

**WATERFRONT VIEWS: DEFINING A NEW PLANNING PROCESS
FOR BROOKLYN'S POST-INDUSTRIAL WATERFRONTS**

by

Carrie Grassi

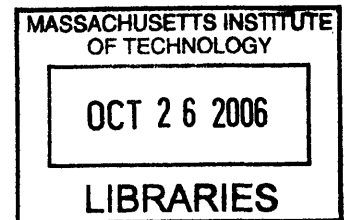
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ABSTRACT

The study of waterfront planning largely focuses on the physical reconnection of the post-industrial, downtown waterfront with the spatial fabric of the city. Attention is given to the need for clarity of regulations, strong leadership, and citizen support. Little focus is given to less visible, residential neighborhood waterfronts, and the importance of understanding and incorporating the neighborhood perspective into the planning process. In this study, the post-industrial waterfront neighborhoods of Greenpoint and Red Hook, Brooklyn are the focus. Ways in which the histories of the neighborhoods, the experiences of their residents and the pressure of outside development interests interact with the city's approach to planning the waterfront are explored. An attempt is made to understand how this dynamic might better inform the way waterfront planning is approached. At the core of this new approach is the recognition that planning for today's waterfront is a complex and contentious process. The neighborhood waterfront setting requires a planning and implementation process that bridges various city-agencies and links to planning activity at the neighborhood level.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Historically, the waterfront has been an important part of the development of a large class of cities. Cities all over the world located on bodies of water have flourished because of the natural resources, transportation options, and economic activity such rivers, seas, or lakes have provided. As these cities developed, the shoreline came to be seen as a resource with its own particular set of issues, challenges and benefits. As a result, a particular kind of waterfront planning developed in order to protect and manage this resource. The approach of traditional waterfront planning was based on the view of the waterfront as a stand-alone linear unit – a ribbon of land on the edge of a city separate from the neighborhoods it lined – that had an economic and physical life of its own.

In many of these cities, the port and its supporting industries became the very definition of the waterfront. City plans for the waterfront revolved around the activities defined by these industries – cargo handling, manufacturing, ship building and warehousing to name a few. However, beginning in the mid-20th century, macro forces changed the nature of the economy, and the port's role as the dominant use of the shoreline diminished. Although attempts were made, through waterfront planning, to sustain and promote the waterfront in its traditional role, the realities of economic change were too strong. With the significant decline in the very activities that motivated the linear system of waterfront planning, cities struggled to find a new approach to this major piece of real estate that had lost its historic reason for being. They began to think in terms of resource management, separating out the various functions of the waterfront – as a location for industry, for recreation and for its natural benefits – and managing the various pieces as they related to the whole. The view of

the waterfront as separate from adjacent neighborhoods persisted. In addition, with the decline of water-dependant industry, zones for “industrial use” came to be loosely defined to include those undesirable uses that were not wanted in other parts of the city, because they were allowed under the same zoning as traditional industrial uses. From the perspective of the city, the waterfront, with its large tracts of increasingly abandoned land, became the perfect site for large, difficult-to-locate municipal facilities. Because the waterfront was seen as separate from the adjacent neighborhoods, little thought was given to the cumulative affects that siting these facilities along the waterfront would have on residential communities.

In the period of decline from the 1960s to the 1980s, a vacuum appeared within the physical space that the working waterfront had occupied and in cities’ visions for the future of that space. From the neighborhood perspective, however, a new trend was emerging. Adjacent neighborhoods – those with waterfronts as one or more of their natural borders – began to see these spaces in terms of the needs of their own communities. Approaching the situation from a tradition of neighborhood planning,¹ neighborhood activists organized to fill the void and to create their own visions for their sections of the waterfront. They were motivated by recent experiences of neglect and mistreatment, by a desire for access to services and amenities lacking in their communities, and by a concern with the relationship of the neighborhood to its edge. Issues of industrial job retention, increased open space, environmental justice, affordable housing provisions, and neighborhood character were at the core of many of these visions. These issues were addressed from the perspectives of

¹ The efforts of citizens to collectively define improvements for a spatially defined area.

groups within the neighborhood and applied to the entire neighborhood, encompassing its specific section of the waterfront.

This “nodal” neighborhood perspective is very different from the “linear” perspective of traditional port planning. The nodal perspective uses the neighborhood context as the basis for visioning and problem solving for the waterfront, while the linear perspective uses the network of edge as its reference point, conceptualizing the waterfront as a city resource to manage, separate from the needs of adjacent neighborhoods.

In recent years, these two planning paradigms have come into direct contact with each other, creating conflicts and opportunities for collaboration, as well as the potential for a new approach to waterfront planning. Neighborhoods along the waterfront have attempted to fill the planning vacuum and the city has struggled to redefine the function of the overall waterfront. This dynamic is further complicated by the difficulties that are inherent in neighborhood planning as well as development pressure from outside interests. In this new reality of the waterfront, the city must devise a way to negotiate the needs and demands of a variety of interests, including those of neighborhood residents, private developers, and the city itself. The ability of the city to successfully set up a process for this is the key to planning the post-industrial waterfront.

In the context of this changing world, my central research question is:

- In Brooklyn, New York, what is the evolving dynamic – the tensions, dilemmas, synergies and solutions – of waterfront planning and how might this dynamic better inform the way waterfront planning is approached?

Specifically:

- How has the city's approach to the waterfront changed to account for the changing nature of the waterfront?
- What is the importance of the neighborhood perspective for the redevelopment of the waterfront?
- Is the way the city views its waterfronts inherently in conflict with the way existing neighborhood residents view them?
- How are competing interests on the waterfront negotiated? What are the external pressures that must be accounted for?

I have found that after a long period of denial over the changing nature of the Brooklyn industrial waterfront, the city has slowly put new policies and tools in place for understanding and planning for the new functions of the waterfront. However, the city has been less successful at establishing a process for negotiating competing claims to the waterfront, as well as incorporating the neighborhood perspective into this process.

Approach

To ground my research questions, I explore the case of the New York City waterfront in the context of two Brooklyn neighborhoods: Red Hook and Greenpoint. Both Red Hook and Greenpoint, located along the historically industrial stretch of Brooklyn's waterfront, are residential neighborhoods with varying degrees of accessibility from Manhattan. Red Hook is minimally accessible, as it does not have a subway station located within its boundaries; Greenpoint is closer to and relatively more accessible from Manhattan, though primarily served by a Brooklyn/Queens subway line.

Because I am interested in neighborhood planning as it relates to the waterfront, I wanted to look at waterfronts that are adjacent to residential neighborhoods as opposed to downtowns or business districts. Areas closer to the downtown tend to attract more outside influence, attention and input and are often redeveloped for the expressed purpose of attracting tourists. For this reason, although part of the historically industrial waterfront, I did not select neighborhoods closer to downtown Brooklyn.

The neighborhoods I selected deal with very similar physical realities. Neither is cut off from its waterfront by a highway or rail line, as are many others in the city, and both are defined by very clear natural and man-made boundaries. The absence of a physical barrier to the waterfront highlights the psychological barriers that exist for adjacent residents due to the types of land use on the waterfront. But it also provides an opportunity for neighborhood residents to interact with the waterfront and to imagine ways for improved connections.

Another important similarity is that both communities have organized around environmental justice issues that subsequently lead to more formal neighborhood planning processes. The Community Boards that represent Red Hook and Greenpoint have both completed 197-a plans that have been approved by the Department of City Planning. Although non-binding, the 197-a plan is the official opportunity for Community Boards to take an active role in proposing land use and planning recommendations for their districts in New York City. Both neighborhoods' 197-a plans present a vision for the entire neighborhood, incorporating a discussion of their respective waterfront areas. They have absorbed the disconnected, linear segments into a more nodal, neighborhood approach.

On the other hand, the difference that makes these two neighborhoods important contrasts is the degree to which they have retained their working waterfront. Although Greenpoint remains a location for industry – mainly light industrial, manufacturing, and municipal facilities – it has very little left of its once booming working waterfront. In addition, subsequent to the City Planning Commission’s approval of Greenpoint’s 197-a plan, the waterfront along the East River was rezoned from manufacturing to residential. Red Hook, on the other hand, although also having experienced a major decline in the activity on the waterfront, has retained much more of a working waterfront; and although included in the 197-a plan, Red Hook’s waterfront has not been rezoned.

Organization

Chapter 1 outlines the general history of the rise and fall of the urban industrial waterfront and establishes the context for the discussion of the particulars of New York City. It also situates this thesis in a larger body of waterfront planning literature. In Chapter 2, I explore ways in which the City of New York has dealt with waterfront planning over the years, and established a pattern of the linear, resource management approach.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I investigate the histories of my case neighborhoods and discuss the particular ways citywide waterfront planning interacted with specific examples of neighborhood planning and politics over the years. I analyze the interplay between relevant actors and investigate both the nature of the subsequent conflict and opportunities, as well as the ways in which the varying perspectives were or were not negotiated.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I make recommendations for the establishment of a process for negotiating competing claims to the waterfront, as well as for incorporating the neighborhood perspective into this process.

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CHAPTER II - THE URBAN INDUSTRIAL WATERFRONT

A Retrospective

The history of the urban industrial waterfront in the United States has been characterized by a cycle of prosperity, decline, rediscovery, and now, rebirth. The pattern is similar from city to city, though specific policies and local decisions affected the way the reality of this cycle has played out in individual municipalities.

Prosperity

The major period of growth for urban waterfronts coincided with the growth of early American cities in the 18th and 19th centuries. The waterfront served as the nexus of economic activity and the coordination and support of that activity became the focus of many cities. Those that were able to fully integrate their systems of production, transportation, and importation with their waterfronts were the ones that prospered. The ability to adapt to technological change and innovation was also crucial for continued growth.

The port became the center of economic activity and the expansion of the port was the engine that grew the power and wealth of many cities. The waterfront, in many ways, was synonymous with the port as this was the primary function that it supported. In fact, the port had so much influence, that in many municipalities the administrative functions of the port were separate from the rest of the city (Marshall, "Modern," 2001). Management of the port dominated the waterfront, while other uses, such as public beaches and amusement parks, were relegated to those sections of the coastline where the port was not viable.

Although economic activity on the waterfront declined during the 1930s depression, this was quickly remedied by the manufacturing and shipping demands due to the onset of World War II. The port and related industries would dominate urban waterfronts until the late 1950s.

Decline

Following the peak in industrial employment and economic activity on the waterfront, however, the trend began to change. Macro-economic forces and technological innovations after World War II led to a steep downturn in the activity on urban waterfronts.

First, modern containerization techniques put new demands on the physical requirements of ports in the 1960s. Containerization is a system by which goods are shipped already packed in containers, and then moved by large cranes directly to rail yards or truck beds. Successful containerports required large upland areas to store goods, as well as deeper waters for ships that could carry the bulky containers. In addition, before containerization, cargo that was transported by ship had to be manually broken down into smaller units and transferred from large ships to smaller barges or rail lines. Longshoremen were the backbone of this operation, providing the labor to make the movement of goods possible. But not only did containerports require more space, they required less manpower because of the use of special machinery. As a result, many ports were moved from established locations in urban areas to less developed areas outside of or on the edges of cities where more land was available and growth possible.

Simultaneously, other major trends propelled the disinvestments in urban waterfronts. New networks of state and federal highways, the subsequent rise of the trucking industry, and the availability of suburban real estate caused many industries that were no longer water-dependant to leave the city in search of cheaper land and more modern facilities.

As the port vacated and the waterfront declined, cities were left unprepared with how to handle the change. Buildings were abandoned, land left vacant, and a host of undesirable uses allowed to intrude. A vacuum of activity appeared and cities, no longer able to rely on the port to define the waterfront, were at a loss as to how to best utilize and manage the once vibrant spaces. Various tactics were tried, from clearing neighborhoods in order to keep port operations in the city, to siting unwanted municipal facilities on the abandoned land. These actions occurred all along the waterfront, in downtown areas as well as those less centralized.

Rediscovery

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a few large cities began to ‘rediscover’ their waterfronts and attempted to revitalize some of the more visible sections, especially those adjacent to downtown areas. This resurgence was in large part prompted by the rise of the service economy and the recognition of the new potential for downtown waterfronts as tourist draws and economic generators (Connors, 1986). The presence of available real estate, cleaner water and land due to stronger environmental regulation, the historic preservation movement, citizen activism and leadership, and general urban revitalization also contributed to this new movement of downtown waterfront revitalization (Rafferty and Holst, 2004).

Cities began to realize that although manifested in a different form than in the past, downtown waterfronts still had the potential to be centers of economic activity. Due to their existence on the border of land and sea, the waterfront is and has always been a unique location in the city. It provides a setting for uses and industries that cannot be found in other areas – water-dependant industry, cruise terminals, and recreational boating to name a few. The service and entertainment economies that have taken over many American cities thrive in this setting. Increasingly, waterfronts all over the world serve as premier tourist draws where activity on the waterfront, now in the form of entertainment centers and festival marketplaces, is a major economic generator.

Likewise, due to the promise of unobstructed views and limited availability of shorefront land, the waterfront has become prime residential real estate, with the desirability of living on the water increasing as more and more harbors are cleaned up. High-end residential towers translate to higher property taxes for the city, a prospect of which is attractive to many cities that saw a decline in their economic base during the mid-20th century.

