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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 New York**

Transcript segments:

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

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

Part 4 of 4: [QnA](#)

Carolina Salguero: ... okay, well while he's figuring out the technology... My name is Carolina Salguero, Director of PortSide New York. That's not ready yet, so I'll tell you... We are a community-based organization, home-grown and evolving here and serving the community. And one of the things that we're doing tonight is tape recording all of... everything that's said and transcribing it, and it will be posted to our website. This is... that was a function that I started for the community board for the website WaterfrontMatters.org and we're doing it again for this process since there's so much interest. So... How does this work? Arrow... Okay...

So PortSide actually has a number of elements in our program and in activities and what links them all together is a philosophy. So, we took a look back in '04 and '05 at the kind of planning that was going on on the waterfront, and though there were some wonderful changes, there seemed to be this tendency of the new waterfront to put down a greensward and just benches and you looked at the water. It was very passive and sort of limited use of the water on.. on the new waterfront. And it also tended to be evicting working waterfront we thought more than should happen. So what we tried to do is come up with a plan where in the same space you could do a mix of things, all of those things that were there. And that was a kind of founding philosophy. So we always look for programs, be they free or fee-based, commercial or what's more classically considered non-profit, that could have a synergistic relationship or physically co-exist. So, that's more of our philosophy, re-establishing a connection. Because, particularly in a place like Red Hook and in this area, there used to be a very strong connection between the communities inland and on the water. And that was severed sometimes by fences and highways

and sometimes just eroded with the changing working waterfront. And so, we were also... whoops... I'm having the same problem... We actually did our business plan with funding from the city as really an economic development and a community revitalization tool. So unlike some non-profits that maybe have a solely social service focus, we were actually posited as an economic asset, and as I said, we felt that the working waterfront was essential but that really, it's relationship to the community could and should change. And so we've been finding ways to recast it and, ways, finding ways to use it in a way that it generally hasn't been, so that it's not just cargo, it actually could be a tour site, it's a workforce development thing, it's an... we've done arts programs in industrial locations... so... We got money from the Department of Small Business Services, and our plan was essentially a maritime hub. Before the brand name PortSide NewYork, we were just called Maritime Hub. And then... the other thing is... We started this plan, and we've received a lot of support, as it says here from the marine industries, then actually the EDC sort of caught up to us. We were finishing our plan summer of '05 and in spring of '08 the EDC finished this very large study called The Maritime Support Services Inventory Study. It's not the best name. But it documented something that we had also already documented. We did extensive market research that the working waterfront was growing. And to clarify, there's the working waterfront that is ports and containers and is internationally-sourced cargo. This study really looked at what's called the local work boat fleet. So that means tug boats and barges, oil spill recovery, the real sort of taxi, the harbor launches, and everything else... and in a later phase they're going to be getting into charter and excursion vessels and things like that. But they documented the growth, and what we found very interesting was that they proposed what we proposed in their study. They recommended that there be a waterfront, a maritime hub, but one in each of the five boroughs. And their elements are really very similar to what ours were. So I'm just going to whiz through here, I'm not going to read this all out loud... But in our package there were some things that might be classically considered more non-profit or more community-oriented. They were the cultural and educational components. And, then... we had a lot of retail built in there. Some of that was to give us revenue, some was to satisfy community needs, so... and some of it was sort of logically waterfront: marine supply stores, bait and tackle shops. There's an awful lot of fishing. Recently, one has opened up, but there hasn't... actually there have been two that have opened in Red Hook in the past four years. They don't seem to last very long. And in some cases, like that café for us, would be a breakfast, lunch and dinner location, which is also a location for us to do cultural programming. By now adult evening cultural programming seems to always occur in a kind of wine and cheese atmosphere, and if we have our own café, we don't have to hire outside caterers. It makes it more economically viable, less dependent on grants. So we did all that sort of thinking to figure out how you can afford to deliver culture, frankly. Otherwise you're always rattling the tin cup. And the service to the marina industry was dock and shop vessels coming into shop, it was primarily grocery shopping in that study, some other support services that the vessels need. The business center was posited. We looked at a lot of things that we could put in that would give us, not only a revenue center, but a kind of reason to come to PortSide if you didn't just come for education or culture. We

