A Preservation Plan for Red Hook, Brooklyn

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Studio II: Red Hook, Brooklyn

Professor
Ward Dennis

Students
Benjamin Baccash
Eleanor Cox
Leah Lanier
Allison Lyons
Kett Murphy
Susan Shay
Catherine Smith
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Andrew Genn, Vice President, New York City Economic Development Corporation

Craig Hammerman, District Manager, Brooklyn Community Board Six

Andrew Kimball, President and Chief Executive Officer, Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation

Greg O’Connell, Pier 41 Associates

Paul Parkhill, Director of Planning and Development, Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center

Cassandra Smith, Project Manager, Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center

Norman Weiss, Columbia University

Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation
As students in our first year of Columbia’s Historic Preservation program, we have been studying the economically challenged waterfront industrial area of Brooklyn called Red Hook. Tasked with creating a preservation plan for the area, our objective is to acknowledge the significance of Red Hook’s maritime and industrial histories through recognition of its historic buildings and waterfront areas while addressing the needs of a community with critical employment, transportation and affordable housing needs. Our study area was limited to the waterfront and industrially-zoned portions of Red Hook, but while we have only focused on a targeted area of the neighborhood, we did so with the entire community in mind.

In 2007 the National Trust for Historic Preservation identified Brooklyn’s industrial waterfront as one of the nation’s 11 most endangered places. This designation was catalyzed by threats to and the demolition of some of Brooklyn’s notable industrial sites such as the Revere and Domino Sugar Refineries, the Old Dutch Mustard Building, and the Red Hook Graving Dock.

As a thriving maritime hub from the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century, Red Hook was a vital center of commerce and its dockyard industry made critical contributions to wartime efforts. The advent of containerization in the 1950s shifted the dynamic of Red Hook’s waterfront industry, and within a decade the larger ports and accommodations in New Jersey pulled business away and Red Hook’s economy began to decline. Historically buoyed by its maritime industry, Red Hook had to cultivate new opportunities to keep businesses in the area. This is an ongoing effort and a large part of our focus.

The 1970s and 1980s were tough on Red Hook as it became notorious as a haven for drug addicts and criminals. The situation was so severe that in July 1988 Life magazine ran a nine-page cover feature on Red Hook’s drug epidemic entitled “Crack: Downfall of a Neighborhood”. Red Hook’s picturesque Belgian block streets were desolate and it’s historic buildings abandoned and neglected.

By the mid-1990s a grass-roots effort to recover Red Hook’s economy was underway, and New York’s art community began to take an interest in the neighborhood’s many low-cost large architectural spaces. This was a key moment for Red Hook, as the influx of artists led to a gradual population surge and rise of new businesses.

Red Hook’s population currently hovers around 11,000 residents, which is barely half the population of 1950, when 21,000 New Yorkers called Red Hook home. The majority of Red Hook’s residents live in the Red Hook Houses, a vast expanse of high-density public housing built in the 1930s to accommodate dockworkers that now houses a lower income population with high unemployment rates. Lower-scale housing is concentrated in lines of rowhouses and scattered among industrial buildings throughout the neighborhood.
Craig Hammerman, district manager for Brooklyn’s Community Board 6, identifies Red Hook’s two most critical community needs as transportation and continued economic development opportunities. Indeed, Red Hook is difficult to get to for those relying on public transportation. The Smith/9th Street station on the F and G lines is the nearest subway stop, and the area is served by two MTA bus lines, both of which terminate in Red Hook. Ikea, which opened in Red Hook in June 2008, offers free bus and ferry services that are heavily utilized by consumers and local residents alike.

When Red Hook’s maritime industry was at its peak in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a smaller business subsection was also thriving. A number of manufacturing businesses were established in Red Hook after the Civil War, further establishing an industrial tone for the area. Industrial and manufacturing businesses continued to proliferate through the beginning of the twentieth century. Among non-maritime manufacturing businesses were some notable enterprises: for example, Robert Chesebrough, inventor of Vaseline, chose Red Hook for his manufacturing and packaging needs. Motor cars and engines, tools and hardware, and can stoppers were all products manufactured by companies based in the area around the turn of the century. Turpentine, rosin, and paint were also produced in Red Hook and utilized by the nearby maritime industry.

Red Hook’s current built environment still features many of these manufacturing structures, some of which have been converted to accommodate alternative industrial uses such as woodworking, sheet metal fabrication, architectural glass, and countless machinery repair businesses. A number of food manufacturers operate out of Red Hook such as Dell’s Maraschino Cherries, Empire Apple Products, Steve’s Key Lime Pie, and Ike & Sam’s Kettlecorn.

This preservation plan is the culmination of four months of research, collaboration and outreach. Red Hook’s industrial character is key to the area’s future. Combining historic preservation with economic development, our goal is to benefit the Red Hook community by protecting its historic resources and implementing ways that these resources could provide economic opportunity and growth. We have identified a number of significant historic structures and areas in Red Hook. Our plan would stimulate industry in the area by providing high quality jobs and rehabilitating historic structures for industrial use. Stimulating industry by incentivizing the reuse of historic structures would entice businesses to relocate to Red Hook and establish the neighborhood as an incubator for new industry. In preserving Red Hook’s past, our plan intends to provide a framework that will shape Red Hook’s future.
Statement of Purpose

The Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn is an historically significant waterfront area with great potential for economic growth through continued use of its historic industrial buildings. In creating a preservation plan, our objective is to make sound recommendations for the effective rehabilitation and reuse of historic industrial buildings that would enable new business growth and create jobs. The fundamental aim of our recommendations is to retain Red Hook’s waterfront as an industrial/ manufacturing zone while preserving its historic fabric and character.

Red Hook’s maritime industrial history is still evident in its architecture, with many buildings dating to the mid-1800s. The waterfront has always been a manufacturing area and current businesses continue this use. However many of the buildings are fully or partially vacant; industrial reuse is necessary in order for these buildings to remain viable as manufacturing facilities.

To gain an understanding of Red Hook, its history, and the community’s needs we met with various business owners, community representatives, and industrial development professionals. Meetings with Tom Fox of New York Water Taxi and property owner Greg O’Connell yielded insight to Red Hook’s development challenges and opportunities; Community Board 6 District Manager Craig Hammerman outlined the community’s primary needs; and tours of the Brooklyn Navy Yard and Greenpoint Manufacturing Design Center showed successful manufacturing reuse examples.

Threats to the community’s historic fabric have already been seen in the demolition of significant buildings to accommodate new commercial development. While new businesses are needed to create jobs in Red Hook, our goal is to demonstrate the potential for accommodating new business growth by utilizing the existing built environment and preventing future demolition through landmark protection.

