

# Comments Submitted to Bridging Gowanus in writing

**Gary G. Reilly**

August 17, 2015  
Hon. Brad Lander  
City Council Member  
456 5th Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11215

Dear Council Member Lander:

I am writing to advise you that at a previous general meeting Brooklyn Community Board 6 overwhelmingly resolved to express our support for the Bridging Gowanus initiative that you have spearheaded on behalf of our community.

The Bridging Gowanus initiative has been a bottom-up, community-driven, facilitated conversation about the future of our Gowanus neighborhood. From its launch we knew that as ambitious an initiative as this was, that its goal was not to produce a monolithic report as opinions on matters relating to the Gowanus are as varied as the microbes in the canal. The best we could hope for was to illuminate the full range of thoughts, ideas, suggestions and opinions to help light the way forward. We believe that Bridging Gowanus met that goal. It showed where these was, and is, dissent within the community on many issues ranging from the size and scale of housing that would be considered to be appropriate for Gowanus, to the question of whether any housing should be considered at all. By capturing and reflecting these positions and honestly reporting them as you have Bridging Gowanus is probably the only initiative to have ever catalogued and reported the full spectrum of visions for the Gowanus.

Based on media reports and historic anecdotes one may think that there was no clear path to move forward given the diverse views and visions for the area. One of the amazing findings of Bridging Gowanus, however, is that on some very basic issues we find a great deal of agreement.

There is broad consensus that the Gowanus should be a clean and safe waterbody that could support a variety of uses. There is broad consensus that the Gowanus is an excellent place for the growing maker community and that new manufacturing uses are finding compatible homes there each day. There is broad consensus that in places where there are already residential uses that some additional housing could be supported without necessarily disrupting or conflicting with the existing business community. There is broad consensus that the Gowanus can and should provide some form of recreational amenity for the surrounding area. And there is great consensus that the community needs to continue to play an active and meaningful role in charting the course for the neighborhood's future.

The above conclusions were not easy to come by. It took a concerted effort to separate out the various perspectives from which people tend to view the Gowanus, which have often tended to divide the community. The incredible devotion of time and energy from your office and our other elected officials—Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez, State Senator Velmanette

Montgomery, Assemblywoman JoAnne Simon, City Council Members Steve Levin and Carlos Menchaca (collectively, the “conveners”), along with the professional support provided by the Pratt Center for Community Development, Pratt Institute, Fifth Avenue Committee, and Center for Urban Pedagogy were critical to the initiative’s success. And we were glad to assist with the community engagement elements by promoting, attending, hosting and participating at the many meetings and discussions on the topic.

It is our sincere hope that we can continue to work together to forge a clear and direct path forward for Bridging Gowanus. Having this accounting of issues and viewpoints should make it easier for the various government agencies who are in a better position to implement the programs, projects and policies suggested in Bridging Gowanus to join the conversation and help move us closer to our goals. We thank you for your inspired leadership and pledge our continued support and cooperation as we continue to move closer toward achieving our community’s goals together.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

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Gary G. Reilly

Chairperson

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## **Gowanus Canal Community Advisory Group**

Dear Councilman Lander,

We were delighted to see that you are interested in engaging the Gowanus Canal Community Advisory Group in the Bridging Gowanus process.

We have already extended an invitation to you, through Catherine Zinnel, to attend our next General Meeting which will be held on January 27, 2015 to present your Bridging Gowanus framework. We are indeed looking forward to that presentation.

Since the current comment period for the framework ends on December 31, 2014, we respectfully request that the comment period be extended for an additional sixty (60) days in order to give the CAG and its members constituencies ample time to digest the material and allow their voices to be heard as well.

We also ask that you include the following three (unanimously passed) CAG Resolutions to the Bridging Gowanus document itself since they are representative of community goals for the Canal:

### **Historic Preservation & Commemoration Resolution to EPA (April 2013)**

*The Gowanus has a unique and complex history as part of the New York Harbor estuary as a pre-industrial tidal mill pond site, as a Revolutionary War battlefield and burial grounds, and as an important transportation route in our nation's early industrial history. It is a cultural landscape of local and national significance.*

*The CAG urges the consideration of the neighborhood's entire history in making decisions concerning the Gowanus cleanup process and that steps be taken to actively commemorate the past. Specifically, attention should be given to the historic bridges, bulkheads, and buildings that remain. The CAG asks that the historic design width of the Canal, 100 feet, be maintained as the minimum width, and that the historic design height of the bulkheads be held at a maximum height for bulkhead or shoreline changes.*

We see these resolutions as an integral part of any plan that includes and impacts Gowanus and the surrounding area.

We look forward to your presentation on the 27th.

Sincerely,  
The Gowanus Canal Community Advisory Group

**Water Quality Resolution to NYSDEC (March 2012)**

*The Gowanus Superfund Community Advisory Group hereby resolves that the water of the Gowanus Canal be reclassified from its current industrial standard, which is designated Class SD. Class SD only mandates a minimal level of dissolved oxygen be maintained in the waters, but places no limit to levels of pathogens present in the waterway.*

*The CAG requests that the Gowanus Canal be given a water classification that is protective of its current recreational uses which includes contact recreation for families and children. A reclassification that imposes limits on pathogen levels, both coliform and enterococci bacteria, is necessary to insure that children and others are not exposed to unacceptable health risks, including dangerous diseases due to a simple act of coming into contact with the water while recreating in, on or at the Canal.*

**Ecological Restoration Resolution to EPA (May 2012)**

*The Superfund cleanup should be consistent with and advance current and future plans for ecological restoration, shoreline softening, riparian buffers, expanded wetlands, habitat restoration, and increased public access pursuant to the goals of the Hudson-Raritan Estuary Restoration Plan and the community's emerging vision for the waterway. Specifically, contiguous steel or wooden bulkheads would not be compatible with the above stated goals*

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**Caron Atlas, Arts & Democracy Project and NOCD-NY**

As the director of the Arts & Democracy Project, which engages the power of arts and culture to increase people's ability to participate in community decision-making, and co-director of Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY, a citywide coalition working to revitalize NYC from the neighborhood up, I was glad to participate in the proactive Bridging Gowanus planning process. I very much appreciated how it valued equity, shared knowledge, and recognized how community-based arts and culture are an integral, and interconnected, part of Gowanus.

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**Simeon Bankoff, Historic Districts Council**

2/27/2015

Early on, Friends and Residents of Greater Gowanus (FROGG) identified preservation as a tool to guide future actions in the community, pre-dating Bridging Gowanus by nearly a decade. Despite the years and the work, FROGG's message is absent, save for one sentence in the "comprehensive" Bridging Gowanus framework.

In this single sentence, Bridging Gowanus calls for a "strategic preservation plan" for "iconic buildings," yet there is no acknowledgement of the community-driven campaign to nominate Gowanus to the State Register of Historic Places, nor any reference to its resuscitation.

The historical significance of Gowanus has been documented and advocated for by State and local groups. The NYS Office of Historic Preservation declared the area eligible for National Register listing in 2006. In 2011, HDC chose Gowanus as one of our "Six to Celebrate" neighborhoods and aided FROGG's award of a grant from the Preservation League of New York State to fund the research for the nomination. The research led to a nomination which was scheduled to be voted upon by the State Review Board in March of 2014, which is stalled because of purposeful, malevolent misinformation. This nomination, while honorific, would provide the basis of a strategic preservation plan that the framework calls for.

The Gowanus is distinct in history, architecture, character and use than Carroll Gardens, yet the framework offers extending the Carroll Gardens historic district as a preservation solution. So what about Gowanus? As for Gowanus itself, markers and/or interpretive installations are offered as a strategy.

Bridging Gowanus is not representative of holistic community input, as preservation as a planning tool is missing. Any research about this neighborhood will render copious media coverage of historic preservation as a priority, yet this story has been lost in this official record. Iconic buildings and distinctive neighborhood characteristics have been lost. Preventing future losses simply requires political will.

Simeon Bankoff, Executive Director

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**Paige Bellenbaum District Leader for the 52nd Assembly District and member of Brooklyn Community Board 6**

Too often, communities across New York City develop piecemeal without thorough and strategic planning and resident input. The Bridging Gowanus initiative is a cutting edge approach to community planning that successfully integrates an open and transparent public process and intelligent design and should be adopted as a viable city wide tool moving forward.

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**Paul Basile, President of the Gowanus Alliance, and owner of a manufacturing business in the area**

The Gowanus Alliance has appreciated this effort to get ahead of the issues affecting Gowanus. Bridging Gowanus' work on developing a framework for our city to better address the priorities needed to secure a future for manufacturers in Gowanus was very productive. Keeping manufacturing productive is critical to our city's job base. We were happy to participate in this process knowing that the tools needed to help our community move forward were well represented and well received by everyone involved. We must be sure that our manufacturing properties are not left behind and that this work will lead to a comprehensive look at Gowanus. The efforts of Bridging Gowanus will lead to a progressive plan that benefits all of Gowanus, and we look forward to continue building that bridge.

