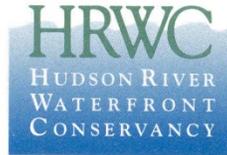


HUDSON RIVER WATERFRONT CONSERVANCY OF NJ, INC.



New Jersey's Lower Hudson River Waterfront 25 Years of Construction: Challenges for the Next 25 Post Sandy Era

Date of final report: May 15, 2014

Project period: June 21, 2013 to May 19, 2014

HEP Funds Received: \$14,650

Matching Funds: \$4,691

Goals of Project: The main goal of this project was to conduct a one-day conference aimed at finding ways to achieve resilience and stability in preparation for the next inevitable super storms along New Jersey's lower Hudson River waterfront. By so doing, we also protect and secure free, unobstructed public access to the Hudson River Waterfront Walkway (WW). The WW is a State -planned and mandated, continuously connected 30 foot wide pathway running through nine waterfront municipalities in two counties, along the river edge from the Bayonne Bridge to the George Washington Bridge. The plan covers a distance of 18.5 linear miles. Eighty-five percent of the Walkway has been completed since the issuance of the state regulations in 1988 (N.J.A.C. 7:7E-3.48 et al) The Conservancy sought the sponsorship of Stevens Institute of Technology's Center for Maritime Systems which together developed and conducted the conference on October 8, 2013 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the university's campus in Hoboken, New Jersey. Another objective was to produce a Conference Report for dissemination of the results to the general public. The Report may be seen on the conservancy website www.hudsonriverwaterfront.org.

Summary: The conference brought together the expertise of engineers, scientists, technicians, planners and architects conversant with waterfront issues. There were 14 presenters plus a keynote speaker and a luncheon address. Topics included understanding the probability of future super storms and the anticipated impacts of sea level rise; the need to plan carefully before choosing and installing any one of the costly stabilization alternatives; exploration of ways of living with water in the Netherlands; the use of a multi-faceted approach and green infrastructure; and the need for a cooperative regional plan that allows individual community plans to be cognizant of impact on neighboring communities. There were 116 persons in attendance. The event included breakfast, lunch, coffee breaks and a reception all provided by

the Conservancy (the grant did not include cost of refreshments). Admission was free thanks to the HEP/NEIWPC grant. Two television interviews were undertaken with the key note speaker and several members of the audience.

Course of action: The work of putting together the conference began in early 2012 even before the Conservancy applied for a grant. Hurricane Irene had occurred and the Conservancy was aware as early as 2010 that many sites along the riverfront were disintegrating, eroding or sinking due to years of powerful river currents, periodic flooding and shoaling and/or faulty or inadequate construction. The board had decided upon a conference to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the adoption of Hudson River Waterfront Walkway (WW) regulations and the Conservancy's own creation in 1988, and in early summer 2012 had begun discussions with The Center for Maritime Services at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken. Then came Hurricane Sandy, the urgency to act, the 2013 grant application and the award to the Hudson River Waterfront Conservancy.

- Met with The Center for Maritime Systems at Stevens, set the date of October 8, 2013 and began discussions about the conference topics, speakers, length of event and location at Stevens. Conservancy took over planning and execution of the event.
- Created layout and text of invitation to speakers and sent e-mails to prospective speakers.
- Hired a clerical assistant and assigned a work plan which included setting up internet webmail, initiation of Constant Contact for sending and receiving responses to invitations and receipt of reservations; research and creation of a contact list of waterfront commercial and residential organizations, municipal governments, nonprofit environmental groups, elected officials and individuals.
- Hired a graphic designer and provided direction regarding ads, hold-the-date post cards, invitations, conference program and the ultimate Report.
- Wrote the text for ads, postcards, invitations, conference program and all letters and announcements.
- Corresponded with confirmed speakers and provided them with the time for speaking, title of their talk, location on the program and where to park.
- Found replacements for speakers unable to attend.
- notice of event placed on website, made media contacts and created press releases. Arranged for coverage from two TV stations.
- Hired writer to audio tape the event and create the Conference Report.
- Solicited donations in support of the conference from seven waterfront-based organizations and received positive responses from four.
- Arranged for a table at the conference entrance for attendees to sign in and pick up programs and evaluation forms. Table also accommodated place for the conservancy's Walkway map brochures, and sale of T shirts and pen/styluses to help cover cost of food and extra furniture.
- Worked with Stevens' liaison to oversee room layout, audio set up and timing of lunch and food breaks. Arranged for videotaping of first segment of the conference.
- Along with The Center Director, co-moderated the conference and oversaw the day's activity.
- Followed up with thank you letters to keynote and luncheon speakers, sent letters and honorarium checks to speakers.

- Completed work on the Conference Report, had 50 copies printed which were sent to elected officials, sponsors, libraries and in the process of hand delivering Report at meetings with mayor/municipal managers of the nine cities/towns along the waterfront. .
- Provided quarterly reports and the final report to HEP and NEIWPC

Evaluation: The event was generally well received. Conference Evaluation Forms were handed out at the door along with the programs and were returned by 48 out of the 90 (or 54 percent) of the people who stayed for the entire day. They included: 17 academic professionals, 17 representatives of advocate organizations (not including conservancy board members), 16 professionals from engineering/planning and technical commercial organizations, 9 leaders of state and county government, 8 leaders of local waterfront community government, 7 property managers of waterfront condominiums, and 16 members of the general public. Overall the responses noted the event as highly informative, that it addressed the important challenges facing the lower Hudson River waterfront and came to an overwhelming consensus for a regional approach as the only way to address the maintenance and funding of the crumbling waterfront infrastructure on which the WW is dependent. The general public and the condominium managers (as differentiated from the technical and academic responders) expressed surprise and concern about the likelihood of more events like Sandy in the foreseeable future. In the days following the event, the conservancy website experienced 1795 hits with 940 of those attributed to interest in the comments of the luncheon speaker Hendrick Ovink who spoke about care in planning for the future, Rebuild by Design and the techniques the Netherlands has adopted in order to live with water. Many people as they were leaving urged that the conference become an annual event.

Lessons Learned: An eight hour conference may be too long for most people. About a third of the attendees left around 2 p.m. In addition, a conference on a weekday also excluded at least thirty people who told us that they would have attended but needed to be at work. An alternative might be a half day event or an early evening meeting. Reducing the number of speakers may also have been a good idea in order to give each speaker more time.

The surprise that laypeople expressed in learning about the likelihood of repeated super storms in the future highlights the need for the Conservancy to undertake an ongoing educational process to keep the understanding about the threat before the general public. This can be done by holding community meetings in the various municipalities. The general agreement about a regional approach to planning is encouraging and becomes the basis for the work of the Conservancy starting with a review of local municipal plans and gathering them into a composite for presentation to the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and meetings with elected officials seeking government backing of a regional plan and funding assistance (similar to the dune replacement fund at the Jersey shore). The waterfront property owners would still continue under such a plan to be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the WW but the huge infrastructure costs would be supplemented by the regional funding.

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