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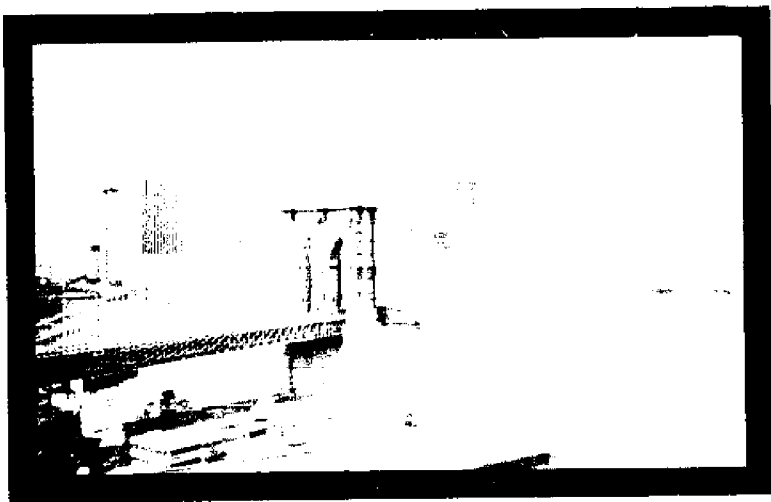
Changing New York City's Waterfront:

STEPHEN LOPEZ

A Citizens' Guide

Changing New York City's Waterfront

View of Lower Manhattan skyline and the Brooklyn Bridge. The Empire Stores site, recently acquired by the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation for eventual conversion to an historical waterfront museum, is in the foreground.



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The Potential for Change

For hundreds of years the ocean waters surrounding the City of New York have brought waves of prosperity to our shores. New York is truly a port of plenty, with miles of well-maintained shoreline that foster continued growth through commerce and recreation. Yet, on the other hand, long stretches of the city's waterfront have become a tangle of weeds and garbage. Whether through neglect or disuse, they suffer a decay that pervades nearby communities and drains their economy and vitality. The condition of a waterfront can be vividly reflected in the condition of adjacent neighborhoods.

This guide is intended to help individuals and organizations improve the plight of New York City's many deteriorating shorelines. The guide is divided into two sections. The first describes ways in which waterfront property can be improved. The second provides a brief look at federal, state, and city agencies that can help bring about change. A checklist near the end of this guide will help you evaluate the condition of your community's waterfront. In addition, a list of addresses and publications will serve as a comprehensive reference for information about waterfront planning.

Industry. Industry is by far the heaviest user of New York City waterfronts. And, in many cases, it is the heaviest misuser. It is often difficult, however, to determine exactly who is responsible for practices that injure the shoreline — if, indeed, any one person or organization can be pinned down at all. The first thing to do is find out who owns the property in question. It could be an individual or a corporation. Or it could be the city itself, which in turn leases the land to public utilities and manufacturing firms.

If the city owns the waterfront, you should be able to look at a copy of the lease. Study it carefully because a hidden clause may require the industry to maintain the property for use by the public. This fine print is often ignored both by the industry and the city. It is expensive to keep any property in good condition, and it is equally costly for the city to enforce such a clause. If, however, you can bring the terms of the contract to the attention of the right officials, you

may have half the battle won. You will be in for a long fight, but you will have some excellent ammunition.

If the property is owned privately, the best recourse is to make your views known to the local community planning board. With the board and other public officials behind you, your chance of success will be much better when you approach private property owners and, for that matter, city agencies as well.

Recreation. Most waterfronts that are set aside for recreation are owned by the city. They can be used for swimming, boating, and fishing or just for strolling, sunbathing, or picnicking. As enjoyable as these activities may sound, they can become hard to bear in contaminated waters and on beaches strewn with trash. In fact, the New York City Health Code has banned swimming in some areas because of pollution. Fortunately, programs to clean up some of our polluted waters are now in the planning stages and promise to

make more beaches available for recreation.

