

VISION 2020

# NEW YORK CITY COMPREHENSIVE WATERFRONT PLAN



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
MAYOR MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG

DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING  
AMANDA M. BURDEN, FAICP, COMMISSIONER

MARCH 2011

[www.nyc.gov/waterfront](http://www.nyc.gov/waterfront)

## Foreword by the Mayor

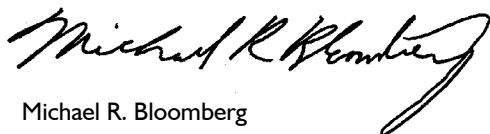
For the past nine years, New York City has been working to reclaim one of our most vital assets—our waterfront. We have already opened up access to miles of the shoreline that had been closed off to the public for decades. We have built new waterfront parks in all five boroughs and cleaned our waterways after years of decline and disuse. And we are creating jobs along the waterfront from the North Shore of Staten Island to Hunts Point Landing in the South Bronx. *Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan* builds on these accomplishments and represents the next step in our critically important efforts.

Prepared by the Department of City Planning, *Vision 2020* is a comprehensive blueprint for the future of our waterfront—and one of two core components of New York City's Waterfront Vision and Enhancement Strategy. It presents strategies for implementing many of the long-term goals of *PlaNYC*, our plan for a greener, greater New York City. Through *Vision 2020* we will improve our water quality and ensure that each neighborhood has access to the recreational space that is so vital to our residents' quality of life.

In addition to *Vision 2020*, the *New York City Waterfront Action Agenda* establishes priority projects that we will begin within the next three years. This agenda includes recommendations from a wide range of stakeholders in our waterfront's future—the public, state and federal agencies, Speaker Quinn and the City Council, and City agencies from the New York City Economic Development Corporation and Mayor's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability to the Departments of Parks & Recreation and Environmental Protection.

These projects are part of one of the most sweeping transformations of an urban waterfront in American history. And as we continue to serve as an engine of economic growth for America and the world, we will invest in initiatives that will help New Yorkers green their communities and build a more economically sustainable city. Jobs and the environment, affordable housing and open space, waterborne transportation and in-water recreation—all of these priorities have informed *Vision 2020*'s goals for our City's more than 500 miles of shoreline.

Our waterfront parks and piers embody the exciting progress that is driving our economy and enhancing New York City's natural beauty. With long-term plans like *Vision 2020*, we will continue to transform our City, and ensure that our once-forgotten waterfront is never forgotten again.



Michael R. Bloomberg  
Mayor, City of New York

## Preface by the Commissioner

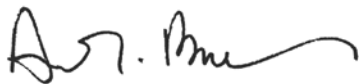
New York is a city of islands and water. From its beaches fronting the Atlantic Ocean to its harbor, to its rivers and preserved wetlands, New York City's 520 miles of diverse waterfront are among its most important resources. *Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan* reflects this diversity and provides a framework for the future of our waterfront, waterways, and water.

*Vision 2020* was developed through a series of workshops and public meetings held in the five boroughs from March to October 2010. The planning process and the plan itself are testament to the strength of the New York City waterfront community. More than 1,000 people participated in the workshops and meetings, and more than 500 comments were received after the draft recommendations were released in early September. On behalf of the Department of City Planning, Speaker Quinn and the City Council, and our partnering agencies, I want to recognize and celebrate the passion and interest of all those who have been involved in comprehensively planning for the future of our waterfront and waterways.

Through this planning process, we have recognized that water has always, and will continue to shape our land. Our water is the connective tissue between our boroughs and is, in effect, our Sixth Borough. The last *Comprehensive Waterfront Plan*, published by City Planning in 1992, called for the redevelopment of the water's edge, opening it up for activity and enjoyment. *Vision 2020* reconfirms the City's commitment to improving the waterfront and takes the next step—into the water itself. The plan establishes policies for the expanded use of our waterways, our "Blue Network," for transportation, recreation, education, and for improving water quality. It also addresses the challenges of climate change and sea-level rise.

This plan will help ensure the health of our waterways, the strength of our port, the ecological vitality of natural habitat, the enjoyment of our shoreline, and the economic benefits of public and private investment in our waterfront.

New York City's waterfront and waterways are integral to its identity, and this plan will help them become a part of the everyday life of all New Yorkers.