There are currently only two city landmarks in Red Hook: the Brooklyn Clay Retort and Fire Brick Works Storehouse and the Sol Goldman Pool at the Red Hook Play Center. We have identified many other significant buildings and areas in Red Hook that are worthy of designation both locally and nationally. In making our recommendations for landmark designations, we underscore the importance of retaining the industrial use of these significant buildings. Any designation should recognize that certain allowances are necessary to accommodate the installation and use of industrial machinery. Tools such as master plans under city landmarks regulation can allow buildings to be designated as landmarks while still being viable for manufacturing use. There are incentives including tax credits for property owners that make preservation compatible with development and industrial use. These regulatory tools could be utilized in Red Hook and work as incentives for property owners to preserve their historic buildings.
Through preservation Red Hook can thrive as an historic and evolving industrial community within the construct of its manufacturing zoning and without losing its unique character and industrial tenor. Our studio group surveyed the buildings and landscape of Red Hook and found numerous noteworthy structures that embody the neighborhood’s historic industrial past. These buildings should be utilized for continued industrial use so that Red Hook’s future trajectory retains its manufacturing and maritime significance.

It is our hope that our recommendations for the preservation of the Red Hook industrial waterfront will be viewed by community leaders as viable and realistic measures designed to enable economic growth without sacrificing Red Hook’s substantial built heritage.
Red Hook is a waterfront neighborhood in Brooklyn so named by 17th century Dutch settlers for the rust colored soil. Red Hook was isolated from the rest of South Brooklyn by wetlands and creeks that were drained and cultivated to use as farmland during the 18th and 19th centuries.

The 1800s

The earliest notable property owners were brothers Nicholas and Matthias Van Dyke. As farmers, they constructed two mills on their property powered by the creeks: one was a ginger mill, and the other was a flour mill. They also constructed a small wharf with a brick powder house at the southern end of Red Hook.

Large-scale land speculation in Red Hook began in the 1830s, prompted by its location within an easy distance of the busy docks in Manhattan and the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. The Red Hook Building Company, overseen by local Brooklyn developer Colonel Daniel Richards, acquired a large tract of land from the Van Dyke brothers. In 1838 the company proposed building hundreds of residences that would be serviced by a ferry connecting Red Hook to Manhattan. The housing plan and the ferry service were never realized and the Red Hook Building company folded.

Richards continued to pursue development in Red Hook and in 1840 obtained approval from the New York State Legislature to build a large shipping terminal on Buttermilk Channel opposite Governor's Island. Richards formed the Atlantic Docks Company to oversee the basin's construction. The project was completed in 1848. The Atlantic Basin's piers and docks provided convenient accommodation for large ships sailing through the Port of New York, while the Manhattan waterfront became increasingly congested and unmanageable.

Richards constructed the first steam grain elevator in the Port of New York on the Atlantic Basin's wharves in 1847. The elevator stored and processed bulk grains moving through the Erie Canal and New York Harbor from the Midwest and Canada. By 1867 the majority of the grain business in New York Harbor was done in Brooklyn, in part due to the absence of grain elevators on the Manhattan side.

The success of the basin prompted further development around the site. In the same year that he built the grain elevator, Richards petitioned the city to build and open a street grid of more than 35 streets around the site of the Atlantic Basin. The City of Brooklyn complied and laid out a street grid that connected Red Hook's waterfront to the rest of South Brooklyn.
In 1843 Irish immigrant William Beard purchased a large tract of waterfront land in Red Hook, just south of the Atlantic Basin construction site, and began to fill in the farmland. By the mid 1850s, Beard had acquired over one million square feet of land and had begun construction on the Erie Basin at the southwest tip of Red Hook. In 1864 the Erie Basin was completed and immediately became a popular station for ship repair and grain storage. It was the largest man-made harbor and storage depot on the eastern seaboard.

After its completion Beard sold a portion of the land in the Erie Basin to the Anglo-American Dry Dock Company, which proceeded to construct the area’s first graving dock, facilitating large-scale ship repair and contributing to the basin’s popularity among shippers. The size of the basin, its proximity to both the Atlantic Basin and the docks of New York City, and the graving dock served to make the Erie Basin the center for ship repair in New York harbor during the Civil War.

The Civil War was a very prosperous time for Red Hook. The Union Army commissioned a number of warehouses in the region. In fact, so many warehouses were constructed in close proximity to one another along Brooklyn’s waterfront that the it became known as the “walled city.”

The earliest warehouses in Red Hook lined the piers of the Atlantic Basin and were used to store grain. The very first was built by the Atlantic Dock Company before the completion of the Basin, in 1844. The W. Beard and J.B. and G.C. Robinson Storehouses were built between Van Brunt Street and the northern end of the Erie Basin around 1869, and contained two grain elevators. Transatlantic ships or those arriving from Canada or the Midwest through the Erie Canal were able to discharge their cargo directly into the warehouses on the piers of Red Hook, where goods were stored before being transported to New York or New Jersey railroad depots on lighter barges.

The successes of Richards and Beard encouraged other developers to buy or lease land in Red Hook. In the vicinity of the Atlantic Basin and the Beard Street stores were many sectional or floating docks and a number of small shipyards where barges, tow-boats, and various other kinds of small crafts were built. As early as 1853, Red Hook housed a large shipbuilding yard. The Burtis Yard at Beard and Conover Streets was one of the first in Brooklyn, and employed more than 500 men by 1855.

After the Civil War, Red Hook continued to serve as a center for ship repair and grain storage. The dry docks and slips in the Erie Basin and the Atlantic Basin made Red Hook a critical destination for ships sailing through the Port of New York. Commercial arteries along Van Brunt and Richards Streets and residential housing along Coffey and Dikeman Streets began developing to support the growing worker population.
As Manhattan’s docks became overdeveloped and crowded, additional industry continued to move to Brooklyn’s waterfront, where the large available space was ideal for heavy and bulky shipping operations. Dozens of wood and brick buildings were constructed and thousands of immigrants poured into the neighborhood looking for work in the thriving industrial port. The post-Civil War years, in particular, saw a huge boom in industrial building in Red Hook. The 1860s through 1890s were the busiest years of the area’s industrial development era. The current built landscape shaped itself during this time.

This wave of industrial building construction was concurrent with the dredging of the Gowanus Canal, approved and funded by the state legislature in the mid 1860s. The mouth of the canal was built just east of the Erie Basin. It accommodated the growing need for dock space and industrial waterfront building in South Brooklyn by providing an artificial extension of the waterfront in Red Hook. After completion of the canal in 1870, it became an active waterway allowing for the expansion of commerce and industry into Brooklyn.