Waterfront Revitalization

A large portion of the early literature on waterfront revitalization is focused on the first wave of downtown redevelopment projects in the late 1960s and 1970s, initiated as cities began to come to terms with the disappearance of the port and other industry from their waterfronts. This first wave of major redevelopment projects, the festival marketplace, fisherman's wharf and waterfront landing developments, was pioneered in places like Baltimore's Inner Harbor and Boston's Faneuil Hall Marketplace (Breen and Rigby, 1994). These types of sites became the model for waterfront revitalization and were copied in many other cities. While

much of the literature lauds these particular types of developments, there is also criticism of the number of cities, waterfront planners, and developers that relied too heavily on the festival marketplace model, for example (Fisher, 2004). Reliance on this model was labeled as a cookie-cutter approach because of the repetition of design, and the standardization of retail outlets, with little variation from city to city (Breen and Rigby, 1994).

As it became apparent that the replication of physical design from waterfront to waterfront did not in and of itself create an economically viable project, those writing about the new waterfront revitalization movement began to focus instead on those projects that were more responsive to the history and context of the specific city. As Richard Marshall writes, “In the consideration of waterfront projects, one must understand the peculiarities of the contexts and their relationship to international frameworks. Only in this way can understandings from one situation be applicable as lessons to another” (Marshall, “Contemporary,” 2001). Much more attention was given to the process of redevelopment than to the product.

While the focus of many of these case studies has been on the particular mechanisms that led to the success of the redevelopment project, little attention has been given to the meaning of the waterfront to surrounding neighborhood residents. For example, the book Waterfronts in Post-Industrial Cities (2001) looks at ways to connect the physical fabric of the city with the waterfront edge; to re-create the image of the city through waterfront development; to integrate the port and the city (for those cities that held onto their port); and, to balance preservation and development. The Urban Land Institute’s book, Remaking the Urban Waterfront (2004), looks at “the key design issues, zoning and land use

regulations, environmental obstacles, and development incentives” needed to create new waterfronts. Neither book addresses the meaning and implication that this “reconnection,” whether it be in the form of new housing, parks, or extension of the streetscape, has on adjacent communities.

This set of literature, however, does focus more on the upland areas than in the past, as seen in its recommendations to integrate the new development with the “fabric” of the surrounding area. Yet the thrust is spatially, rather than socially, oriented. In an essay called, “The Transformation of the Urban Waterfront,” Alex Krieger (2004) outlines ten principles of waterfront development. The fifth principle states: “Even though a waterfront serves as a natural boundary between land and water, it must not be conceptualized or planned as a thin line.” Yet, in his description of possible solutions to this problem, he fails to discuss the social reintegration of the surrounding communities with the adjacent vacant waterfront. He writes only, “To avoid the less desirable consequences of a thin line of development, a city must create perpendicular streets and civic corridors that are as desirable as the shoreline drive” (Krieger, 2004). Design guidelines, land acquisition, and regulatory processes are the focus rather than an analysis of the perspectives with which cities and their residents approach these sections of the waterfront.

The role of community participation in waterfront redevelopment does, however, occur in the discussion of these redevelopment projects. Much of the literature concludes that citizen activism and leadership is a major factor affecting the redevelopment of waterfront sites, but without much other discussion. There is very little written about the neighborhood perspective that prompts this activism, and how planners should understand these

perspectives in their work. In the earlier literature especially, citizen involvement is described in terms of a hurdle to overcome or a resource to harness. For example, Salvatore J. Samperi, former Assistant Director of the Port Authority's Economic Development Department, describes the hurdles to waterfront redevelopment as being land acquisition, environmental issues construction complexities, transportation access, master plan development, and "community/business acceptance" (Samperi, 1986). While important to understand for discrete development projects, this misses a certain perspective – that of the residential neighborhoods that border the less centralized sections of the industrial waterfront. This perspective adds to the complexity of the redevelopment process and, I assert, must be understood.

Many of the cases do not explore the neighborhood perspective, as they are focused on downtown waterfront redevelopment projects. In the later literature, however, more attention is paid to the importance of a clear process for citizen participation. It shares lessons about the role the city can play in bringing together the citywide view and the constituent view. For example, in Seattle, Washington, the city led a planning process that worked with citizens on reconceptualizing the downtown waterfront. First, after collecting input from constituents throughout the city, the city provided a framework to guide the redevelopment strategy, and defined three goals of the strategy. Second, the city held a series of planning forums that "made for a healthy and open exchange of ideas – not simply reinforcing planning assumptions, but raising provocative questions about them" (Rafferty, 2004). Third, the product of this process was a summary of the vision and strategy for the city's central waterfront, and more importantly, an implementation strategy for the coming years. Although downtown waterfront development is different from neighborhood

waterfront projects due to the degree of visibility and potential resources, the lessons these kinds of projects have to share are the importance of a clear process for involvement, the value of a broad framework that gives guidance and direction to the particulars of the redevelopment, and the need for a clear implementation plan that brings together various city agencies and public entities.

CHAPTER III – WATERFRONT PLANNING IN NEW YORK CITY

The Rise of the Port and the Industrial Waterfront

In 19th century New York City, the growth and development of the waterfront occurred steadily and rapidly, but in a piecemeal fashion, largely funded and implemented by private individuals (Betts, 1997). Administration of the activity on the waterfront developed over time and as a result was divided among various city departments with different jurisdictions. This dispersal made it difficult to plan and administer the waterfront in a consistent manner and the confusion eventually prompted the city to create the Department of Docks in 1870. The Department was charged with developing and implementing a master plan for the entire Manhattan waterfront, and with ensuring the construction and maintenance of waterfront infrastructure. Although the Department of Docks would supervise some of the work done in neighboring cities and towns, the actual development of the City of Brooklyn's waterfront would continue to be led by private initiatives until the consolidation of greater New York in 1898. The consolidation brought Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and the Bronx together under one municipal government. The coordination of waterfront improvements was one of the major goals of the consolidation as was the realization of "the potential of the waterfront on a grand scale" (Pollara, 1997).

The Brooklyn waterfront would eventually surpass Manhattan's in terms of economic activity. The growing scarcity of large tracts of waterfront land in Manhattan spurred the growth of Brooklyn's waterfront in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The demand for this type of land pushed the center of New York City's port to the Brooklyn industrial waterfront, which extended "from Newtown Creek in Greenpoint at its northern border,

south past Gowanus Bay, to the Army Terminal in Sunset Park, until the whole of it combined to create one vast configuration of huge shipbuilding and repair facilities, sugar refineries, and enormous storehouses for bulk items such as coffee and grain” (Pollara, 1997).

As Brooklyn’s waterfront developed, so did the upland neighborhoods along its shores. What was once predominantly farmland or estates of the Manhattan elite were given over to the growth of residential neighborhoods that housed the waterfront workers. The very same private individuals that had funded the development of the industrial waterfront funded the residential development. The waterfront and their adjacent neighborhoods grew and prospered in concert and were integrally connected, with those who worked there also residing nearby.

The expansion of the port, in turn, brought forth new needs for coordination. In 1921, New York and New Jersey created the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to facilitate coordination between the two states and improve regional transportation. The legislatures designed the Authority to be a planning agency for the port² without administrative power over physical facilities, but its role evolved over the next fifty years as the influence of the port continued to grow. By 1970 the Port Authority had added numerous responsibilities for which the city was no longer responsible, including the generation and administration of most of the pier and terminal construction in New York City (Betts, 1997). During these times of growth, “the fate of New York and its waterfront were inseparable: as the Port grew, the City grew” (Wagner, 1980).

² The Port Authority gained jurisdiction over bridges and tunnels in 1925.

The Decline of New York City's Port

In the mid 20th century, however, as successful ports required larger tracts of upland real estate, the Port Authority began to turn its back on the New York City waterfront. The Authority built new containerports in largely undeveloped areas of New Jersey, and the Brooklyn waterfront, once known for its abundant land and state-of-the-art port facilities, could no longer compete with its now out-of-date infrastructure. Once a leading world port, the decline of the waterfront dealt a major blow to the economy of New York City. Its effects were felt throughout the city, especially in waterfront neighborhoods, where not only did port operations pick up and leave, so did many of the support industries, manufacturers, and refineries.

As port activity on the waterfront declined, the city struggled with how to best manage the waterfront – a space whose function had never been under question before. Though marked by periods of uncoordinated development, the planning attempts that were made were based on a view of the waterfront inherited from port planning – as a stand-alone unit with its own particular qualities and benefits. Planners paid attention to managing the functions of the waterfront in relationship to itself, as opposed to in relation to the neighborhoods it bordered. This approach would remain relatively constant through the end of the century, despite the development of a couple of waterfront-specific zoning tools in the early 1990s that were designed to better integrate the residential waterfront with adjacent neighborhoods.

Over the course of the forty years following the port's 1960s' move to New Jersey, the New York City Department of City Planning produced four documents dealing with the City's

578 miles of shoreline, and enacted specific zoning legislation for waterfront areas.

Although all linear in nature, the plans do reflect a gradual shift in the understanding of the potential functions that could occur on the waterfront as the realization grew that the port and other industrial activities on the waterfront would never be recaptured. Official city plans for the waterfront focused on how to capitalize on it as a resource and on ways to keep the waterfront economically relevant for the city, whether through industrial retention, recreation, or residential development. The following analysis of the various planning efforts makes clear the linear nature of the city's approach despite no longer being dominated by the port.

Holding onto the Port: The 1960s

In the 1960s, the waterfront continued to be dominated by port planning even as the port was moved to largely undeveloped areas of New Jersey in response to the physical requirements of containerization. In this decade, the city made a series of decisions to try to consolidate Brooklyn's remaining industrial waterfront activities in hopes of strengthening them. In 1963, for example, the city built a new marine terminal in Sunset Park at the southern end of Brooklyn's stretch of industrial waterfront. Although this was done in an attempt to sustain activity on the waterfront, the result was even more disinvestments in the Greenpoint waterfront as cargo ships were drawn instead to Sunset Park. In another attempt to retain port activity, Mayor Robert F. Wagner and Abe Stark, Brooklyn Borough President, announced a proposal for a \$36 million industrial redevelopment project to be located on Red Hook's waterfront in 1964. The plan went through multiple iterations and it too prompted major disinvestments in the neighborhood. Only a fraction of the plan was finally realized in 1981.

This escalating decline of the waterfront led the city in 1971 to produce a supplement to the 1969 Plan for New York City called “The Waterfront.” The approach taken in the plan was to address the changes on the shoreline with a logical structure for resource management – retaining certain areas for industry, while opening up others to housing and recreation. The city hoped to recapture or retain some of the industrial activity that remained. This approach demonstrated both the city’s inability to conceive of the waterfront without the port, as well as its continued view of the waterfront as separate from adjacent neighborhoods. The waterfront was still being planned in relation to itself.

“The Waterfront” hoped to “serve as an overall design for future changes along the waterfront,” yet was primarily focused on maintaining the relevance of the port, and planning for other uses where this was unlikely. The plan recognized Manhattan’s inability to adapt to containerization, but was unwilling to concede other parts of the waterfront, namely in Brooklyn and Staten Island. Though no containerports existed at that time in Brooklyn, the plan indicated that, “the City has allocated \$9 million in capital budget funds to acquire back-up land for piers [already] operated by the Port Authority. These 12 break-bulk piers...can be adapted for containerization with the addition of this back-up land. Forty acres of streets and underutilized land have been designated” (“The Waterfront,” 1971). This planning action demonstrated the city’s attachment to port activities for the waterfront and its inclination to plan the waterfront with no regard for what it might mean for adjacent neighborhoods.

The plan also demonstrated the city’s view of the waterfront as a linear unit. It described the shoreline as being “too precious to be allowed to stagnate or to be exploited

piecemeal...The waterfront is now the City's most extensive, underdeveloped, and promising natural resource" ("The Waterfront," 1971).

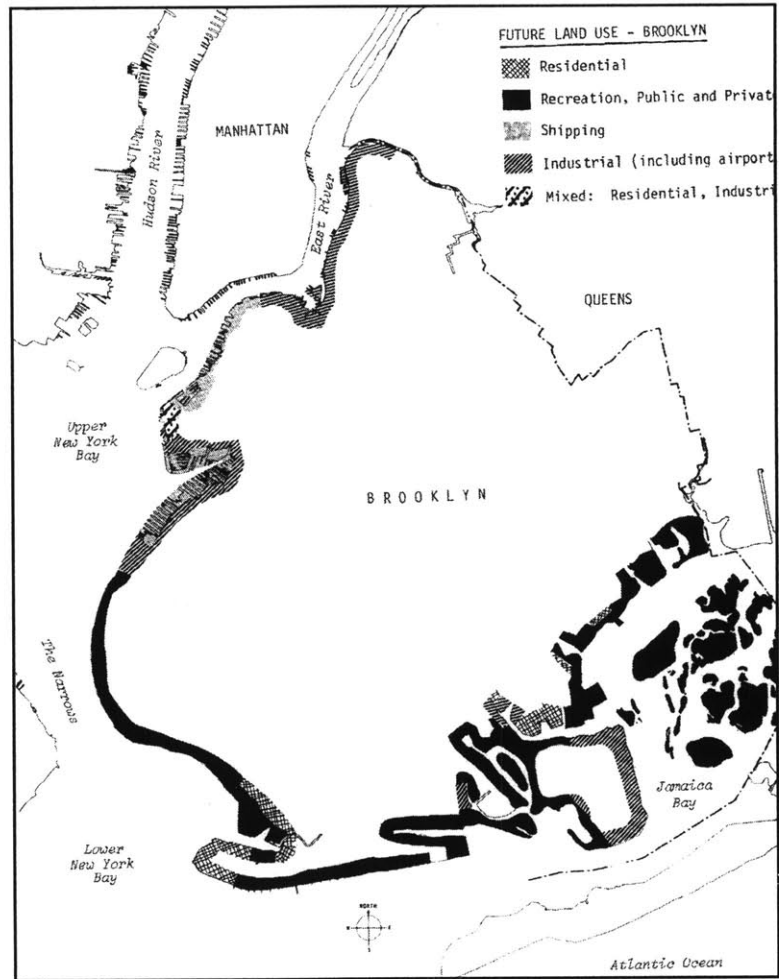


Figure 1 - Recommendations for the Brooklyn waterfront
 Source: "The Waterfront," 1971

As an example of this resource management approach, the plan was organized into sections that describe categories of waterfront use – Port, Housing, Recreation, National Center, Industry, Transportation, and Pollution Control – which were then further organized into geographical units of linear stretches of waterfront. The Brooklyn shoreline, for example,

was divided into two sections – Newtown Creek to the Narrows, the site of industrial activity in the borough; and Jamaica Bay to the Atlantic Ocean Shorefront, more traditionally a place for recreation and environmental resources.

