

# Red Hook

## NY Rising Community Reconstruction Plan

MARCH 2014

NY Rising  
Community Reconstruction Program



# Executive summary

**The Red Hook NY Rising Community Reconstruction (NYRCR) Plan showcases the results of an intensive community-based resiliency planning process and is driven by the local knowledge and collaboration of Red Hook residents.** Red Hook was devastated by Superstorm Sandy with critical housing, economic, social, natural, and infrastructure systems impacted.

Over a year later the impact continues to reverberate throughout the community, as residents and businesses struggle to address the physical and financial damage the storm caused and grapple with the uncertainty of what future storms and other disruptive events may bring.

Through the recovery process the Red Hook community showed great strength, coordination, and goodwill and spearheaded a remarkable grassroots response. The NYRCR Plan captures the Community's experience during and after Sandy and its vision for making Red Hook stronger and more resilient in the future.

## Red Hook and the NY Rising Community Reconstruction Plan

The Governor's Office of Storm Recovery has allocated up to \$3 million in Federal Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) monies to fund eligible recovery and resiliency projects in the Red Hook Planning Area.

**The Planning Area, spanning 1.3 square miles and including 12,400 residents, is a dynamic mixed-use neighborhood with a unique character and discernible small-town feel. Notable Community features include prominent industrial, manufacturing, and maritime assets along with growing mixed-use commercial corridors, a wealth of open space, and a diverse population comprised of both new and longtime residents.** The neighborhood's character is framed by the historic significance and evolving composition of its working waterfront, peninsular nature, and relative isolation from the rest of Brooklyn due to the Gowanus Expressway.

Red Hook is a changing Community. Over the years residential uses have grown while industrial and manufacturing activity has decreased. Proposed developments such as a new hotel, galleries, and new housing would significantly alter the fabric of the Community. While these developments may usher in welcome economic improvements, they also pose risks for the affordability and overall mixed-use balance of Red Hook. Addressing resiliency within this diverse context presents unique challenges and opportunities.



In the wake of Sandy, Red Hook businesses and residents went to great lengths to support the Community (top). Debris cleanup required after Sandy was extensive (bottom). Source: Jojo Demirel (top); Jim Tempakis (bottom).

## Superstorm Sandy's impact and the recovery

Storm surge from Superstorm Sandy inundated almost the entire neighborhood, resulting in extensive damage to homes and businesses and profoundly impacting lives and livelihoods. Flooding resulted in extensive building damage and disruption to the neighborhood's infrastructure, which had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations including the residents of the New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) Red Hook Houses. The Community's businesses were also disrupted and remain profoundly affected by the storm's impacts.

While Superstorm Sandy revealed Red Hook's many vulnerabilities, it also revealed its capacity for unprecedented cooperation and action. Red Hook residents, community-based organizations, businesses, and regional partners rallied in response, piecing together an essential system of distribution and support with limited resources. There are innumerable stories of neighbors helping neighbors and support pouring in from communities near and far. The Community's mobilization and organization has become a regional precedent for grassroots organizing and response.

## A community driven process

**The NYRCR Plan builds on the neighborhood capacity and experience developed in the wake of Sandy.** The Red Hook Planning Committee—comprised of residents, civic leaders, and business owners—served as the leaders of this process and took on the challenging role of creating a unified vision for Red Hook’s resiliency needs and priorities across this varied Community. The Committee embraced the opportunity the NYRCR Program provided not only to develop a resiliency plan, but also to engage a broad swath of the Community, integrating a myriad of ideas in order to generate a unified and inclusive set of priorities for shaping Red Hook’s future. **The Planning Committee guided an extensive community engagement process fueled by 14 Planning Committee Meetings, three Public Engagement Events, and multiple additional engagement meetings.**

Many efforts are already underway by public agencies, utilities, and non-profits in the Red Hook Community and the Planning Committee worked to understand the initiatives and to avoid the duplication of efforts. Avoiding redundancy and leveraging knowledge already gained is a priority of the Committee as Red Hook builds toward a resilient future.



Residents input at Public Engagement #1 in October, 2013 (above) and Public Engagement #3 in February 2014 (below) shaped the NYRCR Plan.

Source: Carolina Salguero (bottom photo)

## Community vision statement

“Empowered by the spirit of unity that helped the Red Hook community survive Superstorm Sandy, our vision for a **resilient and thriving** future is to work as a holistic community to **strengthen the historic waterfront** Red Hook Peninsula by minimizing differences and **maximizing cooperation** among all who live and work here. **Mindful of the growing climate-related** risks to our beloved community and the immediate need for improved emergency preparedness measures, our actions will serve to help to develop measures that will protect our neighborhood from flood inundation, **increase the safety of our citizens**, and move towards a **resilient community**. We are committed to **maintaining and expanding affordable housing** and **increased economic activity** with an emphasis on **local job development**, recognizing the importance of their interdependence. Our rebuilding efforts towards a resilient and sustainable community are focused on a sincere triple bottom line **integration of environment, economy, and community**, which will require **substantial improvement to our long-neglected infrastructure** including sewers, transportation, communications, power and energy provision, and education.”



Community members gather at Red Hook Fest at Valentino Pier Park. Source: Carolina Salguero

## Critical issues

Red Hook residents and Planning Committee members identified numerous vulnerabilities and resiliency issues that were brought to light in the wake of Superstorm Sandy. **The Committee’s focus extended far beyond resiliency to issues of economic development, equity, and sustainability.** Recognizing that climate change will force the adaptation of Red Hook’s physical and cultural landscape, the Planning Committee sought resiliency improvements that could serve the greatest number of residents, provide economic co-benefits such as job creation, and be implemented quickly, resulting in immediate benefits. Much attention was given to emergency preparedness, capacity building, small business resiliency, chronic sewer system issues, and broader economic development strategies.