Before consolidation with New York City in 1898, Brooklyn was the fourth-largest city in the country, providing thousands of industrial jobs in waterfront factories and storehouses. The Red Hook landscape had transformed itself in fifty years from farmland to an industrial port center. Waves of immigrants from Ireland, Italy and Germany filed into South Brooklyn, settling near the docks and piers in search of employment. Most of the neighborhood residents were employed in port-related industries, holding titles such as fishermen, sailors, and dry dock laborers. Others held manufacturing positions as factory workers, carpenters, and ironworkers.

Manufacturing firms that located to Red Hook during its industrial heyday included the Brooklyn Clay Retort and Fire Brick Company on Van Dyke Street; a steam pump manufactory near the northeastern end of the Atlantic Basin; the Esler and Company Boiler Factory near the southwestern end of the Atlantic Basin; and the New York Patent Felt Company on the corner of Van Brunt and William Streets. These firms, although not necessarily dependent on the shipping industry of the area, profited from their waterfront locations and often operated small piers from which they floated their goods to greater New York. The Brooklyn Clay Retort and Fire Brick Company leased a small loading dock from William Beard at the Beard and Robinson Stores in the Erie Basin, just one block from their manufactory.

Other firms benefited more directly from the local shipping industry. The Erie Basin Iron Works, which manufactured stationary steam engines and gas holders, opened on Van Dyke and Dwight Streets during the Civil War, just one block north of the Anglo-American Dry Dock site. The Erie Basin Iron Works' waterfront location enabled ships to have their hulls and machinery repaired at the same time, increasing the serviceability and popularity of the Erie Basin during its formative years.
Red Hook at the Turn of the Century

Industry continued to thrive in Red Hook into the twentieth century, although the major wave of industrial building noticeably receded. Little new construction took place in the first decades of the twentieth century, despite a busy shipbuilding and repair business in the Erie Basin during World War I. Some of the earliest buildings began to show signs of neglect and the early grain elevators on the Atlantic Basin and the Beard Street Piers disappeared sometime during the first decade of the twentieth century. The loss of the grain terminals was the result of a dwindling grain shipping trade, caused by an increase in inland rail transportation. The reduction in trade took an economic toll on Red Hook’s waterfront, and in 1922, in an effort to revive local industry, the large Red Hook Grain Terminal was constructed at the edge of the Erie Basin to receive grain shipments. The effort proved largely unsuccessful in redirecting grain traffic through Red Hook.

In the face of a shifting grain trade industry, manufactories and ship repair facilities continued to offer alternative sources of employment on the waterfront. Many of the original grain storehouses were converted to more general cargo and stevedoring purposes, and Red Hook remained a major shipping hub. Beginning in the 1890s, the New York Dock Company purchased piers and warehouses in Red Hook, including those built by Richards and Beard. In 1901 they purchased the Atlantic Basin from the Atlantic Dock Company. As a result, the New York Dock Company became one of the largest employers in Red Hook. The primary occupation of its workers was longshoremen—those who load and unload ships. By 1942 eleven local chapters of the International Longshoremen’s Association could be found in Red Hook. Local 1195 housed itself at 287 Van Brunt Street and local 1199 at 393 Columbia Street.

Another large employer in the area after the turn of the century was the Robins Dry Dock and Repair Company in the Erie Basin, a subsidiary of the Todd Shipbuilding Company, which inherited the large dry-dock from the Anglo-American Company. Robins employed 16,000 people during the First World War and 5,000 in 1942, during the Second World War.

In 1908 the New York Dock Company began construction on two large reinforced concrete loft warehouses on Imlay Street, directly to the east of the Atlantic Basin. The New York Dock Company buildings were completed in 1913 and set a precedent for new industrial building in Red Hook. The following decade saw a rise in concrete storehouse construction around the Atlantic Basin and along the Gowanus Canal corridor. The open spaces available around Clinton, Columbia and Otsego Streets were selected by paint companies for relocation because the chemical fumes from their new concrete factories would not bother neighbors. The American Marine Paint Company, for example, built a reinforced concrete manufactory on Richards Street in 1920. A decade later Red Hook fell into another building slump.
Industry in Red Hook was largely sustained by the wartime ship repair industry in the Atlantic and Erie Basins. The high degree of industrialization in the area led to the devaluation of residential property, which discouraged the construction of housing after 1915. Stevedoring and longshoring were the primary occupations of Red Hook residents and the irregularity of employment made incomes low and unsteady. By 1940 the population of Red Hook was steadily decreasing.

Even the Gowanus Canal, once considered a symbol of South Brooklyn’s industrial growth and prosperity, became a deterrent to businesses considering relocation to Red Hook. Years of industrial traffic coupled with inadequate systems for sewage disposal transformed the canal into a heavily polluted waterway, drawing complaints about the smell from neighbors that in 1911 resulted in the construction of a “flushing tunnel” to disperse pollutants by using a propeller to push water from the canal into Buttermilk Channel. Despite this effort the canal continued to be a deterrent to meaningful new industry and building in the area.

In the decade following the Second World War containerization had an enormous detrimental impact on Red Hook’s shipping industry. Containerization, the process by which goods are consolidated into metal containers for transport then sent by ship to a large port where they are unloaded onto trucks or railroad cars and transported to their final destination, effectively cutting out the need for smaller port facilities such as Red Hook’s.

The Post-Containerization Era

Containerization ended Red Hook’s era as a major port and maritime center. In an effort to compete with the new technology the big shipping companies left the older, established berths of New York City for the large open spaces in New Jersey and their proximity to railroads and interstate highways. Even the New York Dock Company had pulled out of Red Hook, abandoning the traditional storehouses and piers along its waterfront for the Port of Newark. The land was left unoccupied and undesirable. The City eventually took control of the abandoned properties but found little use for them until the beginnings of a neighborhood revitalization effort toward the end of the twentieth century.

The City of New York undertook major reconstruction projects on Red Hook’s waterfront during the 1950s. The Civil War-era warehouses on the Atlantic Basin were demolished and the large pier built by Beard at the mouth of the Erie Basin was split in two to provide better access between the waterfront and the Basin. Even so, the neighborhood fabric today is a direct result of Red Hook’s maritime and industrial heritage. Some buildings have been renovated, others abandoned, and some are being re-used for modern industrial purposes. But the sense of place provided by Red Hook’s waterfront industrial development history is still apparent in the area’s modern-day streetscapes.
The functional beauty of industrial architecture has often been overlooked by commentators trained in the formal arts. The design of industrial buildings was dictated primarily by pragmatic concerns with technical and economic factors taking precedence over stylistic preoccupations. These buildings are built instantiations of the modern industrial spirit. Nineteenth-century descriptions of industrial buildings routinely commented on the buildings’ substantial and commodious qualities, their well-engineered construction, and their suitability to their purpose. These elements constituted a building’s functional beauty.

