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6. Project Feasibility

Feasibility

Completing a preliminary feasibility analysis helped to shape decisions about potential solutions and served as a guide for the creation of a community-based Vision Plan. The feasibility of specific improvements to the Esplanade is largely dependent upon and a function of four components: community support, technical feasibility, collaboration among governing agencies, and capital funding. Taken together these four components can determine whether a project advances through design and planning to construction, or whether it stalls and fails to be realized. Need and strong leadership can also drive a project forward through the challenges of design, planning, regulation, funding and ultimately construction.

Community Support

Community support is essential to the realization of any major project. Community support can motivate political leaders and private donors, and generate the momentum that moves a project forward. A lack of community support can stall a project, slowing it down through endless debate and delaying it to the point where interest is lost by both the community and political leaders. The outreach process for the East River Esplanade was designed to garner input from the community and harness their ideas and hopes for the Esplanade, integrating them into the planning process from the very beginning. Many community members expressed a desire to see quick changes. While there are short-term opportunities that can be implemented almost immediately, there are many improvements that will take years to complete. For a transformative and comprehensive reconstruction of the Esplanade to succeed, community support must be maintained over time and likely for decades. It is the hope that with the assistance of community based groups – Community Boards 8 and 11, nonprofit organizations such as CIVITAS, Friend of the East River Esplanade, East River C.R.E.W., and other groups – the challenge of maintaining support and momentum will be overcome.

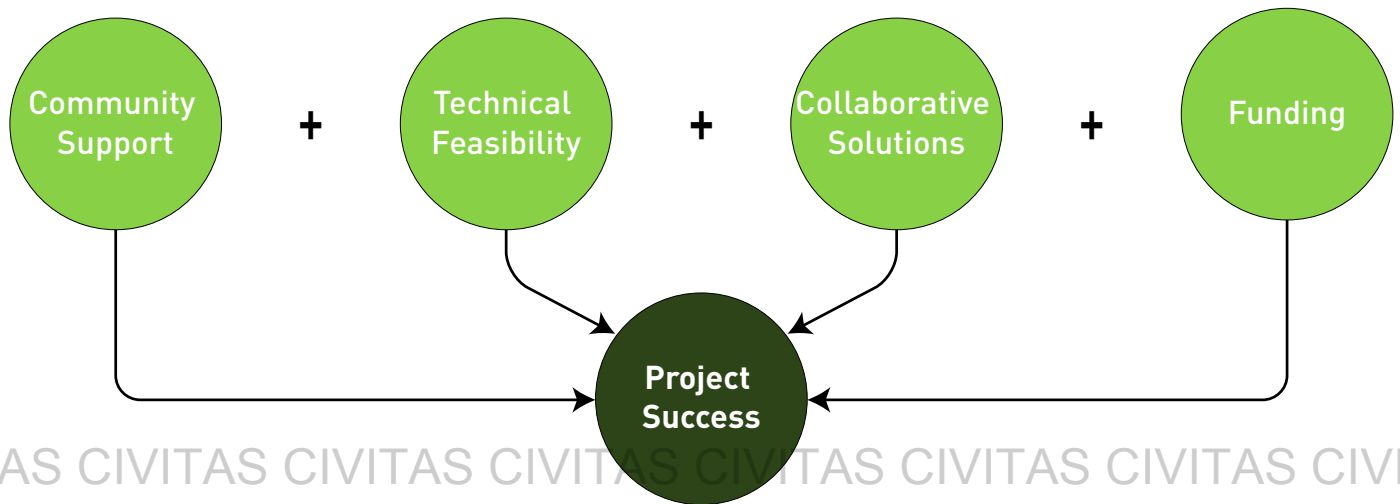
Technical Feasibility

The medium and long-term solutions proposed for the Esplanade must be technically possible, constructible, durable, and achievable with a reasonable expenditure of resources. Moreover, the solutions cannot solve one problem and exacerbate another, or ignore other problems altogether. For instance, sound mitigation may be accomplished by constructing a wall that blocks vehicular noise from the Esplanade but, in narrow linear sections, the same wall may compromise the safety of users. Similarly, reconstruction of the pier and Esplanade sections that do not take sea level rise or storm surge into consideration will not be long-term solutions. Factors such as currents, wave energy, salinity, material limitations, topography, transportation needs, and public infrastructure need to be considered while evaluating any potential solution. Due to the severe deterioration of the Esplanade and its supporting structure, it is understandable that short-term repairs will need to proceed just to keep it from collapsing. However, long-term repairs must consider the future longevity and maintenance of the Esplanade. They should seize upon its capacity to function as both parkland and urban infrastructure, offering resiliency from storms and flooding while providing community amenities. Repairs should also fortify and promote cultural opportunities, restore degraded ecosystems, enhance recreation, and improve public health and the quality of urban waterways. Because of cost and spatial constraints, mid and long-term interventions must be multi-functional.