Other than managing to start a city clean-water project, about the best way to freshen a decaying beach is to enlist the help of a volunteer community group. A community group can plan and coordinate clean-up and improvement drives and can often solicit tax-deductible funding for the cause. Check with block associations and other neighborhood groups in your area. If you can't find any, consider organizing your own. With the strength that comes in numbers, you can work on getting some trees planted or new benches for a shoreline park.

Transportation. Miles of city waterfront are obscured by highways that interfere with access to the shoreline. If the highway is elevated, it is an eyesore, as well. In either case, the noise and pollution are a nuisance that tends to keep people away, and the waterfront deteriorates even further.

There is no way to move a highway. But you can push for well-marked, lighted roads to make getting to the waterfront both easier and safer. Better landscaping can also help filter the dirt, muffle the noise, and screen the roads from view.

Housing. If you are dissatisfied with the condition of privately owned waterfront housing that is on privately owned property, you will find it impossible to get any action from the city. The best approach is to organize a group made up of residents of the community. Purchasing equipment for recreation or undertaking an erosion control project can seem a much less imposing prospect if the expenses and paperwork are shared. A well-organized block association can sponsor fund-raising events and, perhaps, influence local businessmen to donate materials and services.

New York City also has large housing developments that are located near the shoreline. A few examples are Waterside, Roosevelt Island, and the new Battery Park City in Manhattan and Roberto Clemente in the Bronx. Residents of

these developments may be reluctant to accept nonresident use of adjacent waterfront walkways. Furthermore, heavy traffic and limited parking in these dense developments make the waterfront inaccessible to some commuters. As a result, the waterfront gets little use.

If your community is considering a new housing development, you should attend public hearings and contact local politicians to insist that waterfront access be an integral part of the general design. The architecture should make the waterfront easy to get to, easy to see, and easy to use. Organize your neighbors to speak out, too.

Commerce. The use of the waterfront by large and small businesses is growing. Since most of these establishments are interested in attracting customers, they are likely to keep their property in good repair. Unfortunately, they may restrict their frontage only to those who can afford to pay.

These businesses are often tenants on city land. Sometimes their leases can be amended, the

amendments requiring them to allow the general public to use the waterfront for recreation. The River Cafe on Fulton Street in Brooklyn is a good example. The restaurant's contract with the city stipulates that their frontage be maintained as a public recreation area. On public park land, private concessionaires must agree to contribute to the facility's upkeep in return for their vending privileges. This kind of arrangement may be applicable to your waterfront. If so, your community board should consider it.

Nonprofit institutions. A large portion of the shoreline near your community may be used by institutions such as schools and hospitals. They are often on private land that is closed to public use. The people who run these institutions, however, are usually sensitive to the needs of neighboring communities, and a well-organized community group pushing for more land for recreation may strike a responsive chord and get favorable results.

Miscellaneous government agencies. Many city, state, and federal agencies use the waterfront. Frequently, these offices have definite plans for the land on which they are located. Or they have certain requirements that must be fulfilled before the property can be opened to the public. Contact each government agency directly for specific information.

Also, some vacant waterfront properties are available for lease. If your community group qualifies as a not-for-profit corporation, it may be able to rent a parcel and bring it under direct community control.



The Battery Park promenade draws large crowds for panoramic views of the Upper New York Bay and the shoreline including Governors Island, Brooklyn, the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, Staten Island, the Statue of Liberty (Liberty Island), Ellis Island, and New Jersey.

Mechanisms for change

Community planning boards.

New York City has 59 community planning boards, and contacting the one that represents your community should be the first step in seeking to improve your community's waterfront. The planning boards make budget recommendations to the city. Before a final decision is made by a community planning board, issues that come before it are referred to appropriate committees that conduct research into the question, discuss it, and report their findings to the full board. It is essential, therefore, that your board have a waterfront committee. If it does not, your community should see that one is established.

The Citizen's Committee for New York City, Inc., has a publication entitled *Lend a Hand in Your Community Board*, which describes the purpose and function of these boards as well as of other private and public groups that may be of assistance. Write to the Citizen's Committee at 630 Fifth Avenue, 10020, for a copy.