This is not to say that the owners and builders of industrial buildings were completely unconcerned with the appearance of their buildings. Simplified versions of architectural styles, particularly the American round arch style and the Gothic revival, were often overlaid onto industrial buildings. Furthermore, an attractive and neat factory reflected well on the owner or business that inhabited the building and made it more desirable to workers. Many industrial buildings prominently bear the name of the business that occupied them or the business’s emblem, which shows that they took pride in their buildings. Similarly, the letterhead of manufacturing businesses often included a rendering of the factory. In the nineteenth century, the sublime aspects of industry were celebrated.

In the nineteenth century, urban waterfronts were consecrated almost entirely to industry. The wealth of New York City was due in no small part to the centrality of the city’s port to regional and later global trade routes. In addition to supporting the maritime trade industry and complementary enterprises like ship repair, the waterfront served as a center for unrelated industries. The waterfront location was desirable because it provided access to multiple forms of transportation, while maintaining proximity to a large population of workers, and allowing for products to be marketed to urban centers. The architectural vestiges of a complex history of industry remain on Red Hook’s waterfront.

Red Hook Storehouses

Both the appearance and circumstances of the construction of industrial buildings are intimately tied to broader historical trends in trade and technology. The warehouses and piers that characterize the Brooklyn waterfront emerged because much of the trade of bulk goods in the Port of New York took place on the Brooklyn waterfront between 1840 and the rise of containerization in the 1950s and 60s. For most of this period, bulk products on the waterfront were trans-shipped and stored at small terminals consisting of narrow finger piers and in masonry warehouses lining the wharves. While many of the finger piers along the waterfront and within the basins have disappeared, a number of masonry warehouses remain on Red Hook’s waterfront and serve as a reminder of the role of maritime trade on the growth of New York and Brooklyn.
Most of the Brooklyn grain warehouses were built between 1850 and 1880. Typically, these warehouses were flat-roofed structures four to six stories high, 150 to 200 feet long, and 50 to 80 feet wide with three to five bays of round-arched windows on the short sides facing the water and the streets. They were timber framed with longitudinal arrays of square columns generally 15 to 18 feet apart transversely. The storehouses had timber floors, brick exteriors and party walls often made of rubble stone. The most intact examples in the study area include the former Merchants’ or Governors’ Stores on Pier 41 at the foot of Van Dyke Street, the Beard Stores in Erie Basin at Van Brunt Street, and the Bowne Stores on Smith Street at the mouth of the Gowanus Canal.

The Bowne Stores is a remarkably intact grain storage warehouse (c. 1886) that was part of a two-block-long complex of hay, feed, and grain processing facilities from Creamer to Sigourney Streets. The Bowne warehouse is the only gable-roofed example in this class of building in the study area. This massive four-story, 200-by-80-foot brick building has a central transverse fire-wall and is eight bays long. Most of the bays have round-arched window openings. Round arches were often used in nineteenth-century industrial architecture because they both provided and expressed strength. Arched construction also had the virtue of being fireproof because it circumvented the need for a potentially flammable wood lintel.

When the British Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, transatlantic grain trade out of the Port of New York increased significantly and the export of unmilled grain became a major characteristic of portside activity. Heretofore there had been little infrastructure in place for handling bulk quantities of grain and hay, but from 1846 to 1922 many such facilities were developed on the Brooklyn waterfront.

The gable roof at the Bowne complex was clearly adapted to grain handling, and was in some ways a retention of a slightly earlier form of warehouse more widespread until the mid-nineteenth century, when the dominant flat-roofed form emerged. Unlike large grain elevators built later in the nineteenth century to accommodate rail and marine traffic, the early Brooklyn grain facilities were somewhat idiosyncratic, sometimes combining general warehouse forms with grain handling functions largely intended for export traffic, and sometimes including highly specialized structures with little resemblance to typical storehouses.

In the 1880s, when rail began to play an increasingly large role in shipping grain, the grain handling facilities in Brooklyn began to disappear. This was accompanied by an attendant decline in the canal grain traffic, which had previously fed Red Hook’s grain handling facilities. In the ensuing decades, there was a sharp decline in the port’s share of export grain traffic. By 1915 there were no grain elevators in Brooklyn. Many of the grain storehouses were converted to general cargo or stevedoring purposes.
The Red Hook Grain Terminal was completed in 1922. It was part of an attempt to re-direct the Port’s grain traffic to Red Hook. The Grain Terminal was directly related to the New York State Barge Canal update begun in 1905. The improved waterway was designed for diesel-powered barges and followed routes which maximized the use of natural water bodies. These conditions differed dramatically from the older canals, which were entirely artificial channels designed for boats pulled by mules. The new system, which opened in 1918, was an engineering achievement of great significance, although the economic benefits never materialized.

The initial grain terminal construction at the Gowanus Bay took place from 1914 to 1919. During this phase the underdeveloped area behind the Brooklyn Basin was cleared and a deep channel was dredged to accommodate ocean-going vessels. The construction of the grain elevator itself began in 1920. The western side of the pier was fitted for general cargo while the eastern side, closest to the grain elevator, was designed specifically for grain handling. For non-grain cargo, the basic pattern of transfer expected at this pier was from barges unloaded on the west side by crane to ships on the east side loaded over ramps.

Engineers from the New York State Department of State Engineer and Surveyor designed the grain elevator and administered its construction. The design had a combination of elements from several stages of elevator evolution. Major components included concrete storage bins with most elevating machinery other than marine legs in cupolas above the bins, elevator legs and belt conveyors for virtually all horizontal and upward vertical transfers in the grain elevator itself, and a combination of pneumatic unloaders and belt conveyors for loading and unloading vessels not adjacent to the elevator.