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**Eric Bluestone, Michelle de la Uz, Aaron Koffman, Jonathan F. P. Rose**

March 30th, 2015

Councilmember Brad Lander

Councilmember Stephen Levin

Councilmember Carlos Menchaca

New York State Senator Velmanette Montgomery

New York State Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

US Congresswoman Nydia M. Velazquez

Re: Bridging Gowanus Comments

Dear Elected Officials:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the Bridging Gowanus framework which was released in late November 2014 following more than a year of community engagement and dialogue about the community's priorities for the neighborhood moving forward.

The effort put into engaging the local community and laying out both the challenges and opportunities ahead was incredibly valuable and helps clearly lay out the community's priorities.

The Gowanus Green team is particularly grateful that advancing the Gowanus Green project on the Public Place site was a key recommendation of the Bridging Gowanus framework. As you know, the Gowanus Green team was designated by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to re-develop the 5.8 acre Public Place site once National Grid, under NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's (NYS DEC) oversight, has completed remediation of the former Manufactured Gas Plant (MGP) site.

Gowanus Green's vision is to create a truly affordable, mixed income, mixed use development, whose design includes public open space, and approximately 770 units of housing, 70% of which will be subsidized and affordable to families at a range of incomes.

Our team has extensive experience redeveloping brownfield sites to the highest sustainability standards while also creating much needed affordable, mixed income housing. We are eager to begin the formal public review process, which we believe can happen concurrently with both the upland and Gowanus Canal environmental clean-up processes, to ensure there is no delay in providing much needed affordable housing to local residents.

We believe that the Gowanus Green project aligns with and helps advance many of the recommendations and core values outlined in the Bridging Gowanus framework well beyond the affordable housing that will be created. Most notably, the project helps to advance investments in infrastructure and environmental clean-up projects, and would ensure Canal access and improvements to park and open space. For instance, because the Public Place site will be redeveloped for residential use as part of advancing Gowanus Green and due to the US EPA's active involvement, the site is being cleaned up to a higher standard than was originally planned. Additionally, a public park along the Canal has consistently been part of the vision for Gowanus Green. Finally, the Gowanus Green team has been firmly committed to a comprehensive storm water management plan for the development and to integrating several green infrastructure features into the project.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit comments on Bridging Gowanus' recommendations and for including the advancement of Gowanus Green as a key recommendation.

We look forward to working with all of you and community stakeholders as both the vision for Bridging Gowanus and Gowanus Green moves forward.

Sincerely,

Eric Bluestone  
Member  
Bluestone Gowanus Green Partners LLC

Michelle de la Uz  
Executive Director, FAC  
FAC Gowanus Green LLC

Aaron Koffman  
Member  
Hudson Gowanus LLC Rose

Jonathan F. P. Rose  
Member  
Gowanus Green LL

## **Neil Carlson, co-founder of the Brooklyn Creative League, a shared workspace in Gowanus.**

Past rezonings have delivered a windfall to speculative investors and big developers at the expense of small businesses, artists, manufacturers, and middle-class residents. By contrast, Bridging Gowanus establishes a framework that would preserve the mix of commercial, artisan, light manufacturing, and residential uses that we've built in Gowanus, while also providing much-needed affordable housing. If the City adheres to the principles outlined in Bridging Gowanus, I'm confident Gowanus will become a model for sustainable and equitable rezoning elsewhere.

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## **Carroll Gardens Coalition for Respectful Development (CORD)**

Dear Councilman Brad Lander:

The "community based" Bridging Gowanus framework supposedly represents our community's wishes and input for the future.

We at CORD, feel as though it is a more specific part of the community, the Real Estate Developers Community that is represented instead.

CORD attended two of the three meetings. It is extremely difficult to understand where a great deal of the actual Gowanus, Carroll Gardens, Park Slope community voices as presented here, came from. They were certainly not within our earshot.

We heard residents and business owners expressing concerns regarding current infrastructure inadequacies and how analysis of the current as well as a plan for the future would be necessary to support any further development.

We heard voices clearly expressing disdain for out of context, oversized dense development--- using the spot-rezoned Lightstone project as a specific example of what they wished to avoid.

We heard residents and business owners speaking of their growing community as a place where residential and commercial use was not only thriving but cohabiting happily---and a desire to allow that happy union to continue to grow.

We heard quite a lot of distaste expressed for the final questionnaire--a survey with content worded within such narrow context that it was both inappropriate and insulting.

What we saw in the framework was a sentence that said a few refused to fill out the survey but no explanation as to why--which we know was written on those pages!

For CORD, that survey represented the entire Bridging Gowanus exercise. It was obvious that the plan was to reach the point where that survey could be filled out and then labeled the "voice of the people".

The questionnaire zeroed in on trade offs. That is when you give the developers more stories on their buildings in exchange for amenities.

We question the feasibility of some of the trade offs suggested. For example, extra floors for a NYC Library? NYC park space?

On whose property would these amenities sit? Who would build, fund, insure and maintain them for the use by the community? All of that was a bit fuzzy and was not covered (or even mentioned) when we were cleverly asked if we would "give" 2 or 3 or 4 stories in return for these and other amenities.

So, as participants, it strikes us that this "planning" was simply the groundwork for a Stoller Report episode.

You know that cable TV show where a panel of wealthy developer heavy hitters sit around and talk about the great real estate "opportunities" that are out there in whatever neighborhood (s) are on the plate that day.

Those fellas' attitudes so often remind us of the old movies where the Greek gods of Olympus move the lives of the mortals down on earth for their own amusement--the effects on those mortals mildly entertaining and never important.

It is abundantly clear that the whole Milking---oops, Bridging Gowanus process was engineered to eventually allow the possibility for lucrative developer opportunities--and we will be 'on the plate' very soon.

So, let's just call this what it is---a green lit script for an upcoming episode on the Stoller Report-----brought to you by, Your Councilman, Brad Lander.

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**Sasha Chavchavadze, Founder and Co-Creative Director of Proteus Gowanus**

"The Bridging Gowanus process is commendable for its inclusive effort to reach out to the Gowanus community. The draft framework's focus on ensuring that the Gowanus arts community is nurtured and protected as the area undergoes profound changes is impressive and heartening."

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**Patricia Clark**



12/9/15

The presenter mentioned the ability to transfer the manufacturing portion of the development rights to another property -- is this restricted to properties within the boundaries of the "gowanus" site

I was at the Wykoff Gardens meeting discussing the height of proposed housing, I also do not recall people being receptive to building heights of 18 stories. I heard 12-14 max. Let me know if this is the correct forum to comment on the framework, and a link to the on-line location.

Thanks, Patricia Clark

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## Warren Cohen

3/31/15

The Bridging Gowanus report stated one of the two most important threats to our neighborhood. To quote, the plan "does not allow [Gowanus] to be overwhelmed by the relentless swarm of luxury condo and rental towers that have overtaken nearby Fourth Avenue." That specter of over and non contextual development as a result of any potential rezoning looms as the community's major fear. But in the details of the report (and in the contentious third meeting itself), the report summarizes the community as having an "openness to buildings of more than 10 stories (with a distribution of opinion spread about equally from 8 to 18 stories)." This line (and that whole controversial exercise) seems overly incendiary given the elephant in the Bridging room involved the scale, location and appropriateness of residential development. And I wish in retrospect that Bridging had confronted these issues in a more direct manner and across multiple meetings. For all the great dreams, hopes and exciting ideas embodied by the report, its precisely these specifics - how many? how big? where? And who will inhabit? - that would have seemed to best address openly and navigate consensus around, rather than avoiding and later presenting the report as a mere "framework" and "guidelines for more specific decision-making" later.

For instance, aspects like the precise location of any residential development seem of paramount importance to a final report given the second biggest threat to our neighborhood: continued challenges from climate change. This does not only involve the rising sea levels affecting the Canal and the potential for disastrous hurricanes like Sandy but also the increased rainfall and the increasing inability for water to drain from the upland hills of Park Slope and Cobble Hill/Carroll Gardens into the sewer system and Canal. While the report wisely calls for water challenges to be "addressed," the EPA to continue its work and a hydrology study to be completed, it nevertheless barrels into a series of development recommendations without any consideration of how to incorporate or modify the final plan based on what is gleaned. The EPA is years away from completing its dredging and the hydrology study could determine that the ecosystem can't support additional population or buildings without exacerbating flood conditions. It seems premature and a bit hubristic to

construct a framework for new development without knowing this key information (as it is for the EPA and hydrologists to estimate future flood impacts without knowing how much development is called for in the plan) More transparency about the development specifics would have improved how the EPA, the city and the hydrologists could analyze the impact of future growth proposals, while allowing a wiser framework to be written about the possible constraints and limits to such growth. (As well as smarter planning - it may be that the safest and smartest way to achieve the goal of affordable and senior housing is further increasing height on 4th Avenue rather than aside the Canal.)

