

CreateNYC Red Hook Session
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Attendees:

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1. What do we love/value in Red Hook?

- The library as a public gathering space for everyone. It's a central hub.
- The gardens/nurseries on Van Brunt.
- PS 15 has a flea market, lots of other activities, and is a space everyone can feel ownership of.
- There is a lot of park space, the waterfront, the playing fields, all of which are also shared spaces.
- There are also outdoor festivals, like Red Hook Fest by Dance Theatre, Etc.
- The views from the waterfront are special and unique, being able to see the South Street Seaport and Lower Manhattan. The relationship with the waterfront in general is complicated but very important.

2. Major Issues: Equity/Access and Education

Arts education:

- Anytime funding cuts have to be made in schools, it's always to the arts. Kids need more activities than sports; they need to know more than how to run a ball.
- Growing up in NYC, I always had access to the arts in school, it was mandatory, and now it's all about sports.
- Arts are important as an outlet, and classes expose kids to fine art and culture. It gets them away from smartphones and computers. It's a valuable part of their education.

- Kids might discover that they have a talent that can be developed into a career. You can make a living in the arts, and if you don't have opportunities when you're young, you might never know that.
- I wasn't able to provide access to arts, so I took my son to classes. He had a teacher who helped him develop a portfolio so he could get into LaGuardia School of Performing Arts. I created (helped create?) the Red Hook Art Project so that all kids could have the same opportunities.
- Arts education should be lifelong. It shouldn't stop with kids. There need to be opportunities for adults of all ages, because they also need to have creative outlets. You don't need to study art only to become an artist. It can just be to enrich your life.
- But providing arts outside of school requires physical space, which is one of the biggest barriers.
- Culture breaks down barriers and brings diverse people together. It's also a way to learn things beyond your own knowledge. If you can do that, you can do anything.
- I took arts in school, and without a writing teacher who encouraged me, I never would have known I could become an author.
- The focus on sports reflects the win/lose ideology that's taking hold of this country. Arts is exactly the opposite.
- Kids are getting lost after 6th or 7th grade – there's nothing here for them. Young adults are getting phased out. And they see what is happening. They know they aren't getting everything they could.
- PS 15 is a real community gathering space. PS 15 got a grant to help young people see the connection between the arts and STEM, and between arts and social justice. They have a sister school in Japan and are sharing about waterfront concerns, and are trying to come up with creative solutions.

3. Neighborhood Character: Fostering Relationships/Awareness from Existing and Incoming Residents.

- Concerns about displacement and losing neighborhood character. People are moving into luxury buildings which are completely insular. They're not engaging with the local community. So another aspect of education is bridging the barriers between old and new; different socioeconomic populations.
- There's a very strong sense of community here, very unique from the rest of the City. However, it's fragile. There's a lot more happening now, but making it more appealing also can lead to a lot of newcomers who don't have any engagement with the existing community (art-washing).
- Everyone here kind of knows each other; people moving into the community aren't used to knowing their neighbors. They aren't welcoming, they aren't neighborly. It's definitely a socioeconomic divide.
- The City should help; it should be part of spreading knowledge, supporting existing communities, making sure they're aware of what's going on in their own neighborhoods so they can have a voice.
- Developers need to be encouraged to take neighborhood character into account. They don't care about the history, but they have to respect what's already established.
- It's also the City's fault. EDC made promises that weren't kept, and this community isn't high income. They don't have the clout to pressure elected officials.
- Concerned that meetings like this are not helpful, that nothing ever happens.
- The community had no control over the cruise terminal and hasn't benefitted from it at all.
- It's incumbent upon the community to learn from past negative experiences and make sure that they don't happen again. The community has to work together to make their voices heard.

- People living in housing developments don't know what is going on until it's already done. They need to be educated so they know to come to meetings, to know how to make their voices heard. People and community leaders who are more knowledgeable and connected need to make the effort to go to the housing developments and meet with the residents, help educate them. Before going to the City, we need to unite. We're too divided.
- There is the Red Hook Local Leaders, which is trying to do this, but it needs to grow. There's already resistance to developers but it's not enough.
- How can the City help newcomers become responsible citizens? New people are good, there's nothing wrong with that, but they need to be part of the community.

