

Gowanus Canal Community Advisory Group  
May 30, 2011 – Meeting Summary

Attending: See Appendix

Jeff Edelstein opened the meeting by announcing future meeting dates:

June 6<sup>th</sup> – Water Quality Committee

June 7<sup>th</sup> – Real Estate Committee

June 9<sup>th</sup> – Administrative Committee (at CB 6 location)

June 23<sup>rd</sup> – Technical Committee

June 28<sup>th</sup> – Full CAG meeting

CAG member Linda Mariano then announced to the group that FROGG had recently received a \$10K matching grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to document the historic resources of the neighborhood.

### **Remedial Investigation/ Feasibility Study Summary**

Representatives of US EPA (Christos Tsiamis, Natalie Loney, Brian Carr) discussed the ongoing Feasibility Study (FS) and answered questions from the group.

Christos Tsiamis reviewed the Superfund process and timeline. Having completed the Remedial Investigation and convened the community meeting, the agency is now working to complete the FS by the end of 2011. The EPA has continued to meet with stakeholders including National Grid, NYC agencies, NYS agencies, USACE and DLand Studio—the architects of the Sponge Park proposal. Given the engineering complexity of the canal and the cleanup, these meetings will continue and the CAG will be kept updated.

The intent of the FS is to determine the feasibility of different methods for cleaning up the canal so that the risk to human health and the environment is reduced to acceptable levels. In the case of the Gowanus, there are risks associated with coming into contact with the water and the sediments and with consuming fish from the Canal. The goal of the cleanup would be to remove or treat sediments to the degree that contamination levels are brought down to a level where there is no risk. Alternately, a clean barrier could be placed to eliminate risk by preventing contact with remaining contaminated sediments. In order to ensure that recontamination of the Canal does not occur, the following features will also be considered for the cleanup: CSOs, upland sites, storm-water runoff, and groundwater contamination.

The SF law provides a roadmap for the FS, and when EPA selects the appropriate method for the cleanup there are 9 criteria used. Six of these criteria are mainly technical and are based on appropriateness for the site. The remaining criteria are administrative and they include acceptance of the plan by the State and by the community.

In general, Superfund utilizes three approaches for the cleanup of sites based on feasibility and the specifics of the site:

1. *In situ* (or ex-situ) treatment
2. Containment
3. Disposal

In Situ (meaning “on site”): Treatment of contaminants on site, by transforming existing contaminants into non-toxic materials, is often the preferred method. This method can use chemicals or biological treatments (like bioremediation) to clean the site. Treatment of contaminated materials can also occur off-site (ex-situ) after transporting the material to a treatment facility.

Containment: Under this approach, conditions are created to keep the contamination in place. Containment can sometimes mean creating a concrete block to immobilize contaminants, or using high temperatures to immobilize them in the form of glass. Another possibility for containment, if the contaminated material cannot be directly incorporated within concrete or glass, is to cap the site. Some capping is augmented, meaning there are multiple levels of materials—such as sand and special clays, to create a physical barrier that is also absorbent. Creating a concrete barrier to cap and immobilize contaminants would be the most extreme solution for locations where the contamination is severe and mobile.

Disposal: Under this approach, the contaminants are removed to a licensed facility.

Questions:

*Q: The EPA has reported that the air quality around the canal is acceptable, but residents can attest to the presence of “unbearable smells” on muggy, humid days. How can the air be okay?*

A: The air quality around the canal is within EPA’s range of “acceptable risk.” The study the agency conducted investigated only “chemicals of concern,” in accordance with SF regulation, which addresses hazardous wastes. There may be other substances in the canal which are odorous but which are not considered hazardous wastes under SF.

*Q: Will the cleanup be one process or will there be different approaches to different areas?*

A: Most probably, there will be different approaches to different areas. Different levels of contaminants in the canal will require different levels of effort. There are PAHs, metals, bacteria, and PCBs in the soft sediments. The soft sediments of the canal cannot withstand a cap and will likely be removed, and then another buffer layer will be added above the native soils. The complexity of the contamination and the difficulty in profiling the sediment strata makes the Gowanus cleanup a particularly difficult one.