Collaborative Solutions

Solutions for the Esplanade will require the collaboration of community members and groups, elected officials, and city, state, and federal regulatory agencies. On one side, the Esplanade is bordered by the FDR. Opportunities that impact the interface between park and roadway will require close coordination and collaboration between NYCDPR, NYCDOT, and NYSDOT. Likewise, interventions that affect the water will, at a minimum, require input from the DEC, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the Coast Guard. This short list represents only some of the agencies that will, most

Approach



likely, need to be involved. For instance, if sea level rise necessitates changes to sewer outfall elevations, then agencies such as the DEP would also need to be consulted. If resiliency from storm surge and sea level rise becomes an integral part of the Esplanade's design, then the list of agencies involved grows to include, among others, HUD, FEMA, and NYCHA. Therefore, collaboration is not only needed from a regulatory and permitting standpoint, but also within the sphere of design to ensure that all systems and uses linked by proximity to the East River are functionally coordinated.

Collaborative solutions must start by clearly defining the opportunities to be undertaken and the challenges to be overcome, all with priorities articulated. Without a shared goal and political leadership, comprehensive solutions cannot be achieved. This approach also necessitates collaboration among political leaders at the city, state, and federal level. Small, short-term interventions may be handled and implemented on a local level. However, large scale interventions will require significant collaboration by all stakeholders.

Funding

Funding for improvements to the Esplanade will need to come from many sources, especially if long-term improvements go beyond simple structural and aesthetic remediation of existing conditions. Already,

through the effort of political leaders, \$35M is allocated to repair some of the deterioration noted in the OMB and NYCDPR Marine Report. More funding is needed just to keep the Esplanade structurally sound. These repairs do not include addressing issues of noise, flooding, sea level rise, or more programming opportunities, but will maintain the Esplanade until future, more comprehensive plans can be made and implemented. This is a critical first step, but it is far from the final step.

Funding may come from capital funding programs, discretionary funding, participatory funding, grants, private investment and philanthropy. Together these sources can be combined to tackle small and large challenges – both short-term and long-term opportunities. It is not feasible to count on one agency or group to raise sufficient capital for undertaking the major long-term challenges presented by sea level rise. This will require close collaboration and strong political leadership, and it can also be a way to maximize an investment opportunity by addressing multiple challenges with a thoughtfully designed, comprehensive solution that solves many problems at once. Additionally, the long-term viability of solutions, their maintenance costs, and a thorough understanding of the lifespan of interventions should be considered. The end result may be measured by gains to the river's ecology, overall resiliency, quality of experience, and long-term maintenance

cost reductions. A comprehensive solution calls for evaluation and reconsideration of the current regulatory compliance costs that limit the range of feasible solutions. For example, regulations that are intended to protect tidal wetland and shallow marine resources may, in fact, accomplish the opposite. The costly mitigation process effectively limits the potential of a living shoreline to improve overall the ecological conditions of the waterfront and adjacent environments.

Approach

Truly feasible solutions for the East River Esplanade cannot be undertaken in a piecemeal fashion. Partial solutions might fail to achieve their goals and, consequently, may create a scenario where solving one problem exacerbates another. Effectively addressing issues like sea level rise and flood protection require a comprehensive strategy so that one weak link cannot render an entire system useless. Given the landscape of limited funding, proposed solutions must work on many levels. Each

dollar invested in the Esplanade must work to solve multiple challenges. A comprehensive approach that combines the needs of the community and Esplanade, and elicits multiple funding sources and collaboration, will produce the greatest outcome for the community and the city.

Strong leadership, on both a political and community level, is needed to move the project forward in a timely manner. Plans must be developed through collaboration and integrated problem solving. Incrementally built solutions offer the flexibility to implement components of the master plan as funds become available. The alternative approach is to remain disengaged, with the necessity of emergencies driving the decision making process. Unfortunately, it may take additional storms, flooding, and property destruction in East Harlem, and along the FDR, before the need for comprehensive solutions is recognized and funding allocated.