



Action Plan for Enhanced Waterfront Park Management

August 1, 2007

Background

The Rockaway Peninsula is seven miles of open waterfront; making it New York City's longest public beach. But issues over lack of lifeguards, public education, swim/water safety and maintenance along the Rockaway shoreline have prompted concern amongst the community that there is a need for a conservancy/trust to establish better management practice for the entire Rockaway waterfront.

The Rockaway waterfront is presently managed and operated under the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. But due to lack of funding, there is little consistency along the entire stretch of the Rockaway Peninsula.

- Beaches are regularly closed and access to the waterfront blocked.
- Illegal dumping of trash is a constant and rarely are offenders fined for these offenses.
- Specific areas are generously supplied with trash cans, lifeguards and clean beaches, while most of the Rockaways are left with long stretches of blocked public beach access, no public facilities and entire communities with little more than the view of the waterfront.

There is a clear need for a community-led conservancy trust that would keep a watchful eye on protecting the public rights and raising funds to ensure the entire Rockaway Peninsula has adequate public safety, maintenance, and public programming.

The planning and development of the Rockaway Waterfront Park as a public park is a matter of state concern and in the interest of the people of the state. It would enhance the ability of New Yorkers to enjoy and protect the NYC shoreline, one of the state's great natural resources; promote the health, safety and welfare of the people of the state; help alleviate the blighted, and dangerous conditions that characterize much of the area; and stimulate the local Rockaway economy.

Action Plan

The Rockaway Waterfront Alliance (RWA) has reached out to the local community, park officials and water safety personnel to gather input for a plan of action for improving the present maintenance, operations and programming along the Atlantic Ocean side of the Rockaway Peninsula.

This plan has recommendations, prioritized by need, as well as short-time vs. long-term achievement, and could be used to improve present conditions along the waterfront and/or as guidelines for legislation required to establish a conservancy/trust to oversee the Rockaway Waterfront.

Recommendations

1. Public Access

- Maintain all public walkways/ramps open to the public all year long.
- Remove all BEACH CLOSED signs.
- Establish NYC Legislation for “swim at your own risk” liability, making the public responsible for their actions and allowing more people to enjoy their public beaches.

2. Water Safety

- Distribute water safety information to the public through the NYC Parks Department website, public school programs and lifeguards; including information on NYC public swim programs and lifeguard training.
- Create American Red Cross water safety incentive program in NYC public schools requiring all students to view ARC video materials.
- Establish basic water safety program on NYC public beaches to get basic emergency water safety information to the local population through lifeguards or designated Parks officers.

3. Parks Enforcement Patrol Officers (PEP)

- Require all PEP employees to receive ARC training; putting more educated, trained staff on our beaches.
- Require all PEP employees to patrol by bicycle for easier mobility and more active security along the boardwalk.

4. Maintenance & Operations

- Require all public pathways be clear of obstacles to the waterfront.
- Require trash cans along boardwalk at all public pathways.
- Give fines for illegal dumping of trash, or construction debris on public waterfront.
- Establish volunteer certificate programs in horticulture, carpentry, boardwalk repair, welding, machinery, and stewardship within the community to establish a core group of volunteers within the community to work under a certified Parks employee; in order to identify valuable personnel for future staff positions and to establish community stewardship in people from a broad mix of ages and skill level.

5. Lifeguards

- Address the NYC Dept of Health on regulations for number of lifeguards required per chair/every 100'. Establish specific regulation for appropriate open water/beach coverage.
- Require public documentation of people who have gone through lifeguard training, test results and positions they have been offered to ensure fairness.
- Require all NYC lifeguards to be trained under USLA regulations; requiring open water training. (Presently NYC lifeguards are only trained in pools). Will also create more competitive swimmers and friendly competition for NYC lifeguards with other local beaches.
- Review census/population documents to require lifeguards be posted in correlation to population specific to an adjacent beach, to ensure more populated areas receive an appropriate number of lifeguards.
- Encourage lifeguards to inform the public about rip tides, water safety and concerns surrounding the waterfront and to report dangerous situations to their superiors in order to improve community relations.
- Establish consistent green and red flag system on beaches to distinguish swim beaches from non-swimming beaches and to conserve on lifeguard posts and allow better use of limited lifeguard personnel.
- Establish part-time lifeguard program to supplement the limited full-time lifeguard staff on weekends when public attendance is at it's peak.
- Equip all lifeguard stations with defibrillators, and flags to indicate water conditions and chalk boards indicating water/air temperature for public safety.
- Establish jr. program for young recruits to work in tandem with established lifeguards to improve their skills directly on beach. For recruits under 16 this gives them incentive to train for future years and gain valuable experience under the supervision of experienced lifeguards.
- Publicly document locations recruited for lifeguards. Thousands of students come to NYC to study and each summer there are hundreds of trained swimmers who spend their summers in NYC and need jobs. We are losing out on a large number of new recruits if we are not recruiting at these universities and high schools and publicly documenting this information will help to ensure all NYC schools are getting the appropriate information about the NYC lifeguard training program in time to test for the summer.

6. Public Swim Program

- Establish incentive program with ARC to ensure all NYC public schools and the NYC community receive valuable ARC water safety information.
- Establish program for the public to learn to swim from certified swim instructors directly off the beach.

7. Junior Ranger Program

- Establish a training certificate course for young adults and community members to learn about water testing, indigenous plant and wildlife identification and environmental education program under the Urban Parks Ranger Program. These people could qualify for jobs each summer as monitors for the piping plover preserve and other programs presently being established with the Urban Rangers in the Rockaway Peninsula.

In Closing

The shoreline of the Rockaway Peninsula is regulated under the New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program (WRP) which is developed and approved by New York State Department of State with Congressional funding to implement the Coastal Zone Management Act. The WRP establishes a priority with the public's right of access to the beach and foreshore and navigable waters that include the Atlantic Ocean.

New York City's Waterfront Revitalization Program is the primary responsibility for implementing the States Coastal Policies and NYC Department of City Planning, acting as the City Coastal Commission, responsible for enforcing the coastal policies along with NYC Parks Department.

Under this program, the public is encouraged to participate in their waterfront through conservation efforts, education and recreation. The Rockaway Waterfront Alliance works to protect these rights through programs in the local community and the public schools.

Our hope is that these recommendations will be useful in strategizing with the local Rockaway community, New York City, and State agencies to draft legislation essential to public safety and better public use of the Rockaway waterfront.

To support this action plan and give input, please email: info@rwalliance.org