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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**New York City Council
Committee on Environmental Protection
Committee on Parks & Recreation
Joint Oversight Hearing:
The Status of the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project**

**Testimony of Manhattan Borough President, Gale A. Brewer
January 23, 2019**

Good afternoon Chair Constantinides, Chair Grodenchik, members of the committees of this joint hearing and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Gale Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President.

When Hurricane Sandy made landfall in 2012, it devastated New York City through the lives it took and all the damage it caused. It was only 14 months prior to Sandy that Hurricane Irene came through New York City with a storm surge that came only one foot shy flooding our subway system. The short of it is that climate change will continue to bring more frequent and intense storms, and will pose inversed risks. To prepare, we must work collaboratively and creatively, and without delay.

The East Side Coastal Resiliency Project (ESCR) represents an important part of the City's storm resiliency efforts, but many questions remain.

- 1) Community members invested years of time and effort to come up with the original plan and have been upset with the roll out of the significant changes, especially around East River Park. Why did it take so long to come up with this new plan and why wasn't the community given a chance to understand or comment on the plan before it was announced?
- 2) It is currently estimated that East River Park will be closed for three and a half years for demolition and complete reconstruction. Many have felt that

this is too short a timeline and that it will take much longer to complete all the work. How is the City going to maintain this schedule? What plans have been made to inform the community about delays?

- 3) With the \$338 million in federal funding and initial capital funding allocations by the City, the estimated \$1.45 billion project is only half funded. When will the City allocate the roughly \$700 million needed to close the gap? If there are projects within the ESCR that do not start during this administration, what guarantees will be put in place to ensure the work moves forward?
- 4) The project will require the closure of the park and playing fields. Has the City identified temporary park/field usage for the sports leagues that now use East River Park? If nearby spaces are identified, but not adequate to meet all the needs, does the City have a plan to provide transportation to and from fields that are a longer distance away?
- 5) There needs to be regular, frequent outreach by the City throughout the project to ensure that the community is kept up to date. What is the outreach/communication plan for keeping the community informed?
- 6) The community was told that in the City's original plan, parkland alienation would need to be authorized through the New York State Legislature to account for the massive amount of demolition that would happen to East River Park. Now the entire park is being demolished, yet there is no alienation being pursued. This remains a concern for the community and my colleagues in the State Legislature and need to be clarified to their satisfaction.

Storm resiliency is not an option. It is required if we are to protect the Lower East Side and other impacted communities. However; as Christine Datz-Romero said to the New York Time, the timeline for building this park could be much longer, and the City is destroying important vegetation, bird migration habitat, and millions of dollars of City-funded playing fields. She wonders why the park itself cannot "be a floodplain... with juniper and sumac trees that... have been planted." I understand that the Department of Design & Construction will claim that that the plan only

addresses sea level rise and not storm surge, but this idea should be taken into serious consideration prior to the park's destruction.

No matter what, this process must be collaborative, ensuring that the community always feels heard and their concerns are addressed in a timely and substantive way. There is much to be done and the next steps are critical. I look forward to working with the City Council to advocate for the community on this issue, and all related resiliency work that will disrupt and reduce the quality of life for residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and share these questions raised by community members.