Sources of funding. One of your community's main problems will be finding funds to make the waterfront more desirable for recreation. Securing public funding is a long and tedious process, often requiring years of constant effort. If successful, though, the rewards to both the individual and the community are tremendous. Keep in mind that private or local funds can be used as leverage to obtain matching funds. And perhaps a financial scheme using a combination of private, city, state, and federal funds can be developed.

City Budget. The city budget has three sections, each with a separate function. The Revenue Budget outlines the flow of cash

into the city coffers. The Expense Budget covers temporary improvements — those lasting less than five years and costing less than \$15,000. The Capital Budget itemizes costlier and more permanent improvements, such as buildings, parks, and large equipment.

The Capital Budget also includes federal grants. But to get information about a specific grant, you must contact directly the agency that receives it. Likewise, you cannot consult the Revenue Budget to learn the terms of a city lease on public property. This information must be sought from the city office that is handling that particular agreement.

A copy of the complete city budget is available for a charge from the City Record, Room 2213, Municipal Building, 10007. Be sure to request the *adopted city budget* for the correct fiscal year. The fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th. The budget for the fiscal year 1979–1980 is called the 1980 budget.

It is now extremely difficult to have a waterfront renovation program funded through the city budget. If, however, your community's project has exceptional merit, you should bring it before the appropriate boards and agencies. They submit budget recommendations to the city in the early fall. These recommendations are reviewed jointly by the mayor and the Board of Estimate. The actual process and timetables are available through your district manager.

Community Development (CD) Budget. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allocates block grants to certain places that qualify as low-income areas. In fiscal year

1979, New York City received approximately \$150 million. Because this money is apportioned to specific projects and agencies, it is not included in the city budget or the fiscal planning process. You can, however, order the current CD budget from the City Record. More information about it is available from your district manager.

Other public funds for recreation. The following organizations are important sources of public funds:

• **U.S. Department of the Interior.** The Heritage, Conservation and Recreation Service administers a recreation program providing advice and, in some cases, money. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, for instance, gives money directly to states which, in turn, allocate it to specific projects. In New York City, the Department of Parks and Recreation is the only agency with permission to apply for these funds. Other Heritage, Conservation and Recreation Service programs include the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers program, the Trails program, and the upcoming Urban Park Recovery program. Contact the Heritage, Conservation and Recreation Service directly for more details.

• **U.S. Department of Transportation.** The Federal Highway Administration coordinates the Federal-Aid Highway Program and the Federal Highway Act of 1976. Funds are available for up to 90 percent of the cost of bikeways and roadside beautification projects. For more information, contact the N.Y.S. Department of Transportation.

• **U.S. Department of Commerce.** Through the Economic Development Administration, funds are dispersed for public improvements such as tourist facilities. These funds are known as Economic Development Grants and Loans for Public Works and Development Facilities. The N.Y.C. Office of Economic Development can be contacted for further details.

• **N.Y.S. Office of Parks and Recreation.** This agency has a publication entitled *Federal and State Aid for Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation* that is particularly useful. It is available from the N.Y.C. Sea Grant office, c/o Cornell University, 111 Broadway, 17th Floor, 10006, or from ORP, Agency Building 1, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12238.

Private grants. Private organizations may agree to fund improvements to the city's waterfront. For example, the Urban Affairs division of Chemical Bank, Exxon Corporation, Fund for the City of New York, and the Vincent Astor Foundation fund certain kinds of community work or public projects. The best way to impress these potential sources is to organize a strong presentation and to have solid community backing.

Public recreation from private businessmen. Improving the condition of your community's waterfront can sometimes be accomplished without actually going out and soliciting funds.

For instance, on park land, private businessmen run such concessions as restaurants, tennis courts, and horseback-riding stables. In return, the city collects

rent and requires the proprietors to share the expense of park maintenance. A concession may be just the thing to bring about a rapid improvement to a waterfront. More information is available from the N.Y.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, 830 Fifth Avenue, 10021.

