



## **Our Position on the Gowanus Rezoning**

**July 15, 2020**

We are living through an unprecedented crisis that has brought to light the systemic inequalities in our city and country while calling attention to the urgent need for robust social and physical infrastructure. This need is as pressing as ever in Gowanus, where decades of contamination, neglect of basic infrastructure, and gentrification have disproportionately affected low-income BIPOC community members, especially those who live in public housing. As the neighborhood changes, it is essential that we work together as a community to adapt to a changing climate, invest in essential infrastructure, and support a resilient and equitable Gowanus. **We believe that, if done right, a district-wide Gowanus rezoning offers an opportunity to make progress towards a more just and green neighborhood.**

After more than a decade of real estate speculation and property acquisitions throughout the Gowanus neighborhood, new development is likely to occur with or without a district-wide rezoning. If we move forward without a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and rezoning, individual owners will apply for land use changes through private applications, limiting opportunity for community input and benefits. We believe that the City should restart the rezoning process, address the community's priorities, and hold developers accountable in planning for a future Gowanus.

The City still has significant work to do to incorporate community needs into its proposal. And we need to continue to fight, as a neighborhood united, through the land use process to address the needs and priorities across the neighborhood, including advocates for the environment, public and affordable housing, industry, and the arts. **We stand with our partners in the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice (GNCJ), to fight for a Gowanus that is thriving, inclusive, and resilient for all – read more in our joint op-ed published today.**

The following priorities are specific to our expertise and vision for a Gowanus Canal and surrounding urban environment that is clean, resilient, diverse and alive:

### **We need Net Zero CSO in the Gowanus Canal**

Ongoing combined sewer overflow (CSO) pollutes the Canal with raw sewage and stormwater runoff nearly every time it rains. To ensure that new development does not further contribute to pollution, we are calling for a Net Zero CSO rezoning. The City is currently working on the Unified Stormwater Rule to improve citywide stormwater controls on new development sites. These regulations could result in Net Zero CSO in Gowanus, but we need a comprehensive hydrology study to ensure that this strategy will achieve the goal. The City's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as required by the rezoning, will study the impacts of development on the existing system and ensure sufficient requirements and infrastructure upgrades are in place to manage stormwater and reduce CSO.

## **We need a Waterfront Access Plan**

The Gowanus Canal's shoreline is changing dramatically under the Superfund clean-up. While a clean up of industrial waste will result in a cleaner Canal, new bulkheads, dredging and capping the bottom will also eliminate most of the current intertidal zone, which currently supports habitat for mussels, crabs, fish, and shorebirds. At the same time, rising sea levels and flooding threaten waterfront use and public access to the shoreline. It is critical that a Waterfront Access Plan (WAP), is put in place to guide waterfront design that allows critical habitat to be rebuilt, ensures equitable access, and provides permeability to manage stormwater and buffer storms. If done right, a WAP in tandem with the Gowanus Lowlands Master Plan will provide a path forward for a resilient, biodiverse, publicly-accessible shoreline with bilevel esplanades, soft edges, stormwater management, and sustainable programming and maintenance.

## **We need a Parks Improvement District**

With major cuts in the city budget, including a 14% decrease for the Department of Parks & Recreation, funding and coordination is needed to ensure that our public realm is maintained, programmed, and accessible to the community. Maintenance for much of the existing and future public realm in Gowanus is underfunded, including streetscapes, parks, and proposed City-owned public spaces at Gowanus Green and on top of DEP CSO tanks. While waterfront landowners will be required to build and maintain public waterfront esplanades, coordinated maintenance and programming are needed to ensure that publicly owned spaces are resilient and meet the needs of diverse users. A Parks Improvement District (PID) should be established in concert with the Gowanus rezoning to coordinate maintenance across property lines. A PID would leverage a tax assessment on new development to fund public space and streetscape maintenance, programming, sanitation services, capital improvements, technical assistance, and workforce development. Without a funding and coordination mechanism in place we will see deterioration of our public realm in the years to come.

## **We need capital investment**

A fair and successful rezoning will require capital investment in essential infrastructure and community assets. This should include investment in public realm improvements as outlined in the Gowanus Lowlands Master Plan, including parks, streets, streets ends, NYCHA campuses, and other City-owned properties. In a district-wide rezoning this infrastructure investment would typically be funded through the City's Neighborhood Development Fund (NDF). In a time of strained finances, the City will need to be creative in ensuring essential improvements do not fall by the wayside and that commitments are tracked publicly through the NYC Rezoning Commitments Tracker.