City Planning Commission Chair Marisa Lago  
120 Broadway, 31st Floor  
New York, NY 10271

Re: Gowanus PLACES Study

Honorable Chair Marisa Lago,

The Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club is thankful that the Department of City Planning chose Gowanus as a neighborhood to conduct a place-based planning study to foster diverse, livable neighborhoods with mixed-income housing and supporting services. Participants were assured by your staff that all voices would be represented in the effort to describe a vision for our neighborhood’s future and in your compilation of goals and priorities.

Unfortunately, many ideas expressed in the effort were not shared and we hope that the Department of City Planning will correct that error. If the Agency is not willing to share the topics, can we please have an explanation as to why ideas are not being shared? Some Goals that contrast with the Mayor Bill de Blasio’s Housing New York plan were included but the following ideas, that were discussed extensively and may even support the Mayor’s Goals, were censored in the final publication (attached) of the Working Group Recommendations. Many participants would like to understand why the ideas were excluded.

Participants in the Gowanus Dredgers programs may agree or disagree with the following ideas expressed by PLACES contributors, however we hope that DCP include all voices heard and capture all ideas in the record documents of your planning study. The following is a list of excluded ideas for your consideration and response:

1. Develop zoning to enhance the unique and quirky character presently permeating through the Gowanus community. Require a variety of outdoor and indoor spaces, plazas and parklets in the overall public realm vision and plan. Require temporary and permanent arts installations in such public access areas to connect members of adjacent neighborhoods to the Gowanus waterfront.

2. Require access to and from the water every 200 feet to assist in case of a need for emergency exit and ideally, to facilitate boat launching and landing. Avoid shoreline handrails and opaque style supports.

3. When shoreline and water dependent uses are proposed, allow weather protected and active spaces in new developments with required hours to be open to the public instead of public access at the water’s edge. Limit parking and storage use at sidewalk level and require commercial, manufacturing, artist spaces and recreational uses at or close to sidewalk level.

4. Require entrances at street frontages to be separated by no more than 50 feet. Restrict curb cuts within 100 feet from shoreline & encourage driveways where curbside bike lanes exist or are proposed.

5. Build a new connection from 3rd avenue to 1st St. Basin and consider mapping land at 1st St. basin.

6. Evaluate a “managed retreat” use of flood zone properties, including long-term visions of wetland restoration and continuation of industrial manufacturing supportive uses on canal-bordering properties.

7. Properties rezoned to allow residential use should provide one FAR of light industrial, arts-related, community facility or commercial uses (excluding hotel uses) on site or transfer development rights foster growth of such uses to the South Gowanus Area & IBZ where residential is not allowed.

8. Consider excluding parking from FAR calculations for properties within the Gowanus FIRM flood zone.

We are a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.
The Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club appreciates the time and effort the City has expended on the Gowanus PLACES study and we look forward to collaborating with the Department of City Planning as the scoping document is developed for the Gowanus rezoning.

While the primary goal of your study is to create opportunities for new housing, we hope that you consider including the above in the project considerations when proceeding with the ULURP this fall. Ideally, in addition to accommodating needs for additional housing, your plan will identify strategies to promote job growth associated with economic, recreational, and artistic activity so that such businesses can continue to thrive within the greater Gowanus community.

Please don't hesitate to contact us for clarification and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,

Owen Foote
Founding Member