sort of hoped to kind of trap people into learning. And looking around at the growth of small businesses in Red Hook and the number of self-employed people, the nearest ink cartridge is several miles away on the other side of the Gowanus Canal. It's at Staples. It's in Brooklyn Heights. Some of the services are in Sunset Park. And there really wasn't anywhere... you can't get you can't go get a photocopy for pay except the library, in Red Hook. So we thought that was something that would go in, that would support the small businesses on the water and the local community, and some of these other things that you're going to see more about later. So now I'm going to get down to... Our presentation has a bit of what we've done since this plan in 2005, because we haven't been before this committee since May of '05, and then we'll get into Atlantic Basin. Because PortSide also did respond to the RFEI and the RFP and will be responding to, what we've now learned this evening, the upcoming RFP, but I'm going to show you sort of what we've been up to so you can begin to see what some of those concepts on the dry lists actually look like. So we came up with this program called Kayak Valet. It's quite simple. We have people on the beach to watch vessels when you come in to visit Red Hook. We provide maps, information to local stores, in some cases discounts to local stores. Since it proved so popular, we've been asked by the Queens Parks Commissioner to come do it in Queens. We've been asked by Staten Island to come do it there. And the other thing we've been working on, with... in conjunction with the Red Hook Boaters is we've succeeded in negotiating approval from the Brooklyn Parks Commissioner for the first boat storage unit in Valentino Park. It's going to be a 40-foot container. I have to say, for some of you... I see Dave Lutz. I saw him earlier in the back of the room... I went to... Remember the Red Hook Navy?... The first meeting I think I went to about boat storage in Valentino Park was 1998. It took that long. This container is for program vessels, not for private ones. It's a start, and I'll buy you a drink Dave, after this... It's really been... It's been a long haul. The community sailing we've been working on. The notion of community sailing is, in a place where there's limited space for boats or limited money, people can have access to boats. They're shared boats. Frankly, boats are... I know because I maintain a few... are not only expensive, they're a lot of work and it's a way to share the maintenance of them. We've been wanting to do this in Valentino Park, talking to the Parks Department also about moorings. I wish that they moved more rapidly on this. It's been under discussion for over a year. In all honesty, if we had access to Governors Island, we would really be proposing having the moorings over there and just take a ferry over into a much more amenable water space, rather than having to cross the heavy commercial traffic of Buttermilk Channel, but there's been 4 years of interludes at Governors Island and no ferry, so here we are. So programming... Some recent stuff. This is the Whalen's... The ship's... Which is our home right now... the... Her 70th birthday party in Atlantic Basin. We got 500 people there on a raw weekend in December. It was a lot of fun. This is another one of our recent programs. Every year for 5 years now, we go out Christmas Day on a small boat and give out Christmas cookies and newspapers to the tug and barge fleet. So, to actually introduce you more formally to the Mary Whalen, if you don't already know her, she's actually got a long very local pedigree. She was built for Ira S. Bushey, a shipyard and fuel terminal that used to be at the foot of Court Street

in Red Hook. She spent most of her operating life actually based out of, if not Red Hook, certainly New York. She spent the last 10 years, well 12... She spent 10 years in the Erie Basin, from '95 until acquired in August '06 to be the home of PortSide NewYork. She's had significant work done in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, so the hull is now all fixed and it's been retrofitted with spudwells, which is a fancy-dancy marine term for like toilet paper tubes through the hull that you can put your own spuds or pilings through to pin her in place. We did that because this city has lost so many piers, there often aren't piers in a community, or, with all due respect to some of the city representatives present, there are these new-fangled city piers that don't have cleats or bollards. So there's no tie-up infrastructure. So we have adapted the boat to do end-run around those kinds of piers. We don't need your cleat. We can bring our own. So this is an example of how popular the boat and also, frankly, events in a new and industrial area can be. We have only been able to make her available for Open House New York once, in '06. We were the leading site in Brooklyn by a way, way long shot. We had 635 people one weekend and many left because the lines were too long. We did the first public performance in any port in the New York area. It was a Puccini opera. We partnered with the Vertical Player Repertory in Cobble Hill to do... it was 4 performances, 1800 people. So some... that we had a café, catered by a local Red Hook group, Broquet Catering, who run Tini Wine Bar and Home/made, which was very popular, and then a cash bar over here. This is part of our...it's all part of our H₂O art series. Everything we do by the way has to be water or waterfront theme. That doesn't mean maritime, but it means also all of our cultural programming has some connection to that. So we did this book reading in the... in one of the repair shops at GMD shipyard, and it doesn't get more industrial than that. And all the book people loved it. BookCourt now loves us. They sold more books than they ever had before at a reading, and we're going to do more events with them. Neighborhood promotion is a really big part of what we do and it's partly the founding we were funded to be community revitalization, but everything we do is in that spirit. So that's really our goal and what happens. We make people love Red Hook. We're very Red Hook. And so people who come here, it's part of the whole package. And so we actually also actively promote Red Hook, on our website and also at all of our events. We have cards out for all the business and organizations and non-profits who want to be featured. And Kevin's here, a new restaurant on Van Brunt Street, is something that I sort of kind of have a maternal sort of feeling about. They have a lovely story. Kevin Moore and Caroline Parker. They were liking Red Hook very much for a number of years, visiting here regularly. And then they came to that same Puccini opera and really that clinched it. They fell in love with Red Hook and they made a decision to open up a business here. And that restaurant opened up in the past year on Van Brunt Street and I recommend it. Another way that we're actively working on promoting the neighborhood is a maritime trail, which we've been researching for about 2 years. And the idea is that you would have people come here for what's called "cultural tours" and to learn about the place, but in the same map and product it would have all the shopping and dining information. This is also... it's what I would say, smart marketing. Though there are more retail business on Van Brunt, it's not Smith Street, in not everybody will make a destination here solely to buy a brownie or a burger,

