

NYCEDC Citywide Ferry Service DEIS: Comments

The comments below relate to the Draft Scope of Work provided by NYCEDC in September 2015 and the public scoping meeting held at Brooklyn Borough Hall on September 28, 2015.

NYCEDC's presentation and testimony offered by community members and Red Hook residents in particular raise pressing questions about Citywide Ferry Service, which extends new routes to underserved waterfront neighborhoods. This process involves constructing new ferry landings along the East River, at sites which appear to be predetermined, rather than proposed. If the sites are indeed final, this should be clarified to the public, and presented as such.

Communities like Red Hook, the Rockaways and the Lower East Side have devoted time and effort to advocating for ferry service and researching suitable sites. Post-facto public engagement invalidates community input and agency in Citywide Ferry Service. This appears to be a direct result of the plan's aggressive implementation schedule, with its accelerated phasing of new stops and routes. This schedule is unprecedented in New York City's postwar history of ferry service and in many ways, contrary to NYCEDC's generally conservative approach to water mass transit.

Though ferry service is sorely needed in several communities, NYCEDC's selected sites present a number of issues that have not received sufficient attention or response. These are especially pronounced in Southwest Brooklyn and Red Hook, where NYCEDC has focused on Beard Street Warehouses and Valentino Park. These sites were deemed unviable by residents, who made impassioned and convincing arguments in favor of Atlantic Basin on September 28.

NYCEDC has shied away from Atlantic Basin, which is a politically complex site for the agency. Its viability is likely to remain contested. However, the city would do well to consider Red Hook's stance on Atlantic Basin vis-à-vis the Beard Street and Valentino Park sites. As the agency has shown in its citywide ferry studies, demand for water mass transit is driven by local markets. However, markets vary with geography, which is why a well-chosen location is essential to successful ferry service. Red Hook residents who testified on September 28 are NYCEDC's target ridership. If they are unable or unwilling to support the city's landing sites, the new ferry service will not succeed. This prompts the question of why the city would advocate millions of dollars for ferry service unlikely to generate significant ridership. Such a position would have been unthinkable several years ago in Sunset Park or the Rockaways.

In sum, I urge you to consider community input on the proposed landings and allow latitude and opportunity for joint determination of final sites. The ultimate goal of Citywide Ferry Service should be sustained success. It is worthwhile to pause the implementation process to facilitate careful planning that will help attain this result for the city and ferry communities.