

City Island, New York

Morris Yacht and Beach Club
Thursday, June 15, 2000

Nearly 44 people attended the sixth Listen to the Sound hearing, which occurred at the Morris Yacht and Beach Club on the far tip of City Island. The beach club, which eventually became a topic of discussion, provided a back-

ground for discussions about an area plagued with pollution and development issues. The hearing was chaired by William Cooke, director of government relations for the National Audubon Society of New York State.

oysters has declined steadily over the years. Dolensek called for more tax breaks for traditional waterfront uses and fewer waterfront development incentives. She also suggested Tier and Ditmars Marshes, which hydraulically link freshwater and saltwater, for purchase and restoration.

It was noted by Andy Darrell, executive director of the Waterfront Park Coalition, "A combined comprehensive program to save Long Island Sound and other New York City waterways, with serious investment by the community and with dollars, could go a long way to improve them."

Comments on the Reserve Concept

"The reserve concept makes imminent sense, and there is an action in the Long Island Sound Management Plan to create a reserve system."

~ Mark Tedesco

Darrell insisted the main waterways around the eastern section of New York City, the Harlem River, the Bronx River, the East River, the canals that feed into the East River and the Flushing River "have untapped potential."

Mark Tedesco, director of the Long Island Sound office of the Environmental Protection Agency, commented on the system: "The reserve concept makes imminent sense, and there is an action in the Long Island Sound Management Plan to create a reserve system."

Barbara Dolensek reminded the assembly that prior to boat building, City Island's most important industry was oyster farming. The number of crabs and

Alison Beall called for a reserve system that had separate wildlife areas, which had limited access for research, education and recreation. Beall's vision for the Sound emphasized development pressures. She warned, "Once it's gone, it's gone forever..."



Sites in the area for the Reserve System

“We support the proposal of the Westchester County Board of Legislatures to purchase David’s Island so it can be preserved as open space and to provide public transportation through a ferry service,” began Paula De Caro, League of Women Voters of Westchester.

De Caro also urged support of an environmentally sensitive area in Davenport Neck – namely the former Riviera Shore Club – as a prime candidate for purchase by the state and county as an extension of Davenport Park. “We urge the preservation of low density zoning on Davenport Neck.”

In addition to the last remaining wetlands on City Island (which include a freshwater creek between Tier and Ditmar Streets),



City Island Marsh

Doris Strauss

ten-year City Island resident Doris Strauss asked to protect Huckleberry Island, an area that is heralded by National Audubon Society and currently under development pressures by the New York Athletic Club. City Island resident John Sinclair added that the smaller wetlands between Tier and Ditmar Streets were as important to preserve as the large wetlands.

Wilma Turnbull, president of the New York Coastal Fishermen’s Association, asked that Palmer Inlet and Wier Creek be considered for preservation and be made part of the reserve system.

SoundWatch representative Susan Bellison’s recommendations included: Huckleberry Island; Rodman’s Neck, where she suggested that a pier be built; the wetland between Tier and Ditmar Streets on City Island; and Pea Island. And lastly, various large parcels of land throughout City Island vacated by boat yards and marinas could become part of the reserve system. Bellison continued, “The ones that are no



longer in use should be developed very carefully limiting density, keeping within the nautical character of the community and maintaining vistas from as many points as possible, and providing public promenades and seating areas in any new development of shoreline property.”

The Sound supports important bird populations, such as rookeries of herons

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~ Doris Strauss

and egrets, and provides coastal habitat for a range of plant and animal species. “New York City parks, such as Orchard Beach and Pelham Bay, connect hundreds of thousands of New York City residents with the sea,” said Sean Andrews, executive director of New York City Audubon Society. Andrews also suggested Huckleberry Island, a key habitat site for colonial nesting birds such as herons and egrets, be protected as part of the reserve system.

David Kunstler, wildlife manager of VanCortlandt and Pelham Bay Parks administrator’s office, joined with the group to recommend two colonial water bird rookeries, Huckleberry Island and Goose Island.

“The estuary of the Bronx River lies between the communities of Hunt’s Point and Soundview, and empties directly into the Long Island Sound, and the Bronx River itself is a southern gateway to the Long Island Sound,” said Majora Carter, director of Hunt’s Point Re-envisioning Project at the Point Community Development Corporation. Carter also hoped, with time and preservation, that the Bronx River will eventually return to its former glory as an amazing natural resource.

