

## Gowanus Canal Community Advisory Group – Archeology Committee

March 28, 2011 – Meeting Summary

Committee members attending: Eymund Diegel, Marlene Donnelly, Eric McClure, Ray Howell, Linda Mariano

Guests: Natalie Loney (EPA), Gary Busso, Kyle Bryant, Mike Weiss (Brooklyn Eagle), Elizabeth Angell, Angela Murphy, John Vetter (EPA), Lynn Rakos (Army Corps), Andrew Prophete (National Grid), Maria Pagano, Ron Zak, Terri Thomson (National Grid).

Facilitator: Jeff Edelstein

Notetaker: Beth Bingham

Jeff Edelstein opened the meeting by asking the group to describe what the CAG members and others in attendance would like to see the Archeology Committee address. This exercise was followed by a discussion lead by EPA Archeologist, John Vetter who described the procedural framework that the agency will follow in addressing the impacts of the Superfund activities on historic and cultural resources. Andrew Prophete from National Grid wrapped up the meeting with a slideshow with images of the historic buildings and operations of Manufactured Gas Plants along the canal.

### *Archeology and the Superfund Law*

According to John Vetter from EPA, there is a fairly high correlation between sites of historic or archeological significance and SF activities. Generally, the types of resources that made sites ideal for industrial activities, such as proximity to water, also made these sites ideal for other historic uses. The goal of EPA, as lead agency, is to determine the possible impacts of cleanup activities on historic resources, and to recommend measures that avoid disturbing these resources, or that mitigate the disturbance. To this end, the stage is set for Gowanus.

Historic resources are investigated and evaluated for any federal undertaking under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and are generally addressed in the required Environment Impact Study (EIS) or the Environmental Assessment (EA). In most cases, the EIS or EA present evaluations of alternatives (including siting the project in a different location) to prevent or minimize disturbance to historic resources. However, in the case of Superfund sites, alternative locations cannot be recommended due to the fixed nature of contaminated sites; therefore EPA looks to CERCLA for protocol.

For the Gowanus Canal Superfund, the cultural and historic resources will be addressed in the Feasibility Study, where the EPA's recommended mitigation measures will be presented. Subsequently, the Record of Decision (ROD) will guide the cleanup design and the measures prescribed for historic resources.

### *National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and SF*

The website of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation provides a brief overview of these Federal actions (<http://achp.gov/>) The NHPA is the statute of record for application on the SF, a federal undertaking. EPA, as lead agency, is required to meet the Section 106 obligations of the NHPA. Other consulting parties that may advise or approve the mitigation measures for historic resources are the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The EPA will work closely with the New York SHPO in particular on cultural and historic resources analysis.

Under the NHPA, the EPA contractor (CH2M HILL) will follow this sequence of events:

1. Determining the presence or absence of historic resources
2. Determining the significance of identified resources using National Register eligibility criteria
3. Determining whether the undertaking will have an adverse effect on National Register-eligible property

As the SF activities are likely to have an adverse effect on historic resources, the Feasibility Study will present different cleanup design scenarios that will do one of the following: avoid, minimize or mitigate the adverse effect.

#### *Historic Resources of the Gowanus Canal*

Thus far, the EPA has relied heavily on an earlier study of historic resources conducted by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The Area of Potential Effect (APE) outlined by the Corps included buildings and sites directly located on the canal, as well as those whose historic use was tied to the waterway. EPA cannot yet define the APE for the Superfund activities, as the cleanup approach is still unknown. However, as the significance of the resource is linked to the context of the site, the APE will likely reach into the surrounding neighborhoods. The extending context of the waterway may include viewsheds or other features of the canal setting. Tests of the waterway have already included high-resolution side-scan sonar investigation, revealing sunken boats, collapsed bulkheads and other debris.

Some questions that came up:

*Q: Will the historic estuary that predates the historic canal be a consideration?* Yes, it will be considered, though the NHPA only concerns the built environment, and the determination of significance is dependent on the integrity of the site or building. So, while patterned settlements may exist archeologically, they are not covered by the NHPA. If the contours of the earlier historic creek are found, that would be documented as part of the historical investigation.

*Q: If the historic bulkheads are found to be significant features of the canal, do they become inviolate? Can they be replaced with soft edges or other materials/designs at a later time?* The design of the cleanup may address the treatment of the edges. If there is

removal or alteration of the bulkheads during the SF, then the action may be considered an adverse effect and a mitigation measure would be identified. The mitigation could require documentation, recordation or some other treatment for the loss of a historic feature. The adverse effects described by the SF undertaking belong to the SF activity alone and are not a consideration for future development. Possible future conflict between environmental restoration and designation of historic features may be helped by the fact that this project will define what is significant historically.

*Q: Where does archeology enter into the Feasibility Study?* It may be something that is required for community acceptance of the cleanup proposed.

*Q: Is it possible for the site to be opened for archeological excavation?* Yes. If dewatering the canal is part of the cleanup design, there may be an opportunity for open excavation. The adverse effect may actually be mitigated by excavating the archeology of known sites along the canal.

*Q: Will the filled-in sections of the canal be addressed?* Not known at this time.

*Q: The Superfund action itself is historic. Will the EPA share soil and contaminant samples or other artifacts with the community and/ or Proteus Gowanus?* This needs further discussion.

*Q: How will this committee interact with the Outreach committee?* As there is clearly an educational component to the cultural resources activities, this committee will work with the Outreach Committee. The CAG Charter will address how the various committees interact with each other and the full CAG.

#### *Mission Statement of the Committee*

The committee discussed the following as a possible mission statement; a final decision on adopting this was not made:

- To protect, preserve, and document the cultural and natural history of the Gowanus Canal.
- To restore the community memory of the working canal and make this unique heritage publicly accessible.
- To raise awareness of the historic landscape without hindering the canal cleanup.

Included in this would be to link existing resources and organizations within the community, to share the history of the canal with the larger community (outside of the CAG), and to ensure that the historic investigation and research are public and accessible.

#### *Next Steps*

1. EPA will be holding a scoping meeting in mid-April with the contractor CH2M HILL.

2. The committee will conduct an initial walking tour with EPA and other researchers, as a first step toward identifying the sites, views and buildings that are important to the community. At the April 26 CAG meeting, a map will be displayed on which CAG members can identify known historic resources, including viewsheds and other key features of the canal environment. This information will help the committee to develop the tour of the canal with EPA and researchers, planned for June.
3. The committee will create a slideshow to share the unique history of the canal with the full CAG & other interested parties. This will be done as a collaborative effort with various individuals and organizations within the community. This may be presented to the full CAG in July.