



For Immediate Release: July 25, 2019

After Blackouts and Flooding Community Organizers Renew Call for Gowanus Environmental Special District to Invest in Equitable and Resilient Infrastructure

Gowanus, Brooklyn, New York: Three days of extreme weather causing blackouts and flooding in Gowanus and surrounding communities has highlighted the urgent need for investment in infrastructure to defend against the effects of extreme weather events. Members of the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice (GNCJ) renew their call to Mayor DeBlasio and the NYC Department of City Planning to create an Environmental Special District as part of the proposed Gowanus neighborhood rezoning.

A key component of GNCJ's platform is addressing long standing environmental injustices in the Gowanus neighborhood. GNCJ is calling for the City to expand the proposed Gowanus Special Mixed-Use District to an Environmental Special District that addresses the unique environmental conditions in Gowanus.

An Environmental Special District that has equity at its core would establish specific targets to ensure there is not a net increase in combined sewage overflow (CSO) and energy demand; invest in local parks and increase urban tree canopy; mitigate flooding and provide support for emergency preparedness; and improve health and social resiliency by addressing critical capital needs at the neighborhood's three NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) campuses.

As the City proposes the largest neighborhood rezoning of the DeBlasio administration in the Gowanus neighborhood, GNCJ demands that the administration provide real commitments to resilient infrastructure capable of supporting both new density AND existing residents and businesses. GNCJ's full comments in response to the Department of City Planning's Draft Environmental Impact Statement can be read [here](#).

"With the right leadership from the City, the unique challenges in Gowanus--one of the most polluted waterbodies and neighborhoods in the country--could be the impetus for cultivating a groundbreaking green neighborhood. The Mayor must commit to policy and funding solutions to address combined sewage overflow and flooding so that additional density does not further pollute the Canal," said Andrea Parker, of member organization Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC).

"Streets and sidewalks are the largest open spaces in neighborhoods and the absence of a tree canopy from Fourth Avenue to Bond Street creates actual 'heat islands', greatly exacerbating health hazards in a global warming environment where we are told to expect longer and higher heat waves," said SJ Avery, of member organization Park Slope Civic Council. "Historically, sections of Fourth Avenue have been plagued by flooding, as we were recently reminded. A very high water table, combined with known underground springs that criss-cross the neighborhood, creates a challenge that even practices such as routine storm drain cleaning (however welcome) will not resolve. We need an appropriate study and remediation planning that includes CSO mitigation at individual buildings. The CSO from flooded streets, even when it does make its way into sewer pipes, still is likely to end up in the Gowanus Canal, hobbling efforts to 'clean' it."

“For decades, Gowanus industrial businesses have been feeling the impact of flooding on their bottom lines, not only during extreme weather events, but during normal rainfall. Climate change and significant new development will only make flooding more challenging, and for many, impossible to remain in Gowanus to provide quality employment for residents. We are already seeing businesses leaving Red Hook. As a proud member of GNCJ, SBIDC supports the call for investing the necessary resources in order to understand real solutions, plus subsequent and proper investments throughout the neighborhood,” said Ben Margolis, of member organization Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SBIDC).

“Red Hook and the Gowanus public housing residents have been environmentally burdened by indoor and outdoor toxins for decades. Before any rezoning takes place in Gowanus, we need assurances that the new development will have a net zero increase of sewage into the Gowanus Canal. I read in DCP’s Framework that the Bond Lorraine and Columbia Street Interceptor handles 200,000 gallons of sewage per day with the rezoning of Gowanus there will be an increase to 2 million gallons per day. This is unacceptable. We need an Environmental Special District--not a re-polluted canal and community,” said Karen Blondel, of member organization Turning the Tide.

“Investment in clean, local energy and energy storage are necessary in Gowanus to manage demand and reduce the impact of more than 8,000 new homes that could be built through the Gowanus rezoning” said Kedin Kilgore, of FAC Solar, LLC, the Community and Affordable Solar affiliate of GNCJ member organization the Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC).

The Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice (GNJC) is a racially and socioeconomically diverse coalition made up of groups focused on equity, inclusion, economic and environmental sustainability and justice, working to organize and advocate for a just rezoning. Members include public housing residents, seniors, industrial business advocates, local community-based organizations, faith-based groups, and environmental advocates.

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