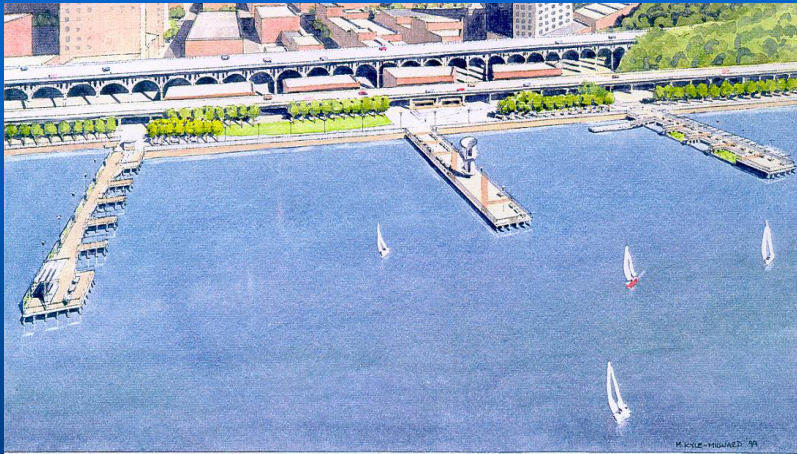


Harlem on The River: *Making a Community Vision Real*



Presented to EPA Urban Waters National Workshop

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WE ACT for Environmental Justice



www.weact.org

WE ACT for Environmental Justice

Our Mission

- WE ACT for Environmental Justice (West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc.) is
- a non-profit, community-based, environmental justice organization
- dedicated to building community power to fight environmental racism and
- improve environmental health, protection and policy in communities of color and low-income.
- WE ACT accomplishes this mission through community organizing, education and training, advocacy and research, and public policy development.



WE ACT Indicators of Healthy *Northern Manhattan Community*

1. Clean Air Quality
2. Healthy Indoor Environments
3. Sustainable Land Use
4. Appropriate and Sanitary Waste Management
5. Reduced Access & Use of Toxic Products
6. Access to Good Food in Schools
7. Public Mobility: safe, clean, affordable
8. Creation and Use of Open and Green Space

Profile of Northern Manhattan

- 7.4 sq. miles, over 600,000 people
- 86% African-American and Latino
- \$16,000 median household income
- Excess mortality: asthma, cancer heart disease, learning disabilities
- Multiple environmental exposures
- Non-attainment area for clean air
- Ranked #1 in Cancer Risk from Air Toxics by EPA
- Highest asthma rates in nation



Environmental Health

P E R S P E C T I V E S

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PAGES A431-A482 & 915-1006



**China's Environmental
Health Challenge**

**Do Genes Predispose
You to Lead Poisoning**

**More Health Risks
from Phthalates**

Harlem on The River:

How a Community-Driven Process Created Access to the Hudson River Waterfront in West Harlem

We will review:

- The history of the Harlem Piers Area and the area's decline
- The broader community context
- Proposals that predated our community-driven process
- The Harlem on The River project timeline
- The elements of our process and vital statistics about the park
- Challenges we encountered along the way
- Elements of our process
- Challenges we encountered along the way

Harlem on The River:

A Look Back in Time



- The Harlem Piers area was first developed in the early 1900s with the arrival of the IRT and IND subway lines, and resulting residential and commercial development. Large warehouses and businesses utilized the piers between 131st and 133rd streets.



