



Technical Assistance Services for Communities
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Community Advisory Group (CAG) Key Interview Findings

Site Name: Newtown Creek
Location: Boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, New York
Date: January 12, 2012

Key Interview Findings

While stakeholders interviewed by TASC had diverse interests, concerns and perspectives, there was also a great deal of agreement on major issues. In addition, it was clear that this is an informed community with a history of civic engagement and experience with constructive engagement and managing disagreements. They value diversity and community engagement. To a person they expressed a bias towards including all interested parties in the CAG process.

All interviewed parties were aware that the site investigation and remedial process will take many years. In general, they expressed satisfaction with the role that EPA has played at the site to date, including efforts to inform and engage the public. They are cautiously optimistic that EPA will continue to appropriately involve the public in the decision-making process and that in the long run, Newtown Creek will be successfully remediated.

While the CAG's work and schedule will in some measure be driven by the pace of cleanup activities and the availability of information, several key issues and concerns raised during the interviews could be addressed by the CAG and EPA during the CAG's formation and early activities. Some of these issues and concerns are directly affected by EPA actions, while others are more tangentially related to or impacted by Superfund activities. The more immediate issues and concerns are listed below, in no particular order.

- The impact of NPL listing on businesses adjacent to Newtown Creek that may or may not have contributed to the contamination may be the largest near-term issue facing the community. In addition to liability concerns, interviewees reported that the NPL listing has already significantly impacted the ability of area businesses to access capital markets. Given the integral role these businesses play in the community, addressing this impact is likely to be the biggest concern of many community members and other key stakeholders.
- Newtown Creek is a major maritime asset of the metropolitan New York area's economy. The maritime community has major concerns regarding how remedial

activities and the site's final remedy will impact boat traffic in the near term, impact viable docking facilities in both the near and long term, and impact the ability to maintain the creek's navigability (dredging) in the long term.

- Several residents raised concerns about health issues and the perceived lack of adequate health studies and the potential existence of elevated clusters of certain diseases in certain areas. The CAG could play an important role in organizing an effort to better understand available health studies, educating the public about what is known, and seeking further investigation of perceived environmental health issues.
- While there seems to be broad agreement that maintaining Newtown Creek's industrial maritime character is a primary community goal, there are also efforts to increase public access to the waterway for recreation purposes. While remedial activities at the creek have the potential to impact both industrial activities and recreation, the concerns of both barge operators and recreational boaters go far beyond contamination-related issues. Nonetheless, since both interests will likely be represented, the CAG might be a good forum for exploring collaborative opportunities around these issues.
- Concerns were raised about how remedial activities would impact recreational access to the creek, including the timeline for constructing a new boathouse. These concerns were linked to additional concerns regarding how funds from previous environmental settlements will be spent. Again, while much of this is only tangentially related to Superfund activities, the CAG might be a good forum to address these concerns.
- Several interviewees raised concerns about individuals (potentially Spanish-speaking individuals) fishing in the creek and consuming the fish on a regular basis. There is a bait-and-tackle shop on Manhattan Avenue. The CAG could help residents better understand the health concerns associated with eating fish from Newtown Creek.
- Significant numbers of Polish and Latino community members may not speak English. Some site-related documents and CAG materials may need to be translated into Polish and Spanish.