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With talk of new stadiums for the Jets and the Nets, new buildings for the site of the World Trade Center, and the possibility that the Olympics will come to the city in 2012, New Yorkers seem to be focusing lately on the future, and hoping for a glorious one.

This has happened before – in the World’s Fairs of 1939 and 1964, for example – and, just as with those ambitious projects, the advocates envisioning an Olympics 2012 in New York City promise investments in preparation for the games that will result in permanent improvements in the city’s waterfront and waterfront communities. But those who remember past promises of future glory know that many of the shining new pools and shimmering lakes have turned into decrepit pools and silted-in lakes.

In any case, we shouldn't have to stay in a holding pattern until July 2005 (when the 2012 Olympics host city will be announced) in order to make improvements. There is much to improve right now.

A. Embrace the Water:

1) In the city's rush to revitalize the waterfront, we are overlooking the most important physical asset: the water itself. We should make water usage and water dependency a priority for waterfront land use policy. In 2002, the city conducted their first ever inventory of publicly owned waterfront. Now we need to take the next step and identify those inlets, bays, creeks and reaches of rivers where in-water opportunities exist.

2) The city has nearly a dozen marinas, stretching from Throgs Neck to Jamaica Bay. Too many of these places are viewed as physical blights rather than community assets. The city parks department should conduct a review of all municipal marinas and explore new partnerships with community-based organizations, particularly the variety of young and upstart rowing and boating programs.

3) Many great waterfront cities have a dock master, someone who understands the physical characteristics of the water (and the submerged lands, pile fields, and ship wrecks underneath)

Eight Ways To A Better Future Now

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and can advise other agencies, communities, and waterway users on how that area can be used and maintained. New York should consider this as well.

B. Face up to End-of-Pipe and Bottom-of-Pail Problems

4) The greatest threat to water quality is our waste. One type of waste is the oily, polluted runoff from streets, highway and roofs that comes with every Nor'easter or summer downpour. In such a heavily paved environment as New York, every serious rain event makes our beaches unswimmable and our fish and crabs inedible. Our current municipal strategy for dealing with storm water is to build giant containment tanks that can capture and hold the "storm surges," as they are called. This end-of-pipe "solution," however, is perpetuating the dangerous trend of creating a whole new infrastructure that future generations will have to pay to maintain. To look at it another way, our gas taxes are being used to build new transportation facilities, which create more runoff. Then our water rates are raised to help pay for the new infrastructure needed to capture this runoff. It's a vicious cycle that is also costing us billions.

Rather than have tax- and rate payers perpetuating the problem of endemic over-paving, the city should institute a "Zero Tolerance for Polluted Runoff." This comprehensive greening program would include new wetland buffers at the water's edge, a giant green grid of new street and sidewalk trees throughout the city, and green roofs on buildings.

5) With two of the city's largest central business districts located on the island of Manhattan, we need more marine transfer facilities in midtown and downtown.

C. Invest In Better Mobility

6) Air quality is threatened with the growth of marine transit for goods, for people, and for trash. On the water, so-called "marine engines" are not regulated by the EPA as are land-based engines. New York City, home of the most famous ferry service in the nation, should invest in clean fuel technology to help our fleet get to the forefront of marine transit. The Staten Island Ferry will be 100 years old next year. We should make a more substantive investment in its long-term success that lasts long after the inevitable blue and orange balloons have gone flat.

7) Truck traffic exacts a tremendous toll on the physical infrastructure of the city, from the cobblestone streets of Soho to the structural steel and deck plates of the river crossings. The movement of goods is critical to keeping New York a center of world trade and business.

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The city should look at truck ferries as a way to reduce truck traffic and increase the reliability with which goods are delivered. New freight ferries from the Greenville Yards in Jersey City to Brooklyn Army Terminal on Atlantic Avenue could help reduce truck traffic along other congested routes such as the Verrazzano Bridge or Gowanus Expressway.

8) And last, with long-range planning back in vogue for the first time in over a decade, the city should put stock into other long-range planning efforts now ongoing. City University's Gotham Center is looking ahead to "NY2050," and a "Comprehensive Port Improvement Plan" is looking ahead as far as 2063.

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