The approach the plan took in terms of non port-related functions also demonstrated the city’s view of the waterfront as a resource wholly separate from the neighborhoods it lined. First, although the “Newtown Creek to the Narrows” section of the waterfront passed through more than five distinct neighborhoods, and many of those waterfronts were on the decline, Red Hook was the only neighborhood mentioned with an opportunity for residential redevelopment, and then only on a “pie-shaped wedge” of waterfront land. Second, although the plan made mention of the deteriorating private housing in the Red Hook neighborhood, the plan stated that “the community needs planning and other help if it is to survive” (“The Waterfront,” 1971). The Waterfront Plan was not designated as the appropriate place for this much needed neighborhood planning.

These 1960s plans and proposals demonstrated the city’s view of the waterfront as a distinctly different and separate entity from the neighborhoods along which it ran. Recommendations were framed in terms of what the loss of industry meant to the waterfront as a whole, not about the implications for each particular neighborhood.

Planning in the Vacuum: The 1970s

Planning for the waterfront in the 1970s was characterized by a period of lost opportunities. The city was determined to reserve large tracts of waterfront land for industrial use, and as a result much of the waterfront was underutilized and disregarded. Robert Wagner, Jr., City

Planning Commissioner, wrote, “an unwillingness to challenge traditional ways of thinking pervaded key decisions” and “the waterfront suffered serious neglect.” He also wrote, “as maritime uses along the waterfront declined, there was great resistance to replacing them with permanent new uses. The City pursued a policy that allowed only the least desirable low-grade uses on the shoreline” (Wagner, 1980). A vacuum developed on the waterfront into which a host of low-rent, locally undesirable uses would move.

By 1980, due to large tracts of vacant land in traditionally industrial neighborhoods, undesirable uses allowed under the same zoning dominated the New York City shoreline. Consolidated Edison, the City’s electrical power supplier, located all 19 of its gas turbine and steam turbine electricity generating plants on the waterfront; 13 water pollution control facilities were sited on the waterfront; nine landfill areas were designated along the shoreline; as were four of the city’s six waste incinerators. Again, the view of the waterfront as wholly separate from the adjacent neighborhoods reinforced this kind of misuse of the waterfront. The linear view prevented a full understanding of what this concentration of noxious facilities meant to the communities that would have to live with it.

New Policies, Same Planning: The 1980s

The next formal planning action concerning the waterfront was prompted by the 1972 passage of the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act. The goal of the Act was to encourage and assist the states in preparing and implementing management programs to “preserve, protect, develop and, where possible, to restore or enhance the resources of the nations coastal zone” (CWP, 1992). In 1981, New York State adopted the Waterfront Revitalization and Coastal Resources Act (WRCRA) the goal of which was to establish a

framework for coordinating state laws and rationalizing decisions at all levels of government. Though these acts prompted the city to reevaluate its relationship with its waterfront, the result was another form of linear planning in the form of the New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program (WRP), published in 1982.

According to the introduction, the WRP was the “first program designed to address urban waterfront problems [by] providing the framework for future policy direction for the City’s waterfront” (WRP, 1982). The WRP outlined a strategy to insure that waterfront concerns and policies were incorporated into existing public decision-making processes. It put forth 56 specific policy recommendations around development, fish and wildlife, flooding and erosion, public access, recreation resources, scenic quality, and solid waste disposal, and established a Coastal Zone Boundary within which all discretionary waterfront actions be reviewed for consistency. Responsibility to define the “long-term management and maintenance of waterfront development and activities” was given to the City Planning Commission of New York City.

Yet these policies did not always translate to regulatory action. Around the same time, there was a noticeable increase in the number of waste transfer facilities sited on the waterfront due to the Department of Sanitation raising the tipping fees for private waste disposal companies at Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island (CWP, 1992). Many of these businesses operated in violation of performance standards and were attracted to the inexpensive, derelict and unregulated land along the industrial waterfront. Yet again, the city’s actions did not reflect the needs or visions of those in the adjacent waterfront neighborhoods. The

waterfront was still being planned in relation to itself and the misuse and economic downturn of the waterfront continued through the 1980s.

A New Approach? The 1990s

The 1990s brought a slightly new approach to waterfront planning prompted primarily by the increasing conflicts between waterfront developers and communities. The conflict revolved mainly around outdated waterfront zoning laws that allowed developers to build big, bulky structures, physically cutting communities off from their waterfronts. The Department of City Planning, instead of just revising the zoning, first conducted a comprehensive planning study of the city's waterfront – the first of its kind.

In 1992, the Department of City Planning published the New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan (CWP), touted as a new approach to the waterfront. According to Tom Angotti, Brooklyn City Planner at the time the CWP was written, it was lauded as such because of the attention that it gave to a full planning study of all of the city's waterfront lands (Angotti, 2006), and the specific recommendations it made regarding the potential functions of the waterfront. Unlike past plans, it moved beyond characterizing the port as the main function of the waterfront. In the introduction, the plan claimed, “for the first time in the city's history, [the CWP] provides a framework to guide land use along the city's entire 578-mile shoreline in a way that recognizes its value as a natural resource and celebrates its diversity. The plan presents a long-range vision that balances the needs of environmentally sensitive areas and the working port with opportunities for waterside public access, open space, housing and commercial activity” (CWP, 1992). While the plan did take

a more comprehensive look at the entirety of the New York City waterfront, it was yet again framed from the perspective of the waterfront itself, not the adjacent neighborhoods.

In fact, the CWP and the borough-specific plans that were published in 1994 clearly articulate this linear view by calling the waterfront study areas, “reaches,” a nautical term for a continuous expanse of water. For example, the historical center of Brooklyn’s thriving port and industrial base that extended from the southern end of Sunset Park to the northern tip of Greenpoint along the East River waterfront was dubbed “Reach 14,” despite the variation in neighborhood character along it.

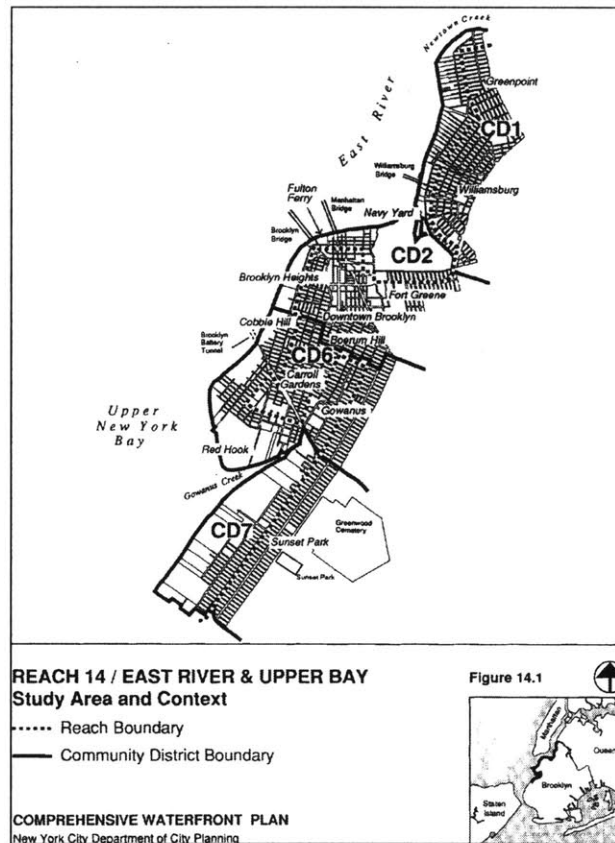


Figure 2 - Reach 14 Study Area
Source: Plan for the Brooklyn Waterfront, 1994

Few steps were actually taken to advance a truly new approach. While each of the reach sections in the plan attempted to contextualize the waterfront plans with respect to the surrounding neighborhoods, this was done in a superficial way. In the description of each of the 22 reaches that make up the New York City waterfront, the plan described the development history, the historic and natural resources, the zoning and land use, the economic activity and transportation resources. The CWP also included a brief discussion of these categories as they appeared in specific neighborhoods in the reach. Despite this, there was absolutely no discussion of how the development recommendations connected to neighborhood visions or needs, or even what those visions and needs were. Each of the reach sections was approached from the perspective of the waterfront as the starting point, much like the plans in the past. So, while the CWP offered a more complete view of the physical and economic realities of the waterfront than previous plans, there was still no sense of what the waterfront meant for adjacent neighborhoods.

The next major development in waterfront planning came with the 1993 Waterfront Zoning Reform. The main purpose of the reform was to amplify and implement the CWP of 1992, and to establish a new set of as-of-right development guidelines to avoid the need for variances and special permits. The new generic, but waterfront-specific guidelines dealt with issues such as requirements for public access and visual corridors in new residential and commercial development; controls for the bulk and height of waterfront buildings and pier structures; and provisions for water-dependant uses and floating structures. This was the first time that the waterfront was to have its own zoning specifications, which was seen as another major advancement in waterfront planning in New York City.

Although the main change was the determination of generic zoning tailored to waterfront areas, it did include a provision for the possibility of contextual zoning³ for waterfront access, which created a new regulatory opening for neighborhood input. The provision written into the reform was that, “the City Planning Commission and the City Council may also adopt Waterfront Access Plans to adapt the generic waterfront public access and visual corridor requirements to specific conditions in an area” (CWP, 1992). This provision was based on the public trust doctrine that originated in English common law, which said, “the state is responsible for preserving the water and shoreline resources for the common enjoyment” (CWP, 1992). It was this provision that signaled a subtle change in the way the city viewed the waterfront. Unlike previous plans that drew no connection between the upland and waterfront areas, this provision acknowledged that public access to residential waterfronts was a priority and that contextual neighborhood issues should be taken into consideration. This zoning provision set the stage for the interaction between linear planning and neighborhood planning for the waterfront.

The last major waterfront planning initiative in the 1990s was the revision of the 1982 Waterfront Revitalization Program, adopted in 1999. The new program attempted to clarify the sometimes confusing or redundant policies in the original plan and to make the policies more relevant to particular areas of the waterfront. It was developed in response to the realization that a WRP that “better reflects the different conditions, issues and priorities along a diverse and complex coastline” (WRP, 1997) was needed. In policy at least, this was another signal that waterfront planners were beginning to realize the relevance of

³ Zoning that regulates the height and bulk of new buildings, their setback from the street line, and their width along the street frontage, to conform with the character of the neighborhood.

neighborhood context – that it made sense to inform planning decisions with what was adjacent to the waterfront opposed to just what lay within it.

Although waterfront planning was consistently done in a linear fashion, by examining the planning actions taken after the demise of the port in New York City, we see that the city had slowly inched towards a better understanding of the need for contextualized waterfront planning. This was done through a few policy changes that allowed for more interaction between the two planning paradigms, though it did not always translate into the decisions that were made on the ground. As we will see in the two case neighborhoods, these changes came at the same time that neighborhood plans called more and more pointedly for contextualized waterfront planning, reflecting the shortcomings of city policy.

We now turn to the case neighborhoods, where we see the effects this system of planning had on adjacent neighborhoods and how residents responded. We will also see how the city dealt with those responses, and where it might be able to improve its approach to waterfront redevelopment in post-industrial residential neighborhoods.

CHAPTER IV - RED HOOK

History

In the 1600s, red clay soil inspired the name “Red Hoek,” meaning red point, given by Dutch settlers to the peninsula that jutted into the East River. The area was full of lush wetlands, natural ponds and creeks, but the Dutch filled most of it to create solid ground for their farms and mills. Although an important site in the Battle of Brooklyn during the Revolutionary War, Red Hook would come to prominence in the early 1800s when New York became the leading port in the United States. The invention of the steamboat in 1815 and the construction of the Erie Canal in 1825 caused an explosion of shipping opportunities in the New York region. Red Hook’s position close to the shores of Manhattan and New Jersey was ideal for coordinating the movement of cargo along the East and Hudson Rivers, to the Erie Canal, and out to the Atlantic. Bulk cargos such as grain, sugar and coffee, unable to find the needed storage space in downtown Manhattan, were instead brought to Brooklyn’s spacious waterfront in Red Hook.