4. Identifying Space and Gathering places

- There's still a strong desire for a cultural center where there is space for the community – something like The Point in the South Bronx, except as a collaboration of multiple non-profits. Someplace with a café, space for gatherings, parties, etc., that's centrally located. We should negotiate with developers so that they include a community space in new developments.
- City Council members and other elected officials can make those demands as part of the ULURP process. There are public meetings, but by the time things get to that point, it's really more information sharing. There's no opportunity for feedback or changes. The meetings are confusing, it almost seems designed to be deliberately hard to understand everything.
- I used to live in Stuyvesant Houses, and they succeeded in bringing out a lot of improvements. There's a high school, a college, movie theater, etc. That should be here too. They became united. (Restoration...?) There was no space at all, and they knocked down buildings to create it.
- This goes to the question of equity; there needs to be a major policy, citywide, that any new development needs to prove that they are doing something to benefit the community.
- In California, 33% of a new construction has to serve the community. It is a law or a policy that they have to speak with an advocacy group for approval.
- It's important to be sure that there is long-term sustainability. Having a space doesn't mean you know how to manage it. Before the space is created, you need a business plan of how it will work. This is how we have to start. We need to know how to operate it.
- Disagreement. If we wait until we're really ready, we'll never be ready. The City/State needs to be willing to take risks, be okay if it fails. We need to be able to experiment, be creative. The City always goes with the safe option, like Good Shepard. Good Shepard does really great things, but there could have been so much more in that space. Give us the building and we'll figure out what to do with it. We'll never get the space otherwise.
- Space is a huge problem for Cora, and so many other organizations. We can't reach our full potential.

5. How can the arts play a role in building alliances and engaging in advocacy?

- People in the neighborhood are tired. So many things are happening they have no control over, it feels like we're fighting a losing battle. There's constant meetings and nothing comes of them.
- The community is still dealing with the repercussions of Sandy.
- This generation probably can't be the ones to do the work, but the next generation can, they can win the fight. But they need to be educated.
- There is no coalition of arts and cultural groups in the neighborhood. We're all just so busy, but we should have a coalition, because we don't all know what each other are doing.

- Activities will be planned and it turns out there are other things going on at the same time. Sometimes that can be great, but other times not.
- There has to be something – electronic or billboards, other vehicles, where everything can be listed and be aware of what’s going on.
- There is the Hub – the community got a grant to have an online and analog site for a calendar of events; people can self-post. But it hasn’t been maintained or publicized enough. It’s a great idea but hasn’t been used enough.
- There should be an arts and cultural ambassador. Everyone gets meeting burnout.
 - There is the Red Hook Resiliency organization; it’s a group dealing with a lot of projects. It’s not specifically for the arts, but it can be inclusive. They want more participants.
 - The City should help bring people together. There needs to be a way to promote within the community and outward as well.
 - They need a person who is dedicated to doing this kind of work. People are already overstretched; they need someone who can do this without other jobs. This needs all their attention.
 - A lot of plans were destroyed when Sandy happened. But how do you find someone to pay for this position?
 - A full-time job, in every City Council member’s office to help build coalitions? Can everyone – nonprofits, businesses, residents – come together and apply for grants to raise the funds, and then not be reliant on the City bringing in someone from the outside. It should be capacitated by the city, but run by a community-based person, as not to be impacted by political shifts.

6. Special Populations

- Senior centers aren’t served well. There aren’t enough spaces for seniors to have arts access.
- Everything needs to be age friendly, not just senior centers. What are the barriers to access for seniors and people with disabilities.
- And need to be mindful of people with language barriers. There’s a large Spanish-speaking population.
- PS 15 offers Spanish classes for adults
- What about intergenerational arts activities?
 - There are opportunities but no institutions. Maybe students should be given school credit if they volunteer with seniors. This would help develop respect for elders.
 - Kentler and Dance Theatre, Etc. both have activities for seniors, but it requires a lot of outreach and support.
 - There’s also a big divide between English and Spanish-speaking seniors.

7. Arts, Culture and Resiliency

- A community organizer and activist ran the JA (?) Foundation. After Sandy she had a Hurricane Sandy dance. It provided a forum for relief and a way for people to meet. It was a free event but they lost permission to do it again. It would be nice to have that back.

8. Community Space Post-Sandy

- There's a new school, supposedly has a lot of space, but there hasn't been much happening with that. Some potential involvement with the Red Hook Justice Center. Hopefully the space will be accessible, but it's up to us to push them. BASIS (?)
- MICCIO – community center in NYCHA
- Heavy emphasis: The level of bureaucracy at DYCD to do programming is outrageously difficult.
 - There's a new Commissioner and we need to start calling him, speak to our City Council representative, to try and make the process easier.
 - They also don't care about the quality of the teachers, just that they've filled out the paperwork.
- Kentler was lucky that they only had flooding in their basement so were able to have programming after Sandy. People did come.