Global warming is a looming catastrophe on an unimaginable scale. We may not be able to get the great balance of mixed use hopes given the Gowanus' fragile ecosystem. And I worry we could consign an entire neighborhood to considerable prevention and remedy costs down the road after the population expands that the federal, state and local governments couldn't possibly afford -- much like the existing situation with the Gowanus Canal. The report identifies "decades of neglect" but it also (perhaps overly optimistically) calls for more "public investments" and "additional [city] resources." But given the prospect of history repeating itself, I would have liked to see more concrete minimums on the "real binding commitments" that the report desires. What is the sufficient amount of investment to guarantee the health and safety of the existing community and future residents? What insufficient response would trigger an alteration of the mixed use plans? (Additionally, I don't think that currently approved cleanup/prevention plans like the Superfund project or CSO retention tanks ought to count as trade-offs for future development. These are already funded and federally mandated efforts that should already be in the "win" column for the community as long overdue. The report should have only considered future "capital commitments" as having value for being "a trade-off" for development rights.)

Warren Cohen  
Gowanus

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**Michelle de la Uz, Executive Director of the Fifth Avenue Committee.**

March 31st, 2015

Re: Bridging Gowanus Community Planning Framework

Dear Elected Officials,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to the Bridging Gowanus Community Planning Framework. As you know, Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC) is a 37 year old nonprofit comprehensive community development corporation in South Brooklyn that advances economic and social justice by building vibrant, diverse communities where residents have genuine opportunities to achieve their goals as well as the power to shape the community's future. To achieve our mission, FAC develops and manages affordable housing and community facilities, creates access to economic opportunities and ensures access to economic stability, organizes

residents and workers, offers student-centered adult education and combats displacement caused by gentrification.

FAC is proud to have participated in Bridging Gowanus and would like to thank Council Members Brad Lander, Stephen Levin and Carlos Menchaca, NYS Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon and her predecessor Joan Millman, NYS State Senator Velmanette Montgomery, US Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez and the entire Gowanus community for working conscientiously to develop a collective framework to envision the future of the Gowanus neighborhood.

Overall, FAC is highly supportive of the vision put forward in the Bridging Gowanus Community Planning Framework and grateful that many of our efforts have enriched the process and community values highlighted for building a comprehensive plan to strengthen the Gowanus community. We champion and uphold the interconnected goals for the preservation and creation of affordable housing, preservation and renewal of the industrial and manufacturing business sectors, and embrace resiliency through improved infrastructure and environmental stewardship, all while nurturing the physical, environmental, cultural and economic diversity that makes our Gowanus community unique and thriving.

As part of the Bridging Gowanus Community Planning process, FAC facilitated the Spring 2014 Community Development workshop series to promote deeper dialogue and understanding of some of the complex policy and planning topics discussed throughout Bridging Gowanus. FAC continues to regularly engage its own constituencies on these issues in a number of ways, including: defining and advocating for truly affordable housing, understanding zoning and its implications, and conducting community education and engagement on the multi-faceted environmental clean-up efforts planned for our Gowanus neighborhood and their implications.

As you know, FAC serves a diverse constituency to provide comprehensive community development programs which directly serve over 5,500 low and moderate income residents annually and regularly engage hundreds more in Gowanus alone in community education and organizing efforts.

FAC's main offices are a mere two blocks away from the northern end of the Gowanus Canal, where the EPA Gowanus Canal Superfund cleanup work is scheduled to begin, along with the construction of one of the two EPA mandated NYC DEP sewage holding tanks, and we are also located on the same block as part of the former Fulton Manufactured Gas Plant (MGP) site. Over 150 of the more than 500 units of affordable housing that we currently manage are in and around Gowanus. Several of these properties were subject to the flooding brought about by Superstorm Sandy and, like other Gowanus and Lower Park Slope residences, continue to experience sewage backups during intense rainfall events.

Our affordable housing pipeline also includes Gowanus Green, an additional 700+ units of affordable housing and public open space immediately adjacent to the Gowanus Canal on the Public Place site. Additionally, FAC's *Stronger Together* effort with partners SBIDC, RHI and BWI, is focused on alleviating poverty in public housing in Red Hook and Gowanus by providing access to free job training and placement, adult education and literacy as well as wrap around individual and community supports such as benefits, financial, legal and credit counseling. *Turning the Tide* is another program led by FAC which will also deepen these same public housing communities' involvement and leadership in local climate-resilience efforts. Last but not least, through direct tenant advocacy, FAC prevents the eviction of nearly 200 local households a year. We also organize tenants at both the building and neighborhood level against residential displacement and for citywide policies that protect tenants. Through this work we are acutely aware of the displacement pressures faced by long-term low and moderate income residents and rent regulated tenants and how land use actions, such as the rezonings in North and South Park Slope, have traditionally accelerated these pressures.

Informed by these multiple interests and stakeholders, FAC is deeply committed to a comprehensive and equitable path toward responsible and accountable development and growth in Gowanus that is sustainable, inclusive and just. With this shared vision in mind we submit the following comments around issues of critical importance for inclusion in future efforts around a comprehensive community plan.

### **Full Community Representation**

We recognize, as was acknowledged in the Bridging Gowanus Community Planning Framework, that low and moderate income residents, the majority of whom are Latino and African-American, who have been living with the unhealthy effects of neglected infrastructure and a toxic Canal for generations, were under-represented in the Bridging Gowanus process. In particular, the nearly 4,500 households that live in Gowanus area public housing – residents of the largest grouping of housing in our area – must be more robustly engaged and consulted in future community planning efforts. One of FAC's ongoing commitments remains to ensure that local residents directly impacted by the proposals set forth in the Bridging Gowanus framework, and by future private and public land use actions, have an opportunity to directly and meaningfully participate in decisions which will impact them and their community.

### **The Urgency of Protecting the Existing Community**

As government is finally turning its attention to the community's long-standing environmental issues and land owners continue to speculate about a rezoning of Gowanus, the displacement pressures for long-time, mostly low and moderate income tenants and industrial firms, is at an all-time high. We face the distinct possibility that the residents and businesses who have made this community what it is today will be barred from enjoying the benefits of a clean and vibrant Gowanus.

Rezonings and other land use actions have the ability to greatly accelerate displacement pressures brought by recent private development and speculative

investment in the area or to proactively address them. As referenced in Bridging Gowanus, the NYC Council's Land Use Division identified highly significant increases in both land values and potential tax revenues if sites were rezoned, ranging between 4 to 24 times their current value. The environmental clean-up of the area will also continue to unlock tremendous land value and lead to continuing and unprecedented displacement pressures. An estimated \$1 billion is being invested to clean-up the Gowanus Canal and upland Manufactured Gas Plant (MGP) sites. It is not only imperative that some direct benefits to local low and moderate income residents be realized in association with these significant economic investments, but also that **residents and industrial businesses are protected before land use actions or rezonings occur.**

Speculation has fueled such an increase in land values that rent regulation alone is no longer sufficient to keep tenants in their homes. The Special Clinton District, referenced in the Bridging Gowanus Framework, provides a model for a special anti-harassment district overlaid with a sound housing provision, which could be applied to Gowanus. With the recent NYC DOB and HPD building inspector scandal, FAC believes the time is right to support the Urban Justice Center (UJC) and the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD) proposal for citywide anti-harassment legislation, following a similar Special Clinton District structure, wherein issuance of certain DOB permits to alter or demolish existing residential buildings is conditioned on the building owner first receiving a Certification of No Harassment from HPD. Although this process was adopted in the Special Clinton District through zoning resolution, we agree with UJC and ANHD that it can and should be established as a legislative initiative through the City Council.

The above protections can provide strong disincentives for landlords to harass tenants, once they understand the implications of the process, penalties and in particular the "look back period" that is a function of such districts. However offering protection to those who are being harassed currently, particularly immigrants, and seniors, is of key importance. . Both existing and new anti-displacement laws and regulations are only as effective as their enforcement and to the degree that there is still a vulnerable community left to defend. We therefor also encourage the report to include recommendations for increased funding for both tenant advocates and housing court attorneys targeted to Gowanus residents, both prior to and after any rezoning or substantial land use change.

After public housing, the largest groupings of rental housing in Gowanus are "market rate" apartments. The Bridging Gowanus report notes that only 200 of the approximately 1,300 rental apartments are rent stabilized. That leaves 1,100 families, mostly in 2-4 family homes, without any protection from likely substantial rent increases. The City Environmental Quality Review Technical Manual (CEQRA) largely measures negative socio-economic impacts of land use actions based on the percentage of low-rent, market rate apartments that become unaffordable to long-term residents. By this metric, the mere speculation over the rezoning of Gowanus has already had a negative impact. Future planning or rezoning efforts must address

this issue of how to mitigate the loss of low-rent unregulated housing and the displacement of long-term tenants, many of whom are seniors. The Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD) is investigating a “good neighbor tax credit” model – which was first proposed by the Fifth Avenue Committee more than a decade ago - to subsidize the difference between “market” and “affordable” rents in such smaller buildings; these and other tools should be investigated for Gowanus.