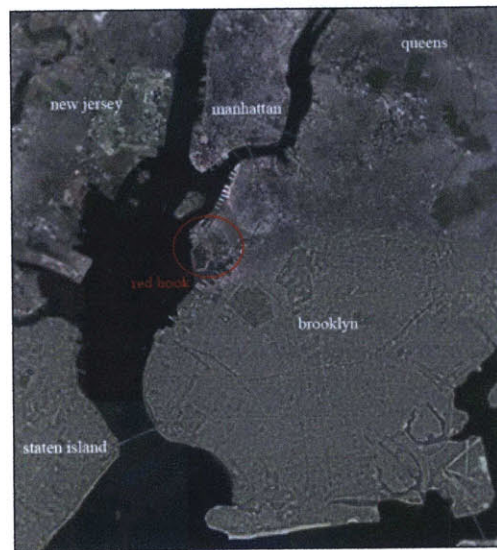


Figure 3 - Map of New York City. Red Hook, Brooklyn highlighted.
Base Map: Google Earth, 2006

Over the course of the 19th century, a series of infrastructure projects sealed the neighborhood's fate as a premier center for shipping. The Atlantic Basin, an inlet designed to protect up to 150 moored ships from the wind, was built in the 1840s by Daniel Richards on 40-acres of the Red Hook waterfront; the Gowanus Canal, constructed in 1848 by widening a narrow creek, brought a new wave of business to the area; and the construction of Erie Basin by William Beard in 1864 added even more sheltered docks and warehouses to the Red Hook waterfront. Industries complementary to port operations, such as ship repair facilities, warehousing, and light industrial production, found homes in the upland neighborhood.



Figure 4 - Erie Basin, Red Hook 1951.

Source: The New York Waterfront: Evolution and Building Culture of the Port and Harbor, 1997

As the port grew, so did the neighborhood around it. Red Hook was a magnet for immigrants well into the 20th century and thousands of homes and boarding houses were

built for the German, Irish and Scandinavian men that flocked to the neighborhood in search of work on the docks and canal. Later, work on the Erie Basin, one of the busiest shipping centers in the 1880s, attracted Italian immigrants to the neighborhood; and in the 1920s, a large number of Puerto Rican families made their home in Red Hook. The Red Hook Pool and Bathhouse and Red Hook Houses, the largest federally funded public housing of its time, were built in the 1930s for the growing population of families drawn to the neighborhood by employment opportunities on the docks. Bars and taverns, where neighborhood seamen and longshoremen congregated, populated many of the streets that led to the waterfront, and neighborhood children played on the piers and docks.

Business continued to boom for port industries during World War II and the number of jobs in Red Hook grew. After World War II, however, the decline of production paired with the introduction of containerization caused the Red Hook waterfront to experience a steep and rapid decline. New containerports built in Elizabeth and Newark, New Jersey by the Port Authority drew barges and industry away from both the Erie and Atlantic Basins on the Red Hook waterfront. Related industries that relied on port business or that transported their goods by water either shut down or moved out of the neighborhood. As described in a history of the Red Hook neighborhood, “When containerization passed Red Hook by, the wharves, warehouses, shipyards and factories became industrial ruins, walling people off from the shore” (Reiss, 2000). The neighborhood connection to the waterfront was severed due to the relocation of the port.

The decline of the port and activity on the waterfront, paired with the destructive actions of the city in the 1940s and 1950s, affected the vitality of the neighborhood as a whole. Large

government infrastructure projects – the Gowanus Expressway, the entrance to the Battery Tunnel, and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) – further undermined the stability of the area when they sliced through the neighborhood, cutting it in half. Homes, stores and churches were demolished, and what was left of Red Hook, now located between the expressways and the waterfront, was isolated from the rest of Brooklyn.



Figure 5 - The entrance of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, built through Red Hook Brooklyn
Source: Red Hook and Gowanus Neighborhood History Guide, 2000

Waterfront Views: Linear vs. Nodal

This destruction was further exacerbated by government miscalculations and delays with regards to the city's plan for the waterfront, which was focused on keeping the port at the expense of the neighborhood. Despite the obvious decline, the city was unwilling to relinquish Red Hook as a site for port activity. In 1964, Mayor Wagner and Brooklyn Borough President Abe Stark announced a \$36 million urban renewal plan to clear 230 acres of the Red Hook waterfront for the construction of a new state-of-the-art containerport. In

accordance with the plans, this required the destruction of 550 homes and 140 businesses on the waterfront along Columbia Street. Neighborhood residents were devastated. Not only was it the location of a tight knit residential community, it was one of the oldest Puerto Rican settlements in the city. Unlike in the past, the growth of the port now required the demolition of the adjacent residential neighborhood.

Due to government inaction and other delays, however, the project was not built immediately. For ten years, a cloud of condemnation hung over the neighborhood, and the result was major disinvestment. Receiving little information from the city, residents lived in limbo not knowing whether to move or to stay. Those that stayed ceased repairs to their buildings or were forced to stop because of the impossibility of receiving a loan under such unstable conditions. The buildings and land vacated by those that moved out of the neighborhood in anticipation of the construction remained vacant, deteriorating and waiting to be demolished.

The Columbia Street community, fed up with the indecision and constantly changing plans, organized the Ad-Hoc Committee to Save the Waterfront, and in 1970 was prepared with an alternative proposal to the Economic Development Administration's containerization plan. In an interview with *The New York Times*, homeowner Bernard Carlson explained, "The terminal may be a boon to the waterfront, but it means the destruction of our neighborhood" (Goldman, 1975). Neighborhood residents were not going to allow the city's plans for the waterfront to destroy their community, though they understood the drive to retain the port. They wanted to retain the live-work connection to the waterfront and so, the community plan proposed a reconfiguration of the containerport that would save much

of the Columbia Street residences and businesses. After a long fight, the city finally conceded that the counter-proposal produced a better containerport in addition to saving the Columbia Street community (“A Fight,” 1973). The first ten acres of waterfront land for the reconfigured containerport were taken by condemnation in 1975 and construction was completed in 1981. Yet despite the hard work of the activists, the live-work connection to the waterfront had already been broken.

Another miscalculation by the city focused on waterfront revitalization further weakened the neighborhood. In 1975, city contractors began digging trenches through the streets of Red Hook for sewer pipes that would eventually connect to a new sewage treatment plant in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Buildings collapsed as workers dug through the unstable landfill on which Red Hook was built and three residents, including an 8-year old girl, were killed. Construction was halted, but the sewer trench was left open and exposed, filling with water and trash and attracting rats and mosquitoes. Thirty-three buildings were condemned and demolished due to weakened foundations and many of the other residents and shop-owners moved away from the dangerous conditions. The population and vitality of Red Hook continued to decline, and resident outrage at the city grew.

The Void: A Period of Decline

The 1980s were difficult for Red Hook. Isolated from the rest of Brooklyn by the Gowanus Expressway, the residential population was 12,000 down from 21,000 in 1950. The crack epidemic that was sweeping the nation took hold in Red Hook, home to large population of poor and unemployed residents. The neighborhood was also physically and racially divided between the large public housing complex, Red Hook Houses, built in 1939 for

dockworkers, and “The Back,” the section comprised of the two- to three-story row homes that had survived the effects of past government infrastructure projects. 75% of Red Hook’s population, largely black and Latino residents, lived in the Houses, while those that lived in the Back were predominantly older white Irish and Italian families – longshoremen that had remained despite the disappearance of the port – and Latino families.

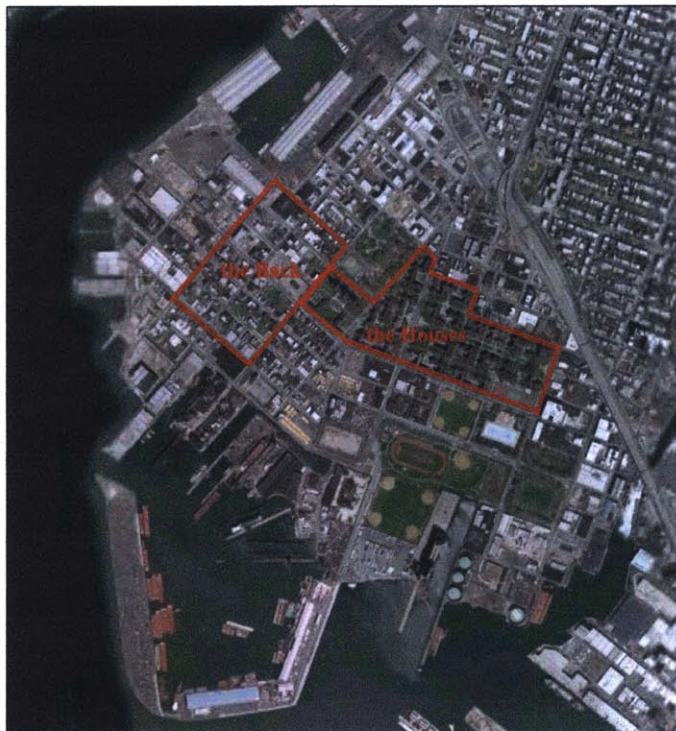


Figure 6 - Map of Red Hook, Brooklyn showing the location of the Back and the Houses
Base Map: Google Earth, 2006

Much of the waterfront lay vacant and abandoned and, except for the new containerport, a planning vacuum developed on the rest of the waterfront. The city, with no vision for its future, approached the shoreline in a piecemeal fashion. One developer, Greg O’Connell, enamored with the history of the waterfront, began buying then inexpensive Red Hook waterfront property in the 1970s and restoring it for industrial and commercial use. He

reflected, “I can remember when I came down here, it was Cyclone fences, packs of dogs running wild, cars abandoned, garbage everywhere” (Rogan, 2000). His vision was for the revival of small manufacturing and light industrial businesses on the water’s edge.

At the time, he was viewed as a welcome addition to the Red Hook community and had the full support of the community, as he was the only one investing in the waterfront in a way that was not destructive to the adjacent residents. Many of the buildings O’Connell purchased were Civil War-era warehouses, and in 1992, he bought his biggest plot of land, 28 acres of waterfront property, from the Port Authority for \$500,000. The piers were sold to him because “nobody else wanted them, and O’Connell’s bid was backed by the community” (Rogan, 2000). In the absence of leadership and productive action from the city, the neighborhood welcomed a developer from the outside to help energize the waterfront. This dynamic, developers being allowed to dominate the planning of the waterfront, would set a precedent for conflicts yet to come in Red Hook.

The Back was experiencing a slight population increase at the time, due to the push of rising rents in other parts of the city and the pull of the city’s Artist Housing Program,⁴ started in the late 1980s. Artists moved into Red Hook, attracted by its affordability, large spaces and industrial character. While this brought life back to certain sections of the neighborhood, it also accentuated the divide between the Back and the Houses – between the increasingly young, white homeowners and the black and Latino residents of public housing.

⁴ A city program, now defunct, that allowed artists to purchase houses for \$1 in blighted neighborhoods.

From the city's perspective, the waterfront, still a vacuum of inactivity, had become the perfect location for a host of environmentally hazardous facilities. At times, Red Hook had over twelve waste transfer stations, ten petroleum related businesses, a marine transfer station, and various warehouses that stored toxic and hazardous waste (Bautista, 1999). While the city viewed the waterfront as being wholly separate from the neighborhood, the residents saw it differently. The host of environmental injustices and the perception of abuse of Red Hook by the city provided a rallying point around which the entire community gathered. This initiated a period of neighborhood organizing and planning in Red Hook.

Filling the Void: Community Action and Neighborhood Planning

For Red Hook residents, the 1990s began with a series of organizing actions aimed at improving the waterfront and the neighborhood. Fighting against unwanted uses brought diverse segments of the population together. However, in trying to craft a vision for the future, conflicts internal to the neighborhood prevented stakeholders from formulating a unified vision. These conflicts arose because of a lack of shared history among neighborhood groups and a lack of explicit dedication to collaborative decision-making.

In 1991, the city released plans to build two new sludge-composting facilities in Red Hook, already home to a number of toxic facilities. Outraged, neighborhood residents of all kinds were determined to fight against this latest offense. With the help of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI), the residents formed a neighborhood-wide coalition to combat the plan. The community-driven movement included representatives from all sectors of Red Hook's business, artistic, religious and educational communities and included working class white, Latino, and African-American residents. According to Eddie Bautista, former Red

Hook resident and organizer with NYLPI, this was the first time that the entire community, usually divided along race and class lines, had come together around an issue (Bautista, 1999).

Due to neighborhood organizing and protest, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), in 1992, formally withdrew Red Hook from the city's sludge plan in recognition of the over-saturation of waste facilities in the neighborhood. This was the first time that a community had successfully employed the city's "fair share"⁵ guidelines to fight the siting of a municipal facility (Bautista, 1999). It was an important victory in terms of what it prevented, but also because it provided the momentum for the next stage of neighborhood and waterfront planning.