and so if you give them something else we can sort of suck them in. This is how people can get involved with us, it's also another way to learn our volunteer days. And so... Where we are now... We've not had either a permanent home nor, frankly really, a publicly-accessible home. Port Authority regulations, Homeland Security regulations, Brooklyn Navy Yard regulations, many things have limited... You can't even see the boat normally. So despite that, we've managed to do all those things that we've described there and we know, therefore, we know what we're doing and how to do these things, that things will really ramp up if we get to be in Atlantic Basin. So, unfortunately Tim Ventimiglia ... is that Tim? Tim, do you want to speak? You don't? Well, could you come around? There's a door over here. I was just going to say, Tim can't make it because he recently had some surgery and something, but I guess he made it. Tim is an architect and a museum planner, and you can finish introducing yourself. Because he did the two renderings that follow.

Tim Ventimiglia: So, my name's Tim Ventimiglia. I'm a local resident for the last 15 years. I've been working with Carolina and the whole PortSide team on a vision for what... for what PortSide could really become in its fullest sense. I'm doing cultural planning across the country and it's really amazing to see something emerge like this right in our own backyard, so... Here's an initial rendering just hypothesizing that perhaps we could find a home in one of the old sheds along the Atlantic Basin. And we really think it will draw the kinds of crowds that it already has and probably double, triple so if we're in this more accessible location. Next...sure... So in addition to the Mary Whalen, which is an incredibly exciting artifact and sort of teaching platform, we'd like to expand to an interior space to offer more programming: exhibits, educational programs as Carolina described. And of course in the sort of PortSide aesthetic, which Carolina described as the romance of rust, we want to make sure that it's really, really exciting, textural, and reflective of sort of the excitement we see and experience every day on the working waterfront. We want to... we want to make that come through in the design aesthetic itself, as you can see here. So it's a local institution. It's of this place. It will promote a sense of place. I think that's vital as we think about our waterfront and how we, how we retain its unique qualities.

Carolina Salguero: Thanks, Tim. Are you going to be here for questions afterwards? Can you stay? Oh good. Okay. So there are a number of projects that we are poised to start or we've been wanting to start but couldn't for lack of a space. Oh now see, I want to back up and say one thing about the Mary Whalen. The other thing that we want to do to change her is the cargo tank space, which is a large part of the tanker underneath that big, long, flat deck is 2,800 square feet of space. So the notion is that that becomes converted into exhibit and classroom space. So we're very different from a lot of historic vessel projects. Actually, I'm generally loathe to call her a historic vessel, because we're doing a lot of conversion and a lot of the programming on the boat doesn't have to do with the history of the boat as is often associated with the historic vessel thing. We're what's more... it's jargon, but, more like adaptive reuse or something else.

