



December 19, 2013

Carl Weisbrod, Co-Chair, Transition NYC
Jennifer Jones Austin, Co-Chair, Transition NYC

Re: Green Infrastructure initiatives

Dear Mr. Weisbord and Ms. Jones Austin,

The S.W.I.M. (Storm Water Infrastructure Matters) Coalition is excited to learn that environmental protection will be a priority in the new de Blasio administration. The Coalition represents over 70 organizations dedicated to ensuring swimmable and fishable waters around New York City through natural, sustainable stormwater management practices in our neighborhoods. Our members are a diverse group of community-based, citywide, regional and national organizations, institutions of higher education, and businesses. (See www.swimmablenyc.info.)

We are writing to ask that the new administration not only continue the “green infrastructure” programs started under the current administration, but expand and enhance them to improve communities and restore urban waterways throughout the City. Under the leadership of Mayor-Elect de Blasio, New York City can build on its initial success and solidify its place as a national leader in the use of green infrastructure, which includes practices such as “green streets,” “bioswales,” street trees, green roofs, and permeable pavement that absorb storm runoff close to where it falls, treating it as a resource rather than a waste. In addition, these features beautify and revitalize neighborhoods, cool and cleanse the air, reduce asthma and heat-related illnesses, help save on heating and cooling energy costs, and boost local economies and support local jobs.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this issue, and will follow-up shortly with a specific set of policy recommendations endorsed by our membership.

By way of a brief introduction to S.W.I.M., the Coalition was instrumental in crafting and passing Local Law 5 of 2008, which required the City to develop the Sustainable Stormwater Management Plan (the precursor to the City’s current “Green Infrastructure Plan”), and the state legislation authorizing the City’s green roof property tax abatement, which provides a financial incentive to private property owners to install vegetated rooftops that capture rainwater and reduce energy costs. Our Coalition has been engaged, on an ongoing basis, with the Mayor’s Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability, the Department of Environmental Protection

(DEP), the Department of Parks and Recreation, and other City and State agencies to provide community perspectives on stormwater management and green infrastructure, as well as key policy recommendations. Several members of the Coalition currently serve on the DEP's Green Infrastructure Steering Committee.

The City made great strides in the last decade, embracing green infrastructure as a viable alternative to more conventional "grey" infrastructure in managing stormwater. Nonetheless, *we cannot emphasize strongly enough that the new administration's attention to this issue remains vital* -- both to ensure the successful implementation of existing plans and to expand upon them to maximize the opportunities to use green infrastructure to improve New York City.

We offer a few examples of where further attention is needed. First, the City's current Green Infrastructure Plan is focused exclusively on areas served by a "combined sewer system," which handles both sewage and stormwater runoff in the same pipes. But these areas comprise only about half of the City's entire land area. New York City will soon become subject to a new Clean Water Act permit from the state Department of Environmental Conservation for the separated sewer system, which will require new efforts to address stormwater pollution in the rest of the City as well. Further, climate change adaptation and resiliency efforts present new opportunities to utilize green infrastructure for flood mitigation from both precipitation and coastal surge.

Second, successful implementation of green infrastructure requires the involvement of multiple agencies: Parks and Recreation, Transportation, School Construction Authority, Housing Authority, to name a few. While the DEP has proven to be a capable lead agency on green infrastructure related programs, we believe a strong leadership from the Mayor's Office is necessary to ensure not only that efforts are well-coordinated among the various agencies, but also that green infrastructure principles and practices permeate all facets of the City's planning and infrastructure work. We believe it is critically important that the Mayor's office communicate to all agencies that this work is a priority.

Third, the City's green infrastructure efforts to date have focused mainly in the public right-of-way. We believe that stronger incentives, as well as regulatory requirements, are needed to fully engage private property owners in green infrastructure implementation.

The S.W.I.M. Coalition looks forward to working with the incoming administration to advance the City's green infrastructure agenda. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues further. Please contact Robert Crauderueff at swimmablenyc@gmail.com or 212.431.9676 x306 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A Crauderueff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

Robert Crauderueff
S.W.I.M. Coalition Coordinator

Robin Kriesberg, Bronx River Alliance
Lawrence Levine, Natural Resources Defense Council
Paul Mankiewicz, the Gaia Institute
Sam Marquand, Rocking the Boat
Tatiana Morin, New York City Soil & Water Conservation District
Phillip Musegaas, Riverkeeper
Jaime Stein, Pratt Institute
Shino Tanikawa, New York City Soil & Water Conservation District
Kate Zidar, Newtown Creek Alliance