

**Testimony of the Trust for Governors Island
Delivered by President and CEO Clare Newman**

Before

**The New York City Council Committee on Resiliency and Waterfronts
and**

The New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

December 9, 2019

Chairman Brannan, Chairman Koo and fellow council members, thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of The Trust for Governors Island. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to share an update on the Island's tremendous progress to date as an extraordinary resource for New York City. I look forward to working with all of you as we continue to transform Governors Island into a vibrant place that's accessible to New Yorkers 24/7, 365.

The Governors Island Corporation, doing business as The Trust for Governors Island, is the 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization created by the City of New York and charged with the planning, redevelopment, and ongoing operations of 150 acres of Governors Island. The Trust's mission is to transform Governors Island into a vibrant resource for New York City, making the Island a destination with extraordinary public open space, as well as educational, not-for-profit, and commercial facilities.

Located at the center of New York Harbor, the Island has long held an important role in New York City's history. The Island originally served as a hunting and fishing camp for the Lenape, and later was occupied by Dutch and British settlers. For nearly two centuries starting during the revolutionary war period, the Island operated as a strategic, mostly administrative military base, first for the U.S. Army, and later, the US Coast Guard, which had over 3,000 military personnel and their families living on the Island, until 1996 when it ceased operations. Twenty-two acres were later designated as the Governors Island National Monument, managed by the National Park Service with the remaining 150 acres sold to New York for \$1. When the federal government transferred the Island to local control, it required open spaces accessible to the public and educational uses, with arts and culture, recreation and entertainment, hospitality, retail and commercial permitted, as well as short-term accommodations and extended stays associated with all permitted uses. The deed prohibits casinos, industrial, parking and power generation for use off-Island, and residences not associated with permitted uses.

The Trust for Governors Island today owns, operates and maintains 150 acres of the Island, and is responsible for 1.5M SF of historic buildings on the North Island, over 120 acres of open space including its newly constructed park, and 33 acres of development area on the South Island.

Thanks to a decade of investment, planning and commitment from the City of New York, Governors Island has been transformed into an extraordinary, vibrant resource for all New Yorkers. Over the past decade, the City has invested over \$300M in creating a Park and Public Space Master Plan, building 43 acres of new park space completed in July, 2016, while readying the Island for year-round

access with infrastructure improvements and expanded transportation. Looking ahead, Governors Island is poised for growth as a year-round public place for learning, innovation, arts and culture with one of the city's most unique open spaces.

Expanding Access and Welcoming New Yorkers

Opening to the public for the first time in 2004 for select summer weekends, the Island has expanded to a 6-month public season, open every day from May 1-October 31. The Island has welcomed over 6M people since its first public season, with 750,000 visitors during the 2019 season alone and an average 12% increase year over year. The Island attracts a uniquely diverse local audience – 80% of visitors come from the 5 boroughs, with 90% of New York City zip codes represented.

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govisland.org

The Island is accessible by ferry daily from Lower Manhattan during the season and on weekends from Brooklyn Bridge Park Pier 6. Ferries are \$3 roundtrip, \$1 for seniors and free at all times for IDNYC holders, children under 12 and military personnel. All ferries are free before noon on weekends. Additionally, Governors Island is accessible via NYC Ferry through a shuttle from Wall St/Pier 11. This season, ferry service expanded to Governors Island with the delivery of the Governors 1, a new 400-passenger vessel owned and operated by the Trust. Service on weekends increased to every 20 minutes between Lower Manhattan and Governors Island.

The Trust anticipates expanding service in the future and is currently in the process of designing new ferries as part of a \$31M capital project to replace the Coursen, the Trust's current passenger and vehicular vessel which is nearing the end of its useful life. In future expansion efforts, the Trust has a desire to prioritize increasing frequency, expanding connectivity and decoupling passenger and freight transportation.

During the public season, the Island is an affordable and accessible destination. Each season visitors enjoy a robust calendar of cultural and educational programs, public art, recreational opportunities and events. In 2019 the Island hosted over 80 events, programs and activities, 70 of which were free. Each season, the Trust opens a call for proposals for use of 150,000 SF of space inside the historic former officer's homes of Nolan Park and Colonels Row, and 25 acres of outdoor space to cultural organizations offering free programming. Highlighted programs include exhibits from the Climate Museum, American Indian Community House, MoCADA, 4heads and the New Art Dealers Alliance, events including Free Outdoor Films presented by Film at Lincoln Center and Japan Performing Arts Festival, environmental learning opportunities from NYC Audubon, GrowNYC, Earth Matter's Compost Learning Center and the Billion Oyster Project, and recreational activities including free bike rentals weekday mornings on the Island's car-free paths and free kayaking with the Downtown Boathouse.