Land that is owned by the city but not used as park land can be rented by private and public groups. The site does not have to be improved before the lease goes into effect. From the city's point of view, the best lease is for a parcel that needs little or no capital improvement or ongoing maintenance by the city. If a change in the use of a city-owned parcel is proposed, the city must advertise a Request for Proposal (RFP) in the city record. The RFP stipulates the improvements and minimum terms the city will accept. The N.Y.C. Department of Ports and Terminals has information on the provisions of existing leases.

Neighborhood organizations. Organizing neighborhood residents or merchants to address a specific problem can be highly effective. The organization may be an informal association or a formal corporation. A nonprofit, public-benefit corporation has the advantage of being eligible for public assistance; an association does not. An association is adequate for organizing clean-ups and small festivals. A corporation is useful for planning major capital improvements.

Forgotten places. Many waterfronts around New York City suffer from neglect. One way to solve this problem is to organize festivals, cultural events, parades, water regattas, and other events. A

permit to sponsor such an event is necessary. For information on permits for activities on park property, contact the N.Y.C. Department of Parks and Recreation; on public property other than parks, the N.Y.C. Department of Ports and Terminals; and on the water, the U.S. Coast Guard. Public participation offices at the N.Y.C. Department of City Planning and the N.Y.C. Department of Environmental Protection may be able to assist you in organizing tours.

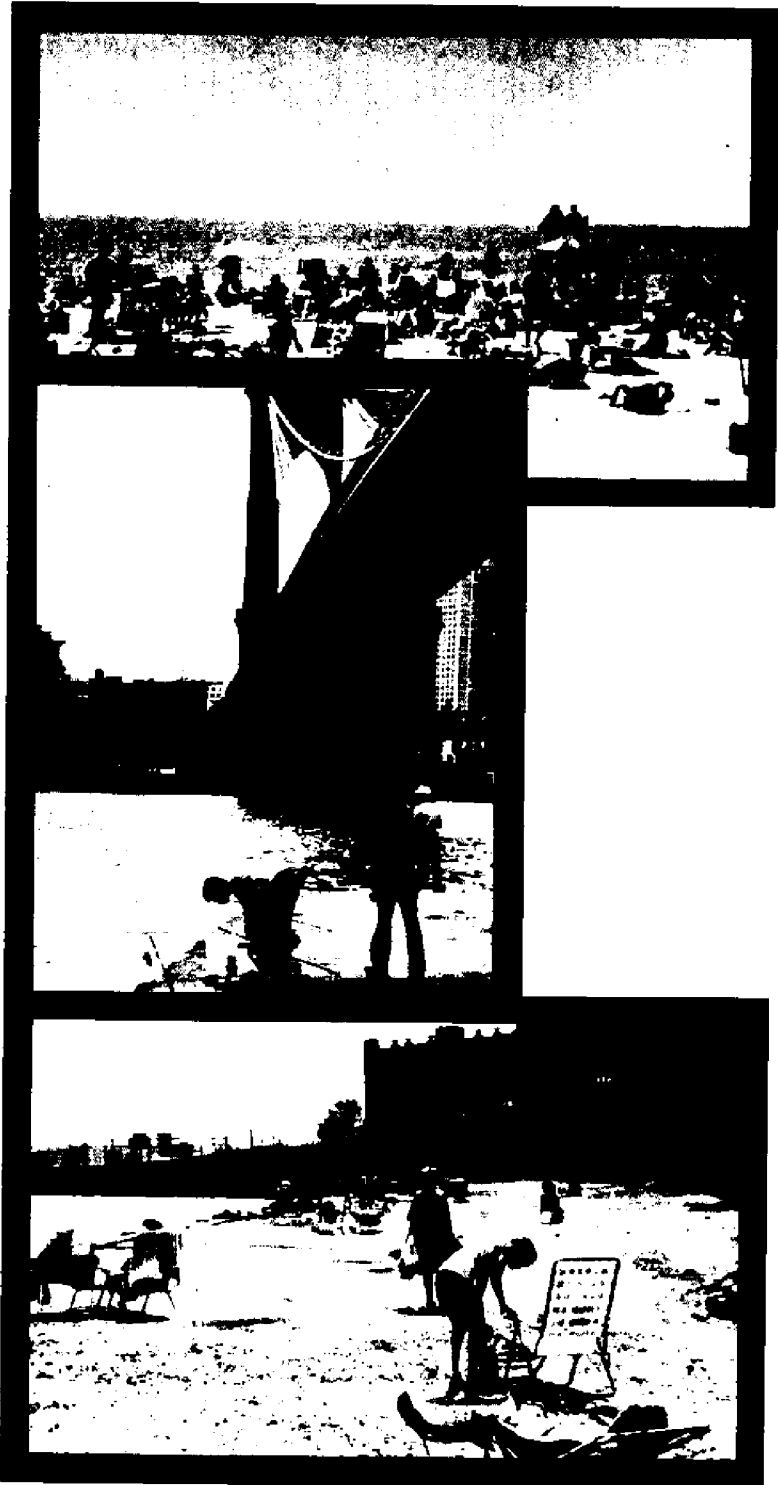
Sea Grant. The New York State Sea Grant Extension Program, located at 111 Broadway, provides technical assistance on waterfront redevelopment to individuals, community groups, business and civic organizations, elected and appointed officials. Sea Grant also conducts statewide research on topics related to bodies of water and communities bordering them. Services are available free of charge.

