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**Brooklyn Community Board 6
Economic & Waterfront Development Committee
Public Meeting About Plans For Atlantic Basin.
Monday 1/5/09, 6:30pm**

**Presenters at the meeting:
NYC Economic Development Corporation
New York Water Taxi
PortSide NewYork**

Transcript segments:

Part 1 of 4: [Intro and EDC presentation](#)

Part 2 of 4: [New York Water Taxi presentation](#)

Part 3 of 4: [PortSide NewYork presentation](#)

Part 4 of 4: [QnA](#)

Tom Fox: Hi. Good evening. My name is Tom Fox. Oh, the crowd in the back there. Happy New Year, everyone.

The, um...I am going to give a presentation on one of the responses to the RFPs. I'm a small business in the neighborhood, and we responded to the first RFEI and then we responded to the second RFP, and we were told a month ago that, that two years of work were being thrown out, and now I hear there is going to be another RFP, so...

Who are we and what are we doing? What I've asked -- Greg has asked me to come and talk about New York Water Taxi, what it does, who it is, and for those of you who don't know us, I'll start off with who I am. I'm Tom Fox, and thirty years ago I was a rabble rouser. I spent twenty-five years building parks. I was a founder of the Green Guerillas. I've just become a ferryman in the last ten years when my wife told me if I didn't get a real job, we were going to be in trouble. So, I did a Brooklyn-Queens greenway that was in National Geographic in 1988, on the cover of the Daily News Magazine. And my largest waterfront project, if you will, was the West Side Highway, where I spent fifteen years fighting what was the deprecation of the New York, of the waterfront on the west side. This is recreation in Tribeca, fifteen years ago, and we protested to build a park. They wanted to build a two-billion-dollar highway. And lo and behold, twenty years

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later, when you get a lot of people out, and you make your demands well-known, and you go to court and you deal with the press, you get the opportunity to design a park.

So, this is designing the Hudson River Park, with everybody in the West Side, all the community boards, we wound up getting a 450 million dollar park where there was going to be a two billion dollar highway.

What we did was, even on the interim, take for the short term, move the parking off the waterfront, again, this was Tribeca, twenty years ago, and just do little interim improvements, like a bike path. Getting people down to, on, the water is critically important. One of the founders of the North River Historic Ship Society, we had historic ships in the west side, and they didn't have a home, so as the new head of the Hudson River Park I made a deal. We gave them a lease, a dollar a year, if the boats were open on Saturdays and Sundays for public visits. So Jimmy Gallagher with the Yankee, the tug Pegasus, was on Pier 26. The Lilac is now in the Hudson River Park. The John J. Harvey. Lots of historic boats. We put together the Chelsea Piers, so we know how to build things on the waterfront. This was built in fifty-four weeks.

And, when I finally decided to get a real job, I started the Water Taxis. My vision was to connect all these waterfront parks and neighborhoods together, and use the waterfront as a bridge instead of a barrier. So we started in Red Hook behind Greg O'Connell's pier, and there's the first three boats. We've been in business six years. We started connecting commuters from – is there a way to douse these lights up forward? Great!

We started connecting tourists at the major tourist attractions up and down the waterfront. We so we ran from the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum to South Street Sea – to Fulton Ferry Landing. This is my favorite spot, spot, under the Brooklyn Bridge. We carry about 500 people a day from here, on Saturdays and Sundays, connecting them all around the harbor. This is our first day. We made the biz...made the price free the first day. It is amazing how easy it is to get people to come on your boat when the price is free. But we get to see how we can handle, with long lines, and bicycles and baby carriages and families. We ran commuters up the East River.

And now, six years later, we have fifteen different locations in the city, we run six different services, from eco-tours to fall foliage tours, seal tours, Jewish history tours, military history tours. Again. I'm a park guy. For me, It's about education, entertainment, recreation. The transportation is something that you use as a medium for it.

So what have we grown to? We now have ten boats. We're out in Greg's, Greg O'Connell's property there. This is... we've become a year-round company. People are out there freezing their little buns off working during the winter, but we've got employment year-round, and I see a number of our employees are in the back here.

We got guys from Staten Island, guys from Brooklyn. We've got folks in the Red Hook Houses like Sequan on the right who's sitting in the back there, who's our, standing in the back, who is the first captain to come out of the Red Hook Houses, he's now moving into marine management. What we did was take the older guys from Gerritsen Beach and Sheepshead Bay, the fishermen who were fishing and there is no longer any fishing going on, and combine them with the young guys, so what we got is the Gerritsen Beach and Red Hook together. We got a new crew of marine people, creating real jobs, now 104 people, from Rhonda who grew up in the neighborhood to Don from Bushwick. Michael grew up on Governors Island, right across the way, there's not too many people that'd grown up on Governors Island. We got guys that moved from Alaska to Van Brunt Street, to run our marine division, so we're actually recruiting people to come, and this guy was an Alaska fisherman. He's the head of our engineering division. And kids from the Harbor School. This is Kareem, we have an average of about a dozen Harbor School employees, and Kareem is now becoming a captain.