At that time, Tom Angotti, planner with the Department of City Planning's Brooklyn office, was working on a set of reports about the waterfront and industrial activity in Community Board 6, which included more affluent Carroll Gardens, Boerum Hill and Park Slope in addition to Red Hook. Through his work he came in contact with the Beard Street Association, one of the community groups in the Back that had actively fought against the sludge treatment facilities. He discussed an idea with them that would bring residential zoning to the industrial waterfront and encourage housing development in the Back. The residents and businesses he met with responded enthusiastically. They viewed the plan as a way to prevent more waste treatment facilities from ending up on the waterfront and to grow the residential population back to past numbers. Owners of some of the industrial

⁵ City charter mandated guidelines developed by the City Planning Commission to make sure that public facilities are located and distributed fairly throughout the city and to avoid any undue concentrations of burdensome facilities.

buildings in the area also supported the plan that Angotti proposed, as it would allow for the conversion of their buildings to housing, a much more lucrative use. The Planning Chairman backed the rezoning of the waterfront as well because “residential uses would look good to the real estate bloc” (Angotti, 1999). As a result, the recommendations were incorporated into the Comprehensive Waterfront Plan (CWP) that the Department of City Planning (DCP) was preparing for all 578 miles of the city’s waterfront. Red Hook was included in the Reach 14 section, the stretch of waterfront from Greenpoint in the north to Sunset Park in the south.

Because of Angotti’s direct involvement with some of the neighborhood residents, some of the recommendations for Red Hook in the CWP are very different than the recommendations for other neighborhoods in the same reach. Instead of only focusing on the thin ribbon of waterfront land, a few of the recommendations are concerned with the neighborhood as a whole and the connections between the waterfront and the upland areas. For example, the recommendation dealing with the section of waterfront that Angotti discussed with the Beard Street Association reads:

Rezone the wedge-shaped area between Wolcott and Van Brunt to permit residential uses. This area...presents an opportunity to integrate the landlocked residential community with the waterfront. (CWP, 1992);

Other recommendations for Red Hook also go beyond the scope of those for other neighborhoods’ waterfronts as they are not at all about the actual waterfront:

Develop affordable low- to moderate-income housing in the six-block area around Van Brunt Street known as Conover Square...New housing, integrated with the community, would help strengthen the neighborhood and contribute toward a revitalized Van Brunt Street. Develop Van Brunt Street as a major access corridor – the community’s commercial and residential spine. Improve mass transit access by working with the MTA to improve bus service and connections to the Smith Street subway station (CWP, 1992).

At this time, Angotti was acting as a bridge between neighborhood and linear waterfront planning, linking residents' goals for their neighborhood and waterfront with the official planning being done by the city. This bridge was an important opportunity for the city to reconceptualize the paradigm of waterfront planning as a process where planning for the waterfront could be informed by the context of the adjacent neighborhood and done in collaboration with residents. This opportunity, however, was not taken. Unwillingness from the city to give more power to neighborhood residents, combined with opposition from influential real estate developers and internal divisions in the neighborhood, prevented this new approach to the waterfront from taking hold. As a result, the city did not provide a clear process for the various groups to establish criteria for the development of the waterfront in the neighborhood.

The bridge that Angotti created between the neighborhood and the city's attempt at linear planning, however, did prompt the residents of Red Hook to initiate a 197-a planning process in 1991. Inspired by a new vision for the waterfront and a desire to improve their neighborhood, a group of residents from the Back requested that Community Board 6 sponsor a neighborhood plan and a 197-a subcommittee was formed. Again, 197-a plans are the official opportunity for community boards to take a proactive role in recommending land use and planning decisions in New York City. The Red Hook plan was only the second plan to be initiated after the 1990 Charter revision giving boards the explicit authority to prepare plans and submit them to the City Planning Commission and City Council for approval. Angotti was encouraged by the proactive efforts of the residents and thought that DCP would respond in kind by giving full support to the Red Hook plan and making it a top priority. It did not. In a later reflection on the process Angotti, who stayed involved as a

consultant, wrote, “My hopes for a new approach to planning dissipated...there was no real commitment [from DCP] to support grass roots planning initiatives in communities of color” (Angotti, 1999). He felt instead that the priority at DCP was to promote real estate development through zoning initiatives. There was no attempt to devise a process by which various interests could be mediated and worked out, and as a result, certain zones of influence from outside the neighborhood were given preference.

But the neighborhood planning process was experiencing its own difficulties internal to the diverse Red Hook community. Membership of the subcommittee had been drawn from its two parent committees on the community board – Land Use and Economic/Waterfront Development. Unfortunately, representation on the Community Board was predominantly drawn from the more affluent neighborhoods it represented and did not reflect the makeup of the Red Hook population. In addition, no one from the Red Hook Houses, the large public housing complex that housed over 70% of the Red Hook population, was asked to join the subcommittee. The deeply ingrained race and class divisions in the neighborhood resurfaced (Bautista, 1999), and the unification that had occurred during the sludge facility fight disappeared. The Red Hook Tenants Association, determined not to be shut out, set out to develop its own plan. The tenants let the Community Board know that if their concerns were not reflected in the official 197-a plan, the tenants would challenge it and submit their version directly to the Borough President or the City Planning Commission. Members of the community board and the Tenants Association met and negotiated a deal – the two plans would be merged into one, and the tenants would be given three seats, plus an alternate, on the 197-a subcommittee. They also agreed that all future meetings were to occur in Red Hook, which they had not been before.

With this merger, the process and subsequent plan were lauded as being a new model for neighborhood planning. The Red Hook 197-a Plan was overwhelmingly approved by the Community Board and was submitted to the City Planning Commission for approval in the summer of 1995. At the last minute, however, some of the more influential member of the business community that had been involved in the process, including Greg O’Connell, came out in opposition to part of the plan. The contested section concerned a portion of the waterfront that the plan designated as a mixed-use zone – the very same “pie shaped wedge” section that had been rezoned to residential use in both the city’s 1971 “Waterfront Plan” and the 1992 CWP. The commercial developers wanted it to remain industrial. The community was shocked and betrayed. “All the careful effort to find common or complementary goals seemed to evaporate” (Cox, 1999). As a result, the City Planning Commission, swayed by the business community, approved a version that excluded the proposed mixed-use zone from the waterfront (Bautista, 1999). This revision was a major blow to the community and re-ignited the atmosphere of distrust and division in the community that had been present at the beginning of the process. Again, the process for negotiating the spheres of influence – the private, neighborhood, and city interests – was unclear, resulting in conflict and manipulation by outside developers.

The reason for the withdrawal of support from commercial developers centered on the future of industrial and commercial uses in the neighborhood and on the waterfront. Those with interests in local businesses located on the waterfront believed that if land was rezoned to residential or mixed-use, industrial uses already in the area would be forced out. They were worried that real estate speculators would flood the area with residential buildings, increasing rents for commercial uses and pricing them out. From the perspective of the

commercial developers, they were trying to protect their investments and rebuild the industrial, working waterfront that they viewed as Red Hook's legacy. Their vision was for the waterfront to be a location for small manufacturing and light industrial businesses – a sector that they believed was not dead, but was one that needed to be cultivated and protected and given a place to grow (Salguero, 2006). These developers, including Greg O'Connell who was once viewed as acting in the best interest of the neighborhood, were no longer in favor with the community. But the confusion that had resulted again revived the divide in the neighborhood, making residents more vulnerable to manipulation.

Waterfront Views: Neighborhood Specific

The breakdown of the neighborhood planning process had huge consequences for Red Hook. Without a clear, unified vision, residents were unable to effectively demand that the city address the needs of the neighborhood. And without a clear plan from the city, the residents were left to fight amongst themselves. Conflict among groups also created confusion of which outside interests were able to take advantage. By appealing to certain segments of the population, these developers fueled the conflict and embedded themselves in the neighborhood. Lacking a clear plan for the waterfront, the city's response was uncoordinated and unsystematic.

First, however, there was another brief period of unity among the various neighborhood factions. In 1999, Red Hook was the target for the siting of another waste transfer station – this time potentially the largest waste transfer station on the East Coast – to be built in preparation for the closing of the Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island (Rogan, 2000). The plan called for the new facility to be located in Erie Basin, once the heart of the working

waterfront. It would “load up to 12,000 tons of garbage a day from local barges onto seafaring barges bound for out-of-state landfills” (Weir, 1999). One more time, the community rallied against the plan, and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani revoked the proposal in response in 2000.

Yet the very same residents that were able to come together around what they did not want on the waterfront were unable to agree on what they did want. Beginning in 1999, the socio-economic divide in the neighborhood again rose to the surface. This time, the focus was a vacant, city-owned building – 480-500 Van Brunt Street – located in the very same “pie-shaped wedge” of land that had been contested during the 197-a approval process. Again, the debate centered on whether or not the building should be redeveloped as housing. The building, a Civil War-era warehouse, was for sale and Greg O’Connell had put in a bid to purchase the property from the city. Still opposed to housing, yet hoping to regain favor with community, his plan was to develop the site as a Fairway supermarket, with a mix of media firms, nonprofit and environmental groups, and artist studios in the top floors. O’Connell claimed to be working with the best interests of the community in mind. When interviewed about his plan by *The Village Voice*, O’Connell said, “Everything I read about getting a community on its feet – communities with half on the poverty level or below – it all said *food*” (Schlesinger, 2002).



Figure 7 - 480-500 Van Brunt Street. Red Hook, Brooklyn, 2006
Source: Carrie Grassi, 2006

In the debate, residents of the Houses sided predominantly with O’Connell recognizing that the Fairway would provide jobs and a needed service to the area. Emma Broughton, Red Hook Houses resident, quoted in *New York Magazine*, said, “I would like to see that building be commercial. It brings in jobs, and we need jobs” (Rogan, 2000). Homeowners from the Back, however, reacted strongly as they wanted to see the waterfront opened to residential uses. The vision of Red Hook Civic Association, whose membership was mainly comprised of residents of the Back, was for the bottom floors of 480-500 Van Brunt to be populated with small shops⁶ and the upper floors be entirely housing. Ultimately, O’Connell won the bid, but was required to compromise to gain the support of a local legislator by providing affordable housing units on the top floor of the building. This created an opening and justification for other residential development on the waterfront, exactly what O’Connell had been concerned about.

⁶ Residential is prohibited on the ground floor because the building is in the floodplain.

The socio-economic divide in the neighborhood was at the root of the conflicting visions for the future of the waterfront. Estimates of unemployment rates in the Houses ranged from 18% to 30% (Louis, 2004) and for the 70% of the Red Hook population that lived in the Houses, jobs and services were of the utmost concern. They wanted the waterfront to become a center of work in the neighborhood, as it had been in the past. Ray Hall, former resident of Red Hook for 26 years and founder of Red Hook Rise, an afterschool program, described why economic development and new jobs on the waterfront was the goal for public housing residents, and why this was in conflict with residential zoning. In speaking about the position of Red Hook Civic Association, he said:

To not have a market of the magnitude of the Fairway, where you can eat better, get a job, join a union, get benefits. Why are you against these things? I call it the most racist statement of all. Because luxury housing supports the upper class white people; jobs support the black people (Hall, 2006).

In addition, the histories that each group had lived with generally informed their respective views of the waterfront and they felt about its future. For residents of the Houses, the homeowners' argument of not being able to live next to a busy, commercial waterfront did not hold much weight. They pointed to the history of the waterfront and the ability of a population double the current size to reside next to a fully functioning port. Dorothy Shields, Red Hook resident for fifty years and president of the Red Hook Houses Tenant Association for thirty, commented:

Years ago, when I first came into the development, there was nothing but businesses [on the waterfront]. There were hundreds and hundreds of them and there were never any complaints. But in the later years we've had certain people that moved back there and they're the ones that find that it's very uncomfortable to have all these businesses. But once upon a time we did have it and there was no problem (Shields, 2006).

In the absence of a functioning city process to negotiate the conflicts over the waterfront, the divisions that were exacerbated by this conflict provided developers with the space and

opportunity to form alliances with particular factions in the neighborhood that would help advance their interests. O'Connell, though considered by many to be a part of the Red Hook community, is one that capitalized on this split. By primarily appealing to the needs of public housing residents and attracting an anchor tenant that would provide 300 union jobs, he attempted to advance his vision of a commercial waterfront.

Ikea, also benefiting from the divisions in the community and lack of clear plan for the waterfront from the city, successfully bid a few years later to build a store on the former site of the Todd Shipyards in Erie Basin – a site that the 1992 CWP had reserved for maritime-related activities. This requirement was lifted and the property given a variance due in large part to the support the Ikea project received from public housing residents. As Dorothy Shields said, “the Ikea site has been vacant for so many years. Just sitting. With everything falling over into the water. And the city hasn't done anything about it” (Shields, 2006).

Watching the fights over the Fairway project, Ikea representatives quickly understood the dynamic in the neighborhood and forged a partnership with the leadership of the Houses. Ikea representatives consulted with residents of the Houses throughout the entire process of negotiating with the city and in return, gained their support during the public comment and review process. Angotti commented, “Developers are getting good at finding those who are institutionally separated and bargaining with them” (Angotti, 2006).

When those from the houses are confronted with comments that Ikea is using a “divide and conquer” approach, they have a number of responses. First, they point out that divisions already existed in the neighborhood. Judith Dailey, longtime Red Hook resident said, “I have to laugh at the groups who say Ikea is splitting the neighborhood. The fact is, Red

Hook has always been split” (Angotti, 2004). Second, unlike organizations in their own neighborhood that exclude residents of the Houses, Ikea consulted with them from the beginning. In speaking about an alternative plan that John McGettrick, President of Red Hook Civic Association, commissioned from waterfront developers Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse, Inc., Ray Hall commented, “John McGettrick told the developer that he was the voice of Red Hook. [Struever] realized that he should have come to the people in the projects. Fairway didn’t make that mistake. Ikea didn’t make that mistake” (Hall, 2006). The final point made in defending Ikea is that not a lot of other companies were looking to invest in the neighborhood. Craig Hammerman, District Manager of Community Board 6, echoed this sentiment when he said, “These two development projects [Fairway and Ikea] represent a commitment that up until that point, no one else was willing to make” (Hammerman, 2006). The community supported both projects.