We support the Bridging Gowanus Report recommendation to create a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) mechanism for bond financing to pay for some of the much needed infrastructure. Given the substantial expected windfall profit in Gowanus for buildings rezoned from manufacturing to Residential/Commercial, we also recommend that a windfall profits tax, as recently suggested by urban planner Ron Shiffman at *Brooklyn for Sale: The Price of Gentrification, A Community Town Hall*, be considered to offset the large public investments needed for infrastructure, green space, preservation of NYCHA and affordable housing tenant and building protections. Though it is beyond the scope of a local land use action, reforming the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), which is supposed to benefit low and moderate income people and neighborhoods, could also help to address lending that is feeding market rate and speculative investment by lending to property owners in traditionally low and moderate income neighborhoods who are then displacing tenants. However, we must not uncritically accept rezonings or land use changes that raise land values as a given and then seek mitigations through the value created. The crisis of neighborhood displacement has reached a point where any land use action, rezoning or large scale development should be judged first and foremost by how it worsens or mitigates the affordable housing crisis . The displacement of tenants in Gowanus has reached a crisis level and addressing it must be a top priority.

### **Creating Truly Affordable Housing**

We appreciate and are enthusiastic about the strong support for preserving and developing affordable housing both in the report and among the hundreds of participants in the Bridging Gowanus sessions. We were pleased that 58% of the Bridging Gowanus participants respondents selected “Deeply Affordable Housing” as their preference. As the report notes, the median income for households in the Gowanus area is under \$60,000 and the median income for public housing residents in Gowanus is just over \$30,000. Median income of renters in Gowanus is lower than both the city wide median income and the Brooklyn median income. To ensure that any new affordable housing is affordable at current median incomes of renters we recommend that the report can indicate that a majority of the affordable housing should be for households earning 60% of AMI and less which is approximately the median income for renter households in Gowanus.

We are also pleased by the strong support for Mandatory Inclusionary housing and an acknowledgement that, given the existing 421(a) rules, the 20% mandatory is not sufficient since most developers will select that to receive the tax abatement. We

support the efforts of the Real Affordability for All (RAFA) coalition and ANHD to require 50% affordability in new construction in rezoned areas, particularly in in “higher demand” areas, such as Gowanus.

### **A Genuine Mix of Uses in Gowanus**

FAC very much supports the focus on ensuring the mixed use character in the northern part of the Gowanus area is preserved. We specifically want to highlight an important concept presented in the Framework since it is a key component to realizing this vision:

*Permit in strategic locations Residential Developers to purchase air rights from nearby industrial buildings that agree to keep the site as (truly) industrial in perpetuity. This will ensure funding availability in manufacturing zones for on-going required modernization and as an inducement to keep the property for manufacturing. Purchasing sites would still be required to maintain the district selected percent affordable housing, adjusted upward by the purchased air rights.*

While we very much support and would welcome the opportunity to take advantage of incentives for nonprofit developers to develop and preserve manufacturing spaces and jobs, to ensure the property remains available for manufacturing use, we feel there should be multiple mechanisms to preserve and develop manufacturing uses. For example, to ensure manufacturing use whenever a private owner makes improvements using City or EDC financing, or is granted a discretionary land use action. Similar to what has been done on inclusionary housing, we would propose there also be an option when there is a private developer or owner to require they have a suitable non-profit “Administrative Agent” that would review each new lease and lease renewal to ensure the property continues to be used for manufacturing use and generates jobs including jobs accessible to local residents.

### **Open Space, Environmental Remediation, Resiliency and Community Amenities**

One area where all the Federal, State and City agencies and responsible parties will be required to effectively coordinate to address adverse environmental burdens is in the NYS DEC remediation of the former Fulton MGP site, part of which lies beneath Thomas Greene Park, and the DEP Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) retention tank siting to be built on or near the Douglass and DeGraw (“Double D”) community pool (which comprises part of Thomas Greene Park). It has been communicated by the US EPA that the Thomas Greene Park and Double D Pool could potentially be taken off-line for years. Yet what remains to be determined, if this site is chosen, is the specific time frame and how alternate facilities will be provided to the community in the proposed cleanup plans and what open and recreational space will be replaced once clean-up and installation of a tank takes place. Green space in Gowanus is barely existent and the removal of Thomas Greene Park would essentially strip Northern Gowanus – and public housing residents in particular -- of the only Park and green space in the area. The 2010 CEQRA manual encourage a standard of 2.5 acres of open space within half a mile for every 1000 residents. Presently, Gowanus

residents only have access to roughly 7 acres of Parks instead of the 70 acres the standard targets.

Climate change is happening now, and as things heat up, we need to protect this valuable public resource and plan for more green space to keep our community cool. This loss of open and green space and a community pool, will greatly impact an already underserved low income community that already suffers disproportionately from a number of health issues that can be linked to a lack of access to open space. Bridging Gowanus' acknowledgement of the importance of public parks and open space is critical; future planning efforts must address the fate of Thomas Greene Park specifically and the open space needs of Gowanus residents in general both in the short and long term.

Maintaining affordability while planning for climate change is another significant concern and FAC sees the uncertainty about future flood insurance premiums as an emerging struggle for local low to middle- income homeowners, businesses and for non-profit affordable housing developers, like our organization. The Center for NYC Neighborhoods (CNYCN) 2014 report, *Flood Insurance and NYC's Affordability Crisis*, illustrates the problems homeowners will face in the City's greatly expanded high-risk flood zones with new requirements to purchase flood insurance (either through the National Flood Insurance Program administered by FEMA or through private insurance providers) accompanied by significant rises in flood insurance rates. CNYCN estimates that insurance premiums could increase from around \$1,000 in 2014 to nearly \$14,500 by 2030 for 1-4 family homes. Despite attempts to limit the impact of the rate hikes through the federal Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act of 2014 homeowners on fixed incomes and small businesses will still suffer disproportionate harm and face tough decisions that could force them to sell their properties. Flood insurance rates for commercial properties are not covered at all by the Act.

CNYCN recommends allowing for "partial credit for partial mitigation," where homeowners could receive more affordable priced insurance rates by making partial mitigations designed to reduce the impacts of possible flood damage, like flood-proofing basements, elevating or reinforcing mechanical equipment, storing valuables in the attic, securing propane tanks and other possible debris. Still even these measures require investments that could increase rents, threaten local businesses economic viability, and further contribute to the community displacement and destabilization crisis, not only of long time renters in the area, but of property owners as well. Bridging Gowanus acknowledged the importance of investing in infrastructure in Gowanus and weighing the costs and benefits of a neighborhood wide approach vs. individual property approach makes sense especially given current efforts to design an integrated flood protection barrier for Red Hook and study the feasibility of flood protections for the Gowanus Canal.

### **Preservation of Commercial Establishments and Other Amenities Critical to Low and Moderate Income Households**



NYCHA residents and other low income residents in the Gowanus area are experiencing a dramatic loss of laundromats, pharmacies, affordable grocery stores and produce markets, affordable restaurants, accessible health care and affordable childcare. A prime example of this is the recent loss of the Met Foods supermarket on Smith Street, between Baltic and Warren that served as a basic food resource for residents of Gowanus Houses and other low and moderate income residents. NYCHA residents face unique displacement threats in that their rent levels and housing stock are relatively secure but everything else necessary to survive is vulnerable to disappearance by market pressures. The Downtown Brooklyn Rezoning Plan provides Gowanus-area NYCHA residents with a cautionary tale. A supermarket that served the Ingersol Houses community on Myrtle Avenue was removed in the wake of that rezoning, causing years of hardship, particularly to seniors and the disabled. A sustained campaign by FUREE (Families United for Racial and Economic Equality) forced magnate John Catsimatidis of the Red Apple Group to eventually replace the supermarket but the disruption to residents was substantial. The threats to these businesses and amenities must be addressed in any planning process or rezoning.

### **Retention of Industrial Firms; Connection of Local Residents to Job Opportunities**

Bridging Gowanus highlighted the need to preserve industrial businesses, (warehousing, manufacturing, auto, etc) which are a critical job resource to Brooklyn residents, particularly those with low educational attainment whose employment options are otherwise limited. The “maker” economy and the potential for creative production industries to expand their presence in the Gowanus corridor was also highlighted. However, not all jobs benefit local residents equally. As the Greenpoint-Williamsburg Industrial Business Zone has shown, traditional industrial businesses can be displaced not only by housing, hotels and bars, but also by more profitable creative class enterprises. This newer generation of maker spaces and other emerging industries such as technology, have yet to provide the same job pipeline out of poverty as traditional industrial firms, though there is significant opportunity to do so with the proper investments in workforce development and education. The importance of linking economic and workforce development opportunities supported by public policy decisions to decent jobs for local residents must be strongly considered not just in the potential MX zones but also in parts of the Gowanus that are recommended to remain industrial by Bridging Gowanus. Concurrently, opening up “maker” or other emerging industries to existing unemployed residents, particularly residents of public housing, should be addressed in any planning process or rezoning.