Top to bottom:

Rockaway Beach in Riiss Park is a popular site for sunbathing and swimming. As water quality in New York City waters improves in the decades ahead, usable beach areas should expand.

Local youngsters fish from an abandoned pier beneath the Brooklyn Bridge. Though the fish from the East River are not recommended for eating, sport fishing is still popular. This pier is scheduled for demolltion under the Army Corps of Engineers' Harbor Drift Removal program because it is structurally unsound.

Impromptu use of industrial waterfront south of Waterside along Manhattan's east Midtown shore. The site is once again in active industrial use precluding recreational use.



Regulation of the Waterfront

Agencies. Following is a list of appropriate agencies to contact when seeking a change in the way your community's waterfront is used:

Department of Ports and Terminals	<i>If waterborne or airborne traffic is involved</i>
Department of Marine and Aviation	
Department of City Planning	<i>For land use or special zoning</i>
Environmental Protection Agency	<i>For changes in environmental quality standards</i>
Army Corps of Engineers	<i>If shorefront structures are involved</i>
Port Authority of New York and New Jersey	<i>For facilities under the Port Authority's jurisdiction</i>
Department of Parks and Recreation	<i>For improvements involving structural changes in any of the city's waterfront parks</i>
Army Corps of Engineers	
N.Y.C. Department of Transportation, or N.Y.S. Department of Transportation, and possibly, Department of City Planning, Army Corps of Engineers, or Environmental Protection Agency, depending on jurisdiction	<i>For transportation problems and approval for changes affecting transportation corridors</i>
U.S. Coast Guard	<i>For changes affecting navigation</i>

Changes that do not fit into any of these categories must be studied separately to determine the jurisdictional boundaries.

Comprehensive plans. Planning the management of coastal property is required under the federal government's Coastal Management Program (CMP). Strategies that may affect your community's waterfront are formulated by the city



This abandoned pier and car are in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn. This site offers panoramic views of the Upper New York Bay, especially the Statue of Liberty.

Department of Planning and, once finalized, become part of a statewide management scheme by the N.Y.S. Department of State.

The *New York City Charter* stipulates that public hearings be held before the Department of Planning submits its recommendations to the state. These are held at the borough board or the community planning board. For more information, contact the N.Y.C. Department of Planning.