So what we are about is opening up the waterfront for you folks to move around, opening it up for young kids to get a new experience on the waterfront. And hopefully we are the greenest, we -- not will be, we are the greenest fleet in the United States. Our newest boats have Tier 3 generators and Tier 2, these are regulations in terms of pollution control. I've got hospital grade mufflers on the boats so they don't make noise. I've got low wake hulls so they don't rip up the environment. The cabin is isolated on rubber bumpers so you can speak at an audible sound. The inside, again, I'm a park guy, eight-fifty pitch on the seats so you can get in and out comfortably.

We run commuters up the East River. We have the longest commuter run in the United States. We run to Haverstraw and Yonkers, 38 and a half miles. And these boats also do tours. We've been blessed this year in a down economy to finally hit our stride. We have connections with Grey Line in lower Manhattan, and this is a line on a cloudy Sunday morning at 9.30. We took 160,000 Chinese tourists out to experience the Statue of Liberty this year, We've taken 30,000 Spaniards, 40,000 French Canadians. We've become the vehicle of choice, the symbol of New York, if you will. There's the line on a Sunday morning. We have one boat loading, one boat full, one boat leaving full and a leased boat full. So, we not only have out ten boats working, but we have two boats working for us under contract, as well as a fuel barge.

We use our boats for unusual things. Like I said, entertainment is fun. This is a swim around Governors Island. We also use it for serious things. This is a protest up in Williamsburgh and Greenpoint against power plants.

We're members of the Brooklyn community. I'm born and raised in Flatbush, went to 'Nam when I was nineteen, worked my way through Brooklyn College repossessing cars

for GM, and I've become a park guy over the last 25 years. But that's why it's important to get kids from the neighborhood real jobs.

What's our problem? Our problem is we're running out of space. We're all the way to the end of the cut and there's no place to grow. Much as I love Greg as a... as a landlord, he has no room at the inn for the fleet that we are growing. We want to grow in the neighborhood. Where can we grow? Atlantic Basin, the contested piece of ground. Why do we want to grow here? This is a unique body of water. You see these two arms that come in? This protects this small body of water. See that island? The wind comes from this way, so this is the most protected piece of water in the City of New York. I've got small aluminum boats.

Atlantic Basin, voila. Atlantic Basin has two sides to it. It's got the industrial side, which butts up against the contain...the passenger ship terminal, and it's got the residential neighborhood, which is on the opposite side and inboard. As you can see here, the passenger ship terminal, which you've seen already.

So that's the basin. What's the issue? We have no boatyards in New York City. If you want to build a steel boat, you can build it. If you want to repair the Intrepid or the USS United States, you can repair it here. If you want to repair an aluminum ferry, you have to go to Connecticut. If you want to repair your fiberglass boat, you have to go to Long Island or New Jersey. There are no boat repairs here. And why is that important? This is New York Waterway. This is their 50 – their 38 vessels they have. This used to be their repair yard, it's now going to be condos, over in Jersey. Notice what they had to build to protect their boats from the river? It's already built in Atlantic Basin. But all of the dinner cruise boats, the tour boats, the charter boats, the marinas, from World Financial Center, 79th Street, Lincoln Harbor, Liberty Landing -- there's no boatyard, and the new one that's supposed to go in Brooklyn Bridge Park -- there's no maintenance facility.

EDC says it is important to support maritime. We believe it's critically important to secure Atlantic Basin and the future of Atlantic Basin to support water-borne transportation, but on a smaller scale.

This is our proposal for the basin, as we made it the second time around. Basically, We're looking at building a maritime center -- this is Melbourne, Australia -- with a dry stack marina, where boats are actually stacked in the building instead of having to be all over on the water.