Now, this is a program that we've been looking for a space for... two of them really... A carpentry shop, Flotsam Project... And we're the first people to come up with this... Which is to collect the big flotsam that comes up. There's a lot of it that happens to wash up in Red Hook. We've also already spoken to the Army Corp of Engineers. They actually have to pay to through it out. A lot of it is very good lumber. We can use it. And the idea is, it's like a two-tier thing, the younger kids, lower skilled, could make benches and very simple furniture. Boat building is more complex. This here is actually my uncle. He's a boat builder on Martha's Vineyard, with a very well known yard for repair design of wooden boats. This is a very small thing for them. But there have been a lot of projects that have started in New York. We've looked at them: Rocking the Boat; Float the Apple. This idea of building a boat, learning how to row, estuarial education. So our idea was we start with benches and we grow up to boats. Some other things that we would like to do... We've already spoken to Judge Calabrisi at the visitation center. You know, he said the Mary Whalen would be a very good community service project. We've not been able to really do that inside the homeland secure container port. It's the kind of thing that we can start, likewise school and tour programs. We've been approached by a lot of schools and summer youth programs, and Homeland Security made it very clear that they really weren't interested in piles of school kids tramping through the port. So we can have quietly, by invitation only, some ones. But we can't run a fully ramped-up public-announced program where we are. It's the kind of thing we're really keen to do in Atlantic Basin. Marine Career Center. This is something really very near and dear to me. I come out of this project, just so you know, with a marine family in a couple parts of the country, but after years of documentary work. And I spent 2.5 years on tugs and barges in New York Harbor doing a big project for National Geographic, which is where I learned about the industry from the inside. And it became very clear to me that they were desperately in need of a few things, including places to go grocery shopping, crew. And they needed it badly. So our idea was... and we knew that there was really severe unemployment in this neighborhood and, frankly, in a lot of other waterfront neighborhoods because that was where the city tended to put public housing projects for a long time. But there was no connection between the employment on the water nearby and the unem... the area with unemployed right inland. So our idea was to set up youth programs like the community sailing, like the building and row, which would start to get people familiar with the water on the water and then more formally channel them through with a career center, which would involve paper classroom learning, as well as on deck training. We polled... I have a very good relationship with a lot of the marine companies, particularly the towing industry in port, and they confided, they told us their pay scales, how they hired, where they looked, what worked, what didn't, what were their concerns. And these were, this was as of May '05, what the high and low pay scales were for various ranges of people and how it compared to Red Hook census information and the time. And they compare really quite favorably. And so the other thing that we did... We've talked to a couple historic vessels who offer, in the case of this one, tour products... the idea was that you could have kids, they also have sea scouts, they give kids being like a scouts program

a float, who are also collecting sea time and supporting the boat while it's being used for tours, which again is another way economically to pay for the youth program and the training, cause you're charging for the tours. The historic tug, Pegasus, which has actually now been repainted another color, is interested in doing training with us and also giving tours and talking about its life. And then we also did extensive research in '05 with charter and excursion vessels in port. Because one of our main ideas was that also that the Mary Whalen and/or any other pier facility we might have would be a landing or a dock for lots of other vessels. So that PortSide was a maritime hub that you would have, something that we don't have anywhere in this city at this point, a mixture of type of vessels. So you could have a tug boat coming in to go grocery shopping, or to pick up, let's say a prescription at the pharmacy; you could have a charter boat coming in, let's say a fishing head boat to take people out fishing, the kind we have in Sunset Park; a smaller dinner boat coming in and out; a historic vessel giving tours. There are also government vessels that educate. A lot of people in the harbor were so excited by this. I remember in '06, getting a call from NOAA, that's the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association. Their 208-foot state-of-the-art research vessel, the Thomas Jefferson, was here in the harbor to survey the harbor and update the charts for the first time since 1989. And they said, "Is your facility ready? We need a place for the Jefferson." And I said, "I'm terribly sorry. I don't have a facility yet." And I tried to line them up to come in here. And I said, "I'll help you get a berth if you provide tours or some education for the community." "Yeah, we're all about that. We're here for seven weeks and for seven weekends we'll do that." And we didn't have a place to bring them. And so, there are many opportunities afloat for ways to learn and have experiences and our goal is to really provide that. So our concept for Atlantic Basin is very much a focus on public access; year-round attractions; a lot of vessels that are accessible to the public, some for free, some for hire; and indoor experiences as well, because this is a photo of what we can sometimes get in our winter. So this is some of our supporters. We have a lot of support in the marine industry. These are some of the local retail businesses that have helped sponsor events and done things for us and it's indicative I think of the kind of close working relationships we have with the community. And there it is. Thanks very much.