 billion in capital projects for HPD and \$1.5 billion for capital projects at NYCHA in the city budget.

NYCHA, after NYC Parks, owns the most open space of any city agency or department. There is a major opportunity for NYCHA properties to serve as resiliency hubs, where residents have access to green, open space for recreation and aesthetic value as well as flood and heat mitigation. Without an increase in funding, NYCHA and HPD will not have the resources to address their climate risks. We cannot afford to continue kicking the can down the road and climate impacts will overtime increase maintenance and repair costs.

75% of NYCHA's land across NYC is open space. We recommend that the City Council realize the opportunity that investments in affordable housing can provide, not only for those who live in the properties, but for addressing flood reduction across NYC.

Lastly, we would like to bring attention to the HPD's HomeFix program. The program provides access to affordable low- or no-interest (and potentially forgivable) loans for home repairs to eligible homeowners in NYC. This program has potential to serve as a tool for resiliency retrofits and upgrades for homeowners, like elevating critical systems; sealing basements; and adding green infrastructure to properties exposed to flood risk. We recommend that \$1 million be provided to the HomeFix program in the city budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your work to ensure New Yorkers are protected from the impacts of climate change. I am happy to discuss these items in more detail with you at any point.