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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
NYNJHAT Study Team, Planning Division
26 Federal Plaza, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10279-0090

**North Brooklyn Neighbors comments on NY & NJ Harbor & Tributaries Focus Area
Feasibility Study (HATS), Tentatively Selected Plan**

To whom it may concern:

North Brooklyn Neighbors (NBN) is a grassroots nonprofit organization serving the Greenpoint and Williamsburg sections of Brooklyn. NBN advances community-based solutions on issues of public space and the environment - through activism, education, and collaboration - to create a more just, healthy, and safe place to live and work. For years, NBN has fought for the right for our communities to have access to the waterfront. Our first fight involved shutting down an illegal waste transfer station on the East River - that area has now become Marsha P. Johnson State Park. Connection to the water is a vital part of our neighborhood. The community has struggled for years to ensure that there are get-downs amongst bulkheads and consequently we have a thriving boating community and plans for swimming areas are underway. It would be devastating to lose access to the waterfront just as the water quality improves enough to allow for new ways of interacting with the East River.

NBN is pleased that the New York-New Jersey Harbor and Tributaries Coastal Storm Risk Management Feasibility Study is bringing to the forefront the urgency with which we must address climate change and sea level rise in our waterfront community. However, we view this plan as a starting place to have a regional and community-wide conversation about how we want our neighborhoods to adapt and what is prioritized in the process.

To that point, NBN has some issues, questions, and recommendations.

- **A limited set of options**

Issue: The proposed alternative does not explore the full range of options available.

There is an overreliance on in-water barriers and gray solutions and only explores how

to limit flooding due to storm surge events, and does not include comprehensive land use planning.

Recommendations:

- While nature-based solutions may be unlikely to be effective enough to fully protect our communities during storm surge, they should be the first line of defense. In the current plan, green infrastructure is treated as an afterthought. Green infrastructure has the additional advantage of being protective of our communities during the more common occurrences of extreme precipitation events and ongoing sea level rise as well as providing a number of other benefits such as carbon sequestration and habitat for wildlife.
 - Effective design of waterfront parks could play a key role in being a buffer zone during flooding events. Indeed, land-use planning should play a key role in any plan. North Brooklyn has seen the rise of countless luxury high-rises built on the waterfront, and more are slated to be constructed in the vulnerable flood plain. Comprehensive land use planning and analysis should be done of what kinds of benefits and avoided damages could be had by simply being thoughtful about where new construction is allowed on the waterfront and inland within the floodplain.
 - The narrow scope of suggestions provided by the US Army Corps of Engineers leads us to suggest that the set of solutions is larger than those currently under consideration. Instead, solutions for the problem of storm surge, sea level rise and flooding in the New York and New Jersey area should be opened up to a wider set of practitioners. The New York region is a global leader and ideas for protection, design, and innovation should come from all around the world.
- **Environmental justice**

Issue: NBN is concerned about the environmental justice impacts of the plan. While elements of the plan may be subject to change, there is a lack of information on how the proposed infrastructure will affect our neighborhood. In particular, only certain segments of the neighborhood, mostly Greenpoint, are protected. The report frequently mentions “induced flooding” and some places have “induced flooding features,” yet there is little explanation for how neighborhoods were prioritized for these features. Indeed, Appendix A12 states, “According to estimates for the 1% flood with 95% confidence level plus the intermediate relative sea level change at year 2095, the measures in Alternative 3B would reduce coastal storm flooding for 62.75% of the area expected to flood.”

Recommendation: Provide clear information as to how certain areas were chosen for protection. Name the other 37.25% of the area expected to flood where measures would not reduce coastal storm flooding. Outline where flooding will remain similar and where will it worsen. Ensure that vulnerable populations are prioritized and protected and that the 37.25% of the area without protection does not include environmental justice areas.
 - **Soil and groundwater contamination**

Issue: While many areas have soil and groundwater contamination, North Brooklyn has a particularly heavy burden. Our region is home to two of the city’s four EPA Superfund

Sites. One of these sites, Newtown Creek, has been under investigation for years and cleanup has yet to begin. Another site, the Meeker Avenue Plume, was only added to the National Priorities List last year and the community has been told it will likely take decades for cleanup to occur. In addition to these sites, brownfields, State Superfund Sites, and many other toxic contaminants are in our ground. Page 527 of the report states that, “The Study Area is a highly urban environment with a long history of industrial activity that has contributed to a degraded environment for a broad range of environmental receptors. While it is a priority to avoid known contaminated sites, it may not be possible along all portions of the TSP, or any Alternative assessed under the NYNJHAT Study. For sites with HTRW issues that lie in the project footprint and that cannot be avoided, the non-federal sponsor would be required to ensure that they are fully remediated prior to the NYNJHAT Alternative being constructed. This remediation would also be at 100% Non-Federal cost. This can be a timely and costly process that has the potential to cause schedule delays and funding lapses. Planning for future remediation needs and ensuring its cleanup to an acceptable level prior to construction of any USACE project is a known concern of the non-Federal sponsor.”

Recommendation: Flooding of areas with known contamination is especially important to protect, as such flooding could spread toxins and would increase the likelihood of human contact. The recommendation that full remediation occur before protective measures are taken is hugely problematic. Priority in the project timeline should be given to environmental justice communities, areas that are likely to experience induced flooding once other projects are completed, and those containing highly polluted sites.

- **Public outreach and information**

Issue: While some effort has been made to do outreach on the proposed alternative, in general, the plan is not accessible to the general public. Presentations focus on the general plan rather than letting the public know how the proposal would actually affect their neighborhood and their lives.

Recommendation: A much more detailed proposal with maps and accurate depictions of options should be available. In addition, there needs to be outreach conducted that includes much more granular information about how the proposal would affect their neighborhood, city and region. Information needs to be written in accessible language and should be translated into multiple languages.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue.

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