And we split our proposal, Again, I've done waterfront planning a lot in the past. We separated the north side as the industrial side, with wharfage for vessels, work vessels, a boat yard; and the south side is a recreational marina with a beach, and a water taxi stop, relating directly to the residential community, which as you can see is right next to the

Basin. There's the edge of the Basin. This is Pioneer Street running down Van Brunt Street

So what do we want to do? We want to put in – all the yellow is New York Water Taxi boats. That's our fleet, almost as it is now, and as we see it shortly. This is for visiting boats. You have tugs, and dinner boats, and excursion boats, and ferries, and Coast Guard boats that come through the harbor and have no place to tie up. Plus, you have the problem with boats that break down. NYPD has no place to bring a boat that broke down. So if we have a full-service marina here, with a boatyard – a boatyard that could repair all 58 aluminum ferries in the harbor, all 1400 recreational boats that are sitting around in the harbor -- it could repair the Coast Guard, Fire, Police Department, all the new small boats that are being brought into the harbor. It also provides a basis for emergency services, god forbid something happens like it did before. So, a diesel fuel facility that supports the work boats, and then a marina on the south side, in-water slips for larger boats that would move out of the harbor, and a Water Taxi stop that would connect the neighborhood and the passenger ship terminals and the marina to lower Manhattan and other parts of Brooklyn. So, the southern end of this site again is directly adjacent to the neighborhood.

What kind of employment are we looking at? We've been here for five years. We've created almost 100 full time jobs. This would create 816 construction jobs, 219 full time operation jobs.

Who are we? My partner is the Durst Organization. And they built the first green office building in the world, at 4 Times Square. They're building the largest LEEDS office building. They're proud of building a partner in New York Water Taxi. That's 42nd Street and Broadway. My partner is a little civic minded. He put up the debt clock, so that everyone would be reminded as to how much debt they owned, and when they had to take this building down he put it up right over the IRS office, which is one of his tenants. He owns the largest organic farm in New York State, which is outlined in green. He's an environmentalist who wears green socks to work every day with his suit.

So, the other partner is Westrec Marine. They have 19 marinas in six states, Brazil and Jamaica. They manage 8000 in-water slips for the Chicago Parks Department in Lake...Lake Michigan. They have a place in Florida which is like what we want to create here, which is recreational vessels, a dry stack marina, boat yards that create jobs. A variety of jobs, from painting to engine repair, you know, real hands-on blue collar work-your-way-up-through-the-ranks jobs, to the larger jobs of electronics and engine repair. Have shops, prop shops, transmission shops, aluminum welding shops, electronic shops, transmission shops, diesel engine shops, where boats can be repaired, pleasure boats and work boats, because work boats are more time and price sensitive, whereas the

recreational boats are less time and price sensitive. We'd have gas stations. Bait and tackle. Marine supplies. Maps, charts.

Now this is the view down Verona Street right now. If there's no change in Atlantic Basin, this will be the view down Verona Street for the next 20 years. This is the view on the other side of the building at Verona Street. One of the things we believe can happen is you can build a beach like we did in Queens. I used to be a Green Guerilla. We dumped 1000 tons of sand on a vacant lot, put in a 30 foot Tiki bar, put in a Water Taxi stop right next to it and, voila, you got a beach. A beach where they play volleyball, a beach for the young people, for families, for older people. It's not... Young and old, tall and short, where you can have private parties, where you can have barbecues, where you can have music – that's Adam playing bass, in the back there, at Time Out New York Kid's Day – we have graduations for the local kindergarden, you name it. But it would be a public space that would allow people to be on the waterfront, right here at the foot of Verona Street.

The dry stack marina would be thermally heated, via geothermal well. We've actually...the thing about RFPs, you have to get out and get zoning experts, and engineers, and naval engineers, and so we've looked into this significantly and you can build... drill a hole 1200 feet down, one foot around, and heat this entire facility to 65 degrees year around. Why is that important, besides energy consumption? Because if you have a boat in a dry stack marina, and it's a Saturday afternoon, and you're Ralphie up at the VFW and you want to get it out 'cause it's a nice day, and it's not wrapped up, you can call the marina, they take the boat out, because you don't have to wrap it, you don't have to drain it. It's at 65 degrees year round. So, this would be a state of the art facility that we believe would open the waterfront.

What we'd hope to do – we have great respect for EDC, and great respect for the need to keep maritime on the waterfront. We're just pleading that this is a unique maritime asset, and it really should be used to support the maritime industry, to open up the waterfront to the community, and if there were a compromise to be had, where perhaps Phoenix could go back to Pier 7. The Governors Island ferry does not have to be here. The Governors Island ferry is here, half of the basin cannot be used for other maritime use. The...right at the foot of Wolcott Street both the Coast Guard and the Tug Barge Association has said the Governors Island ferry could go. They could still enter at Bowne Street, they'd never go onto city streets, and they go straight here and leave for Governors Island.

So, The Governors Island ferry, we believe New York Water Taxi, Phoenix Beverages, ASI, and the Brooklyn Queens Greenway – the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway -- could all co-exist in here, if we could look at a creative way of planning and thank you very much for the opportunity, and I hope to be part of the process if you guys think it makes sense. Thank you.