

October 18, 2017

The New York City Council  
Committee on Waterfronts  
Deborah L. Rose, Chair  
Via email

re: Oversight - The Economic Impact of NYC Ferry and the New Ferry Transport Routes 10/19/2017

Dear Honorable Councilmembers:

Thank you for holding a hearing on this important topic.

Since its founding in 2005, PortSide New York has advocated for ferry services. PortSide is a maritime non-profit located in Red Hook, Brooklyn, within shouting distance of the new NYC Ferry dock there. Our offices are based on the historic ship MARY A. WHALEN in Atlantic Basin, where our crew observes the ferry and even communicates with passengers and boat crew over the water.

The following testimony is based on our extensive experience working with NYC Ferry staff, close observation of the ferry, our community outreach, and use of the service by crew, board members, and visitors. PortSide also held an event to celebrate the first day of Red Hook ferry service to raise awareness of the service.

In brief, NYC Ferry is a tremendous asset for direct and indirect economic development. The NYC shoreside staff and boat crew are responsive and community oriented. The ride goes beyond transportation, delivering joy, fun and educational experiences. There is room for improvement in marketing the ferry to NYCHA residents, promoting destinations on the ferry docks, and managing routes that are oversubscribed. We offer suggestions for such fixes and observations below.

### **Benefits of Ferry Landing in Red Hook**

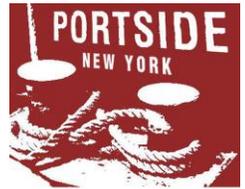
Note: PortSide is part of the effort to revive the B71 bus, and recommend moving the route a few blocks south for an easy connection to the ferry.

The ferry landing in Red Hook increases options in the transportation desert of Red Hook. We thank the EDC for responding to community demands to site the Red Hook ferry dock at Atlantic Basin rather than other locations the EDC proposed.

Here are some examples of its positive impact beyond the usual discussion of commuter service:

- People have moved to Red Hook since they can now commute to downtown Manhattan.

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- The dock is a resiliency asset that can serve multiple uses for special events and situations. A FDNY boat used it to get to the Secret Service, based yards from the ferry dock, to work on security planning for the UN General Assembly. A Miller's Launch boat picked up planners going on an EDC RFP site visit. It was an amenity during Formula E. It will continue to be an amenity in emergencies.
- NYC Ferry is using the Atlantic Basin as a site for captains to train on boat handling and docking because the site is protected water with little current. We have seen 2-4 boats at a time training there, whereas the EDC had resisted having a dock here saying that using the basin was going to slow ferry times.
- Promoting education is indirect economic development.
  - PortSide has used the ferry as an educational amenity. We gave our summer interns an intermodal harbor tour, using NYC Ferry and Citi Bike to get from Red Hook to a harbor tour on the retired fireboat JOHN J. HARVEY, which left from Chelsea in Manhattan. We expect school groups to come to us by ferry. Many schools come to our programs from outside Red Hook.
  - We often see groups (tours, classes, students) coming off the ferry.
  - We expect Red Hook elementary schools will be able to increase their field trips out of the neighborhood thanks to the ferry. Previously, such field trips were limited because the low-income community could not afford to hire buses for the little kids, and the neighborhood has no subway.
- The ferry improves our own operations in many ways. PortSide staff commute on the ferry. We now go to business meetings in Manhattan using the ferry, saving time and cost. We were able to move board meetings from midtown offices to our ship because the commute to Red Hook became more reasonable thanks to the ferry. We have shopped for event supplies by going to Manhattan. People attend our programs because they can see activity on our ship (though signage on the dock would help) See this blogpost: <http://portsidenewyork.org/portsidetanke/2017/6/8/do-you-have-any-slovenians>

### What needs improvement:

- **Marketing to NYCHA residents.** We propose that the EDC and NYCHA create a mailing that goes directly to all NYCHA residents. The ferry was often touted as making commuting easier for NYCHA residents. Mayor de Blasio even introduced Lillie Marshall, President of NYCHA Red Hook Houses West on the Red Hook dock during the launch event. However, based on our observation of the dock and community outreach, few NYCHA residents are commuting by ferry and few NYCHA residents that we have spoken to even know the ferry exists.
- **Destination Marketing on the dock.** We propose that our Red Hook WaterStories map and guide be placed on the Red Hook NYC Ferry dock and that PortSide NewYork, an EDC subtenant and attraction on site, be included on any map that the EDC selects.
  - PortSide has a close working relationship with the marketing and community relations staff of NYC Ferry. They like and promote our shipboard programs and our e-museum and guide to contemporary Red Hook at

[www.redhookwaterstories.org](http://www.redhookwaterstories.org) (RHWS). They are working to include RHWS in their app. However, they do not control the signage and map on the docks themselves; those are controlled by the EDC, which is not as responsive. The EDC chose a DOT map from the WalkNYC program that has almost no information about Red Hook (we hear the same is true for the Rockaways). PortSide is not even listed on that map! We want to be on the map, and Red Hook businesses and advocates want the neighborhood and retail corridor promoted. PortSide struggles to convey to NYC Ferry passengers that our old oil tanker IS a public access vessel. If we were in a park, people would presume we were public access. Atlantic Basin is an industrial area, and since there are no other oil tankers in NYC (or the world) open to the public, people don't presume that our MARY A. WHALEN is a ship they can board.

- **Improve Brooklyn access to Rockaways beach service.** Next summer, some of the Rockaways weekend ferries should start in Brooklyn, to ensure that Brooklyn beachgoers have a better chance of using this service. The beach ferries to the Rockaways are a splendid amenity for all who take them, and support economic development in the Rockaways. Manhattan, however, is overly privileged with this service. Although NYC Ferry was touted as an amenity to transit-starved neighborhoods, those communities in Brooklyn have a hard time getting on the beach boats -- they fill up at Wall Street, and tickets are not sold in advance (unlike trains or buses) for a specific vessel or journey.
- **Provide better alerts about wait time and length of line.** During the first month of Red Hook service, NYC Ferry staff were on the dock, and could be asked "is there a line at Wall Street?" Once they left, there were no means to know if the Wall Street line was already hopelessly long for getting to the beach within two hours. The wait to leave Rockaways can also be over two hours long, so adding capacity or providing an update system on the dock would improve the situation.

### **Praise for Hornblower as Ferry Operator**

We have found NYC Ferry a receptive and engaged community partner:

- NYC Ferry has been actively promoting neighborhood events near ferry landings, including their own promotion of Open House New York sites on the various ferry routes and promotion of all our summer events.
- We applaud NYC Ferry for hiring a diverse workforce. We see many women and people of color working on the boats and docks, whereas the NYC maritime workforce elsewhere is often extraordinarily white and male.
- NYC Ferry is responsive when extraordinary circumstances arrive, when we call in such a circumstance, when special events are being planned, or when emergencies arise. PortSide was contacted by a responder group during the fire aboard the JEWEL in September. When we called NYC Ferry for assistance they were on the case and receptive to our call. NYC Ferry added boats when the cruise ship AURORA was delayed in Red Hook the weekend of September 9-10, 2017 due to hurricanes down south as the cruise ship passengers queued up to visit Manhattan.

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- NYC Ferry boat crew are helpful and often offer great customer service. We hear announcements such as “the wallet you forgot at Wall Street will be on the next ferry.” “We have a runner” and the boat then waits a minute to get that passenger.

PortSide will continue to work with, and observe, our neighbors at NYC Ferry, and remain ready and willing to share our experience with you.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carolina Salguero', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Carolina Salguero  
Director