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City of New Rochelle New York

Interim Report of the Davids Island Task Force January 2011

BACKGROUND

Davids Island (“the Island”) is located in western Long Island Sound, a short distance from the New Rochelle mainland. The Island is approximately 120 acres in size, of which 80 acres are upland and 40 acres are underwater. With the exception of a 5 acre Consolidated Edison easement, the Island is owned entirely by the City of New Rochelle (“City”) and is currently vacant and inaccessible.

For more than 100 years, the Island was home to Fort Slocum, a United States Army base. In 1966, the federal government deactivated Fort Slocum and subsequently sold the Island to the City. Since then, a variety of uses have been entertained. These include an atomic energy plant, high-rise multi-family housing, single-family luxury housing, and County parkland. Each of these potential uses was ultimately rejected or abandoned in the face of environmental concerns, economic obstacles, political opposition and/or lack of adequate resources for implementation.

DAVIDS ISLAND TASK FORCE

In September 2010 the City of New Rochelle convened a city-wide task force which included representatives from neighborhood associations, federal, state and county elected officials, local school district and city council representatives, regional environmental advocates, representatives from adjoining Sound Shore municipalities as well as experts in sustainable design and development. Stakeholder participation in these discussions signaled the City’s desire to seek input to help shape a new vision for the Island. The Davids Island Task Force was initially broken into two sub-committees; the Re-use committee and the Current Conditions/Challenges committee. Following further public outreach, the entire task force will reconvene as a whole to create an action plan to advance the use of the Island.

GOAL

The City wishes to shape and achieve a vision for Davids Island that:

- appreciates and takes full advantage of the unique nature and value of the site;
- draws upon and is consistent with public input from residents of the region;
- appropriately balances environmental and economic concerns and objectives;
- enables the public to better achieve and enjoy access to Long Island Sound;
- demonstrates and advances a commitment to sustainable design and activity;
- is achievable within foreseeable economic and fiscal constraints;

This brief summarizes the group’s activities and provides an outline of the next steps for public outreach to the general public.

CURRENT CONDITIONS/CHALLENGES SUB-COMMITTEE

This sub-committee focused on issues pertaining to infrastructure concerns including sewage treatment, a Con Ed easement, and access/transportation challenges, as well as, environmental conditions, such as soil contamination, ecology/habitat, and projected increases to existing sea-level; the group also reviewed existing policy documents outlining current land-use. The sub-committee met several times last fall with members taking on issues where individual expertise or interest could be applied.

Consolidated Edison Easement

An easement consisting of approximately 5.20 acres has been identified. It must be retained by Consolidated Edison Co of New York for the purposes of providing access to an electrical cable line that traverses a portion of the southwest corner of the Island.

Access/Transportation

Access to Davids Island is currently limited to waterborne transportation via the beach area located on the southwestern shore of the Island. Fort Slocum was served by a ferry. Bridge access to the Island has been proposed in some past development schemes, but opposition to a bridge has been a contributing factor to the termination of those projects. The City's LWRP expresses a preference for water-borne access, but does not rule-out bridge access. In the context of considering the establishment of a County park on the Island, City and County officials contemplated the construction of a pedestrian bridge that could also serve emergency vehicles linking to Glen Island.

Site Contamination

Between November 2005 and February 2009, the US Army Corps of Engineers (The Corps) performed the demolition and asbestos abatement project, razing 94 on-site buildings and structures. The Corps secured funding from the Department of Defense Office of Economic Adjustment. Concurrent with the building demolition activities, a Site Investigation was performed jointly by the City of New Rochelle and County of Westchester, as part of the Davids Island Environmental Restoration Project. The primary objective of the Site Investigation (SI) was to delineate the nature and extent of site contamination. Using this data, remedial alternatives could then be evaluated and a remedy proposed under the Environmental Restoration Program (ERP). The SI revealed that areas across the Island have been impacted by polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), pesticides and metals in soil as well as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in select areas (typically in former transformer areas). Groundwater sampling revealed no elevated concentrations of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) or semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs). In addition to the areas of soil contamination discussed above, an on-site landfill was identified along the southern tip of the Island. The landfill contains significant quantities of ash and slag from past on-site incineration practices.

Ecology/Habitat

The Long Island Sound Stewardship Initiative, a partnership formed by the Long Island Sound Study to identify places with significant ecological or recreational value throughout the Sound has developed a strategy to protect and enhance these special places, of which Davids Island has been included. The goals of the Stewardship Initiative are to conserve natural areas, increase access to the Sound, protect important habitats, and plan for multiple uses. Please refer to <http://longIslandsoundstudy.net/issues-actions/stewardship/background/> for further information. In addition the Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon Society has prepared the Davids Island Audubon Report which outlines the Audubon's desire to keep Davids Island as passive recreation.