### **Involvement of/Investment in NYCHA**

As highlighted above, land use changes, large-scale development, changes to the commercial corridor and access to jobs directly impact the ability of NYCHA residents to remain in the community and to pay expenses – including rent. NYCHA has both a vested interest and a responsibility to engage in any planning process or rezoning. We appreciate that the Bridging Gowanus report noted the need to

encourage more extensive NYCHA and NYCHA resident involvement in any rezoning proposal.

Similarly, substandard housing conditions and aging infrastructure at the NYCHA developments constitute an on-going crisis, and nascent displacement threat, for a huge segment of our community – nearly 4,500 households. We should not and cannot move forward as a community with any planning process or rezoning that does not address this crisis.

Furthermore, as the NYCHA funding gap grows exponentially and dangerously greater, we also have to leverage new sources of investment to make public housing in Gowanus more resilient and affordable for the long-term. This past winter, with the prolonged cold temperatures, there were incidents of pipes and water towers freezing, preventing clean water from reaching residents for days and disabling some elevators. Prolonged limited or no access to clean water and elevator failures are not new issues, after Superstorm Sandy polluted saltwater corroded two manholes covers and flooded basements in the Gowanus Houses, disrupted water and electricity to Gowanus Houses buildings for almost two weeks. If we indeed want Gowanus to be more equitable, sustainable, inclusive and just, then we must recognize and leverage investment in Gowanus for NYCHA's acute need for resiliency retrofits and climate adaptation measures at its properties.

### **Planning for Community Policing for Racial and Economic Justice**

Rezoning, land use actions and large scale development projects can bring dramatic racial and economic demographic shifts to a neighborhood. The increase of gentrification to an area not only changes housing prices and commercial establishments but also street life, cultural norms and policing patterns.

Rezoning, land use actions and large scale development projects have the power to, among other things, increase patterns of racial and economic segregation and increase the isolation and harassment of youth, people of color, NYCHA residents, the homeless, controlled substance users, sex workers and other people frequently profiled by police. Eric Garner, whose death at the hands of police galvanized a citywide call for racial justice and police accountability, spent his formative years in our community and was eulogized at a local church. A community planning process can and should consider alternatives to the current policing paradigm, a return to community policing practices and the realities of how policing changes when spaces previously defined and occupied by low and moderate income people of color are gentrified.

### **Public Transportation**

Inequitable public transportation adds to the burdens that neighborhood residents are already experiencing in this historically neglected area. Making mass transit better and more equitable should be addressed in any planning process or rezoning. We support the calls for the restoration of the B71 and also for ADA accessibility at Smith and 9th Street and 4th Ave and 9th Street train stations.

## **Sewer-shed and CSO Planning**

Increased flooding and CSO discharges from the Canal pose a health threat to the all residents who live in the flood zone. Even with the DEP Long Term Control Plan (LTCP), green infrastructure initiatives and additional holding tank remedies, the expected percentage of CSO reductions for the Gowanus Canal are unclear, but certainly not 100%. Increasing development without additional investment in public infrastructure in the surrounding area, combined with increases in predicted average annual rainfall and sea level rise, all contribute to the urgency of the need to address the CSO issue in a timely and proactive manner. Large scale developments and upzoned areas both inside and outside of the Gowanus neighborhood, (eg. Atlantic Yards and the upzoned 4th Avenue corridor) that contribute to the Gowanus sewershed, should bear some financial and planning responsibilities.

New York City's Waterfront Revitalization Program and its recent revisions establish the City's policies for development and land use of the City's coastal zones such as Gowanus to promote significant maritime and industrial uses and protect ecologically sensitive areas. With the Gowanus sewershed locations and boundaries being well understood, development permits within the sewershed can be established to prescribe sewage offsetting measures for new developments. Such measures could include green infrastructure, installing more efficient building water and sewage retention and capabilities or prescribed levies towards neighborhood level flood and sewer overflow protection projects. Further innovations to the Waterfront Revitalization Program could include efforts modeled after the Business Improvement District with local commercial, industrial and manufacturing business contributions being collected to enhance property and project measures to enhance green job sector growth, on site power production and more resource reuse.

## **Conclusion**

EPA's consistent approach in engaging the surrounding community in the Superfund cleanup of the Gowanus Canal and the Bridging Gowanus process, led by Council Member Lander and all local elected officials have established an excellent foundation on which all stakeholders involved in the future planning of the Gowanus neighborhood can build upon. As other proposed large scale local projects to promote resiliency, infrastructure improvements and rezoning are introduced, we agree that an Environmental Quality partnership and Community Oversight body, as proposed in the framework, should be utilized in Gowanus. Not only can this serve to build upon community cohesion, engage more racially and socio-economically diverse stakeholders and ensure meaningful public involvement, but it can also expose where adverse environmental or other burdens impacting the community continue to exist.

FAC sees the usefulness of sharing our experiences and lessons learned across NYC neighborhoods. Gowanus is living with the consequences of decades of failed public policy and now, as hard fought and long-awaited environmental clean-ups progress, and private investment is introducing new and sometimes speculative uses, we must ensure that the community's comprehensive needs are met.

As the Bridging Gowanus process transitions from a framework to developing plans for action and a potential proposed rezoning through ULURP and a related environmental review, we also we feel it is important for the Gowanus Community to have planners and consultants available at all stages of any proposed rezoning process, including environmental review, to ensure that impacts for any zoning changes are properly analyzed and appropriate remediation's recommended in line with the Bridging Gowanus Framework and community's input. Similar to the role played by the Pratt Center in the Bridging Gowanus process, the Community should have planners available to assist residents and to ensure issues raised in the Bridging Gowanus process -- such as day care and school seats, traffic impacts, residential displacement, shadows – can be properly analyzed with appropriate recommended remedies. Planners can also help the community to wade through the complicated use groups and height, bulk and density implications for any rezoning and its impact both on likely development sites and the surrounding area. It is important that no rezoning or substantial land use action proceed without this level of technical assistance being provided in a timely manner and without the above issues being addressed.

FAC and other non-profit Community Development Corporations and community based organizations across NYC are coming together in recognition of the need to establish city wide policies and principles to protect communities before any future large-scale land use actions or neighborhood rezonings transpire. We encourage all neighborhood stakeholders to review and endorse the ANHD Community Platform for Equitable Neighborhood Planning and join the ANHD Communities First coalition to work towards implementing equitable and sustainable policies and new planning tools to shape the future of Gowanus and NYC. We look forward to working with local residents and stakeholders towards a more inclusive, sustainable and just Gowanus.

Sincerely,  
Michelle de la Uz  
Executive Director

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**Michelle de la Uz, Executive Director of the Fifth Avenue Committee.**

The Gowanus community is an incredibly diverse and unique community that, until recently, has been largely a hidden gem in Brooklyn and home to a broad range of families and businesses including thousands of public housing residents, and hundreds of manufacturing businesses and artists. The Bridging Gowanus process has successfully engaged diverse stakeholders to articulate what we value most about this community and what is important to us as we look beyond our soon to be remedied environmental challenges to the community's future. Fifth Avenue Committee is grateful to our elected officials for their leadership and willingness to engage the community in challenging but vitally important dialogue and debate so that the community's priorities for the future are clear.

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**Eymund Diegel, local resident and planner.**

Crossing Gowanus bridges has often meant looking at stagnation - polluted waters and abandoned landscapes. A healthy dialogue about what should stay and what should go is something the community needed. I welcomed this opportunity to meet neighbors at this critical turning point, and hear what they had to say, including the point that you can't script democracy. Bridging Gowanus has been an opportunity to bring fresh ideas forward, and to challenge each other on how we can embrace the future without losing our rich industrial and natural heritage.

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**Katie Dixon, Powerhouse Workshop**

POWERHOUSE WORKSHOP  
98 4th Street, Suite 406, Brooklyn, New York 11231

BridgingGowanus.org  
Pratt Center for Community Development  
[info@bridginggowanus.org](mailto:info@bridginggowanus.org)

Re: Public Comment to: *Bridging Gowanus: Community Planning Framework* (draft for community feedback; November 2014)

Dear *Bridging Gowanus* Team:

I am the Executive Director of the Powerhouse Workshop, the not-for-profit entity created to revitalize the site of the former BRT Powerstation located at 322 Third Avenue (Block 967 Lot 1) in the Gowanus area. Our goal is to rehabilitate and restore the extant historic structure and create a robust, active and permanent home for the arts that will be a vital, significant and lasting resource to the Gowanus community, Brooklyn and New York City as a whole. We are in the early planning stages of the project and have greatly benefitted from the conversations that have been generated by *Bridging Gowanus*. We thank you for all of your work to facilitate this community conversation and for the opportunity you have given us to participate. I would like to comment directly on the section of the draft *Bridging Gowanus* report titled 'Ensuring a Genuine Mix of Uses'. In general, we whole-heartedly support the recommendations made around arts and culture and its inclusion in a 'mixed-use' area. Specifically, creating 'an arts and culture plan' that builds on the strong arts community in the Gowanus; developing 'incentives that enable artists, cooperatives and nonprofit organizations to own their own space'; establishing the Powerhouse Workshop; as well as supporting public art and increasing access for artists to public space. We applaud *Bridging Gowanus* for highlighting these ways that the arts community can be more strongly embedded in the infrastructure of the neighborhood. We also look forward to contributing to the conversation and being a resource as these ideas evolve.