As conflict in the neighborhood grew and a lack of a clear vision for the future of the waterfront and the neighborhood persisted, development pressure from outside the neighborhood increased. Residential developers tried to take advantage of the confusion in the neighborhood and construct luxury housing on the waterfront. Fights and lawsuits concerning various parcels of land sprang up, and the divisions in the neighborhood became even more pronounced. Trying to regain some semblance of order and control, the city released a set of maps outlining the proposed boundaries for new “Industrial Business Zones” (IBZs) and “Ombudsman Zones.” The IBZs were meant to clarify where industrial zoning had to be maintained and residential zoning restricted, and the “Ombudsman Zones” indicated where mixed-use development was allowed (“Protecting,” 2005). The entire Red

Hook waterfront was designated as an IBZ except for one block – the one that included 480-500 Van Brunt Street – which fell in the Ombudsman Zone.

The battles over the waterfront in Red Hook continue today. Developers continue to take advantage of the lack of a unified community and keep groups on the defensive, rather than having to respond to a set of development guidelines set out by the residents and city. The city's IBZ designations were an attempt to provide some guidance in the future development of the waterfront, but these zones do not provide a process for negotiation and were determined without community input. As a result, conflicts over discrete development projects continue.

CHAPTER V - GREENPOINT

History

The name “Greenpoint” comes from the lush greenery covering the peninsula that the Dutch settlers encountered in the 1600s. The area was sparsely settled as farmland and remained so through the 18th century despite the arrival of new settlers. The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 advanced trade opportunities and the growth of the industrial sector in the New York region. Greenpoint became prime property, as waterfront land was crucial for economic expansion. In the 1840s, Nezhiah Bliss, the owner of an iron works operation in Manhattan, bought much of the waterfront land in Greenpoint, laid out streets and lots, and built roads and bridges in anticipation of this growth (Reiss, “Greenpoint,” 2005).



Figure 8 - Map of New York City. Greenpoint, Brooklyn highlighted.
Base Map: Google Earth, 2006

Soon, the neighborhood became a major shipbuilding center, as well as a location for skilled carpentry, ironworks, glass and porcelain works factories, and later petroleum refineries. Companies such as the Sneed and Rowland Shipyard, that produced the huge iron pipes to carry drinking water over the High Bridge Aqueduct, and the Continental Shipyard, where the Union's legendary ironclad warship the *U.S.S. Monitor* was built, were located along Greenpoint's waterfront during this period.

At this time, the lives of Greenpoint residents were closely entwined with their shoreline. Workers who lived in the neighborhood either worked on the waterfront or in industries supporting those that did. In fact, those shipbuilders and industrialists, such as porcelain manufacturer Thomas Milton, who played key roles in developing Greenpoint's waterfront were crucial in building Greenpoint's characteristic row houses for the working- and middle-class families they employed (Reiss, "Greenpoint," 2005). Essentially, the development of the neighborhood was driven by the activity on the waterfront.

By the turn of the 20th century, the era of shipbuilding and artisan work was coming to an end. The 1930s depression hit Greenpoint hard and many of the glassworks and ironworks factories shut down or moved out of the city. Jobs disappeared and many families were unable to maintain their homes. Industry peaked again during the years of World War II when jobs once more became plentiful on Greenpoint's waterfront. Cargo ships docked at piers at the end of almost every street providing steady work to large numbers of longshoremen (Reiss, "Greenpoint," 2005). The live-work connection to the waterfront sustained Greenpoint once again.



Figure 9 - Greenpoint docks, in the days of active shipping
Source: Greenpoint Neighborhood History Guide, 2005

The years after World War II were more difficult for the neighborhood and planning actions communicated the city's disregard for local residents. In 1950, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway plowed directly through the southeastern section of the neighborhood, destroying homes and displacing many families. Then in the 1960s and 1970s a host of undesirable uses invaded Greenpoint's declining industrial waterfront. Industry relocated to other parts of the country in search of cheaper labor and energy costs and the city struggled with how to deal with this decline of the waterfront. On many parcels it did nothing, and on others it used the increasingly vacant industrial waterfront to site a host of municipal facilities. Huge factory buildings located on the waterfront were left vacant and abandoned. Oil storage tanks and waste handling plants that employed few moved onto the land vacated by the former job-producing industries. In 1967, New York City's largest wastewater treatment plant opened in Greenpoint along Newtown Creek. Late in the 1980s, a large garbage incinerator and nine marine trash transfer stations had also located along the waterway. Locally undesirable land uses filled the vacuum on the waterfront created by the disappearance of job-intensive manufacturing.

This was the situation that set the stage for a period of activism and community organizing around the waterfront during the 1990s. The abandonment of the waterfront by job producing companies along with the use of the neighborhood as a dumping ground for the city's undesirable uses meant that there was no longer a live-work connection between the neighborhood and the waterfront. Although the neighborhood stayed "industrial" in name, the reality meant something very different. The heyday of the port evoked hard work, plentiful jobs and an active waterfront – by definition there was a connection between the waterfront and its upland neighborhood. This connection disappeared with the port and other industries, and "industrial" came more and more to mean a dirty and polluted zone near which no one should be living. The industrial waterfront became completely cut off from the rest of the neighborhood due to fenced off vacant lots, derelict and dangerous buildings, a host of noxious uses, and a deteriorating waterfront infrastructure of piers and bulkheads. The original live-work connection between the waterfront and the neighborhood was broken.

In 1992, the City developed the Comprehensive Waterfront Plan (CWP) and borough-specific plans. Recommendations pertaining to Greenpoint were included in the Plan for the Brooklyn Waterfront. Again, these plans were meant to "provide a framework to guide land use along the city's entire 578-mile shoreline," (CWP, 1992) and were touted as a new approach to waterfront planning. However, the plans followed a pattern similar to previous plans and dealt with the waterfront as a ribbon of land, not as an integral part of adjacent neighborhoods.

The CWP did include specific recommendations about Greenpoint's waterfront, but they were not written from the neighborhood point of view. The plan divided the Greenpoint waterfront between two reaches: Reach 13, which extends along both shores of Newtown Creek – the southern one that runs along Greenpoint, Brooklyn and the northern one that runs along Hunters Point, Long Island City and Maspeth, Queens; and Reach 14, which extends along the East River from the northern edge of Greenpoint, through more than ten neighborhoods, to the southern edge of Sunset Park in south Brooklyn.

In the CWP, both reaches were explicitly characterized as working waterfronts, industrial in nature. In this context, “working waterfront” meant a location for industrial uses that require an M3 (heavy industrial) zoning, not one teeming with dockworkers (CWP, 1992). On the Greenpoint side of Reach 13, the reality of this industrial waterfront took the form of storage facilities for oil and petroleum products, warehousing, distribution and trucking companies, and waste transfer stations. Reach 14, however, was characterized as industrial because it “continues to support important cluster of maritime activity and port-related infrastructure at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the Red Hook Marine Terminal, Erie Basin and Sunset Park,” none of which were located in Greenpoint, though the Greenpoint segment of Reach 14 was described as having “substantial concentrations of industrial jobs” (Plan for Brooklyn, 1994). For such reasons, the plan asserted, “the reach will remain primarily an industrial waterfront.” But this vision is exactly what the residential community in Greenpoint did not want and against which they spent the next decade fighting.

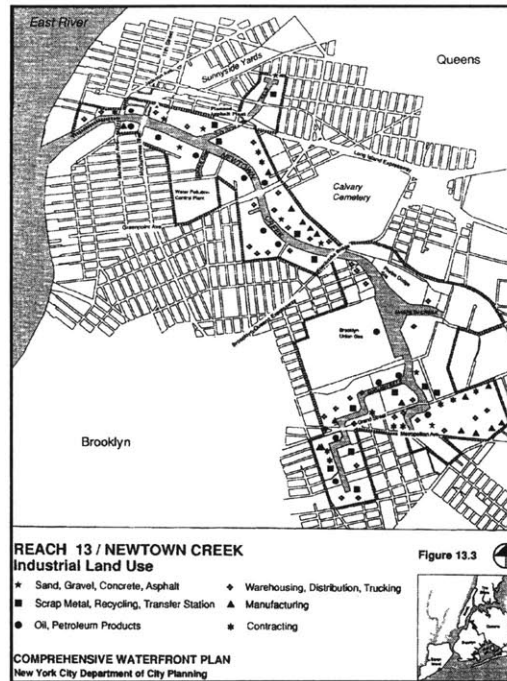


Figure 10 - Reach 13 Study Area: Industrial Land Use
Source: *Plan for the Brooklyn Waterfront, 1994*

Filling the Void: Community Action and Neighborhood Planning

For Greenpoint residents, starting in 1989, the next decade was characterized by a series of organizing actions around the waterfront. The first stage, fighting against unwanted uses, was done in response to the city's approach to the waterfront; the second stage, a process of neighborhood organizing, focused on crafting a vision for the future; and the third, putting the plans to action, required negotiating with the city. It was at this point when the nodal, neighborhood perspective came into contact with the city's ongoing linear approach to planning the waterfront in Greenpoint. It was also at this point when private waterfront developers were competing for a say in what happened on the waterfront. The ability of the city to create a process for these various interest groups was the key in establishing a new way of approaching the waterfront.

Greenpointers, no longer entwined through jobs and economic activity, grasped at ways to stay connected to their waterfront. Despite the dangerous conditions that existed due to rotting piers and polluted waters, neighborhood residents clung to the last points of access they had and found discrete spots for sunbathing, fishing and views of the Manhattan skyline (Reiss, "Greenpoint," 2005). But a growing anger and disappointment about the abandonment of the waterfront as well as the perception of it as a dumping ground for the city prompted community activism centered on environmental justice and waterfront land-use issues.

While the city was developing waterfront plans for linear, reach segments, community groups in Greenpoint and in Williamsburg to the south, motivated by wishes for the overall health of their neighborhoods, began to organize against the neglect and abuse of their waterfronts. In 1989, the group Concerned Citizens of Greenpoint, Inc. formed to fight for the environmental health of the community. Fed up with what it perceived as an unfair burden of the city's noxious industries and facilities, it set about to work with local groups and political leaders to upgrade and maintain the quality of life in Greenpoint. In addition, it monitored the policies and actions of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), with regards to the Newtown Creek Sewage Treatment Plant, the garbage incinerator, and the 17 million gallon Mobil Oil spill⁷ in the neighborhood, among others.

⁷ The largest in U.S. history.

The community was becoming increasingly fed up with the abandoned and derelict sites on the waterfront as well. In 1989, Community Board 1's Waterfront Committee⁸ initiated a public planning process to develop a re-use plan for sections of the Greenpoint and Williamsburg waterfronts. The original goal of the process was to develop a design for the redevelopment of two of the most underutilized waterfront sites in the district – the former Brooklyn Eastern District Terminal (BEDT) on the Greenpoint/Williamsburg border (20 acres), and the Greenpoint Terminal Market (20 acres) in Greenpoint.

The BEDT site is symbolic of the community's fight to reclaim their waterfront. BEDT was a rail-to-barge terminal that had operated on that same location for 150 years. Freight agents who worked at the terminal would load as many as 1,400 railroad cars a month onto barges to have them pulled cross New York Harbor to New Jersey. After the terminal closed in 1979, the buildings and land lay empty. In the 1980s, "homeless encampments sprang up on the site, and fires burned the buildings to empty shells where the sky showed through" (Sutro, 2001). A garbage transfer station operated by alleged organized-crime figure Phil Barretti took over the site, until the city finally took ownership of the site in 1994 and it became a "clean fill" operation (Sutro, 2001). Clean fill is defined as "uncontaminated inert solid material" by DEP, but according to Neighbors Against Garbage (NAG), a newly formed community group, the "clean fill" site was dusty, dirty and unregulated (Sutro, 2001). Tired of these undesirable uses on their once vibrant waterfront land, NAG successfully led the fight to close the clean fill operation.

⁸ One of 24 committees.

Understanding the potential their waterfront held for overall neighborhood revitalization, and wanting to recapture the connection to the waterfront for its residents, Brooklyn Community Board 1 set out to produce a 197-a plan for the two waterfront neighborhoods in its boundaries. Brooklyn community boards have submitted six out of the sixteen 197-a plans that have been done in New York City to date. Five of those six are for waterfront neighborhoods dominated by industrial uses and all five are located along Reach 14. The plans address the issues that their respective sections of the waterfront face.

The state of the waterfront was something the Greenpoint community was rallying around and taking very seriously, and in 1993, calls for broader community participation and scope of planning led to the formation of the group Williamsburg/Greenpoint Organized for an Open Process (WOOP). In early 1997, because of the “diversity of interests, issues, and the structural differences between the two communities” participants decided to undertake two separate planning processes for the two neighborhoods (Greenpoint 197-A Plan, 2002). Planning for the future of the waterfront in Greenpoint would truly become a function of the neighborhood.

