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COMMENTARY

Op-ed: The benefits – and urgency – of coastal resiliency



Rendering of the North/West Battery Park City Resiliency Project (Battery Park City Authority)

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In recent weeks, New York City has taken another major step toward protecting its coastline from flooding and the accelerating impacts of climate change as construction began on the North/West Battery Park City Resiliency Project. This milestone shows what effective, community-driven climate planning can achieve – and it's a clear signal that the rest of Lower Manhattan must proceed with equal urgency.

Stretching from the top of Wagner Park, north along the Battery Park City Esplanade, crossing to the east side of West Street, and ending above Chambers Street at Greenwich Street, the project will establish a comprehensive coastal flood protection system to protect residents, businesses and critical infrastructure when the next major storm arrives. It will safeguard tens of thousands of New Yorkers, the economic engine of downtown, as well as vital upland assets like the World Trade Center campus.

As chair of the New York City Council's Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Sitings, Resiliency, and Dispositions, I see firsthand how urgently our city must accelerate this work. Climate change is no longer a distant threat. It is here, now. And as the New York League of Conservation Voters has long warned, delay is not an option. We must learn from projects that are working and make their rapid replication a citywide priority.

Severe weather is becoming more frequent and more intense. Subways flood, basements fill with water, and infrastructure built for yesterday's climate struggles to keep up with today's reality. The challenges are already here, pressing against our shoreline.

Battery Park City is one important piece of a much larger puzzle. Progress at East River Park, which recently reopened following major resiliency upgrades, shows that meaningful action is possible. But New York City has 520 miles of coastline. Protecting it all will require sustained commitment, coordination and speed.

What makes the North/West Battery Park City Resiliency Project especially valuable is not just its scale, but the model it provides for community engagement.

For years, the Battery Park City Authority has worked closely with residents and local businesses, incorporating their input into the project's design. The result is a project that reflects community priorities and delivers tangible benefits. When completed, the project will remove the area from federal flood maps, eliminating the need for flood insurance on federally-backed mortgages and putting real savings back into residents' pockets.

The benefits extend even further. For every dollar invested, the project is expected to generate more than two dollars in return. At the same time, partnerships with labor organizations are supporting thousands of union jobs while expanding opportunities for Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses. Climate resiliency, in this case, is also economic development.

Wagner Park, one of Lower Manhattan's most beloved green spaces, reopened last summer as both a resilient landscape and a revitalized public space. Elevated above the floodplain, it now integrates hidden flood protection, modern stormwater systems and sustainable water reuse, all while offering a more beautiful and accessible park. Similarly, improvements at East River Park have created expanded recreational spaces with sweeping waterfront views, proof that resiliency and livability can go hand in hand.

These projects demonstrate that New York can rise to the climate challenge with ambition, urgency and partnership. Now comes the hard part: scaling this success. As construction begins, the city must take what we've learned here and apply it across our more than 500 miles of shoreline.

The stakes could not be higher. Protecting our communities, strengthening our infrastructure and securing a resilient future for New York depends on it.

Christopher Marte is the City Council member for District 1 and chair of the Council Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Sitings, Resiliency, and Dispositions. Julie Tighe is the president of the New York League of Conservation Voters.