Ensuring that all New Yorkers feel welcomed is a key priority for the Trust. The Trust works with its partners The Friends of Governors Island and the National

Park Service to improve the visitor experience through free tours, welcome centers and informational materials. Additionally, the Trust works closely with local elected officials, community boards, advocacy groups, tenants and cultural partners through the Governors Island Community Advisory Council, who advise on the Island's ongoing initiatives and provide an important link in getting the word out about the Island's public season. Non-English speakers are able to easily navigate the Island as well, with translation options on our website and translations of our maps into Chinese, Spanish and Russian. Thanks to support from Council Member Margaret Chin, we will offer free tours on a brand-new Eco-Shuttle during the 2020 season, which will expand our reach to seniors and persons with disabilities. We look forward to continuing to work with the City Council other partners in broadening our outreach for next season.

A Park Designed with Climate Resilience in Mind

Governors Island is home to a world-class, award-winning park. 43 acres of the Island's southern half have been transformed with rolling hills overlooking New York Harbor, sports fields, play areas, a 6-acre food court, hammocks and permanent public art. The park was completed in two phases between 2014 and 2016, when the Hills, its crowning achievement, opened to the public one year ahead of schedule and under budget. Today, the Trust manages and operates the park, and partners with the Friends of Governors Island through volunteer stewardship projects and fundraising for ongoing maintenance.

West 8, the Dutch landscape architects who released the Island's Park and Public Space Master Plan in 2010, intended every aspect of the park's design to increase the longevity and success of the park despite changing climate conditions in New York City. While the North Island is predominately above the projected 100-year flood plain, the South Island was originally designed as a flat landfill, with a lack of elevation that made it vulnerable to rising sea levels and storm surge. Key design principles included transforming the topography by lifting the land out of the flood plain and plantings out of brackish water, rainwater management, use of diverse, experimental plantings to increase biodiversity in changing climate conditions, and replacing a 100-year old seawall with a riprap revetment more resilient to harsh wave action. During Superstorm Sandy, when the initial fill was placed for the park, the newly elevated topography saw virtually no flooding.

Now open to the public, the Island's park is a model for resilient design and a living classroom for biodiversity and ecology. Future activation of the two development sites adjacent to the park will be designed with equal consideration to the park, demonstrating sustainable urban development practices.

Tenants and Planning

Today, the Island is home to several year-round tenants. At the time of the transfer, the Island was zoned for low-density residential use, in conflict with the requirements and restrictions outlined by the deed. In 2013, the North Island was rezoned as a Special District, allowing for the mix of mix of non-profit, cultural, commercial uses and amenities, primarily for the adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

Currently in its 10th school year on Governors Island, the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School is a 500-student DOE public high school with a Career Technical Education curriculum focused on maritime, marine biology and environmental education. The school operates out of two facilities on the Island, including a laboratory space shared with the Billion Oyster Project Students utilize the Harbor as a classroom, engaging in vessel operations, diving programs, waterfront advocacy and more.

The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council opened its expanded Arts Center at Governors Island on September 19, 2019. The new 44,000 SF facility transforms a former ordnance warehouse into a new center for artists and audiences, with public galleries, a café, 20 open-plan artist studios and rehearsal spaces. Year-round, the Arts Center will operate as an artist residency program, providing free space to over 40 artists annually with galleries free and open to the public during the Island's season.

QC Terme, an 80,000 SF day spa, is currently under construction across three buildings within the Island's Historic District and is expected to open in 2021.

In 2016, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced plans to transform Governors Island into a year-round destination that would bring together educational, commercial, cultural, research and retail uses complementing the Island's existing open spaces, recreational and cultural activity. Plans have progressed, with the City announcing in August 2018 plans to rezone development parcels on the South Island to allow for these uses. The Trust is currently working on articulating a comprehensive vision that will inform future planning, strategy and timeline around the contemplated rezoning, and plans to re-engage community stakeholders in the process in the coming months. A key priority of the Trust is leading all future development with a clear vision that complements the Island's character as a great public place with extraordinary open space, arts and culture. The Trust is currently exploring the Island's potential as a center for climate adaptation research, that brings together education, innovation, policymaking and public engagement, while enhancing the Island as a public resource for all New Yorkers. This is an early step in a longer planning process, which will include broader engagement around a contemplated ULURP for the South Island and, ultimately, a future RFP.

In parallel, The Trust is also continuing to work to activate the Island's historic buildings with a mix of non-profit, cultural, commercial uses and amenities.