Another portion of this section of the report on which I would like to comment specifically, is the first recommendation titled 'Consider NYC Landmark Designation for Specific Iconic Buildings'. Although the recommendation is not site-specific, the fact that the background for the page is a photograph of the former BRT Powerstation building has raised concern on the part of the Powerhouse Workshop team and its supporters that this may suggest an intent by *Bridging Gowanus* to recommend that what remains of the former BRT Powerstation be considered for designation as a NYC Landmark.

Having studied the issue extensively, we think such an action would be inappropriate for a number of substantive reasons. The following is a summary of these reasons, which will be articulated in more detail in a full documentation of the site.

First, we feel that the goals of the Powerhouse Workshop will directly support the aim of *Bridging Gowanus* to ensure a genuine mix of uses. The Powerhouse program, which is still in development, will make a major contribution to secure and stabilize space for the arts in the Gowanus community. However, while the Powerhouse Workshop is committed to preserving and reusing the remaining facades of the Powerhouse, designating it as a landmark would impose significant regulatory constraints and additional costs in connection with our planned restoration and adaptive reuse. As the Powerhouse Workshop is a non-profit endeavor, designating what remains of the Powerstation as a landmark would put an undue financial burden on its mission.

With respect to the physical structure, below are a number of additional reasons that the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission should not designate the Powerhouse as an individual landmark:

- The existing structure is a remnant of the original building. A substantial portion, approximately one-third of the original Powerstation, was demolished over 50 years ago.
- The existing structure and its surrounding context have long ago been substantially altered. The roof and smoke stacks have been removed; windows are missing, the first floor is buried by later land-fill, and additional floors were added at later dates.
- The exposed northern façade of the existing structure is in fact an interior wall of no historic or aesthetic value.

The Powerhouse Workshop is publicly committed to preserving and reusing, to the greatest extent possible, the remaining building facades. This can be done without imposing an unnecessary layer of governmental oversight and additional costs on the Powerhouse project or by placing a demand on LPC's limited resources.

We urge you to clarify this report by noting that the adaptive reuse and preservation of the former BRT Powerstation does not require designation as an individual landmark.

Thank you again for the incredible work you have done on this community planning effort. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you as the plans for our project evolve.

Sincerely yours,

Katie Dixon  
Executive Director

Cc: New York City Council Member Brad Lander  
United States Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez  
New York State Senator Velmanette Montgomery  
New York City Council Member Stephen Levin  
New York City Council Member Carlos Menchaca  
New York State Assemblywoman-elect Jo Anne Simon

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**Stephen Giumenta, owner of Architectural Grille.**

As owner of a third generation - family owned business in Gowanus, it is important to us that small businesses and most importantly the employees that work for these businesses, have a voice in their future. Bridging Gowanus has made that possible through a series of meetings and open lines of communication. The efforts of this process have brought to light the fact that people still need a place to work, and that the manufacturing sections of Gowanus cannot be wiped out, because in doing so we lose out on current jobs, job creation, and business growth, all of which are keys to getting our economy back on track.

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**Janet Henry**

11/26/15

Dear Bridging Gowanus Planning Board,

I heard from a neighbor who attended the Monday meeting that one of the recommendations you seemed eager to endorse was erecting buildings up to 18 stories high along the Gowanus canal. As a resident of Carroll Street between 3rd Ave and the canal I would strongly object to any more high rise buildings going up, it's bad enough we had to deal with the enormous housing development along Bond Street at 2nd Street. More congestion and high rises are a detriment to our quality of life.

Thank you,  
Janet Henry

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**Bisi Ideraabdullah**

11/23/15

Dear Bridging Gowanus,

I read through the plan and there is little that I can add. It's thorough and well thought out and clearly put together the best in thinking through what we'd like to see in this area toward

real improvement and equity. My interest is aligned with any new housings mainly but green and non-polluting industry is essential more so, especially if it provides jobs to some of the local residents.

If anything, I'd add the following:

- "Affordable" needs to be better defined as it can mean many things and many of the affordable options are not really affordable if we look at the median income of the majority of New Yorkers. \
- perhaps there can be created a guideline of "affordable" based on the current realities of income and sustainability (as it regards investors being able to gain a fair return). We understand that affordable today is not the same affordable of the 90's
- Also any agreements made through these efforts must be locked in. Administrations change and priorities shift i.e attacks on public housing in the last administration and the subsequent neglect currently.
- Will there be anything in this plan to improve the conditions in public housing and build on the strengths of the tenants - where living there is not stigmatization of poverty but a decent place to live that is "affordable."
- Schools across the city are becoming segregated. If schools are built how will this be avoided. Clever redistricting has sometimes led to this problem.

Thanks for the good work. I'm sorry I cannot attend at this time, but it is important to me as it should be to all who live in Brooklyn and who care about Canal.

All the best,  
Bisi Ideraabdullah  
Bergen Street  
Brooklyn 11217

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**Ben Jones, Vice Chair of the Gowanus Canal Conservancy.**

The Bridging Gowanus draft framework does an excellent job capturing the environmental priorities of the neighborhood, reflecting a clear community consensus that remediation, revitalization and resiliency should be front and center in the planning process.

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**Katia Kelly**

3/29/15

**HANDS OFF GOWANUS!!!**

"Bridging Gowanus", much like "[Gowanus Summit](#)" in 2008, is a thinly veiled attempt to make the community believe that it has a say in the future of Gowanus.



It has been described as a democratic process, but at the end of this months-long series of meetings, Councilman Brad Lander has refused to allow the community to vote on the final report to ensure that Bridging Gowanus corresponds to what the community envisions for this unique neighborhood.

Having attended all but one of the Bridging Gowanus meetings, I have come to the conclusion that Gowanus needs no re-zoning at all. Despite decades of neglect by our City and State, the neighborhood has been healing itself, is thriving as an artist community, and has become an incubator for small, vibrant new businesses. It also has an engaged residential community that takes pride in the neighborhood's uniqueness. Many of the existing historical buildings have been re-purposed to meet today's need. New 2-4 story residences, like the ones on Carroll Street between Nevins and Third Avenue prove that residential development opportunities already exist.

Make no mistake! If we allow the City to rezone (read upzone) the Gowanus Corridor, we will get more developments like the vastly inappropriate Lightstone Group project, a twelve story, 700-unit rental development currently being build on Bond Street, adjacent to the canal.

Bridging Gowanus claims that the community is fine with building heights of 18 feet as a trade-off for new schools, green space and upgrades in infrastructure. After being used as an open sewer by the City of New York, the Gowanus neighborhood is owed schools, more park spaces and an adequate sewer system without handing the entire community over to developers.

Many claims, especially those regarding building heights, found in the final Bridging Gowanus document, were based on leading questioning and exercises which were specifically phrased and designed to get a certain answer. How shameful!

Councilmember Lander, you may have fooled some people, but many have seen through your 'Bridging Gowanus' ruse.  
Katia Kelly

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**Ariel Krasnow, Member, Brooklyn Community Board 6.**

The "community" - those who know, work, live and use the Gowanus have never stopped thinking about its immediate future, and for many, its value as a greater city-wide resource. Gowanus has been studied for years but with Bridging Gowanus, the potential to corral a decade of planning initiatives with new ideas into a framework that could actually have impact, now becomes a distinct possibility. The product is somewhat unknowable by intention. It is not a plan, but a list of issues, concerns and development ideas which I hope will have broad community support and will influence future local development.

## **Daniel Kummer, Chair of Brooklyn Community Board 6.**

The organizers of Bridging Gowanus, including City Council Member Brad Lander and Congresswoman Velazquez, have conducted an extraordinary process leading up to presentation of this community planning framework. I look forward to reviewing the report at Brooklyn Community Board 6 in the coming weeks.

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## **Ben Margolis of the American Can Factory**

As a long-time home to creative businesses and individuals, we appreciate this effort to lead and reshape the Gowanus planning conversation. It is encouraging to see a plan that includes the concept of mandatory mixed-use zoning that may include light manufacturing, arts production and affordable artist housing. This approach could provide much needed stability to the industrial and cultural communities in Gowanus, where, we believe, creative working and living can not only coexist, but be mutually reinforcing.