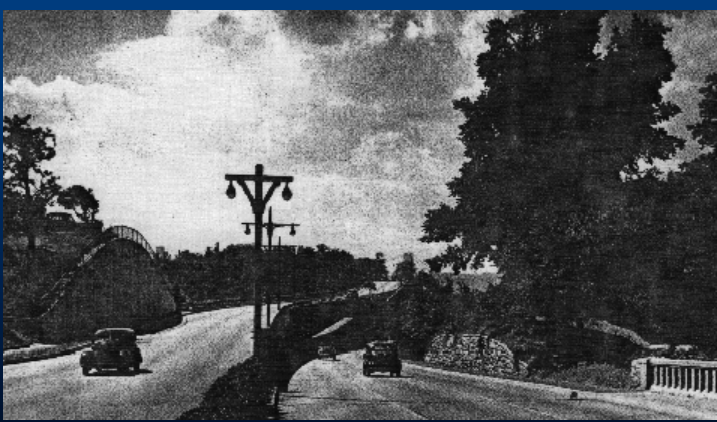
Harlem on The River:

A Rail Line Provided Freight Service...



- The rail line between Riverside Drive and Marginal St. — presently used by Amtrak— provided freight service to the piers, including the various meatpacking operations located in the area. A section of the piers was used as a recreational venue and the Palisades Ferry and other Hudson River excursion boats used the piers as their termini.

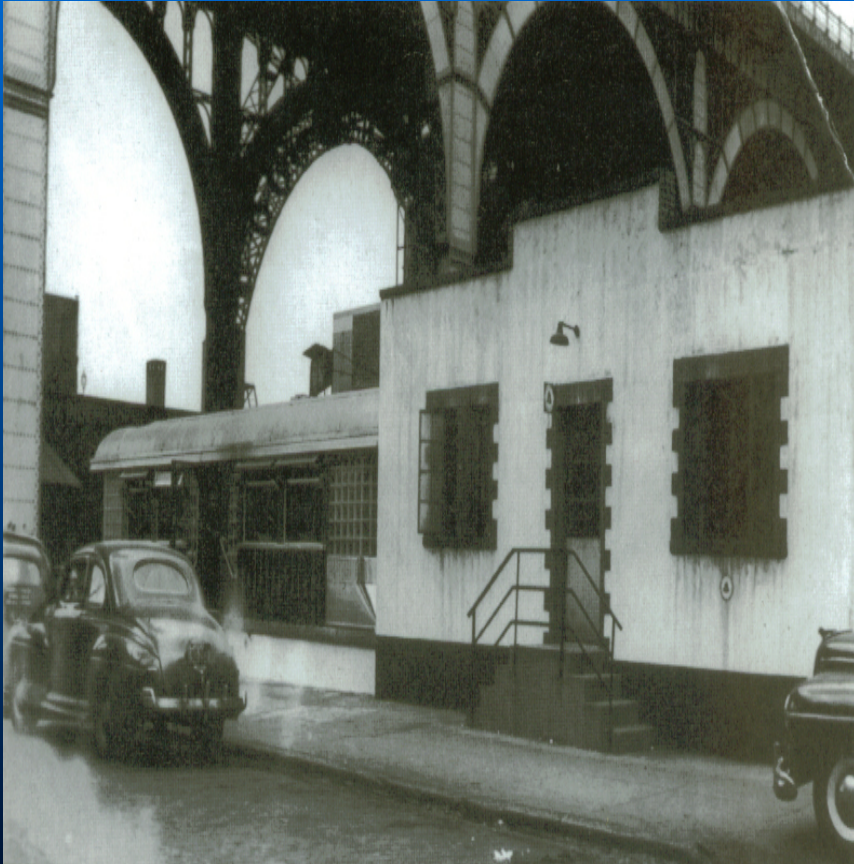
Harlem on The River: *Rail and Ferry Service Phased Out*



- By the 1930's and 40's the construction of the George Washington Bridge and the Henry Hudson Parkway led to the demise of both ferry and rail service in the Harlem Piers area.

Harlem on The River:

Decline, Deterioration and Demolition



- By the 1950's the new, elevated parkway isolated the riverfront from the neighborhoods above. The neighboring industrial businesses were relocated, and the piers themselves were allowed to deteriorate in the absence of any ferry service. Eventually the recreational pier was demolished in the late 1950's.