A 1984 survey for the Army Corps of Engineers provides details about the construction of the grain elevator. Fegles Construction Company from Minneapolis poured the concrete for the elevator. A virtually continuous network of reinforced concrete bins, encompassing a space 408 feet by 69 feet in area and nearly 95 feet in height, formed the core of the grain elevator. These bins were 8 inches thick, and included three shapes: 54 circular bins 20 feet in diameter on 24 foot centers, arranged in 3 rows of 18; 37 quarter bins on the outside of this array; and 34 inner bins between the rows. Bins had funnel shaped bottoms, and rested on an array of concrete mushroom columns which in turn rose 19 feet from the foundation concrete mat. There were 136 full or freestanding columns, in 4 rows of 14, and 68 pilasters along the elevator walls. The bottom of the bin array, which was level with the terminal upland, was a 6 inch thick reinforced concrete slab, resting on
about 4.5 feet of cinder fill above the foundation slab in a relieving platform type of construction. Thus the column bottoms were embedded in the fill, which was retained in part by the bulkhead. Construction of the bin walls and supports began in the fall of 1921, and featured a spectacular performance by the contractor, who poured everything between the top of the 6 inch slab and the top of the bins as a monolith during a period of thirteen days. The completed bins had a storage capacity of two million bushels. Other terminal structures included several brick outbuildings around the grain elevator, a transformer house at the Terminal Pier, and the elevator boiler house.

The grain elevator was something of an anomaly in being a large grain elevator designed for canal traffic. Early twentieth-century changes in overseas grain shipping patterns highlighted a fundamental lack of grain handling development that had been a growing problem in the Port of New York for a quarter century. With essentially no improvements in grain facilities after 1922, competition from other ports significantly reduced grain traffic.

Manufacturing Facilities

In addition to acting as a transshipping hub for grain and other goods, the Red Hook waterfront was also home to a number of manufacturing industries including brickmaking, iron foundries, paint manufacturers, and boiler works. Indeed, the strong presence of the maritime industry was probably the catalyst for the growth of complementary operations. For many of the Red Hook industries, access to redundant transportation facilities (in this case water, road, and to a certain extent, rail) was crucial to successful business practice because it reduced the amount of intermediary shipping of raw materials and finished products. Urban waterfronts also had the advantage of providing opportunities for the marketing of manufactured products to the metropolis and providing access to a large labor force.

Manufactories had to respond to the needs of the people and machines that inhabited them. They often had solid floor systems to withstand the weight and vibration of machinery. They were organized in an open way so that the maximum area could be overseen by a single foreman, and large windows provided light to workers engaged in precision work.

There were a number of foundries in Red Hook. Because Red Hook was a center for ship repair, the local foundries often manufactured iron components and machinery for ships. One striking example of a foundry is the Lidgerwood Manufacturing Company (1886) at the intersection of Coffey and Ferris Streets. The company’s most celebrated product was the Lidgerwood rapid unloader.

The rapid unloader expedited the process of discharging dirt, ore, and ballast from flat railroad cars and simplified the process of moving such cargo from barges to rail cars. Given Red Hook’s
position as a thriving port in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it seems possible that a number of neighborhood industries may have relied on Lidgerwood rapid unloaders.

After the Lidgerwood Manufacturing Company disappeared from Red Hook the building continued to be used for iron work. The building footprint is organized around two central courts. Foundries needed access to open space to store raw materials, flasks, and castings. The building used to have a monitor roof which would have provided light and ventilation to the casting floor when the molding took place.

The Brooklyn Clay Retort and Fire Brick Works is another example of a manufactory in Red Hook. It was one of the earliest manufacturing enterprises in Red Hook and some of the complex’s remaining buildings have been landmarked.

This illustration from Henry Stiles’ History of Brooklyn shows that the Brooklyn Clay Retort and Fire Brick Works complex, like that of the Lidgerwood Manufacturing Company, was organized around a central courtyard. The smokestacks indicate that the complex had a kiln. It was common for kilns, foundries and boilers to be separated from the rest of an industrial complex because they were the most volatile industrial sites.

Urban manufactories had ready access to transportation systems and a labor force, but were often limited in the way they could expand. This densely developed lot of the Chesebrough Manufacturing Company (later inhabited by the American Stopper Company) at Columbia and Delevan Streets is an example of a complex comprised of a series of architectural accretions.
The continuity of materials provides visual unity and facilitates identification. The maps on the left illustrate how the industrial division of labor became manifest in the architecture of a manufactory.

**Reinforced Concrete Structures**

Many of the manufactories in Red Hook are a series of buildings organized around a central court. The emergence of reinforced concrete as a building material literally changed the shape of manufacturing facilities. Reinforced concrete industrial lofts brought the diverse set of manufactory activities together under one roof. The technology of reinforced concrete made it possible to have desirable large open floor spans as well as large windows to provide daylight in workspace interiors in an efficient multi-story structure. Fireproof reinforced concrete loft buildings with centralized fire sprinkler systems had the advantage of allowing tenants or owners to qualify for lower fire insurance rates. Additionally, their location on an industrial waterfront allowed companies to take advantage of the proximity of manufacturing space, storage space, and shipping. The quick construction of reinforced concrete structures made the building material very economical.

The New York Dock Company’s twin loft buildings at 100 and 160 Imlay Streets are early examples of reinforced concrete construction in Red Hook. They were built in 1911–12, by which time reinforced concrete was no longer an experimental construction material. The level of decoration on the buildings is evidence of the sophistication in the construction process. The buildings are massed around a central tower that encloses a water tank. The central tower is a design trope frequently employed by architects in industrial buildings which highlights their fortress-like appearance.

The American Stopper Company constructed a reinforced concrete building on the former Cheseborough site in 1922. In this building we see that the floor plates extend beyond the face of the building to support brick panel walls and large windows giving a grid-like expression to the exterior walls. The use of reinforced concrete in skeletal form was one of its most common iterations. Reinforced concrete and steel-frame construction vastly increased the amount of wall space that could be devoted to windows.

Grain storehouses, manufactories, and reinforced concrete lofts are three building types characteristic of the Red Hook waterfront. They are built reminders of the industry that was responsible for the growth and success of New York and Brooklyn. These storehouses also provide a record of the evolution of industrial architecture over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as materials, technology, work practices, and trade changed.

Sources:


Proposed Designations

We have identified a number of historic structures and features in Red Hook and recommend several designations that would satisfy many community needs while preserving Red Hook’s important historic remnants. We propose a thematic district recognized by the National Register of Historic Places and three types of New York City landmark designations: the Red Hook Waterfront Historic District, historic waterfront sites, and individual landmark buildings.

The National Register of Historic Places is a government entity overseen by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Sites and districts listed on the National Register in New York State are administered by the State Historic Preservation Office in collaboration with the Department of the Interior. Buildings and sites typically become eligible for National Register landmark status when they are fifty years old or older. The proposed National Register thematic district designation acknowledges non-contiguous functionally related structures in an area. Beyond contributing to Red Hook’s sense of place as a once-thriving maritime and industrial center, by utilizing historic preservation tax incentives available for National Register-listed properties, these historic structures can serve Red Hook as economic resources.

