

## Dauids Island Task Force

TO: Honorable City Council and Honorable Mayor  
City Manager Charles B. Strome, III

FROM: Davids Island Task Force

RE: Report to the New Rochelle City Council

DATE: October 11, 2011

The Davids Island Task Force was created to examine, the challenges and opportunities surrounding a unique waterfront asset and to assisting the City Council in shaping an achievable, community-based vision for the Island's future. In approaching this mission, the Task Force sought to honor several overarching principles:

- *Recognize and take full advantage of the unique nature and value of Davids Island;*
- *Draw upon and respect public input from New Rochelle and our region;*
- *Appropriately balance environmental, economic and social concerns and objectives;*
- *Enable the public to better achieve and enjoy access to the waterfront;*
- *Demonstrate and advance a commitment to sustainability; and*
- *Consider economic and fiscal constraints to ensure that plans are realistic.*

The Task Force conducted a comprehensive assessment of the Island, researched its history and current conditions, and entertained a variety of potential re-use scenarios.

The Task Force did not attempt to achieve consensus on a single, specific re-use plan, but rather to illustrate the probable benefits, impacts and obstacles associated with a spectrum of options and to provide tools for evaluating the consistency of such options with the principles above. Clarity in the City's goals and expectations, coupled with additional outreach to the public and stakeholders, will maximize the prospects the successful re-use of Davids Island.

The Task Force's chief conclusions and recommendations are as follows:

**Slightly More Than Half Of The Island Is Developable:** Approximately 45 of the Island's 78 acres could be developed. This figure accounts for shoreline setbacks, probable sea level rise, the presence of a Consolidated Edison easement, and a variety of other constraints. The 33 non-developable acres could, nonetheless, serve a variety of public functions, and the use and condition of this additional acreage should be integrated into

any overall plan for Davids Island.

**Environmental Remediation Is Necessary & Costly:** Significant and costly environmental remediation will be a necessary component of any plan entailing meaningful human access to the Island. The required scope of such remediation will depend upon the intensity and nature of intended development and recommendation from DEC.

**Balancing Environmental & Economic Objectives Is Essential:** A plan that blends private and public uses, with the former wholly or partially subsidizing the latter, is more likely to meet the tests of financial and political viability than a plan that is either exclusively private or exclusively public. Especially at a time of limited public resources, the Island should, over the long-term, at least “carry its own weight” and contribute to the vitality of our local and regional economy.

**Sustainable Design Presents A Key Opportunity:** Sustainable design and operation, from energy neutrality to innovative waste management, can and should be a defining feature of any re-use plan. In addition to enhancing the overall quality and marketability of any development, sustainable design and operation may also help to reduce infrastructure costs, mitigate negative development impacts, and attract public and/or private financing. The range of options for sustainable design and operation is dramatically larger today than during any previous consideration of re-use plans for Davids Island.

**Access Should Minimize Car-Dependency:** Water-borne transportation, coupled with surface transportation between the downtown central parking district and any ferry embarkation point(s), is likely to be the most cost-effective and least impactful means of providing access to Davids Island, and would also help integrate the Island into the downtown commercial economy. The prohibition of cars on the Island would reduce infrastructure costs and reinforce sustainability principles. Bridge access, although not recommended, is nonetheless examined in this report for the sake of completeness.

**Implementation Should Be Phased:** Re-use plans for Davids Island can and should be phased. Immediate steps should concentrate on facilitating passive public access to the Island for kayakers and boaters and on encouraging greater public awareness of and exposure to the Island’s potential value. Short-term development should be self-contained, sustainable and consistent with a longer-term vision for the Island, and should serve as a catalyst for future development.

The Members of the Davids Island Task Force express their thanks to the City Council for the opportunity to participate in this exciting and engaging exercise. We acknowledge the guidance and support of City staff, including Commissioner of Development Michael Freimuth, Planning Director Eleanor Sharpe and Senior Project Manager Suzanne Reider. And we express great appreciation to KPF/ARUP, whose donation of time and expertise contributed immeasurably to the professionalism and thoroughness of our report.

Task Force Members were deliberately selected to represent a wide array of constituencies, viewpoints and interests. Our exchange of ideas and perspectives was consistently enlightening and thought provoking. After more than a year of working together, differences of opinion about Davids Island still remain, but we are firmly united in the belief that Davids Island holds significant potential for our community and region, and that the time to explore this potential is now.

It our hope that the product of our efforts will enable the City of New Rochelle to meet this challenge in a confident and positive spirit, escape a fruitless cycle of reaction to external proposals for Davids Island, and instead formulate a bold, community-based vision that excites the public's imagination and engenders the durable support necessary to sustain a long-term endeavor.