## A blueprint for future resiliency

**The NYRCR Plan for Red Hook offers a blueprint for implementation of the goals and vision of Red Hook residents.** The Plan identifies critical resiliency strategies and recommends Proposed and Featured Projects. Proposed Projects are projects that the Planning Committee has recommended be funded through their Community’s CDBG-DR allocation. Featured Projects are innovative projects that the Committee is highlighting in the NYRCR Plan and potential second phases that would result from Proposed Projects.

## Recovery support functions

The New York State Department of State (NYS DOS) has recommended a structure for each plan focused on a set of criteria, known as Recovery Support Functions. These Recovery Support Functions were utilized when developing needs, opportunities, strategies and projects to ensure that a comprehensive approach is reinforced throughout the effort to shape a comprehensive resiliency strategy for the Community.



New York Rising Community Reconstruction Plan Six Recovery Support Functions

## Strategies and projects

### Strengthen community capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies

**Relief center network (Proposed).** Fund the creation of a network of relief centers to house the coordination of relief services following a disaster, such as provision of food, water, power, medical services, and information.

**Emergency backup generator for health and social services provider (Proposed).** Purchase and install one fixed generator for a health and social service provider in Red Hook to ensure continuity of critical services to the Community during and after an emergency.

### Strengthen individual economic resiliency & financial stability

**Resiliency construction workforce training (Proposed).** Fund training of Red Hook youth and adults—particularly low-income individuals with limited employment experience and/or education—and connect them to employment opportunities related to the construction of resilient infrastructure or building improvements.

### Increase the resiliency of existing businesses and promote opportunities for economic development, & increase the physical and economic resiliency of private and public housing

**Local financial assistance program for small businesses, star-ups, and homeowners/tenants (Proposed).** Provide financial support to Red Hook small businesses and homeowners/tenants seeking to implement resiliency upgrades, as well as to entrepreneurs seeking to start micro-businesses.

**Solar-powered emergency lights for Red Hook Houses stairwells (Proposed).** Fund the implementation of a solar-powered emergency lighting pilot project in two or three buildings in Red Hook Houses. A second phase of this project would expand the program to all 30 residential buildings (Featured).

### Create opportunities for alternative and/or redundant power generation and distribution

**Red Hook Houses microgrid feasibility study (Proposed).** Conduct a feasibility study for a microgrid that can provide backup power for Red Hook Houses—home to 50% of the Red Hook Community—during an emergency. Implementation of the project could occur during a second phase (Featured).

### Increase transit connectivity and redundancy to facilitate evacuation and rebuilding

**New ferry landing at or near Atlantic Basin (Proposed).** Provide partial funding for the construction of a new ferry landing, at or near Atlantic Basin, contingent on Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) and New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) approval to use the site and a commitment of matching funds by a private/public entity to ensure completion of the ferry landing. A key second phase would secure operating subsidies to extend commuter ferry service to the new landing (Featured).

### Improve drainage and reduce flooding from sewer backup

**Red Hook drainage study (Proposed).** Analyze the existing conditions that contribute to frequent flooding in Red Hook. By uncovering unknown details of existing conditions, the study would identify specific measures to improve drainage in the neighborhood.

### Provide coastal flood protection

**Integrated flood protection system (Featured).** The Committee applauds the recent announcement of a \$200 million partnership between the State and the City of New York to construct a comprehensive flood management system—the first of its kind in the nation—to protect Red Hook. This project would reduce risk for much of the Community and is critical to the overall safety of this evolving neighborhood. The Community has drafted principles to guide the development of the project.

These initiatives are only a small segment of what is needed to achieve Red Hook’s full range of physical, economic and social resiliency goals. Additional recommendations proposed in the NYRCR Plan include:

- Preparation of a local emergency preparedness plan
- Implementation of a virtual citywide resiliency information clearinghouse, with specific information for local communities
- Creation of a resilient healthcare resource program with a mobile health clinic
- Development of partnership between Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) participants and emergency services/nurse training
- Study of land and facilities activation at and around Atlantic Basin
- Study of the economics of resiliency upgrades for industrial properties
- Construction of resiliency improvements at Red Hook Houses
- Support for National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) reforms that mitigate premium increases
- Creation of a community/cultural/food space in Red Hook Houses
- Improvement of communication and collaboration between Red Hook residents, PANYNJ, and NYCHA, the largest property owners in Red Hook
- Establishment of direct bus service from Red Hook to Lower Manhattan
- Completion of repairs to the Van Brunt Street Pumping Station

## Outline of the plan

The NYRCR Plan begins with **Section I. Community overview**, which provides an orientation to Red Hook’s distinctive character, the critical issues that were revealed by Sandy, and the Planning Committee’s work in the context of recent and parallel resiliency and recovery efforts and studies. Initiatives such as Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) updates to Federal Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM), the legislation surrounding proposed repeals of NFIP subsidies, and the City of New York’s Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency are noted here.

The next **Section II. Assessment of risks and needs**, describes the diverse assets at risk from future storms as identified by the Planning Committee and the public. This section identifies key needs and opportunities that form the rationale for resiliency strategies and the related projects developed by the Planning Committee.

**Section III. Reconstruction and resiliency strategies** presents priority strategies that organize the risks, needs, and opportunities which were outlined in previous sections. The reconstruction and resiliency strategies lead into the development of Proposed and Featured Projects.

The Proposed and Featured Projects, which are the path to executing resiliency strategies, are described in more detail in **Section IV. Implementation - project profiles**.

**Section V. Additional materials** includes Additional Resiliency Recommendations, and the Extended Table of Resiliency Recommendations which presents the sum total of key projects discussed by the Community. Detailed information on Public engagement is also provided in this section.