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## **Linda Mariano, Friends and Residents Of the Greater Gowanus (FROGG)**

I feel, and as many of my friends and neighbors do - Bridging Gowanus has added to the atmosphere of dread and emotional distress - in our lives, creating something like post traumatic stress syndrome. For many years we as a community have all been engaged in trying to save our neighborhood from the wrong kind of development - out of context development, such as the now defunct Toll Brothers site (now the Lightstone site). Toll Brothers demolished several buildings which were nominated by the United States Army Corp of Engineers to the National Register of Historic Places before they left Gowanus.

Then came the very intensive campaigns for Superfund Gowanus, the brownfield applications, flooding issues, Hurricane Irene, and Hurricane Sandy.

Most of us live in flood zone A, a mandatory evacuation zone. Residents have had to deal with infrastructure problems, CSO's, flushing tunnel problems, historic preservation issues, the neglected and damaged Coignet Building (NYC land mark) by the Whole Foods Company, the take down of the Eagle Clothes sign and the Kentile (State and National Register eligible) sign. As residents of Gowanus, we have written hundreds of letters to an assortment of government agencies, hoping they would hear our voices. We have all attended very many meetings with numerous city agencies, to counter the unwanted burdens the city agencies have placed on us.

Our government has let us down.

I find the completely faux planning process called Bridging Gowanus to be neither a community planning process or a legitimate endeavor to create a community planning process. I believe this is a false plan for the real plan, which is to **REZONE** Gowanus **for the greedy developers**. Bridging Gowanus has created an atmosphere of hopelessness about the future of Gowanus . I do not believe Bridging Gowanus has truly listened to this community. Not listening to this community, the people who actually live here, is disrespectful and disenfranchising.

Bridging Gowanus, just like all the government agencies, has killed our hope for the future and it has let us down! It is not a democratic process. Bridging Gowanus has done the best for the developers.

Bridging Gowanus, means rezoning for over development, and saying this is what the community wants?

Linda Mariano, Gowanus resident since 1976 and co founder of Friends and Residents Of the Greater Gowanus (FROGG)

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**David Meade, Executive Director of Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation**

SBIDC participated in the process from the beginning and experienced firsthand the great efforts to continually and effectively engage a diverse set of stakeholders including small businesses of all types in meaningful discussions throughout the yearlong process. The Bridging Gowanus draft planning framework successfully unites the results of the process incorporating the greater community's current ideas with those that were generated as a result of previous plans. SBIDC supports the framework's many tenets, namely the importance of strengthening the small business and manufacturing community. Now near its conclusion, SBIDC is dedicated to the forward momentum of Bridging Gowanus so that both the community-driven process and framework truly stake a claim for the future of the Gowanus.

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**Charlene Nimmons, President of the Wyckoff Gardens Tenant Association.**

The Bridging Gowanus community meeting series has been a welcoming and enlightening experience. We had the opportunity to work with community stakeholders that surround the Gowanus Canal, and all of us were given equal time to express our concerns and desires for our changing neighborhood.

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**Maria Pagano, John Hatheway, and Glenn Kelly**

Dear Council member Lander,

We are writing to express our thanks for your initiative in the Bridging Gowanus community planning process. Despite skepticism from some people in our community, the process has been well thought out and executed. The interim reports seemed quite accurate in portraying what we were hearing at the larger public meetings and in the smaller working groups. While the process has not resulted in a specific plan for Gowanus, it has, as promised, recognized consensus in important areas and offered suggestions for how we might achieve some of the desired goals.

There is, however, one area where we have concern. The executive summary

describes the results of the June 2014 Pratt density/trade-off survey and reports that more than 60% of the participants supported greater mixed use density and that nearly 3/4 of those supported building heights greater than 10 stories. This is certainly not what we have been hearing from our community before, during, and after Bridging Gowanus so we were surprised.

Once the survey documents were made available to us, we examined them and found fault both with the survey itself and the interpretation of the results. We looked closely at the 78 documents and discovered that just 21 clearly supported higher density, 28 wanted little or no change, and the third group (29) included some which provided too little information or demonstrated ignorance of the issues, or provided conflicting information, such as the responses which created tall buildings on the front and expressed opposition to them in their comments.

Our own forms also fell into this group along with others which challenged the design of the survey and the suppositions used. It was clear that many people did not understand the instructions and therefore completed the form incorrectly. It is also clear that the participants did not know how the surveys would be evaluated and reported so that is a big problem. Our fear is that this faulty survey will undermine the otherwise good work which was done and the skewed results will overshadow the entire process and jeopardize the chance for a better Gowanus. We encourage you to re-evaluate the responses and we offer our assistance in that endeavor.

Maria Pagano John Hatheway Glenn Kelly

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**Andrea Parker, Executive Director of the Gowanus Canal Conservancy.**

The Bridging Gowanus draft framework lays out a proactive road map to sustaining our neighborhood's unique character while addressing its diverse challenges, from climate change to real-estate speculation. As a community-based process, Bridging Gowanus reflects our values as an organization, as we believe that decisions about the health and future of the neighborhood should be driven from the ground up.

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**Paul Parkhill, Executive Director of Spaceworks NYC.**

Bridging Gowanus represents an incredibly important first step toward a new zoning paradigm, one in which industry and the arts can co-exist with new housing over the long haul. I am excited about the plan's potential not just for Gowanus but for mixed-use neighborhoods throughout New York City.

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## Property Markets Group Inc.

Property Markets Group Inc.

Comment on Bridging Gowanus Report of November 24, 2014

Submitted by Property Markets Group

The *Bridging Gowanus* proposed zoning parameters incorporate recommendations to mandate the inclusion of “maker uses” and affordable housing in conjunction with any new residential development:

“Residential developers would not be able to build housing/retail alone. They would be required to preserve or create compatible light manufacturing space, art/artisan work space, or nonprofit organization work space. This space could be built on-site in new buildings...or by preserving existing buildings and commercial tenants nearby (within the Gowanus mixed-use Zone)...It would not take the place of affordable housing, which would still be required.”

“Where new housing is allowed in areas currently used for manufacturing, or where increased density might be allowed, developers should be required to include affordable units....mandatory inclusionary zoning...should be applied to Gowanus. Moreover, where developers apply for 421-a tax breaks, they should not be allowed to ‘double dip’ and use the same housing to satisfy their inclusionary requirements but should be required to increase the amount of affordable housing.”

However, with regard to improvements and public benefits, the report places the first and apparently highest priority on requiring new infrastructure, emphasizing environmental infrastructure to support the Superfund mission (new bulkheads) and to preclude or diminish flooding caused by rainstorms, hurricanes and climate change. Additionally, it calls for the remediation of brownfields and the creation of a “Gowanus Greenscape” network and general expansion of green infrastructure. In this regard, The Lightstone Group – the one tangible example to date of new residential development under construction along the banks of the Canal – is building new storm sewers, catch basins, bioswales, tree pits, green roofs, hydrodynamic separators (a vortex system that cleans street run-off contaminants such as gas and oil from captured stormwater before it is released into the Canal after flooding subsides) along with a heavily-planted waterfront esplanade that will absorb stormwater and divert it from entering the Canal.

While *Bridging Gowanus* specifically demands that most infrastructure improvements be largely undertaken by government – which makes complete sense – in reality developers will be mandated to make many of these costly improvements, in some cases where it is inherently logical for the developer to do so, and in many instances in lieu of what government should have done over a period of many years. In this regard it is instructive to examine the recent “settlement” between EPA and The Lightstone Group, which EPA acknowledged was crafted in a collaborative partnership with Lightstone and not as the result of any litigation or threatened actions and could be fairly characterized as an “agreement” as opposed to a “settlement” (“settlement” is the standard EPA term whether a resolution is collaborative or not).

EPA's cost analysis of the environmental infrastructure measures to which Lightstone formally committed, including those steps required by State and City agencies as well as the exigencies of the Superfund, totals \$20 million dollars. Several developers who own property along the banks of the Canal, including Property Markets Group (PMG), anticipate building residential developments as large as, or larger, than the Lightstone project. PMG and other developers recognize the civic and social need, and likely mandates, to include some significant extent of maker uses and affordable housing. However, the challenging economic implications of funding environmental infrastructure on or around their properties, as well as creating extensive green waterfront amenities for the dual purposes of recreation and flood control, represent extraordinary costs that few developments in the city must face.

***This comment is submitted in the hope that new zoning parameters adopted for the Gowanus planning area heavily take into account the extraordinary cost of essential environmental infrastructure when formulating mandates for maker uses and affordable housing.*** The oft-stated policy of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor for Housing & Economic Development and the chair of the City Planning Commission is that while the de Blasio Administration will require significantly more affordable housing and fewer associated public subsidies than historically has been the case when new residential development requires zoning changes, along with mandating the creation or retention of light manufacturing, the City recognizes that it must provide increased FAR or other measures to avoid disincentivizing development so as not to preclude the expansion of the city's affordable housing stock and job-creating uses.