The Landmarks Law is a regulation enacted in 1965 and administered by the LPC that seeks to protect the character and historic fabric of New York City’s built environment. Buildings and sites become eligible for New York City landmark status when they are thirty years old or older. The three New York City landmark designation recommendations—the Red Hook Waterfront Historic District, individual sites, and individual buildings—offer more protection than a National Register designation as any proposed alterations, additions, and demolitions must be approved by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) before being carried out. This process ensures that the proposed changes are sensitive to the scale of the area and character of the surrounding neighborhood.

New York City district designations protect areas that are collectively significant for their historic contribution or architecture. The proposed Red Hook Waterfront Historic District is notable for its array of waterfront industrial buildings, all of which relate to the area’s maritime and manufacturing history. District designation also prevents out-of-scale and inappropriate development from taking place. Individual landmarks and sites are protected as isolated entities.

The map at the upper right shows each building and site we have determined to be significant in purple. Together, these comprise the proposed thematic district for the National Register of Historic Places. The map at the lower right shows the same significant buildings and sites along with the proposed Red Hook Waterfront Historic District in yellow. Each building and site (in purple) would be individually landmarked by the City of New York. The following section highlights some of the significant buildings we have identified.
The Lidgerwood Manufacturing and LeComte buildings are brick factories built in the late-19th century. The Lidgerwood Manufacturing building originally manufactured machinery and is now used by a moving and storage company. The LeComte building also manufactured machinery and is now occupied by a high-end hardware manufacturer.

Both buildings are located within the proposed Red Hook Waterfront Historic District and within the proposed National Register thematic district.
The Red Hook Stores are Civil War-era storehouses that were recently converted into a Fairway Supermarket. Windows were added at each end that are not original to the building, however we still believe it to be significant and worthy of designation.

The vacant waterfront warehouse on the right is the last remnant of the Revere Sugar Refinery. Both warehouse buildings are located within the proposed Red Hook Waterfront Historic District and within the proposed National Register thematic district.
Pier 41 and the Beard Street Pier are Civil War-era waterfront warehouses. Both have been successfully rehabilitated in recent years and now house dozens of light manufacturing and commercial businesses. They are excellent examples of the potential for industrial building reuse in Red Hook and are both located within the proposed Red Hook Waterfront Historic District and within the proposed National Register thematic district.
The German American Warehouse is a Civil War-era warehouse that originally stored cotton. The Brooklyn Clay Retort and Fire Brick Works was established by J.K. Brick in 1854. It is a complex of three buildings that processed and manufactured materials for gas works construction in the mid-1800s. The building shown on the lower right is a designated New York City Landmark, although the building with the smokestack is actually the oldest in the complex. The smokestack is the last remaining of three originally built. All four buildings are located within the proposed Red Hook Waterfront Historic District and within the proposed National Register thematic district.

German American Warehouse
106 Ferris Street
Year: pre-1869
Architect: Unknown
Original use: Cotton storage

Brooklyn Clay Retort & Fire Brick Works
76-86 Van Dyke Street
Year: 1854-1859
Architect: Poss. Joseph Brick
Original use: Manufacture of materials for gas works construction
200 Conover Street is an example of early wood construction in Red Hook. Residences were primarily built of wood through the 1860s until stone and brick became more common. There are a number of wooden buildings that remain in Red Hook, some of which are in remarkable condition but most of which show significant deterioration. This historic row of houses on Coffey Street is well cared for. The Belgian block street is visible in the lower edge of the photo. The rowhouses are contributing structures within the proposed Red Hook Waterfront Historic District.
The Lehigh Barge is an historic New York vessel that now houses a maritime museum. It is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places and we recommend its inclusion as a significant contributor to the proposed Red Hook Historic Industrial Waterfront District. There are currently no vessels designated as New York City landmarks (and it is not clear if there could be).

One of Red Hook’s character defining features is its Belgian block streets. The proposed local historic district would protect these streets from damage, removal, and paving.
The Atlantic and Erie Basins were vital to Red Hook during its maritime peak. Although there are no historic structures at either basin, both retain their man-made footprints. As such, they are among the most important artifacts of Red Hook’s early industrial and maritime history. We recommend that the basins be recognized by the City as historic sites. Site designation would acknowledge the historic significance of basins, protect their footprints, and provide control over future development fronting onto the basins.
80 Richards Street is an early steel-framed reinforced concrete building. It is currently occupied by a jewelry manufacturer for fabrication, storage and order fulfillment.

The Bowne Stores are a complex of three buildings built in 1886 to store grain. They are currently used as warehouses. Both buildings contribute to the National Register thematic district and should be recognized by the city as individual landmarks.
Likewise, the New York Dock Company buildings on Imlay Street and American Marine Paint Company building on Richards Street merit designation as individual landmarks by the city and listing in the National Register thematic district. The twin New York Dock Company buildings were built in 1911–12 as industrial lofts. They are currently the subject of a contentious redevelopment plan. The reinforced concrete American Marine Paint building is a typical example of the industrial architecture.
The Red Hook Grain Terminal is one of the most distinctive landmarks in Red Hook. As one of the tallest buildings in this low-rise neighborhood it is easily seen from afar. The American Can Company Stopper Factory bought its Delevan Street property in 1904. Several buildings on the site were built in the late 19th century for the Chesebrough Vaseline company. The large four-story structure at the far end was originally a two-story Vaseline bottling plant. The Stopper Company added two floors. Both complexes are proposed as individual city landmarks and as contributing structures in the National Register thematic district.

**Red Hook Grain Terminal**
685 Columbia Street  
Year: 1922  
Builder: New York State Department of State Engineer and Surveyor  
Original use: Grain storage

**American Can Company Stopper Factory**
20-30 Verona Street  
Year: 1892-1911  
Architect: E.G. Brown and Others  
Original use: Bottling of Vaseline and manufacture of can stoppers
Red Hook’s development pattern consists of two parts. The waterfront developed as a major industrial and manufacturing port in New York City’s shipping industry. The residential and commercial areas of Red Hook developed further inland to provide the necessary housing infrastructure—with respective services—to accommodate the industrial labor force. Aside from the addition of higher-density residential structures, such as the Red Hook Houses, the area has remained a low-rise, low-density, mixed-use neighborhood due to its zoning framework. Red Hook’s current zoning has controlled the area’s development since its introduction in the 1960s. Zoning regulates a building’s envelope and use, but not its visual aesthetic.

