



To: DEP.R2@dec.ny.gov
Cc: SICWF2017@gmail.com
Re: Comment on Application # 2-6401-00287/00002 seeking an Article 24 Freshwater Wetlands Permit

Tamara A Greco
NYSDEC Region 2 Headquarters
47-40 21st St
Long Island City, NY 11101

Dear Ms. Greco,

I am writing to request that your agency schedule a public hearing on Application # 2-6401-00287/00002 seeking an Article 24 Freshwater Wetlands Permit.

NY/NJ Baykeeper is a conservation organization that has served to protect, preserve and restore the waters and environment around the NY-NJ Harbor region for 30 years.

Our introduction to Graniteville Swamp was after the 1989 Exxon Oil Spill when 40,000 gallons of heating oil from a Bayway Facility Pipeline spilled into the Arthur Kill just across from Old Place Creek and the wetlands at Graniteville Tree Swamp, impacting a four mile stretch of the Kill.

Significant funding and resources were expended by NYC Parks and other entities to restore the adjacent wetlands at Old Place Creek. Does it really make sense to spend millions restoring wetlands, then fill the wetlands next to it?

Many wetland restorations have been implemented and others proposed throughout the Harbor Estuary Region to preserve wildlife habitat, protect water quality, absorb floodwaters, and attenuate the impacts of coastal storms. It seems that preserving these existing water-absorbing buffers should be a top priority.

We also request that the agency require applicants to draft an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that addresses the permit that they are now seeking from your Department.

Projections for sea level rise and impacts from coastal storms have consistently projected severely-increased flooding in the region, including Staten Island. Wetlands are a primary natural defense against flooding that provide countless public benefits at no cost.

The USACE Harbor and Tributaries Study for the region--authorized by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation--is reviewing barrier projects throughout the harbor, including the Arthur Kill near Graniteville that would cost an estimated \$10 billion to \$50 billion to build, and \$100 million to

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\$2.5 billion each year to maintain. Certainly preserving existing wetlands should be strongly considered at Graniteville and throughout the Estuary.

Manhattan is debating the merits of the “Big U” and the “Big J.” Preserving all remaining wetlands has become a cornerstone of the Master Plan for the New Jersey Meadowlands. The NY-NJ Harbor Estuary Program has long been seeking funding for numerous wetland restoration projects in the region.

So, before we spend billions on floodgates and seawalls, it is critical to protect our existing wetlands that provide proven flood protection and many other benefits at no cost. The more wetlands preserved, the more property protected, the more local communities remain intact, with fewer public expenditures required for engineered structures and other flood protection.

Atop all this it is important to consider the long history of communities of color, like Graniteville, bearing the brunt of negative environmental impacts such as exacerbated flooding from wetland filling.

A hearing is needed so that the agency can hear directly from community leaders, residents and the myriad individual and entities who care about coastal protection and flooding.

It is extremely difficult to justify the filling of flood protecting wetlands while simultaneously exploring the expenditure of billions of tax dollars on flood control. Even more so when the request is for a gas station and strip mall that, if needed, should be built upland.

In addition, our understanding is that the 2017 EIS is inadequate in two additional ways: (1) It was written to describe potential impacts of two specific zoning changes that the developer sought from the City Council and (2) It fails to address potential impacts on the Eastern Mud Turtle (*Kinosternon subrubrum*), an endangered species that the Department recognizes potentially makes its home in the wetlands.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Gregory A. Remaud
Baykeeper & CEO
NY/NJ Baykeeper