This is an exciting time for Governors Island. We're continuing to deliver our mission to expand public access, maintain and enhance our natural and historic resources, deliver amenity and infrastructure improvements, and move towards year-round activation. As we advance the planning process for the Island's next chapter, we look forward to continuing to engage with our stakeholders for input and ensure that Governors Island is a vibrant resource for years to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our progress and work. We welcome any questions the committee may have.

**Public Testimony – Maggie Flanagan, Director of Education and Outreach
December 9, 2019
New York City Council Committee on Resiliency and Waterfronts
Re: Oversight – Governors Island**



Waterfront Alliance is a non-profit civic organization and coalition of more than 1,100 community and recreational groups, educational institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders. Our mission is to inspire and enable resilient, revitalized and accessible coastlines for all communities.

What is the Governors Island Maritime Activation Plan?

In 2018, Waterfront Alliance was engaged by The Trust for Governors Island (The Trust) to produce a Maritime Activation Plan (MAP) examining how The Trust can make the most of its 2.2-mile perimeter and offering practical and creative recommendations for addressing the challenges of an island in New York Harbor and capitalizing on that island's unique waterfront assets. The Governors Island MAP was constructed with input from dozens of the most experienced maritime experts from our region and around the country, along with local stakeholders.

As The Trust moves forward with the transformation of Governors Island into a dynamic, year-round destination, maximizing its waterfront is an important undertaking to support further activation of the park and the potential growth of the Island's commercial zones

Our well researched menu of options to guide policy and support decision-making to best manage and maximize the Island's waterfront includes these priority recommendations to:

- Improve ferry service
- Increase education and recreation on the water
- Build dock infrastructure for freight
- Add waterfront management expertise

What, specifically, does the plan recommend?

- Getting There: expand ferry service to meet growing demand
 - Invest in Yankee Pier and increase ferry services landing there by re-equipping the pier to create more slips that host additional ferry runs. (See Pier 11 or the Midtown W 39 St. terminal for examples.)
 - Explore direct ferry connections to more distant New York docks and to New Jersey.

- **Enjoying Island Life:** enable diverse marine recreational and educational opportunities
 - Add a protected water touch point (a cove or get down) for education and recreation, possibly with a nearby environmental education center. Potential locations include the western shore or picnic point.
 - Continue recreational and educational activities at Piers 101 and 102, including tall ship visits, oyster restoration, and kayaking.
 - Invite more recreational boaters to visit the Island, possibly through a mooring field and town dock on Buttermilk Channel, between Lima Pier and Yankee Pier.

- **Moving the Goods:** freight access requires new infrastructure
 - Rebuild Lima Pier as the Island's "service entrance," handling freight by commercial vessels.

- **Maximizing Management:** boost waterfront expertise and integration
 - Increase necessary upland space and support for waterfront activity such as kayak storage areas and staging areas for service vehicles to meet freight barges.
 - Add one or two internal maritime specialist professionals to The Trust staff to manage and coordinate all waterfront contracts and activity.

What future considerations are emerging?

Governors Island's coastline is the front line for developing models of resilient infrastructure and resilient access on the waterfront, with those goals intrinsic to the guiding 2010 Park and Public Space Master Plan and the recently opened West 8 designed park spaces. Waterfront Alliance's WEDG program (Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines) is an additional, helpful tool to inform best practices for balancing resilience, ecology, and access for all in the complex world of waterfront design.

There are opportunities for existing tenants and new uses that come to the Island to complement and support goals for resilience and access. The Urban Assembly New York Harbor School and Billion Oyster Project are among the current tenants whose programming shares this focus. Future development could seek to establish a Climate Education Hub on Governors Island, actively disseminating the resilient features and practices that are innovated under The Trust's leadership.

Thank you!

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Testimony of Merritt Birnbaum, Executive Director, The Friends of Governors Island Before the New York City Council's Committee on Resiliency and Waterfronts jointly with the Committee on Parks and Recreation

December 9, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of The Friends of Governors Island.

Originally established in 1995 as part of the Regional Plan Association, we advocated for Governors Island to be transferred from the federal government to the people of New York. More recently, we recognized the need for an independent nonprofit that could help support the Island with volunteers and fundraising. In 2014, we received our 501c3 status and are now dedicated to taking care of the park and enhancing the public experience of Governors Island.

We work closely with the Trust for Governors Island to provide the funding and volunteer resources needed to keep the Island's green spaces sustainable, vibrant and healthy. We run a visitor services program focused on providing information, guidance and amenities that enable the public to take full advantage of the Island's unique offerings. And we work to build a community by recruiting and training volunteers, operating a membership program and producing free public events.

With its incomparable views, rich history, dynamic public programs, and progressive approach to environmental sustainability and resiliency, Governors Island is like nowhere else in New York City. It is a place for all New Yorkers – not tied to any one neighborhood or demographic.

