

Zoning for Flood Resilience Workshop

Eastern Bronx @ SUNY Maritime

Location: SUNY Maritime – 6 Pennyfield Avenue, Maritime Academic Center

Date: Saturday October 21st from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

List of DCP Staff // Zoning Division: Manuela Powidayko / Waterfront and Open Space: Melissa Herlitz, Dana Bennewitz, Allan Zaretsky / Bronx Office: Christine Camilleri, Shawn Brede, Susanna Castiello / Queens Office: Greg Miller / Environmental Review: Christopher Lee / Housing Economic and Infrastructure Planning: Dylan Sandler

Other Agency Staff // Legal Services NYC: Margaret Becker; Mayor's Office of Recovery and Resiliency: Rachel Finkelstein; NYC Office of Emergency Management: Jill Cornell

Attendees // Janet Bitner, Craig Bitner, Barbara Fornal, Ralph Mauro, Ron Rauch, Marjorie Hooks, Ann Kelly, Denise Noble, Joe Donovan, Louis Kleinman, Ryan Brenner, John Gale, Dorian Fulvio, John Distefayo, William Cinotti, Edmond Pryor, G. Postrk, Sally Desiderato, Dorothea Poggi, Majorie Velazquez, Carol Brumley-McMon, Karl Carter, Paul P. Landomada, Jenisi Rigsa, Terri Fitzpatrick, Matthew Cruz

Co-Sponsors // Bronx Community Board 10

Workshop Description

Summary

The Department of City Planning hosted an informational meeting and workshop about floodplain design and development. Following a short presentation on zoning rules that were adopted after Hurricane Sandy to facilitate resilient building construction, participants had the opportunity to share their ideas on how to shape a future update to these rules to advance resiliency in neighborhoods throughout the Eastern Bronx and across the city.

Goals

1. Educate the public about zoning for flood resilience;
2. Share information about resilience strategies that can protect buildings in the Eastern Bronx from future flood events;
3. Establish urban design priorities for Eastern Bronx and other coastal neighborhoods;
4. Collect feedback on how zoning can help achieve building-scale resiliency.

Summary of Main Takeaways

Feedback on how zoning can help achieve building-scale resiliency

- Basements and cellars are widely used as living spaces in the Eastern Bronx, and workshop attendees are supportive of providing building owners with a way to recoup floor area that is lost when retrofitting (in constructing porches or decks, elevating homes, and/or filling basements or cellars).
- Participants expressed concerns about accessibility issues that may arise as living spaces are relocated above the design flood elevation, and are supportive of the existing zoning provisions that allow flexibility for wheel chair lifts, ramps, etc. to be constructed.
- In relocating mechanical equipment, homeowners with views of the water may want the flexibility to place their mechanical equipment in the front yard rather than in rear or side yard if it were to obstruct their view. Relocating this equipment to the attic was also discussed as a feasible option in some cases.

Urban design priorities for the Eastern Bronx

- Attendees voiced concerns about the height of newly constructed or elevated homes being potentially out of context with structures that may look too tall when compared to its surrounding context. DCP pointed out that this item was discussed in the [Edgewater Park Resilient Neighborhoods study](#), where the working group suggested to change height restrictions to reduce the overall height above the design flood elevation, due to the low density context of the neighborhood.

- Participants were supportive of using streetscape and design mitigations (like plantings, stair turns, and porches) to mitigate blank facades and maintain neighborhood character. During the tabletop exercise and larger group discussion, participants discussed utilizing porches, plantings, and stair turns, and the importance of paying attention to materiality in selecting construction materials. DCP pointed to the [Edgewater Park Resilient Neighborhoods study](#) for more information and examples of how these strategies can be applied to resilient buildings to preserve neighborhood context.

Feedback on non-zoning resiliency issues

Flood Insurance

- Participants are concerned that increasing flood insurance rates, alongside existing homeowner expenses including mortgage payments and property taxes, may displace residents from neighborhoods.
- Attendees expressed support for partial mitigation measures to be taken into account in calculating National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) premium rates.
- On the floodhelpny.org website, it is not possible for residents of Edgewater Park to search for their properties. This is due to a longstanding issue related to the cooperative being one single tax lot.

Department of Buildings (DOB)

- Attendees described issues working with DOB during the construction process including a case where the incorrect flood maps were referenced in reviewing building plans.
- Participants expressed their view of the need for DOB's review of building plans and issuance of permits to be expedited.

Upfront cost and feasibility of retrofits

- Although some workshop participants would consider relocating mechanicals elsewhere in the building, many are concerned about the cost of doing so. The expense of retrofitting when combined with the lengthy timeline for DOB approvals may be prohibitive (in terms of both time and cost) for some building owners in the floodplain.
- Participants had feasibility and safety concerns regarding elevating older, single story homes to the current design flood elevation. This is especially a concern amongst seniors on fixed incomes who own older homes.

Communication

- Attendees inquired as to if any online platform exists where residents in the floodplain could share information and experiences with construction, flood insurance, or other issues.
- DCP pointed to the resources on our [website](#) and email (ResilientNeighborhoods@planning.nyc.gov) and encouraged workshop attendees to sign up to receive email updates on our work.
- Participants plan to create a Facebook page to serve as a platform for local information sharing about issues related to resilient construction and flood insurance.