*Q: What will happen to any sediment that is removed?*

A: The contaminated sediment would be removed from the Canal. It would then be stored in a licensed facility, or treated then stored, or treated and reused.

### **Contaminated Sediment and Core Sampling**

The coring of the native sediment showed contamination as deep as the sampling went. National Grid cored the Public Place site to 80 ft. and found contaminated sediments at that depth. According to Christos, a clean horizon does not exist within the depths sampled. With this in mind, a likely treatment will be to remove the overlaying soft material, then put a cap on the native sediment. The earlier recommendations by the USACE also called for the removal of the soft sediments.

The free product (NAPLs) found in the native soils, in the vicinity of the former MGP plants, would likely not be able to be effectively contained by a sand cap, as these chemicals move up and down with hydrology. However, as these free products are not found in all sections of the canal, the treatments employed in other sections of the canal may be different. The Manufactured Gas Plants (MGP) will need more intensive measures that will also require more than a sand cap. Additionally, the operation of the Flushing Tunnel, following its repair, would create some difficulties for solutions involving a simple sand cap.

Once the feasibility study is complete, the EPA expects the design portion of the SF process to take 2 years or more. The solution proposed will need to be flexible enough to consider future advances and improvements in the technologies involved.

Questions:

*Q: How deep did EPA sample the soils?*

A: EPA cores went 6 ft. into native sediment typically, though in some places the cores went 8 or 12 ft. The cleanup itself could not go as deep as the contamination likely goes without the bulkheads of the canal collapsing.

*Q: Is there an analogous site for the CAG to explore in order to understand the FS and likely cleanup designs?*

A: Yes. Although no two sites are the same, Christos pointed to the Fox River site and recommended emailing EPA to get more info.

*Q: Because future navigational dredging may be required on the canal, how will the capping of sections that are navigable be handled?*

A: The EPA will be considering the navigable sections of the canal and will design treatments that will maintain the proper depths for continued navigability.

*Q: Has EPA considered "green engineering"?*

A: The cleanup itself is green, in the sense that it improves the environment. Green solutions will be considered during the design phase.

## **Recontamination**

In order to prevent recontamination, EPA will take an aggressive approach to deal with the major sources of recontamination including the following:

1. Working with NYS on upland sites that may require the removal, treatment or containment of contaminated soil.
2. Working with NYC DEP to take a good look at the CSO issue, & to investigate specific CSO improvements individually. In this case, the USACE concurs that the SF obligations provide a golden opportunity to really address this issue.
3. Addressing free product contamination (NAPLs) from 10-12 upland sites, including the Lowe's site, that moves into the canal. Preventing the entry of contaminated groundwater into the canal from beneath the waterway and along both sides by looking into groundwater management of the contaminated groundwater in the uplands in cooperation with NYS.
4. Addressing storm-water runoff that carries oil and other street debris by supporting current and future private and NYC initiatives.

Questions:

*Q: Besides the MGP sites, what are some of the other known sites causing contamination?*

A: Some are parts of the former Toll Bros site, the 1<sup>st</sup> Street Basin, the Lowe's site, and one at the mouth of the canal, among others. The Public Place site is a problem for MGP contaminants. At this time, National Grid is close to submitting a 50% design that proposes a wall along the bank of the canal to contain the pollutants and prevent them from entering the canal.

*Q: If a wall lines the canal, what can be done to prevent contaminants from then backing up into people's homes?*

A: With a site like Public Place, this won't be a problem and the materials would not back up into the neighborhood. The plan for the cleanup of the site incorporates recovery wells, and the contaminants would not bounce off of the constructed walls and re-enter the residential neighborhood but will be pumped out of the recovery system and shipped off-site.

*Q: How is the canal impacted by the contaminated groundwater with known dissolved contaminants?*

A: To solve the complex problem of the canal re-contamination, the EPA is prioritizing the higher impact changes that are needed. The most immediate beneficial impact will come by addressing the CSOs and the MGP contributions. The groundwater and stormwater issues are more long-term problems, and are lower priority. Without compromising the remedy or the schedule, groundwater will be considered in the solution.

