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City's New Waterfront Parks Pose Management Challenges

New Report Provides Recommendations for Balancing Public and Private Responsibilities along the waterfront

New York – New York City's tremendous success in revitalizing its waterfront will require about \$ 100 million a year to meet new management and operating needs, according a new report by Regional Plan Association. The Association stated that ensuring an equitable and public character to the City's new waterfront will require additional public funding and a stronger role for the Department of Parks & Recreation in privately built public spaces.

This first-ever accounting of the management implications of the City-wide explosion in waterfront access found close to 700 acres and 58 miles of new waterfront parks, greenways and other public spaces being created in all five boroughs. The public and private parties responsible for managing these parks have developed a variety of strategies to meet management goals. Some of these strategies have challenged traditional definitions of park uses, and fostered concerns about an inequity in financing and delivery of public services.

"We found a tremendous variety of wonderful new public spaces being created on waterfronts in all five boroughs," said Robert Pirani, Director of Environmental Programs at Regional Plan Association. "Making sure that this legacy is well maintained and managed in the public interest will require that the responsible public agencies have the resources to take a primary role. Private partnerships provide welcome creativity and support, but the promise of these resources should not drive decisions about park management".

The report is the culmination of over a year's worth of presentations and discussions by a workgroup convened by Regional Plan Association and made up of numerous parks professionals from government, advocacy groups, and the private sector. Based on these discussions, the Association developed more than a dozen specific policy recommendations.

While stressing the responsibility of the City to provide essential leadership and public management services on the waterfront, the report also included recommendations designed to continue and improve private partnerships that exist all along the waterfront. These include creating new Waterfront Master Plans that tie management of existing parkland to developer-financed esplanades, a model now being developed in Greenpoint-Williamsburg, and looking to capture the revenue for licenses or leases on or adjacent to parkland.

"Innovative sources of funding can be helpful in providing a regular income stream for parks management, provided there is a long term plan for the funding, transparency and appropriate park uses" said Christopher Collins, Executive Director of Solar One at Stuyvesant Cove Park, an EDC-owned park that receives funds from the revenue of a parking garage located directly north of the site on EDC-owned property until 2012.

The report emphasizes the need to enhance non-profit management partnerships with the City for parks and greenways. "In the long run, the most successful waterfront parks will be those where both community residents and the government are invested in sustaining the park," said Linda Cox, Executive Director of the Bronx River Alliance and Bronx River Administrator for the City of New York Department of Parks & Recreation. "There are many opportunities for the Department of Parks & Recreation and non-profit organizations to work as partners in preserving the long-term value of parks, and with Mayor Bloomberg being such an advocate of restoring our waterfront, this is the time to act."

At an estimated \$135,000 an acre per year, the report details the significant costs in managing a waterfront park, cautioning against solutions that could create a two tiered park system where neighborhoods with greater resources have better parks.

"Every community has the right to a safe, healthy environment and that includes the right to safe, well-maintained, exciting waterfront parks for all of the City's waterfront communities," said Cecil Corbin-Mark, Director of Programs for West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. a non-profit, community-based, environmental justice organization.

The full report is available at: www.rpa.org.

Regional Plan Association (RPA) is an independent regional planning organization that improves the quality of life and the economic competitiveness of the 31-county New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region through research, planning, and advocacy. For more information about RPA, please visit our website, www.rpa.org.

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