Federal statutes require that wastewater be treated to remove impurities. The *New York City Charter* guarantees that citizens have a say in formulating these policies as they relate to the city. A citizen's advisory committee also makes recommendations to the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection. The department's Public Participation Office has more information on the clean waters programs and on how you and your community group can take part in the decision-making process.

The zoning plan for the City of New York is the basic document regulating land use. Copies are available from the map sales division of the N.Y.C. Department of City Planning. To change a zoning law, an appeal for a variance before the Board of Standards and Appeals is required. This process is described in a booklet entitled *Uniform Land Use Review Procedures*, which is also available at the Department of Planning.

If you live in Brooklyn, Queens, or Staten Island, the Gateway National Park Plan may also affect the way in which your community's waterfront is used. The Gateway National Recreation Headquarters, Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn, 11234, will send you a copy of the plan.

The following checklist can assist you in evaluating proposed waterfront changes. According to the list, the impact of change on environmental factors may be marked positive (+), negative (-), or none (0). By assigning one of these values to each condition, you can get a clearer view of necessary improvements.

Checklist for Waterfront Change

Factors Affected by Change	Change Index		
	-	0	+
<i>Public recreational access</i>			
<i>Traffic generation / conflict</i>			
<i>Safety</i>			
<i>Pollution</i>			
<i>Effect on adjacent uses</i>			
<i>Economic gain</i>			
<i>Housing</i>			
<i>Services</i>			
<i>Physical improvements</i>			

References— Government

Citizen's Advisory Committee
New York 208/Water Quality
Management Programs
40 Worth Street, Room 902
New York, NY 10013
212-566-3730

Community Board Assistance Unit
51 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007
212-566-7938

N.Y.C. Department of City Planning
2 Lafayette Street
New York, NY 10007
212-566-8568

N.Y.C. Office of Economic
Development
225 Broadway
New York, NY 10007
212-566-3501

N.Y.C. Department of
Environmental Protection
Municipal Building
New York, NY 10007
212-566-0108

N.Y.C. Department of Marine and
Aviation
Battery Maritime Building
New York, NY 10004
212-248-8060

N.Y.C. Department of Parks and
Recreation
The Arsenal
Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021
212-360-8101

N.Y.C. Department of Ports and
Terminals
Battery Maritime Building
New York, NY 10004
212-248-8211

N.Y.C. Department of Transportation
40 Worth Street
New York, NY 10007
212-566-2980

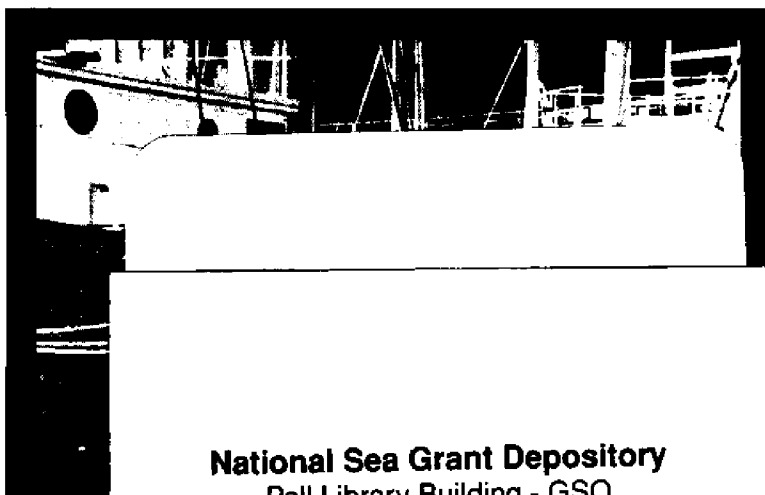
Gateway National Recreation Area
Floyd Bennett Field
Brooklyn, NY 11234
212-252-9208

Port Authority of New York and New
Jersey
1 World Trade Center
New York, NY 10048
212-466-7000

N.Y.S. Department of Transportation
2 World Trade Center
New York, NY 10047
212-488-6613

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:
Region 2
2 World Trade Center, 61st Floor
New York, NY 10047
212-480-2758

U.S. Coast Guard
Governors Island
New York, NY 10004
212-668-7252



National Sea Grant Depository
Pell Library Building - GSO
University of Rhode Island
Narragansett, RI 02882-1197USA

The South Street Seaport Museum offers visitors a fine sense of what life in old New York was like. Tall ships, restored buildings, and museum displays all help recreate the atmosphere of a city whose livelihood has historically stemmed from its location in one of the world's most spectacular natural ports.