*Q: How big is the plume under the Public Place site?*

A: Not known.

*Q: As the Lowe's site was already cleaned up by DEC, and is now known to be inadequate, how will the contamination there be handled moving forward?*

A: The State cleanup doesn't affect what may be required under SF or EPA's associated activities. The cleanup remedy undertaken by the State did not consider the canal, but rather was based on the intended final use of the site as a parking lot.

*Q: How far along is the design of the cleanup?*

A: All agencies are still in a brainstorming phase, but EPA is moving along with the FS. Coordination and scheduling between and amongst agencies is the greatest issue. Though the timeline of the cleanup is important to EPA, the agency is hoping to move all parties along together. The FS will be completed by the end of 2011, and the EPA hopes to finalize the cleanup proposal in 2012.

*Q: How long is the comment period after the FS?*

A: There is no comment period after the FS. The FS goes to agency peers for review and a remedy is then proposed. Public comment follows the presentation of the proposed cleanup scenario. The public comment period is generally 30 days, but it may be extended (to 60 days) for the Gowanus Canal.

*Q: When will EPA return to the CAG to give updates on the FS?*

A: Whenever the CAG requests an update, EPA will attend to do so.

### **Bulkheads and Debris**

The current state of the canal edge is very bad. EPA has proposed to work with USACE to address the issue of the restoration of bulkheads at the end of the remediation. Some owners along the canal will need to be in compliance with NYS bulkhead enforcement actions. The canal edge is being investigated and documented by the EPA under the archeological component of the cleanup in order to determine the possible historic significance.

Any dredging (a likely scenario) will probably be conducted with the installation of temporary sheet piling on the canal edge. No dredging can happen with the amount of debris in the waterway. Removal of debris will also require some archeological documentation. The EPA is looking at sites along the canal that could potentially be used for needed staging facilities.

*Q: Who owns the water of the Canal? The Basins?*

A: The canal itself is owned by the city north of the Hamilton Street Bridge. South of the bridge, the canal is a Federal Navigable waterway. The water of the canal is regulated by the state, also flowing into federal waters, therefore triggering the Clean Water Act (CWA). The 1<sup>st</sup> Street Basin is a city-owned property.

## **Contaminants**

EPA investigated over 150 chemicals in the canal for analysis. Other chemicals are present and are called Technically Identified Compounds (TICs). National Grid tested the CSOs for other chemicals that EPA is not testing for, and is not part of the agency's responsibility. The data collected by National Grid is available to the public.

*Q: The filled basins (1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sts.) are contaminated; will they be cleaned by EPA or NYS?*

A: Not known at this time. The fill of the 1<sup>st</sup> Street basin appears to be contaminated with diesel oil, but not coal tar.

*Q: Is the EPA continuing to sample?*

A: No, the agency has all the information that is needed to proceed and complete the Feasibility Study.

*Q: This community feels that DEC and DEP have mismanaged the contamination of the canal and adjacent sites – both in the past and on an ongoing basis. What can the community do to guide these agencies in a different direction?*

A: The local expertise in the community is a great asset. Many elected officials are supportive of greater collaboration and moving beyond the past mistakes. DEP and the city have been very involved in what the EPA has done so far.

Dan Wiley, from Congresswoman Velazquez's office, said that in the past the USACE had difficulty with DEP meeting deadlines, but EPA has not experienced this. The SF structure appears to be the appropriate vehicle for changing the relationships between the agencies and the community.

## **Other Business**

The CAG will continue to schedule meetings for the full group on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of every month. All members can join new committees this month, but soon will have to follow the Charter and attend at least 2 meetings before joining a committee.