Mechanisms to protect open space

Much of New York City’s waterfront is not protected in terms of wildlife habitat or for public access. “This reserve concept will help funnel federal money into the Long Island Sound watershed for open space acquisition,” stated Clark Wallace of the Trust for Public Lands. “The Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act will expire, so we’re hoping that another source of funding will be able to fill the gap.”

Fearing burgeoning housing development, Howard Smith, president of the City Island Civic Association, claimed that five acres of land on the Morris Yacht Club that were being “taxed out of existence” were consequently the cause for the probable loss to development. Smith warned, “You can put an awful lot of dwelling units on five acres.” Jack Reith, representing the Long Island Sound Commodores Association, echoed the demand for control on taxation.

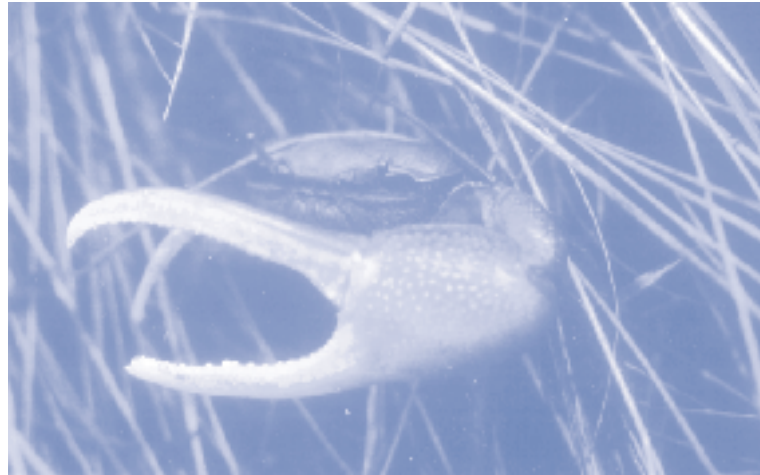
Dr. Paul Mankeiwicz, executive director of the Gaia Institute, said unless “the coastal structure, as brought up locally by Howie Smith, the tax structure and

also regulatory structure” are addressed, “we’re going to end up with very little on the coast.”

Related conservation issues

Doris Strauss, ten-year resident of City Island, criticized owners of personal watercraft for causing increased pollution from boat traffic. She blamed them for the premature demise of ocean and wildlife. “My husband and I have personally witnessed water birds being attacked by jet skis, and neighbors have also reported a swan killed by a jet ski as it tried to defend its young,” exclaimed Strauss. “These kind of watercraft, more often than not, seem to encourage a brutal lack of respect for our environment.” She added that control of these watercraft must be part of management strategies in the reserve system.

Bob Lebinsold, New Rochelle Environmental League, insisted that although the reserve concept incorporated a list of recommended properties, it



Bruce Ando

should also “include costs for cleanup of toxins.” Lebinsold cautioned that those who swim at the beach would undoubtedly be in contact with polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs), and contaminated sites should be part of the plan.

The Hunter’s Point Community Coalition has concerned itself with habitat restoration along the East River, the Bronx River and the waterways in New York (the metropolitan area of the boroughs). “We need to do some habitat restoration on those water bodies,” began Long Island City resident Eedie Cuminale. “Water pollution control treatment

plants won’t do the job, cleaning up brownfields and all of that won’t do the job completely.”

Ten years ago lobstermen stood to express their disgust over the demise of the profitable lobster industry in the area due to anoxia. Local lobsterman Eugene Garbowski spoke at this hearing about the all-consuming pollution created by antiquated sewage treatment plants.



“There used to be lobsters right out here,” recalled Garbowski, pointing at the map. “They’re all dead...they die farther and farther up. It’s just a very sad thing.” He called for action.

Conversely, Catherine Poggi, representing Westchester Creek, mentioned that the Rochester Creek’s waters have progressed greatly in current years. However developers have turned the other cheek in favor of the dollar. Poggi commented, “They’ve had blue claws in that creek since the 1600’s, but no one wants to notice it, because...if you notice that the blue claws are coming back, it means the water is not poisoned, and if the water is not poisoned, they can’t develop it as industry on both sides of the creek.”



Concluding Remarks...

Virginia Gallagher of City Island reminded the group that only persistence will insure the success of the preservation program and of the historically nautical community. “We all want to be able to use the waterfronts. We have got to do it judiciously, and what that means is we’ve got to draw up a plan and it’s got to be an overall plan.”

“It’s our hope that our messages that come from these hearings are heard loud and clear and that they translate into changes which will protect habitat and open space and increase public access and enjoyment of the Sound,” declared Susan Bellinson.