Adopted Budget — Fiscal year 1980: Expense — Revenue — Capital. Available for \$7.50 from the City Record, Room 2213, Municipal Building, New York, NY 10007. Order for current fiscal year.

Community Development V Block Grant Program. Available free of charge from the N.Y.C. Department of City Planning, Room 1400, 2 Lafayette Street, New York, NY 10007. Fiscal years are indicated by roman numerals; inquire which is most recent.

Kornbluh, David, and Milde, Gordon. **Lend a Hand in Your Community Board.** Available free of charge from the Citizen's Committee for New York City, Inc., 630 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10020. August 1978.

New York City Charter. Available for \$8.50 from The City Record, Room 2213, Municipal Building, New York, NY 10007. 1977.

N.Y.C. Department of City Planning. **Coastal Zone Management — Draft N.Y.C. Regional Element of the N.Y.S. Coastal Management Program.** Available free of charge from the N.Y.C. Department of City Planning, 51 Chambers Street, Room 515, New York, NY 10007. June 1978.

N.Y.C. Department of City Planning. **Outline of New York City Regional Element of the N.Y.S. Coastal Management Program.** Available free of

charge from the N.Y.C. Department of City Planning, 51 Chambers Street, Room 515, New York, NY 10007. 1978.

N.Y.C. Department of City Planning. **The Waterfront.** Supplement to **Plan for New York City.** Available for \$3.00 from the N.Y.C. Department of City Planning, 2 Lafayette Street, Room 1616, New York, NY 10007. 1971.

N.Y.C. Department of City Planning. **Zoning Handbook.** Available for \$3.00 from the N.Y.C. Department of City Planning, 2 Lafayette Street, Room 1616, New York, NY 10007. 1974.

N.Y.C. Economic Development Administration, Department of Ports and Terminals. **Rules and Regulations — Waterfront.** Available free of charge from the N.Y.C. Department of Ports and Terminals, Battery Maritime Building, New York, NY 10004. September 1970.

N.Y.C. League of Women Voters. **What Makes New York City Run.** Available for \$1.85 from the League of Women Voters, 817 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. 1979.

N.Y.S. Department of State. **Coastal Management Handbook.** Available free of charge from the N.Y.S. Department of State, 162 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12231. 1978.

References— Publications

N.Y.S. Office of Parks and Recreation. **Federal and State Aid for Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.** Available free of charge from N.Y.S. O.P.R., Agency Building 1, Rockefeller Plaza, Albany, NY 12238. August 1977.

N.Y.S. Office of Parks and Recreation. **N.Y.S. Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan — Summary.** Available free of charge from the N.Y.S. Office of Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Planning and Research, Agency Building 1, Rockefeller Plaza, Albany, NY 12238. 1972.

United States Department of the Interior, Heritage, Conservation and Recreation Services. **National Urban Recreation Study — Executive Report.** Available free of charge from the Heritage, Conservation and Recreation Service, 600 Arch Street, Room 9310, Philadelphia, PA 19106. 1978.

Price per copy 60 cents.

For additional copies or information, contact:

Cornell University Cooperative Extension
111 Broadway, 17th floor
New York, New York 10006
Phone: 212-587-9728

or

New York Sea Grant Extension Program
Cornell University
10 Fernow Hall
Ithaca, New York 14853
Phone: 607-256-2162

Cooperative Extension, the New York State College of Human Ecology, and the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating. In furtherance of Acts of Congress May 8, June 30, 1914, and providing equal opportunities in employment and programs.

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