Today I would like to give a brief update on our recent activities and organizational growth. In the past five years, since becoming a fully-fledged nonprofit, we have tripled our annual budget to over \$1.8 million in 2019. With this increased capacity, we were able to achieve the following outcomes this year:

- We funded the Island's first year-round team of professional gardeners needed to properly maintain the park.
- We operated two Welcome Centers at the Island's ferry landings, providing daily visitor services, retail amenities and free guided tours.
- We engaged more than 2,400 volunteers, both individuals and corporate groups, who contributed over 14,000 hours of service.
- We produced two major free public events—a spring volunteer festival and a fall pumpkin patch—that drew over 20,000 people from all over the City.
- We held our most successful fundraising Gala to-date, raising over \$1.1 million.

During a time when the Island's seasonal visitorship is at an all-time high, and in keeping with the City's vision to activate the Island as a year-round destination, the Friends work has never been more important. We look forward to continuing to work with the Trust for Governors Island and the City Council to ensure that all New Yorkers can enjoy this unique oasis in our Harbor.



NYC Council Testimony Oversight - Governors Island

Monday, December 9, 2019 at 10:00 A.M. 14th Floor Committee Room 250 Broadway New York, NY

Dear Committee on Resiliency and Waterfronts, and the Committee on Parks and Recreation,
Good Morning. Thank you for hosting this Governors Island oversight meeting, and for inviting Earth Matter NY to submit testimony.

This past season, Earth Matter, in partnership with The Trust of Governors Island, processed 38 tons of food scraps generated by visitors, vendors and events. We take in all of GI's yard trimmings too. This year, our total combined compost processed is 520 tons. This translates into serving 2500 households, preventing what would otherwise be carted far, far away, into landfills, or incinerated. Next year, with the increase of visibility of our joint Zero Waste Island Initiative, which we call ZWI, we anticipate the volume of GI generated food scraps will double.

I'm Marisa DeDominicis, Executive Director of Earth Matter NY. We are a nonprofit dedicated to reducing waste and improving soil health through local composting. We have collaborated with The Trust, formerly GIPEC, since 2009, to develop GI into a regenerative closed loop.

The crux of The Trust's mission is sustainability. Under Clare Newman's leadership of "The Jewel of New York Harbor", they are putting GI on the forefront of helping New Yorkers embrace composting, as a basic way that each of us can recover our own resources, and limit our waste, which mitigates our destructive contributions to climate change.

Since hosting the first ZWI event and setting up the Island's first public source separation stations. The Trust has always embraced our work. Recently, they provided a 3 year land use agreement for our 1 ¼ acres on the Urban Farm, located in the Eastern Development Zone. This agreement provides us the grounding needed to grow funding and partnerships.

Earth Matter, with the help of our chickens, goats, and worms, provides a place for people to get hands on composting and environmental education. We serve over 13,000 people, directly, every year. People need to see, in order to believe, that their food scraps are composted locally. We feel honored to have a home on GI, which allows us to give to, and receive from, all of the people we meet + greet, and are privileged to work with.

ZWI's closed loop isn't just good for the earth, it also creates a circular economy and local jobs. We have graduated over 200 trainees, fostering neighborhood leaders and teaching employable skills to NYC residents.

Our Compost Learning Center is a NYSDEC Registered Compost Facility, supported by the DSNY's NYC Compost Project. We process neighbor food scraps from the GrowNYC Greenmarket drop-off program, also funded by DSNY. As I said earlier, this amount totaled 520 tons in this past year. Where does all of our compost go? Most of it, will go right back onto the GI landscape, where New Yorkers play, and get away.

Composting reduces the direct costs of waste disposal, and its associated carbon footprint. Compost use for soil stabilization, erosion control and nutrient retention is an essential part of any resiliency project involving planting. It reduces the need for fertilizer, and the resulting nutrient run-off into the harbor, which can degrade marine life.

The GI Horticultural staff's focus on planting native species has had a measurable increase in the diversity of bird life; in fact, Governors Island rivals Central Park in this regard. The Trust is on track in doing their part to steward our public land, and identify new partners who can develop the Island as a model for a livable world of tomorrow.

Council Members, we know you share in our dream of a "green" city. I humbly request that you expand all you do, to create policies and incentives, for a more resilient and sustainable NYC. Can you increase funding for education around all things 0X50? Can you increase funding to all NYC Parks, so staff can compost yard trimming and leaves to create their own local compost hubs? These measures would help the "greening" of NYC in a big, big way.

Thank you for your continued support of The Trust's endeavors. And thank you for your time.

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