Unlike the CWP produced by the city, the Greenpoint 197-a Plan incorporated the residents’ vision for the waterfront in a broader concept for the overall neighborhood. It was not linear in nature; that is, it did not deal with the needs of the waterfront separate from the needs of the neighborhood as a whole. For example, the vision statement read, “the community envisions Greenpoint as a neighborhood with a continuous publicly accessible waterfront, restored housing stock, and revitalized commercial streets, a radically improved environment, and a high quality of life” (Greenpoint 197-A Plan, 2002). All of the

recommendations, including the ones that dealt directly with the waterfront, were based on the specific conditions in the neighborhood and the experience and observations of its residents. The call was mainly for the redevelopment of the waterfront in a way that addressed the needs of the neighborhood. Open space, public access and neighborhood scale residential development was the overriding vision, which was driven by the lack of connection to the waterfront at the time.

Waterfront Views: Linear vs. Nodal

As reflected in the two plans, the city and the neighborhood's perspectives posed different visions for the future of the Greenpoint waterfront. A group of people intimately familiar with what it meant to live next to an inaccessible, polluted waterway wrote the broad goals and specific recommendations in the 197-a plan – recommendations that differed substantially from the city's plan. And unlike the Red Hook case, there was no bridge between the two plans, highlighting the differences in the two sets of recommendations even more.

First, recommendations for specific sites along the waterfront either varied in content, or in the depth of thinking about the issues and possible solutions. For example, in the Reach 14 section of the CWP, a specific recommendation was made to “ensure waterfront views from the Newtown Barge Terminal Playground,” that were being blocked by the adjacent Greenpoint Lumber Exchange. Here, although the existing neighborhood was considered in the city's recommendations, it was off base from what residents actually needed or wanted. This 1.2-acre playground was the only parkland in all of North Greenpoint and was home to the Barge Park Pals, a community group that hosted an annual softball tournament for

neighborhood kids. As such, the recommendation in the 197-a plan was instead to improve Newtown Barge Terminal Playground. This meant, “creating a new basketball court, improving lighting of the park and the surrounding streets, installing new swings and sprinklers for small children and providing public bathrooms” (Greenpoint 197-A Plan, 2002). At this particular site, the important issue was not whether or not residents could see Manhattan, but rather, the provision of safe recreation experiences for neighborhood children.



Figure 11 - Newtown Barge Terminal Playground. Greenpoint, Brooklyn.
Source: Greenpoint/Williamsburg Open Space Plan, 2004

Similarly, at the adjacent lumberyard – the Greenpoint Lumber Exchange – the CWP recommendation was to, “support residential redevelopment of the Greenpoint Lumber Exchange if it were to cease operations,” while the 197-a recommendation was to “work with the owner of the Greenpoint Lumberyard to undertake a property transfer for Greenpoint Park.” Again, a major issue for residents of Greenpoint was the lack of recreation and open space for adults and children. The 197-a plan better reflected the reality of life for residents already in the neighborhood.

Second, although the 197-a plan, in some areas, offers similar recommendations to the CWP, the motivation comes from a very different perspective. The neighborhood view is evident in the detail and context provided with regards to specific recommendations. For example, in the CWP there is a proposal to “rezone the former Greenpoint Terminal Market to permit residential development.” This 20-acre site is one of the two that prompted the initial planning process by Community Board 1, and it holds tremendous significance for the community. As described in the 197-a plan, the complex of buildings on the site is “a visual reminder of the community’s industrial heritage as a working waterfront. Once vital to [the] community’s economic and population growth and livelihood, these turn-of-the-century structures...have been vacant since the 1960s.” The community’s recommendation calls instead for the “development of the Greenpoint Terminal Market as a high performance mixed use, residential, commercial, retail, workshop and studio facility...Existing buildings worthy of landmark status should be retained and designated.” For the community, this space was not just a potential site for redevelopment along a ribbon of industrial waterfront, but rather was a place of historic meaning and connection to the neighborhood’s past.



Figure 12 - Greenpoint Terminal Market. Greenpoint, Brooklyn.
Source: Cassandra Smith, 2006

Finally, although both of the plans discussed the environmental degradation of Newtown Creek due to decades of pollution and toxic emissions from private industry and city facilities, the differences between the two plans made it clear that the Greenpoint community was concerned about the health and welfare of its residents to a much greater degree than was reflected in the CWP. For example, while the CWP includes seven recommendations for that address the environmental degradation of the area around Newtown Creek, the 197-a plan outlines twenty specific recommendations and nine guiding principles to “promote the cleaning of the neighborhood’s pollution problems and protect the residents and workers against future environmental problems” (Greenpoint 197-A Plan, 2002). This attention to the environment was rooted in the reality of living in a neighborhood where there is a 17-million gallon oil spill from the 1940s still seeping through the ground; where the largest wastewater treatment facility in the city is located, often discharging raw sewage into the water during high intensity storms; and where there is the

largest concentration of waste transfer stations in the city. In summary, the differences between the two plans highlight the disconnect of the city's perception of the waterfront from the realities of living in a post-industrial waterfront neighborhood.

Waterfront Views: Neighborhood Specific

The residents of Greenpoint were fighting for a better life for those already residing in the neighborhood. Tired of living with an unproductive and unhealthy waterfront, they looked for ways to reclaim their waterfront for the health and welfare of current residents. Access to the waterfront in the form of parks and open space became the overriding goal in Greenpoint and rezoning the waterfront to residential became the main tool to advance that goal. Though the city had not recommended this in the CWP, the prospect of adding waterfront property tax revenue to the city coffers was appealing. From the perspective of the city, this economic benefit was the main motivation to make a change on the waterfront, and the support of the residents was the main catalyst. But again, the main motivation for change on the waterfront for Greenpoint residents was the decades of pollution and lack of access that they had endured.

As a lifelong resident of Greenpoint and member of the Community Board 1 Waterfront Committee, Greenpoint Waterfront Association for Parks & Planning (GWAPP) and Barge Park Pals, Laura Hoffman's motivation for getting involved with waterfront and neighborhood advocacy came when she was diagnosed with Lupus. She was the third person in her building to be so diagnosed, and her son, shortly thereafter, was the fourth. As she researched Lupus, she discovered that many other clusters of people living with disease across the country were also located near waste treatment facilities. She believes that

the waterfront is important because of the environmental and public health benefits a clean and accessible shoreline can provide for neighborhood residents (Hoffman, 2006).

Irene Klementowicz, Greenpoint resident for almost 50 years and founder of Concerned Citizens of Greenpoint, Inc., began her fight for a healthy neighborhood in the mid-1950s. Her first battle was for the enforcement of pollution controls of a plastics factory located across the street from two schools and gave off “a sweet nauseating smell.” The factory was required to install pollution detectors on the roof as a result of her work. She then turned her attention to the Greenpoint Incinerator that opened in 1958. It was a 1,000-ton per day mass-burn plant, which according to Irene “was spewing all kinds of white snow,” and was frequently cited by the EPA for violations of federal emissions limits. She and her neighbors successfully fought to get the plant closed in 1995, though it has still not been demolished. She believes that the effect of all of these facilities has on her neighborhood is “cumulative environmental degradation” and she would like to see better things for her community (Klementowicz, 2006).

Although the residents of Greenpoint were motivated to activism mainly in reaction to the concentration of undesirable uses located along their waterfronts, they understood that many of the municipal facilities were crucial to the operations of the city and had to be sited somewhere. Nevertheless, they felt that when evaluating the potential sites, instead of viewing the waterfront as being disconnected from the upland neighborhoods and siting facilities based on previous land use or the presence of similar uses, the city should have also evaluated the impact and burden these facilities place on area communities. As a result, the use of “fair share” siting criteria and improved enforcement of environmental violations was

at the core of the Greenpoint 197-a Plan's recommendations. This was evident through the plan's strong call for a "permanent ban on any new or relocated garbage and marine transfer stations, recycling facilities or other solid waste related businesses anywhere in Greenpoint," despite the acceptance of the "Significant Maritime and Industrial Area" (SMIA) designation given to Newtown Creek by the Department of City Planning.

The Greenpoint 197-a Plan, and the four other 197-a plans from Reach 14 neighborhoods, occurred on the heels of the publication of the city's CWP borough-specific plans published in 1994, and their momentum pushed waterfront planners to begin to adjust their approach to the waterfront. The 197-a plans in Greenpoint and Williamsburg, specifically, spurred the city to reexamine the zoning along the waterfront in these two neighborhoods and to eventually rezone the waterfront from M3 (heavy industrial) to R6 and R8 (residential). For the first time, the city tapped into the provision they had established for specialized Waterfront Access Plans (WAP) that allowed for public access requirements along residential waterfronts based on specific neighborhood conditions. Greenpoint residents viewed the WAP as a major opportunity to achieve their goals of increased waterfront access and recreational spaces. Determined to keep the pressure on, the residents, organized by GWAPP, designed their own open space plan, which they used as a basis to negotiate with the city.

But conflicts internal to the neighborhood planning process further complicated the interaction between the city's approach and neighborhood waterfront planning, and made it easier for outside interests to advance their own goals. The potential for disagreement among various neighborhood interest groups depends greatly on the degree to which there is

a shared history among groups and a dedication to collaborative decision-making. In Greenpoint, because of the commitment to designing a collective vision and building consensus, the internal conflict was kept to a minimum during the 197-a planning process. It was during the next stage, negotiating with the city on bringing the vision to reality, that the commitment began to be undermined.

Over the course of the ten years it took to complete the Greenpoint 197-a Plan, a concerted effort on the part of leaders and participants created a transparent and open process, inclusive of all sectors of the Greenpoint community. Though time and energy intensive, the understanding was that this would create a more powerful and meaningful plan, which would be crucial when negotiating with the city. And although Greenpoint and Williamsburg had decided to embark on two separate planning processes, the two neighborhoods also made an explicit commitment not to let their different perspectives divide them (Lawrence, 2006).

The major difference between the goals of the two neighborhoods was the degree to which industrial retention was a priority. While the residents of Greenpoint agreed to accept the designation of Newtown Creek as an SMIA, overall they were sick of “industry” on the waterfront and were determined to increase the amount of open space and public access along the East River. As Irene Klementowicz stated, they wanted industry to “get lost” (2006). For her and many other residents, public access to the waterfront through public parks, public walkways and residential development that was in keeping with the scale of the neighborhood was the priority.

Though this was also a goal expressed in the Williamsburg 197-a Plan, Julie Lawrence, former Chair of the Waterfront Committee and resident of Williamsburg, explained that Williamsburg residents valued industrial retention more than Greenpoint residents (2006). This difference stemmed from the different demographics of the two communities and each group's historical relationship to industry. In Greenpoint, those involved in the planning process were mainly life-long, older residents that had lived through the worst years of abandonment and environmental degradation. Industry and a "working waterfront" had come to represent pollution, undesirable uses, and lack of jobs for the residents of Greenpoint.

The perspective of Williamsburg's residents, however, was slightly different. More easily accessible from Manhattan, it had become a destination for artists, artisans and light manufacturers fleeing the high rents and small spaces offered in Manhattan in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For these artists and the gentrifiers that followed, "industry" connoted not just pollution and environmental degradation, but also a kind of gritty urban living that was increasingly in-vogue (Ley, 2003). Cheap rents, converted lofts and live-work spaces attracted these residents to Williamsburg, and this way of life was under assault by rising rents and condominium conversions. Despite their difference in perspective, residents from Williamsburg understood that Greenpointers wanted to see industry go because they felt completely overburdened by it (Lawrence, 2006). The two neighborhoods managed to coordinate with each other and not let internal disagreements disrupt the primary task at hand – that of reclaiming the waterfront for neighborhood use.

The transparency and effectiveness of the process was due to an early recognition by community members for the need to expand the process beyond the Community Board. Community Board 1, the official sponsor of both 197-a plans, was not known for its inclusivity or transparency, and the formation of WOOP during the initial phase of visioning set the tone for the entire 197-a neighborhood planning process. The transparency of the process added legitimacy to the plans and produced two 197-a plans that the entire community could stand behind. However, after the completion of the 197-a plans, when the city began to do rezoning studies of the Greenpoint and Williamsburg East River waterfronts, transparency became a thing of the past as the Community Board reverted back to its old ways. The process lost legitimacy and the residents of Greenpoint worried that important decisions were being made without the input of the full range of neighborhood interests. This was especially worrisome because of the advantages it gave to developers who were interested in advancing their own goals of high-end, condominium towers on the waterfront.

From Planning to Action: Negotiating with the City

The ineffectiveness of Community Board 1 played a major role in undermining the next stages of the waterfront planning process in Greenpoint – negotiating with the city around implementation. This ineffectiveness created an opening for the city to proceed with the rezoning without full participation from the neighborhood, yet still be able to claim community support. Well-connected developers were also negotiating with the city at this time, and the absence of a coordinated effort from the Greenpoint community gave the developers an advantage. Private developers had their own plans for the Greenpoint

waterfront and were also able to utilize the space created by neighborhood division to advance their own goals.

Although 197-a plans are not binding, the Greenpoint and Williamsburg neighborhood plans created enough momentum to push the city to reevaluate the zoning along their stretch of waterfront in Reach 14. But from the city's perspective, the rezoning also made sense because of the rise in the real estate market in the two neighborhoods over the previous few years, and the pressures residential developers were exerting to push for residential rezoning as well. The economic benefits of a residential waterfront were clear. For Greenpointers, however, the redevelopment of formerly industrial land into public recreation space was the main goal, not the creation of a residential waterfront. The ability of community groups to negotiate the terms of the rezoning, and to prevent the city from responding only to the pressure from developers would be the test of their real influence over the process. A process to mediate the interaction between the city, the neighborhood, and outside interests existed, but whether it was to be more effective for private interests than for those in the neighborhood remained to be seen.