**Appendix 1.**

<b>Organizational Members (attendance is indicated by “x”)</b>		
Carroll Gardens Coalition for Respectful Development (CORD)	Rita Miller	X
Carroll Gardens Neighborhood Association	Maria Pagano, President	X
Cobble Hill Association	Elizabeth O. Velikonja, Executive Board member	
Fifth Avenue Committee	Michelle de la Uz	X
Friends of Douglass/Greene Park, Inc.	Maria Pagano, Treasurer	X
Gowanus Canal Community Development Corporation	David Z. Krieger	
Gowanus Canal Conservancy	Hans Hesselein	
Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club	Ray Howell, Board member	X
Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance	Louis Kleinman	X
Park Slope Civic Council	Eric McClure, Trustee	X
Park Slope Neighbors	Eric McClure, Campaign Coordinator	X
Pratt Center for Community Development	Eve Baron, Senior Fellow for Planning and Policy	
Riverkeeper	Josh Verleun, Staff Attorney	X
Sierra Club	Diane Buxbaum, Chair, Gowanus Canal Committee	X
South Brooklyn Local Development Corporation	Bette Stoltz, Executive Director	X
Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce	Lori Raphael, Director of Real Estate and Development	
Center for Urban Pedagogy	Christine Gaspar, Executive Director	X
Citizens of Pozzallo	John Heyer II, Chair, Public Relations Committee	X
Friends and Residents of Greater Gowanus (FROGG)	Marlene Donnelly	X
Community Board 6	Craig Hammerman, District Mgr.	X
Gowanus Houses Tenants Association	Marguerite Scott, President	
Red Hook East Tenants Association	Dorothy Shields, President	
Gowanus Neighborhood Association/Gowanus-4-Life	Betty Lester	
Proteus Gowanus	Angela Kramer Murphy	X
Red Hook Civic Association	John McGettrick, Co-chair	
Wyckoff Gardens Tenants Association/Public Housing Communities, Inc.	Charlene Nimmons, President	
Red Hook West Tenants Association	Lillie Marshall, President	
Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation	Josh Keller, Executive Director	
Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation	David Meade	
Urban Divers Estuary Conservancy	Ludger K. Balan, Executive Director	

<b>At-Large Members (Attendance is indicated by “x”)</b>			
Brendan Aguayo	Aguayo & Huebener Realty Group	Park Slope	
Jerry Armer	President, 76 <sup>th</sup> Precinct Community Council, various past affiliations	Cobble Hill	X
Sabine Aronowsky	Videographer, Public Policy student	Boerum Hill	
Lauren Elvers Collins	Former Executive Director, Gowanus Canal Conservancy	Windsor Terrace	
Lucy DeCarlo	CORD	Carroll Gardens	
Anthony Deen	Gowanus by Design	Carroll Gardens	X
Eymund Diegel	Various	Gowanus	X
Nathan Elbogen	XO Projects, The Old American Can Factory	Gowanus	X
Lou Femenella	76 <sup>th</sup> Precinct Community Council attendee	Carroll Gardens	
Emily Guyer	The ELM Group	Park Slope	
Andrew Jackson	Hudson Company	Gowanus	
Katia Kelly	Local blog, FROGG, CORD	Carroll Gardens	X
Linda LaViolette	Abutting property owner/business/resident, Nicholas Cabrini, Inc.	Gowanus	X
Alex Lechich	US Coast Guard	Cobble Hill	
Alphonse Lembo	Monadnock Construction	Gowanus	
Linda Mariano	FROGG	Gowanus	
Margaret Maugenest	FROGG	Gowanus	X
Steve Miller	CB6 committee member, FROGG, CORD, CGNA, Block by Block	Gowanus/Carroll Gardens	X
Linda Mariano	FROGG	Gowanus	X
Abe Naparstek	Homeowner, various	Carroll Gardens	X
Lizzie Olesker	Friends of Bond, FROGG	Carroll Gardens/Gowanus	
Bryan Quinn	Great Ecology and Environment	Park Slope	
Gary Reilly	CB6 Environmental Chair	Carroll Gardens	
Triada Samaras	CORD	Carroll Gardens	X
Buddy Scotto	Various	Carroll Gardens	
Deb Scotto	Clemente Realty	Carroll Gardens	X
Cynthia Simmons	Mill Condominiums	Carroll Gardens	

**Facilitator:** Jeff Edelstein

**Facilitation Assistant:** Beth Bingham