Harlem on The River:

Decline, Deterioration and Demolition



- The 1970's and 80's brought still more decline and deterioration. The bulkhead was neglected for many years and ultimately began to crumble into the Hudson River in the 1980's. This exposed many residents to dangerous gaping holes in the paved surface.



Harlem on The River:

A Quality Market Comes To West Harlem

- In the 1990's Fairway Market opened their Harlem store in the Harlem Piers area providing quality fresh food, jobs, and a parking lot on the waterfront.



Harlem on The River: *Environmental Injustice*



- In 1955 the City opened the 135th Street Garbage Marine Transfer Station (MTS) to receive garbage from Northern Manhattan communities and public institutions. The MTS sits at the northern end of the West Harlem Piers Park.
- In 1988 the Metropolitan Transportation Authority opened the Manhattanville diesel bus depot. The depot is one block east of the park.



Harlem on The River:

Catalyst for WE ACT's Formation



- Also in 1988 the City built and opened the North River Sewage Treatment Plant with the capacity to treat 170 million gallons of raw sewage daily. The treatment shed for the plant extends north to Riverdale in the Bronx and South to Tribeca in Manhattan. The plant is just north of the West Harlem Piers Park.

Harlem on The River:

Proposals Before Harlem on The River

As the Harlem Piers fell into decline the area became a magnet for several development proposals including:

- A proposal to relocate the back offices and support services for the garment district and the fashion industry in Manhattan.
- “Harlem on the Hudson,” a proposal to build luxury market-rate condos and a marina with berths for yachts. This proposal started to go through its environmental review in 1989 at a time when the median income of Harlem residents was not even \$20,000.

Harlem on The River:

Burdens But No Benefits



- In the 90's both New York City and State made multi-million dollar investments in the creation of the Hudson River Park. This park stretched from 59th Street to the southern tip of Manhattan. It also allowed for upgrades to Riverside Park south of the Harlem Piers, but no green amenities were being planned for the Harlem waterfront.

Harlem on The River:

Parking Lot For Harlem's Waterfront



- While green space and waterfront access were being planned for the more affluent predominantly white communities on the Upper West Side and in lower Manhattan, the New York City Economic Development Corp. (EDC) was contemplating a renewal of Fairway's lease for the parking lot on the Harlem waterfront.

Harlem on The River:

New Proposal With No Community Input



- The EDC released an RFP for developers to submit proposals for the redevelopment of the Harlem Piers as a commercial development project. In response, developers proposed a variety of projects including a hotel.

Harlem on The River: Timeline

WE ACT Gets Grant For Community Vision Plan



■ Fall 1998/Winter 1999

WE ACT was awarded a U.S. Department of Energy grant of \$35,000 for communities within empowerment zones to engage the community in a visioning process.

A partnership was forged with Community Board 9 (CB 9).



WE ACT hired urban planner Mitchell Silver, of Abeles Phillips Preiss & Shapiro Systematics, Inc. and Thomas Balsley, of Thomas Balsley Associates, landscape architects.

Harlem on The River:

Timeline for Community Change

■ Fall 1998/Winter 1999

- WE ACT and CB 9 developed goals and objectives, project timeline, and a steering committee.
- Steering committee meetings were held bimonthly.
- Sponsors organized the first community meeting to include a variety of area stakeholders and residents.
- WE ACT mailed a brochure about the project to recruit residents to participate; 200 residents responded agreeing to join the process.



Harlem on The River:

Timeline for Community Change



- Winter/Spring 1999
 - The first community meeting was held drawing 200 residents, elected officials, and the New York City Parks Commissioner.
 - Additional residents and other stakeholders volunteered to join the steering committee.
 - A community design workshop, or charrette, was planned.

Harlem on The River:

Timeline for Community Change



- Winter/Spring 1999
 - Design professionals and environmental protection specialists were recruited to work with WE ACT staff to develop a handbook for distribution at the charrette.
 - Two hundred people participated in a six-hour charrette held at City College.
 - WE ACT recruited members by attending local churches, tenant association meetings, and direct outreach to residents while at the piers.