In the summer of 2002, after the final approval of both 197-a plans, Community Board 1 organized a rezoning taskforce, comprised of housing, open space, height/bulk, and mixed-use committees, to monitor the process and negotiate with the city. But the Community Board was not as proactive about publicizing meetings, reaching out to a wide group of constituents, and organizing an open process for the task force meetings as the subcommittee leaders of the 197-a process had been. The Community Board was led by a group of people who had been on the board for quite some time, and were not used to

sharing their power. According to one community member, “the process for decision-making on the Community Board is really a problem.” As a result, the taskforce never built up the momentum that was needed to sustain itself and was disbanded in the winter of 2004, at the height of the process. This was the moment when the community should have been negotiating with the City Council regarding the boundaries of the rezoning area, the provisions for affordable housing, the degree of industrial retention, and the public access requirements. The various interest groups were forced to negotiate independently of one another, weakening all of their causes. Housing advocates, attracting support from housing groups all over the city, were the most organized and vocal and pushed the City Council on the issue of affordability. They were successful in getting many of their demands met.

Although many outsiders tout the rezoning as a success because of the affordable housing provisions, this view is not completely shared by Greenpoint residents. Many feel that too many trade-offs with respect to open space and public access to the waterfront were made. During the negotiation process, affordable housing advocates overshadowed the open space interest groups that were led by GWAPP, and did not achieve the goal they had set of adding another 72.5 acres of parkland to the waterfront. The inclusionary zoning guidelines that were instated allowed waterfront developers to build larger, taller structures on the waterfront in return for including affordable units in their buildings. Despite the requirements for a public walkway along all newly developed sites, Greenpoint residents worried that these private developments, potentially forty stories tall, would effectively block them from accessing the water. The very thing for which residents were fighting, the ability to enjoy the revitalized waterfront, was potentially going to become co-opted by other

influences, such as developers concerned with maximizing their returns, the city increasing its tax base, and advocacy groups from outside the area.

Moving from the negotiation to the implementation stage worried many residents. The interests of the city had begun to converge with the waterfront developers, and residents were again put on the defensive – this time requiring them to protect their waterfront from overzealous development, and to demand the city follow through on its promises for waterfront access. Laura Hofmann expressed wariness over “the ‘corrections’ that the city is making...There are some changes that look like the city is trying to eliminate things [we] fought for. And they are doing it in a disguised way – as a ‘corrective action.’ Little things like this take a lot of energy and attention” (2006). The Community Board, involved in this process, was negotiating and making decisions, altering original agreements, without informing the community at large.

This lack of vigilance on the part of the community board combined with a major spike in development and real estate prices throughout the neighborhood has made many of the residents realize the need for more organizing and advocacy. Although momentum was building, an unexplained fire at the Greenpoint Terminal Market in 2006 motivated another resurgence of community action in the neighborhood.

The North Brooklyn Alliance (NBA), a coalition of 35 community based groups in Greenpoint and Williamsburg, demanded an independent investigation into the cause of the fire as well as greater oversight of the development that has resulted from the waterfront rezoning. Again, the Greenpoint Terminal Market was one of the vacant industrial

complexes that motivated the community to action in 1989. Because of its historical significance to the community, there had been mounting energy in pushing for the building to be landmarked. For example, a press release from the NBA said “Greenpoint Terminal Market, a 100–year-old warehouse landmark, was a monument to the community’s proud history and a symbol of their future as they struggle to reconnect with their waterfront” (NBA, 2006). But the landmarking process was a lengthy one and would have delayed the development of the site. Suspicions abound that the fire was set by the owner of the property in order to speed up the redevelopment of the site for luxury condominiums.



Figure 13 - Greenpoint Terminal Market after the fire. Greenpoint, Brooklyn.
Source: Harry J. Bizzarro, www.flickr.com, 2006

Again, the community’s vision was being co-opted by both official and unofficial acts of the city and developers. The community was extremely upset by the lack of respect given to their energy in working through the official process. A press release issued by the NBA underscores the community’s disappointment in the process. It read,

Our community has embraced development as the best opportunity to create needed open space, affordable housing and good jobs. But so far we have been rewarded with the destruction of our property, displacement of our neighbors, inadequate public services and a degraded quality of life— culminating in the tragic fire at the Greenpoint Terminal Market (NBA, 2006).

The community is slowly coming to terms with the fact that, due to a unclear process for implementation, their fight is not yet over. That in order for their vision, or even part of their vision, to be realized on the waterfront, they will need to be vigilant. They will need to continue to organize and to hold the city accountable to its promises and developers accountable for their actions as well. The challenge in this is sustaining the momentum and the unity in the neighborhood, especially as neighborhood demographics begin to change due to new development. The onus of holding developers accountable, however, should not lie with neighborhood residents, but rather, should be the responsibility of the city. The city should continue the planning for the waterfront beyond a simple legislative action in order to ensure that the development of the waterfront is in keeping with the vision that prompted it in the first place.

CHAPTER VI - CONCLUSIONS

It has been over thirty years since the decline of the port in New York City and the city is still struggling with how to understand and plan for the future of the industrial waterfront in Brooklyn. The decline of heavy industry created the potential for collaboration between the city and waterfront neighborhoods, but it also created new opportunities for conflict. Where the waterfront was once solely the purview of the port and water-dependant industry, it has become the focus of a number of competing interests – industrial retention, luxury housing, public access and historic preservation, to name a few. Residents of adjacent neighborhoods, private developers, and special interest advocacy groups clamor to have a say in the future of these waterfronts. While the city has developed a few tools – such as specific waterfront zoning guidelines and contextualized Waterfront Access Plans for residential areas – to deal with some of these issues, it has not developed a clear process for negotiating and balancing competing interests. Instead, groups are left to fight it out on their own and the result is a messy and cumbersome process dominated by the influence of private developers.

The Red Hook and Greenpoint cases demonstrate why waterfronts are unique and why they require special attention from the city. Unlike in most parts of the city, non-“highest-and-best” uses (i.e., uses other than housing) lay legitimate claim to the shoreline, requiring some mechanism for regulating and monitoring overzealous, high-end housing development. One of these claims is for the protection of the “working waterfront,” which includes uses that have historically been found on the industrially zoned waterfront. Industrial zones are shrinking all over the city, and in many cases the waterfront is the only area left where some

of these businesses are allowed, despite the resistance of neighboring residents. The waterfront is also the only feasible location for certain businesses that truly are water-dependant.

The other competitive claim to the waterfront is for public space and parks. The legitimacy of this claim finds its origin in the public trust doctrine that says that the waterfront is to be preserved for public use. This was the basis for the provision of Waterfront Access Plans, which gave active and passive recreation areas the potential to compete with other uses for space at the water's edge. Thus, the need for a clearly thought out process for determining how to balance these competing uses, both from a city-wide perspective as well as within the context of individual neighborhoods, is clear.

When the port dominated the shoreline, the city approached the waterfront as if it was detached from adjacent neighborhoods; the organic relationship between the port and adjacent neighborhoods facilitated this. Yet even as the port vacated the Brooklyn waterfront, this view continued to dominate the city's actions and plans. The city failed to adjust its way of thinking in response to the changing nature of the waterfront and failed to understand the evolving relationship between neighborhoods and their waterfronts. This prompted a backlash from residents of adjacent neighborhoods who bore the brunt of the negative impact of the city's actions on the waterfront.

Driven by the lack of a clear city-led process for addressing the needs of the waterfront from a neighborhood perspective, residents initiated their own waterfront planning processes, of which the Red Hook and Greenpoint 197-a Plans are examples. Efforts of these kinds have

attempted to push the city towards a more neighborhood-centered approach. And although the process for negotiating the waterfront development process remains unclear, actions that were taken, or not taken, subsequent to the completion of these plans highlight the lessons learned and the gradual, but slow, evolution of the city's approach.

The Red Hook case highlights the complexity of the issues surrounding the redevelopment of the industrial waterfront and the need for a strong city role in guiding the process. A clear opportunity existed for the city to take on this role when Brooklyn city planner Tom Angotti pushed for a greater connection between the government and community planning processes that were occurring almost simultaneously in the early 1990s. However, due to resistance from the city, the two remained separate with no mechanisms put in place for interaction or implementation. Without this attention to process, government miscalculations, internal neighborhood divisions and external influences from private developers were allowed to continue to go unchecked.

The actual Red Hook 197-a planning process (until it was undermined by a private developer) was lauded as a huge achievement for neighborhood planning in New York. Despite the lack of support from the city, it was one of the first plans of its kind and expectations were high for what might come of it. Nevertheless, due to the actions of the developer and the lack of formal mechanisms for implementation, the plan was deemed ineffective even before it was approved. The divisions in the neighborhood, the influence of private developers, and the lack of clarity from the city for the future of the waterfront in Red Hook persisted.

In the years that followed the completion of the 197-a plan, developers were able to take advantage of these factors to further advance their interests on the waterfront. What emerged in Red Hook was the continuation of an uncoordinated, project-driven approach with no overarching framework. And because of the divisions in the community, developers were able to align themselves with one faction or another, sustaining this approach with minimal community support.

The tools the city had developed to address the city's changing waterfront, the 1993 Waterfront Zoning Reform and Waterfront Access Plans, were not applicable in Red Hook as they were meant to address only those sections of the waterfront that were zoned for residential use. Yet, other than the outdated and ineffectual "Significant Industrial and Maritime Area" designation, the city had no mechanism to protect existing non-polluting industrial businesses or address the co-existence of residential and industrial uses on the waterfront. The city made no attempt to advance a new process for addressing this conflict, which continued to grow, exacerbated by the racial and socio-economic divide in the neighborhood.

The Greenpoint case is slightly different as the available tools were to be utilized to advance the development of the waterfront. This case, however, demonstrates the bluntness of the existing city tools in both monitoring the implementation of changes on the waterfront, and addressing the affects those changes had on the neighborhood as a whole. The Greenpoint 197-a Plan was completed six years after Red Hook's and although motivated by many of the same reasons, it prompted a very different outcome. Due to the seeming convergence of

neighborhood, city and community interests, the city responded to the neighborhood planning process by rezoning the East River waterfront for residential use.

After a long process of neighborhood planning, the city responded with a waterfront rezoning study. Although the Greenpoint 197-a Plan addressed much more than zoning, the only official mechanism for change that existed was for rezoning the waterfront. This was at least a step in the right direction for Greenpoint residents as it resulted in the city taking action. Given that an increase in recreation opportunities and access to the waterfront were two of the major goals of the 197-a plan, and that residents understood that a Waterfront Access Plan would accompany a residential rezoning of the waterfront, they pursued rezoning as a way to achieve these goals. Also beneficial to the city and waterfront developers, the rezoning and WAP was approved.

The case also highlights the need for constant vigilance on the part of the community to hold the city accountable to its agreements. Once residential development was approved for the waterfront, speculation and development in rest of the neighborhood increased tremendously. Because the city's subsequent action dealt with the waterfront only, no mechanisms had been put in place to address the affects this development would have on the neighborhood as a whole. Again, a large problem with the city's actions on the waterfront was the disconnect between them and the neighboring community. Residents became concerned that the rezoning they advocated for their waterfront would eventually price them out of the neighborhood that they had fought so hard to improve.

In addition, because the provisions for waterfront access were tied to the development of individual parcels of land on the waterfront, community members had to be extra vigilant to hold the city accountable for the promises it had made. Implementation of these agreements has again become subject to deal making, putting residents on the defensive and heightening the need for them to remain organized. As a result, the success of the rezoning will be based on the ability of the community to remain unified throughout the implementation process.

As seen in the two cases, not only is there a lack of tools to address conflict over the future of the waterfront, the tools that do exist still do not fully address the relationship of the waterfront to adjacent neighborhoods. Neighborhood residents have been leading the call for a clearer process for waterfront revitalization, but the city response has been minimal at best. The city should take a more proactive role in developing a process, inclusive of the neighborhood perspective, for negotiating the competing interests in the waterfront and for carrying the process through to implementation.

Through the 1993 Waterfront Zoning Reform and the Waterfront Revitalization Program updated in 1999, the city has already established broad goals for the waterfront and clarification of appropriate uses for the waterfront from the citywide perspective. What is still lacking, however, is a process for negotiating the criteria for the actual revitalization of the waterfront, beyond just that for residential rezoning, neighborhood by neighborhood. A transparent neighborhood-based process is crucial for dealing with the conflicts that arise between residents, private developers, and advocacy groups in their quests to lay claim to the waterfront. The city must extend its role beyond just policy setting, and devise a process to

facilitate waterfront redevelopment all the way to the implementation stage. Greater attention should be paid to neighborhood dynamics and to facilitating the neighborhood planning process, by providing more technical support and clearer connections to actual implementation. Greater coordination between the agencies responsible for various aspects of the waterfront is crucial as well.

The city's approach to the waterfront has changed as the nature of the waterfront has changed, but not at the same pace. More needs to be done if New York City wants to realize the potential of its waterfronts – in all neighborhoods. At the core of this is the recognition that planning for today's waterfront is a complex and contentious process. Such a setting requires a planning and implementation process that bridges the various city-agencies as well as links to planning activity at the neighborhood level. The experiences of Greenpoint and Red Hook make clear that such a multi-layered negotiation is required to make waterfront planning a true contender in the post-industrial city.

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