In the context of development along the Gowanus Canal, the costs of any environmental infrastructure mandates also must be taken into account and result in the lessening of affordable housing or maker use requirements and/or FAR must be further increased. Otherwise, none of these laudable and essential public policy goals will be realized.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this comment in the interest of facilitating the viability of the generally constructive *Bridging Gowanus* plan.

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**Ben Schrank**

11/25/15

I am Ben Schrank, owner, 459 Carroll Street. This is my email address and my phone number is (**\*OMITTED FOR PRIVACY\***) I am writing to say that I strongly object to the suggestion of 18 story buildings in Gowanus. The rest of your recommendations are commendable but it is wrong to imagine that very tall buildings are part of the solution to our neighborhood's problems.

Thank you.

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**Carlo Scissura, President and CEO of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce.**

The Brooklyn Chamber fully supports the collaborative planning effort known as Bridging Gowanus. Through Bridging Gowanus, important community stakeholders were given a seat at the table in order to shape the future and institute a long-term vision for Gowanus. The proposed community goals strongly reflect the needs of both residents and businesses in the area, and will ensure the sustainable growth of the neighborhood for years to come. We commend the elected officials involved and the various Gowanus community groups involved for leading this important initiative, and look forward to seeing its framework implemented in the near future.

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**Mark Shames, member of Brooklyn Community Board 6.**

Bridging Gowanus has always been this community's best means of seeing our environmental, infrastructure, middle income and senior housing needs and quality of life concerns melded with our City's program to address its affordable housing crisis while creating and maintaining space for more living wage jobs. This is a tall order and I thank the group of elected officials who convened Bridging Gowanus for confronting this challenge. By pressing forward with the Bridging Gowanus process we will be ready to have meaningful discussions with the de Blasio administration as it expedites the implementation of its strategies for production of affordable housing through HPD and City Planning.

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**Josh Skaller, District Leader for the 52nd Assembly District.**

The Bridging Gowanus framework provides an incredibly important proactive articulation of the community's concerns, priorities and values in light of the changes that are sure to accompany a clean and revitalized canal. I believe that to meet the core values of our community - preserving the essential character and role of Gowanus, safeguarding people from environmental pollution and rising sea levels, envisioning an inclusive future - this document is an important step in avoiding the poorly planned and often rapacious development typical of our city.

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**Bette Stoltz**

1. In the on line text (but not mentioned in the slide show) – Under “New Gowanus manufacturing Zone” , in the paragraph headed “Restrict non-industrial uses” – the list includes nightclubs, amusements (like large sports facilities) – it needs to be more specific. For example would we consider The Bell House an undesirable? Or the shuffleboard place? What are large sports facilities? We already have a pool, gyms, rock climbing, archery, tennis, and a skate park that I know of – would we allow a marina, a jai alai fronton, a skating rink, bowling alley? Or are we just saying not another Barclay size Arena, and no X rated facilities? If things are not allowed as of right, will they still have access through BSA variances?

2. There was not enough talk (not any) about the important cement/concrete cluster that exists. What will happen to them? How will we help them to thrive whether in place or nearby? There was no talk about their barging in of their materials and the truck traffic saved by this. Also, there is a need for adequate depth and width of water to accommodate barges & tugs and all importance of bridge maintenance – needed not only for them but also for the cleanup operations. These should be a part of the critical business infrastructure.
3. Engineering Schools should be challenged to invent retro-fits for allowing parallel parked loading & unloading. Also what about some incentives for companies with vehicle fleets (buses, trucks, etc. to build multi story garages to reduce their footprint while adding new industrial facility space in the former parking area.
4. Why would we want to get rid of all bus & truck businesses? They are very labor intensive . i.e. Red Hook has 4 school bus companies – 600 buses leave Red Hook every morning. That is 1,200 working peoples’ jobs – drivers, matrons, mechanics, cleaners, route managers, office staff. This was how Red Hook On The Road came about – they needed drivers, people needed jobs.
5. I loved the new idea of incentives for residential owners to use wind & solar. Goes with the new EDC program we discussed at cb6 a while ago. Businesses should too!

Thank you for including two of the things I asked for early on in the process. Right at the beginning I put forth a hope for a “Mandatory Mixed Use Zone”. I want to better inform myself about how the TIF would work and how things would be enforced, but I am very glad to see some thought going into this subject . I am also glad to see the idea of an Industrial BID explored - It is something I tried about 20 years ago in Red Hook (an effort before its time perhaps), but would be great in the Gowanus. However, there should be more of a contribution from new large residential development than \$1 per year if they are to receive the BID’s services. A BID would be a very good thing for SWBIDC to undertake.

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**Abby Subak, Executive Director, Arts Gowanus.**

One year into this process, I remain incredibly hopeful. This framework has genuinely incorporated the many priorities expressed by the community. Gowanus is fortunate to have elected officials who listen to what the people want. Of course, we aren’t done, and a framework is not yet a set of rules and policies. I still see a lot of anxiety and skepticism in the neighborhood. Yet, the proposed framework is a significant step, and it is heartening to see it reflect the hopes and visions of the existing community. I look forward to seeing the framework fleshed out. We have a very real opportunity here to create a community that values and protects people and creativity, as well as manufacturing and the environment.

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## Carl Teitelbaum

3/30/15

Dear Councilmember Lander,

I'm afraid the re-zoning of Gowanus to the mis-nomered "mixed use" designation will pave the way for the demolition and destruction of a vibrant neighborhood. Guess what? It is currently a real mixed use neighborhood but rezoning will make way for rampant non-contextural development of residential housing of the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue variety. The existing small businesses will be forced out by rising rents. If there was one theme that ran through the Bridging Gowanus meetings I attended (all but one), it was the desire for the strip around the canal not to become 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

What I don't see in the report is an actual vision of what the area should look like in twenty years. For all the graphics in the piece, I'd like to see what you'd like things to be like and look like if we could actually follow through on a plan. This is an opportunity to be visionary. Not be all things to all people. Not promise a little bit of this or that to many groups but to come up with a city of the future built on a human scale for human needs. What you've laid out, especially with re-zoning, just makes way for more of the same. Especially since it was stated that City Planning can pick or choose from your recommendations, why not be bold? Right now, CP (with pressure from developers) will choose the re-zoning and pay lip service to other recommendations.

So far the process has not been democratic or inclusive. The few hundred people who showed up for the meetings can't possibly truly represent the 150,000 people in your district or the 10,000 (not sure of the number) who live and work in and around the Gowanus. In the large meetings, you couldn't hear people on the other side of the table, so nice try but the process was flawed. There was lots of noise but little exchange of ideas. I'm not laying blame just stating what occurred.

I have also been and continue to be shocked by your not publishing, as they come in, the comments made by people from the community. Catherine mentioned that your staff is small and is not able to handle these but it would seem that it's far less taxing to post the comments as they come in rather than sifting through them all at the end of the process. This would generate new ideas on an ongoing basis and get more people involved. Not posting them until the process is over makes the comments irrelevant.

**BUT ALL IS NOT LOST!** We can make this more open, more democratic, more creative and more productive by making this the beginning of the discussion, not the end of it.

- Post all of the comments you've gotten including all of the anonymous ones. There's no need for censorship. I would suggest that anonymous comments be rejected in the future. One thing that has been frustrating about dealing with the question of development is that developers have legions of PR people, lawyers, lobbyists and influence peddlers doing their bidding while the public has none of these representatives. It wouldn't surprise me if the

anonymous comments were mostly representative of a particular point of view (that is, they were paid for).

- Create forums for each of the categories in your report and list the comments in each of the categories.
- Do not issue a report until you get a broader, more democratic representation of the community feels. Let's make this process more representative than it has been.
- Create graphic representations of what Gowanus will look like if various re-zonings were to take place.

To talk about transfer development rights is one thing but what would a 30 story building look like next to the Gowanus? The architectural graphics programs are out there, let's come up with various visions of what the strip around the Gowanus would or could look like according to the various visions put forth.

A lot of time and effort has gone into creating this forum and presenting ideas. Let's not cut this process short for the sake of putting out a half-baked plan. Let's keep discussing and formulating until we come up with a plan that will benefit the community and the city and not just a few developers who are warehousing properties hoping for a large payday at the expense of the community's well-being. Let's keep this going until we have a creative vision of the future. Then it will be worth both the time and the effort. We're not there yet!

Carl Teitelbaum  
374 Bond Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11231

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### **Ed Tyre and Theresa Davis, leaders of the Gowanus Houses Tenant Association**

The Bridging Gowanus report is a good start, with attention paid to the needs of the Gowanus Houses residents. It addresses many pressing issues, like the need to upgrade our buildings and prevent flooding. As these projects move forward, we need to make sure there is accountability to the community. It's important that the community continues to be involved every step of the way.