Harlem on The River:

Timeline for Community Change



■ Spring 1999

- The ten designs created at the charrette were reviewed by the steering committee. There were seven common elements among all of them.
- These elements served as the framework to draft a composite plan.
- Project design consultants created a draft composite plan by incorporating teams' ideas onto one map.

Harlem on The River:

Timeline for Community Change



■ Spring 1999

- A town meeting was held at Columbia University to present the composite plan to the steering committee, planning teams, and residents for comment.
- This community vision was submitted to the NYC Economic Development Corp. (EDC).



Harlem on The River:

Timeline for Community Change



■ Fall 1999/Winter 2000

- Efforts to mobilize political and civic support began.
- Accountability sessions were held to garner support for the Harlem-on-the-River plan over any other plans that may be in the works.
- Meetings were held with elected officials to gain their support.

Harlem on The River:

Timeline for Community Change



■ Fall 1999/Winter 2000

- Harlem-on-the-River was promoted through presentations, radio shows, meetings with civic organizations, and press releases to the media.
- A celebration was held at Riverbank State Park where the final design and financial concepts were unveiled. An exhibit featuring the ten original designs and photos from the charrette were displayed.

Harlem on The River:

Timeline for Community Change



■ Winter 2000

- The EDC announced that it was scrapping their original RFP and would develop a master plan based on the Harlem-on-the-River community plan.
- WE ACT assisted EDC in developing membership on its West Harlem working group, which advised the Master Plan process. The working group included residents, elected officials, other stakeholders, and government representatives.

Harlem on The River:

Timeline for Community Change



- Spring/Summer 2000
 - West Harlem Working Group met four times to advise the planning process
- Winter 2001
 - Master Plan was presented to CB 9
 - A new Mayor took office.
- Fall 2002
 - EDC announced the beginning of design process.

Harlem on The River: *Ribbon-Cutting At Last*



- Fall 2006
 - Ground breaking and construction began.
- January 2009 West Harlem Piers Park was completed.
- May 30th 2009 Ribbon Cutting and park opening

Harlem on The River:

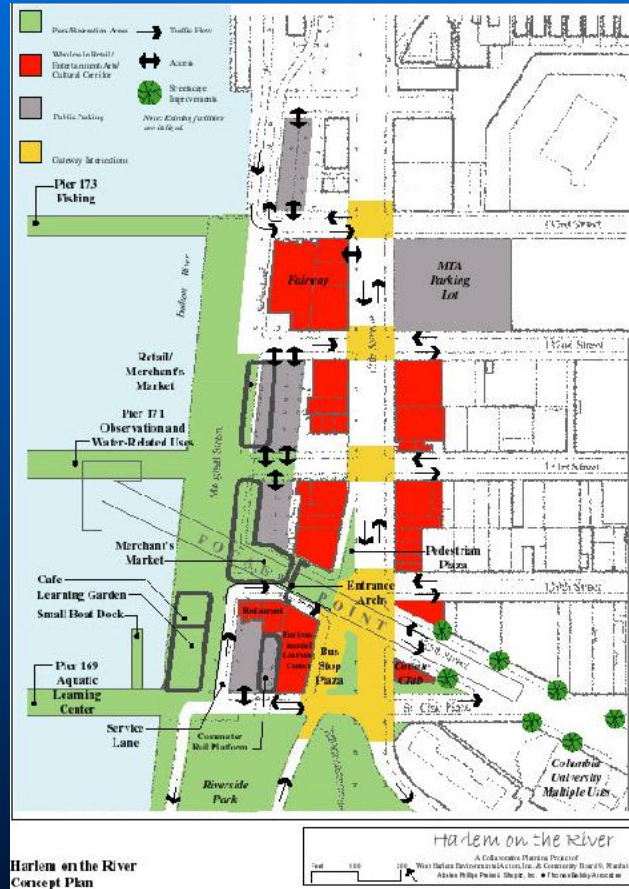
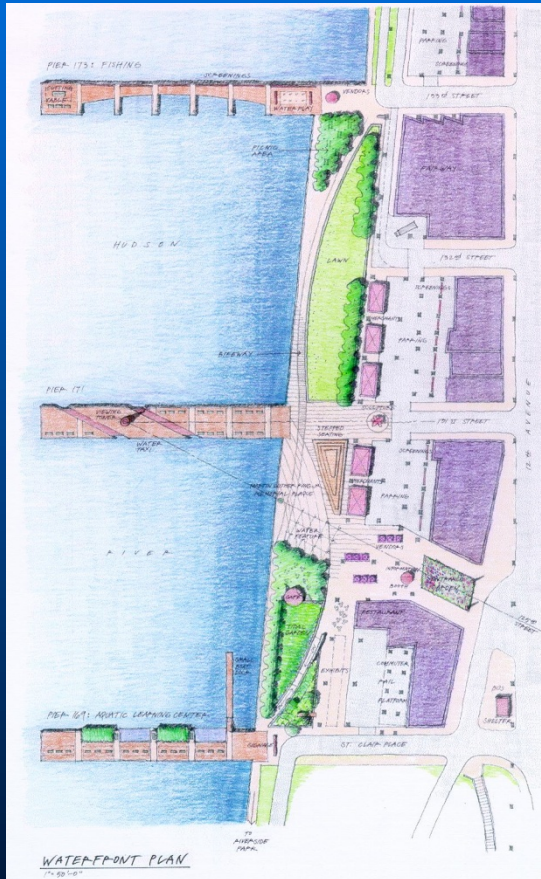
Summarizing the Elements



- Community Meeting
- Community Design Charrette/Workshop
- Concept Plan
- Implementation Strategy
- Final Community Meeting
- Community Exhibition & Celebration

Harlem on The River:

Developing a Community Vision



Harlem on The River:

Vital Statistics



- From the start of the community visioning process to the park's completion it took 10 years. (Jan 1999 – Jan 2009)
- \$20 Million in construction costs from the City, State and Federal Govt's, the Port Authority of NY & NJ, the NY City Council and the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone.

Harlem on The River:



- The former parking lot is now a two-acre park with landscaped green spaces, a water feature, pedestrian paths and vistas of the Hudson River.
- Marginal Way was narrowed to increase the park size by 25%.

Harlem on The River:



- The park created the first new piers in the area in more than 40 years.
- The new pier amenities consist of:
 - A recreational/fishing pier
 - A kayak launch
 - A pier designated for excursion boats

Harlem on The River:



- The West Harlem Piers Park closed a gap in the Hudson River Greenway on the West Side of Manhattan and allowed the bicycle and pedestrian paths to link the Harlem waterfront with other riverside parkland.

Harlem on The River: *Celebration*



- The park created new space in the community to celebrate the arts. At the ribbon cutting ceremony the Dance Theatre of Harlem performed.
- The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Percent for Art program made it possible for local artist Nari Ward's work to be displayed throughout the park.

Harlem on The River:

Vital Statistics



- By removing the black top of the former parking lot we increased the permeability by 35%.
- Materials were reused to reduce waste, for example, granite from the bulkhead was used to create the benches in the park.
- The blue lights on the piers are solar powered.
- As mitigation for the new piers, reef balls were submerged to improve marine habitat.

Harlem on The River:

Troubled Waters of the Past



Riding the waters to success was not always smooth sailing. Along the way we encountered some currents that tried to stop our forward motion. They included:

- Navigating City and State politics when the Mayor and the Governor didn't get along
- Dealing with the good old boy network uptown
- Confronting the NYC development paradigm, which excluded the community voice



Harlem on The River:

From Vision to Reality



- Thank you and for more information visit our website at www.weact.org where you can learn more about our work.