Sea-Level Rise

The State of New York has adopted one set of projections for sea level rise for all three of the major adaptation reports currently underway or nearing completion. The projections were generated by Columbia University/NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies. New York City, in partnership with the state, commissioned the development of these projections for a major infrastructure adaptation study. Municipalities should plan for two feet of sea level rise by 2050 and four feet by 2080. As the vision for the

Island evolves, it will be necessary to further the engineering assessment of any likely sea level rise to determine the impact on the mean high tide line and related shore area change; with the development of effective adaptation methods being critical to the long term re-use of the Island. The entire Sea Level Rise Task Force Report can be found on the DEC website at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/67778.html>.

Nitrogen Levels

One of the major issues of concern over the last decade has been hypoxia, which has been linked to an overabundance of nitrogen combined with the naturally occurring density stratification of the water column. While nitrogen is essential to a productive ecosystem, too much nitrogen fuels the excessive growth of algae. Discharges from sewage treatment plants, atmospheric deposition, and runoff are the primary sources of nitrogen enrichment to Long Island Sound. In December 2000, the LISS prepared the Total Maximum Daily Load Analysis which provided limits to municipalities pertaining to the allowance of nitrogen to be discharged into the Long Island Sound.

The maximum daily load for all of Westchester County is 1780 lbs/day of nitrogen and any additional nitrogen discharge from a proposed development on Davids Island must be included within this total. As a practical matter, this means that any sewage discharge from Davids Island would need to be returned to the mainland for treatment at the New Rochelle Sewage Treatment Plant, rather than treated at a new Island-based treatment facility. For a full copy of this environmental analysis please refer to www.ct.gov/dep/lib/dep/water/lis_water_quality/nitrogen_control_program/tmdl.pdf.

RE-USE SUB-COMMITTEE

This subcommittee met twice to consider possible visions for Davids Island. Ideas varied from keeping Davids Island as is, as a place for passive recreation and a preserve for existing wildlife to proposals for intense development with full build-out of a variety of mixed uses including, residential, office and recreational.

Development of the Island as a passive recreational destination was a popular idea. This included preserving the area in its natural state, with an emphasis on the protection of flora/fauna with any development focused on marine biology. Another idea was the development of the Island as a public park to include playgrounds and picnic areas. A focus on recreation for young children and more active recreational uses were also suggested; chiefly, miniature golf, a driving range or a par three golf course. Education was another theme and the creation of a museum on the Island and having the Island host arts, music, and theatre events were also proposed.

More intense development proposals included restaurants, a conference center including housing, hotels, offices, medical and science facilities, and a country club. Development suggestions consisted of a variety of residential developments including the exclusive development of private homes, a larger development of residential units, mid-rise (five stories) loft/warehouse development and a townhouse development.

Conversion of the entire area into a solar farm was suggested and committee members were open to utilizing parts of the Island, especially those that are considered difficult for development as a potential location for sustainable energy system to serve the Island.

The vision of the subcommittee is one that sought to achieve a balance between developments that provided a fair economic return while simultaneously respecting the preservation of the natural environment. From this broad palette, the subcommittee reached a preliminary consensus, with the following elements:

General Principles

- Blend private development with public use and access, with the intent that the former should partially or wholly support the latter.
- Affirm the major goals of the City's Harbor Management Plan and LWRP, which are to promote economic development, preserve environmental resources, strengthen the City's fiscal condition, and provide public access to the shore
- Concentrate initially on short-term steps that can be self-contained, sustainable and serve as a catalyst for future development. Allow further development to unfold on a phased basis, in flexible response to conditions, opportunities and public interest. Therefore, the first-phase uses listed below are envisioned as occupying only a portion of the Island's total area.

First-Phase Development Objectives

- A hotel/marina with a conference center to be surrounded by land reserved for simultaneous or eventual conversion to a public park for passive recreation. This facility should be of such scale and luxury rating as to attract regional business conferences as well as seasonal vacationers.
- A possible educational component, such as a children's museum, to attract families;
- A possible venue for public viewing of large events, such as July 4th fireworks or major concerts.
- A solar farm on undevelopable portions

General Guidelines for Initial & Future Development

- Prohibit cars. On-Island mobility should be restricted to walking, cycling or small electric vehicles, such as golf carts
- Maintain a degree of public ownership and/or perpetual public access
- All development must be energy neutral
- A destination needs to be created

PUBLIC INPUT

The purpose of this brief is to provide a foundation for public outreach. The DITF will reach out to larger community with hearings to gather input and ultimately to present findings of the DITF. It is anticipated that public outreach will begin during the month of February where citizens of New Rochelle and the surrounding region will have an opportunity to voice concerns and/or provide additional feedback to the City.