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The Red Hook Star-Revue

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Our own Matt Graber talks with Carolina Salguero of Portside:

Her Vision For the Future Builds on Our Past

When Mayor Bloomberg and the Department of City Planning released "Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan" in March of this year, the mayor referred the water as the city's sixth borough, and promised that New York "will again be known as one of the world's premiere waterfront cities." The nearly 200 page document is meant to be a blueprint for the future of the waterfront, charting out a 10-year course toward increasing public access, supporting the maritime industry, and cleaning up the water among many other things. But turning New York City into a "premiere waterfront city" after decades of neglecting the waterfront presents various roadblocks that have to be surmounted. Carolina Salguero - one of the harbor advocates that were deeply involved shaping the document during its year-long collaboration process - knows from her own experience that going from vision to reality takes time and a lot of tact.

Salguero is the director of *Portside New York*, a non-profit organization currently operated out of the Mary A. Whalen, a retired oil tanker docked off the coast of pier 8 in the Port Authority Marine Terminal. The organization was selected in 2009 by the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) to create a maritime hub and cultural center at the Atlantic Basin. Under the plan, they would be given 600 feet of shoreline, the Pier 11 shed, and part of the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal parking lot to work with. The maritime hub would combine direct service to all types of boats within the maritime industry with a variety of programs and activities for the public to enjoy.

Vision of a Working Waterfront that is also a Tourist Destination and Cultural Space

"Our M.O. is the show by doing," Salguero says while sitting on the deck of the Mary A. Whalen on a drizzly late afternoon in mid June. And what her organization wants to show is that the working waterfront and public access to the waterfront need not be mu-



The Mary A Whalen, retired oil tanker, rests alongside Pier 8, facing American Stevedoring

tually exclusive.

"A maritime hub is like a truck stop for all sorts of floating things," she says. "Ours would cater to local work boats, tug boats, police boats, fire boats, crew boats." It would also cater to the mariners themselves. "People want to get out, go jogging, go shop at the Fairway, after being on a boat for a period of time."

On the public access/social service side, the site would be used to create a marine career center, which would be designed to serve both a community

with high unemployment and the work boat sector. Other programs include boater safety classes, youth programs, and what Salguero calls place-based education. "People can learn about a principle by learning about a place," she says. "We can use water to teach transportation, health, history.. It can be a tool, a medium, a theme that touches upon many things."

The synergistic style of catering to the working waterfront while at the same time to the public at large was what attracted the EDC to Portside. At a Community Board 6 meeting in January 2009, Venetia Lannon, then the senior VP at EDC, said: "...a lot of the programming that we think is ideal is really embodied in what Portside is all about." Salguero says that the essential philosophy of Portside and many of its specific recommendations are laced through the Vision 2020 document.

But two years after receiving the green light from the EDC, Portside's maritime hub is still a vision. "You don't see it right now because we don't have the real estate to make it happen," Salguero says. This is Portside's current roadblock: creating the desired maritime hub at the Atlantic Basin means negotiating a complex ownership and management situation

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Portside 2012 - Less Events, More Planning for the Future

(continued from page 1)

involving the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (which owns the space) and the EDC (which leases the space). The two entities co-manage the cruise terminal.

In the midst of these lease negotiations, Salguero has managed to keep an optimistic attitude, focusing on

In many cases, Salguero says, gangways are not designed to accommodate certain boats, and the needed waterfront space is not provided for historic vessels to store necessary supplies. A lot of historic vessels have migrated away from New York City in the last five years because of these constraints

and a greater ability to apply for more funding. "We've shown the world that we can design and create programs that work out, with no problems," Salguero says. This summer, Portside is focusing on institutional growth - mainly applying for grants - and planning a lighter programming schedule for the late summer and early fall.

The strategy for this summer has been to select programs that don't require the real estate and the long-range planning. "We've figured out a lot of things in advance," Salguero says. "Film events are free if we're not charging. We have a donated projector and screen. This is one of the reasons why I've focused on the Boat Box. It's not dependant on a permit or lease."

The Boat Box project involves re-designing the large container located at Valentino Park where the Red Hook Boaters store their kayaks. Portside won a grant from DesignNYC - a volunteer organization made up of a group of notable designers - to have the project done pro-bono. The restored box will include posted info about water safety, upcoming programs and local history.

Portside Complications a symptom of larger problem

Salguero believes that what Portside is facing is what anyone trying to implement change on waterfront will face. "New York City is not New England," she says, referring to the fact that much of the city's dock infrastructure is simply not designed to accommodate a diverse array of boats. Hudson River Park, for example, opened up Pier 25. But the pier is not designed for historic

vessels like the Lilac and the Tug Pegasus to use them. In many cases, Salguero says, gangways are not designed to accommodate certain boats, and the needed waterfront space is not provided for historic vessels to store necessary supplies. A lot of historic vessels have migrated away from New York City in the last five years because of these constraints, she says.

High insurance rates also make it impossible for many historic vessels to run programs in the city, she says. "If you want a historical vessel to be able to dock at a certain pier, you have to lower liability insurance requirements below 4 million per vessel. It's like building

a road but then laying down requirements that nobody can meet." Such problems reflect a rift between the harbor advocates and boating experts making recommendations and the city planners that ultimately design and build the infrastructure.

"Us advocates are saying piers need A, B, C and D," Salguero says. "But the piers don't have them. We're at the meetings, but we're not being listened to. We've been recognized rhetorically, but not physically and operationally." The infrastructure that is needed exists in the world but not in New York, Salguero says. It exists in parts of Europe, where you have a mix of waterfront and public access. There are places



Carmine Salguero aboard the Mary Whelan

that are more water-focused that can serve as success models. In the United States, these include Martha's Vineyard and Seattle's Fisherman's Wharf, where restaurants and boatyards live in harmony with one another.

Perhaps a model for future maritime development could be Jack London Square in Oakland, a city in many ways like Brooklyn. The Port of Oakland is the 5th most active US port, and now boasts a hotel, dining and activity area that includes a large farmer's market and music and art events on a year-round basis. With proper funding, and the guidance of Portside, we could have that here.

what can be done to advance the organization in the absence of its desired real estate. Last summer, she worked with a maritime lawyer to get a 55-day permit to operate at the Atlantic Basin location. Portside hosted 44 events and programs in that period of time. But to run programs at such a frequency, and without a reasonable planning window to develop the programs, the "pop-up" model is unsustainable. The success of Portside's summer run has given the organization a measure of credibility

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