The adaptation of Red Hook’s historic industrial infrastructure to new uses is permitted under the regulations dictated by the region’s zoning districts. Red Hook is largely a manufacturing zone along the waterfront. The New York City Planning Commission established manufacturing zoning for the specific purpose of providing adequate space to accommodate the operating needs of industrial and manufacturing entities while minimizing their impact on the surrounding communities in which industries reside. This manufacturing zoning is divided into four groups: M1, M2, M3, and M1/Mx-5/R5. New residential construction is prohibited in manufacturing districts in general, but live-work situations are permissible in M1-5A and M1-5B areas and Special Mixed Use districts that allow the conversion of industrial or manufacturing buildings to residential spaces. A few historic residential structures remain residential in manufacturing-zoned districts because they existed before the zoning was implemented.

**M1**

M1 districts house a variety of light manufacturing and industrial uses that must strictly adhere to standards because the zone is a buffer for heavier manufacturing zones. M1 zoning ensures that minimal adverse effects from noxious byproducts of manufacturing are mitigated to protect nearby residential or commercial neighborhoods.

While there are no height restrictions for this district, the floor area ratio (FAR) in M1 districts ranges from 1.0 (M1-1) to 10.0 (M1-6) and parking is only required in M1-1, M1-2, and M1-3 districts. However, there is a required setback for structures reaching 30 feet in height at a 1.0 FAR. Due to standards that prohibit excessive noise and pollution, M1 districts have proven to be advantageous for promoting the lighter industrial uses desired by communities such as Red Hook.
M2 districts represent the middle ground between light and heavy industrial areas. M2 districts can accommodate industrial uses that generate a moderate level of noise, ground vibrations, and pollution. The Atlantic Basin and surrounding upland area is an example of an M2-1 zone in Red Hook.

M3

Of the three primary manufacturing districts, M3 allows for the heaviest industrial uses in its area of designation, although it also allows commercial, retail, recreational, and medium-manufacturing uses. In this zone, companies may perform heavy industrial uses. Areas of Red Hook along the Gowanus Canal and the Erie Basin carry the M3-1 district designation.

Special Mixed Use Districts: M1-1/MX-5/R5

In January 2002 the Planning Commission rezoned a small area of Red Hook bounded by Van Brunt, Conover, and Coffey Streets into a Special Mixed Use District, denoted as MX. According to the Commission, the purpose of this district is to encourage new development by providing an area that is more relaxed with respect to its regulations of uses. Specifically targeting industrial neighborhoods, this district allows for the development of residential, commercial, community facilities and light manufacturing/industrial by combining manufacturing zoning (M1) with low-high density residential zoning (R3-R10). Commercial, residential, and light manufacturing uses can occupy the same lot side by side or use the same building. Fairway Supermarket (formerly the Red Hook Stores), located on Van Brunt Street next to the Beard Street Warehouses, utilizes the Special Mixed Use District restriction. Here, a permissible light manufacturing use (retail supermarket and produce processing area) occupies the lower and upper floors, while condominiums (medium density residential use governed by R5) occupy the middle floors and are within the same structure.

How does the current zoning benefit or hinder the development of Red Hook?

An advantage of the current zoning is the flexibility for new construction and adaptation of pre-existing structures to new uses. This is particularly attractive for businesses wishing to relocate or expand in Red Hook. Each zoning district allows a developer to adapt an existing building to suit its needs within the zoning restrictions, enabling Red Hook’s existing infrastructure to be adapted and preserved, especially when a historic building is larger than what might be permitted under current zoning.
However, one drawback to the regulatory framework governing the manufacturing zoning along the waterfront is that it does not regulate the building aesthetically. This has led to the presence of infill developments that do not relate to the context of the surrounding neighborhood. Areas along Dikeman Street (particularly between Ferris and Conover Streets) have seen not only the construction of infill that departs from the scale of the surrounding structures, but also inappropriate alterations that damage the integrity of historic buildings. Thus, while the flexibility of the current zoning is favorable for introducing new development into the area, care must be taken to establish a system of controls that will govern the context and height of new construction as well as the alteration of pre-existing infrastructure for new uses.

**Recommendations**

The survival and maintenance of Red Hook’s historic character and continued viability as a mixed-use zone are contingent upon the implementation of more stringent district overlays or changes in zoning. The Red Hook community objects to the heavy manufacturing zoning (M3) located along the Gowanus Canal and the Erie Basin, which allows for heavier industrial uses such as sewage treatment facilities and other noxious uses. To ensure that the area will not be infiltrated by these uses, manufacturing zoning along the waterfront might be altered to light and medium manufacturing districts, which would require the downgrading of M3 districts to either M2 or M1. This zoning will also limit the potential for the area to be developed for residential or hotel purposes. Furthermore, historic district overlays or Special District designations (such as those similar to the Madison Avenue Special District) could provide the necessary framework to regulate existing and new construction in a manner that is both respectful and compatible with the overall context of the neighborhood.

**Sources:**


* The grey denotes areas that have no buildings or serve as parking facilities, storage or open space.

Paint factories, such as the American Marine Paint Company on Richards Street are examples of heavy industrial use that is permitted in an M3 district.
Development Pressures

Development of the Recent Past – The Fairway Project, Brooklyn Cruise Terminal and Ikea

The past ten years have changed Red Hook substantially. Much of this change is a result of new developments that have occurred in the area, three of which we will look at in detail. In 2002, Greg O’Connell, a local developer, bought a waterfront, Civil War-era warehouse of 230,000 square feet from the New York City Economic Development Corporation. O’Connell proposed its development as a mixed-use structure. A Fairway Supermarket would occupy the ground floor while the upper floors would be developed as live-work dwellings. This plan took advantage of a rezoning that authorized mixed-use development at the waterfront. Locals opposed this project for several reasons. They claimed that traffic would overwhelm the neighborhood, cause a rise in pollution, and compromise the structural integrity of the buildings along the streets by which trucks would deliver goods to the supermarket. The community also warned that allowing residential development at the waterfront would set a precedent which could eventually lead to the demise of the working waterfront, and also said that while Fairway provided jobs to local residents, the nature of these jobs were low in quality and pay. Preservationists raised issues with the physical realities of converting a historic warehouse from manufacturing to mixed-use necessitated by the New York City Building Code, specifically that the addition of windows and light courts would compromise the historic integrity of the structure.