**Amanda M. Burden, FAICP**  
Director, Department of City Planning  
Chair, New York City Planning Commission



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On the water and waterfront in New York City. From left: the Staten Island Ferry traversing New York Harbor; the Manhattan skyline seen from Gantry Plaza State Park in Queens; an opera performance aboard the Mary Whalen docked in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

## CHAPTER I

# Introduction

New York is famous for its dazzling skyline, iconic bridges, glorious parks, and grand avenues. But our global city possesses two other extraordinary physical assets: our waterfront and waterways. Four of New York's five boroughs are on islands, and the fifth is a peninsula—and that translates into 520 miles of shoreline bordering ocean, river, inlet, and bay.

New York's edge is not just expansive, it's astonishingly diverse. Our waterfront is brawny, home to maritime industries and the largest port on the East Coast. It's sporty, laced with biking trails and dotted with boat launches. It's natural, inhabited by hundreds of species of birds and fish. It's peaceful, with parks that offer places for quiet contemplation as well as active recreation. And it's historic, encompassing buildings dating to the 1700s and archaeological sites that go back even further.

Above all, our waterfront is constantly changing. After decades of turning our backs on the shoreline—allowing it to devolve into a

no-man's land of rotting piers, parking lots, and abandoned industrial sites—New York made reclamation of the waterfront a priority. In 1992 the Department of City Planning issued the *New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan*, the first time in the history of New York that a long-range vision was offered for the entire shoreline. A bold rethinking of the water's edge as a place not only for commerce and industry but also for people to live and play, the plan proposed ways to reinvent the shoreline for public access and productive uses. In recent years, we've opened parks and greenways on the waterfront, built new housing, restored natural habitat, and fostered all sorts of recreation from kayaking to rollerblading. Today our waterfront has become a destination in and of itself like never before in New York's history.

But that doesn't mean it can't get even better.

Problems remain on the waterfront, including uneven development, crumbling infra-

structure, and the contaminated areas known as brownfields. Some neighborhoods are still cut off from the waterfront. In 2008, New York launched a citywide, multi-agency initiative to create a new sustainable blueprint for the shoreline. Called the Waterfront Vision and Enhancement Strategy, this effort has two parts. The first is *Vision 2020: New York City's Comprehensive Waterfront Plan*—the plan you are now reading. Crafted with the help of city, state, and federal agencies as well as non-governmental advisory groups and members of the general public, *Vision 2020* establishes eight broad goals (see capsule descriptions on the facing page) and offers hundreds of recommendations for the waterfront and waterways for the next decade and beyond.

*Vision 2020* builds on the 1992 plan and the advances made on the waterfront over the past 18 years, and goes even further. The new plan reasserts our commitment to the priorities established in the earlier plan—such as expanding



Sam Stuart



Daniel Avila, NYC Department of Parks & Recreation



Daniel Avila, NYC Department of Parks & Recreation

From left: American Oystercatchers at Plumb Beach in Brooklyn; paddlers on the Bronx River; Rockaway Beach in Queens.

public access, supporting the working waterfront, and restoring the ecology of our shores. But while the 1992 plan guided us to the waterfront, *Vision 2020* proposes ways for people to get out *onto* and even *into* the waterways themselves—now the cleanest they’ve been in a century. The new plan views the waterfront and waterways as a single interconnected network and calls for increased water recreation, waterborne transportation, and water-related cultural activities and educational programs. In addition, *Vision 2020* considers the impact of climate change on our densely populated coastal metropolis and begins to identify strategies for addressing rising sea levels and more frequent and severe storms anticipated in the coming years.

Of course the City is also focused on the here and now. The second part of our Waterfront Vision and Enhancement Strategy is the *New York City Waterfront Action Agenda*, a set of projects chosen for their ability to catalyze investment in waterfront enhancement. The City commits to initiating these projects over the next three years and will be tracking progress on an ongoing basis. Together, these strategies and projects lay out a comprehensive vision for the waterfront and waterways and a plan of action to achieve that vision. They will guide our efforts in the years ahead, helping New York City grow and flourish and become even better than it is today.

### Goals of Vision 2020

The City’s recommendations for our waterfront and waterways spring from eight broad goals:

- Expand public access to the waterfront and waterways on public and private property for all New Yorkers and visitors alike.
- Enliven the waterfront with a range of attractive uses integrated with adjacent upland communities.
- Support economic development activity on the working waterfront.
- Improve water quality through measures that benefit natural habitats, support public recreation, and enhance waterfront and upland communities.
- Restore degraded natural waterfront areas, and protect wetlands and shorefront habitats.
- Enhance the public experience of the waterways that surround New York—our Blue Network.
- Improve governmental regulation, coordination, and oversight of the waterfront and waterways.
- Identify and pursue strategies to increase the city’s resilience to climate change and sea level rise.