Two years after the Fairway project, the city’s Economic Development Corporation (EDC) announced a twenty-year master plan to develop three cruise terminals focused around the Atlantic Basin. The EDC claimed that these three terminals had the potential to create 1,600 jobs. In 2005, one of these three cruise terminals opened at the southern arm of the Atlantic Basin. Only 14 full-time jobs were created as well as 279 part-time jobs on the forty days when a cruise ship was docked. The Red Hook community has voiced interest in using the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal on some of the 315 days when it is not in use, perhaps for a craft fair or a flea market. So far, no such plan is in place.

That same year, the Swedish furniture company Ikea identified the Erie Basin as its new location. Ikea said that its development had the potential to create 500–600 jobs. Ikea’s development plans were approved by Community Board 6 provided that Ikea address issues of traffic calming as well as offer a local job training program. Before accepting job applications from the general public, Ikea gave the Red Hook zip code (11231) a two-week head start to apply for jobs at their new store. Ikea also sent a mass-mailing in which the entire zip code was alerted on how to apply for jobs. Ikea’s job application process was done via the Internet, thus precluding anyone without a computer from applying; however, it is unclear how much this truly affected the hiring process as it is not known what proportion of Ikea employees live in the 11231 zip code. Ikea’s plans to build its new store involved filling in a historic graving dock previously used
by the Todd Shipyards. The Municipal Art Society spearheaded the campaign to save this graving dock. While the campaign was unsuccessful, the filling is reversible should the graving dock need to reemerge. Currently, the only visible trace of the graving dock is a stone outline in the Ikea parking lot.

There are many smaller developments happening in Red Hook that are less controversial. Because Red Hook has a preponderance of vacant lots, many infill developments are taking place. Many of these developments do not fit in with the historic building stock in Red Hook. However, due to the lack of current regulation, nothing stands in the way of their construction.

**Current Developments – the Atlantic Basin, Revere Sugar Site, and Imlay Street Buildings**

Red Hook’s Atlantic Basin is currently slated for redevelopment. In January 2007, the EDC issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Atlantic Basin. The RFP specified that all proposals should include a marina and maritime support facilities and that preference would be given to proposals which maximized public access to the waterfront and provided direct employment opportunities to the Red Hook community. Tom Fox of New York Water Taxi and Douglas Durst, a developer, partnered to create a proposal to submit to the EDC. Their proposal, which had the potential to create 1,106 jobs, included a homeport for New York Water Taxi vessels, docking for transient vessels and working boats, a diesel fuel facility, a boat yard for repair and maintenance, an in-water marina, and a dry-stack storage facility, as well as community facilities such as a beach, a neighborhood park, a portion of the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway, and a waterfront esplanade. Durst and Fox ensured the community that they were committed to offering jobs to the community and their proposal gained substantial local support. The Durst/Fox proposal provided the best of both worlds: it made the Atlantic Basin accessible to the Red Hook community as recreational space as well as maintained a working waterfront. Six other entities submitted proposals as well.

In February 2009, the EDC formed a new plan that included facilities for Phoenix Beverages, a distribution company currently located in Long Island City, Queens, was threatening to move to New Jersey. To deter them from doing so, the EDC proposed the Atlantic Basin. The EDC’s plan for the Atlantic Basin includes space where Phoenix Beverages will receive goods transported by boat; space for PortSide New York, a maritime education non-profit, to dock its historic vessel; as well as a maritime career center and a visitor center from which a ferry can transport the public to Governor’s Island across Buttermilk Channel. This plan prompted public outrage. Local residents voiced concerns that there would be an increase in truck traffic, that the potential for job creation was unclear, that PortSide New York was included in the plan without issuing an RFP for cultural institutions generally, that local access to the waterfront would not be possible,
and that the Durst/Fox proposal would be more beneficial for the city. However, all of these criticisms are not necessarily sound. While there is not as much public access to the waterfront as in the Durst/Fox proposal, there is some. Likewise, the maintenance of Red Hook’s waterfront as a functioning port is beneficial to the Red Hook community. Many of the concerns voiced by residents are a result of Red Hook’s new population. Red Hook used to be populated by those who worked on the waterfront. However, today, most of the residents do not. Because of this, they are not as understanding of the realities of a working waterfront. A working waterfront ensures Red Hook’s livelihood as well as the protection of its historic waterfront buildings as functioning resources. The EDC will effectuate its plan in the coming year.

The Revere Sugar Site is another development in Red Hook. The site, adjacent to Ikea, was formerly the home of the Revere Sugar Refinery. Today it is owned by Joe Sitt of Thor Equities. The Revere Sugar Site once included Civil War-era warehouses and an iconic conical dome used in the production of sugar. It was eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Joe Sitt acquired the site and in 2006 demolished all but one of the structures. In their place, Sitt plans to build a mixed-use development. The most recent renderings for the site attempt to recall Red Hook’s history of a shipping port in a very literal sense. Currently, the site is inactive.

The twin Imlay Street buildings are another source of controversy in the Red Hook community. Formerly used by the New York Dock Company, these ninety-year-old six-story reinforced concrete structures were bought by Bruce Batkin in 2003 and 2005 respectively with the intention to develop them as condominiums. In order to achieve this conversion, Batkin would need to gain a variance that would shift the zoning from manufacturing to residential, from the Board of Standards and Appeals. Batkin gained a zoning variance on 160 Imlay Street, allowing him to develop it to his liking only after fighting a lawsuit initiated by the Red Hook/Gowanus Chamber of Commerce among other local groups. The Imlay Street buildings currently sit in the midst of conversion. There is little activity at the site, a probable result of the drastic difference in economic climate from when Batkin bought the buildings and today.

**Recommendations:**

- A Neighborhood Conservation District should be created in order to shape future development so as to be contextually appropriate.
- Maintain dictated Manufacturing zoning by limiting variances for non-conforming use (including residential) as well as limiting size and bulk variances.
- Establish measures to ensure the Red Hook community is protected and benefits from big box development. Existing structures should not be destroyed and replaced with a new structure or parking lots. Existing historic industrial structures should be reused, as warehouses, stores or parking garages. Community Benefits Agreement(s) should be made with new businesses opening in Red Hook to ensure economic development.
197-a: A Plan for Community Regeneration

In 1992 the Red Hook community, in conjunction with Community Board 6, began what would be a nearly five-year journey in forming a 197-a plan. Section 197-a of the New York City Charter enables the creation and adoption of community plans “for the development, growth, and improvement of the city and of its boroughs and community districts.” Titled *Red Hook: A Plan for Community Regeneration*, the Red Hook 197-a plan intended to create an “economically, socially, and physically integrated community,” acknowledging Red Hook as a “valuable asset and not a forgotten liability.” The plan dealt with issues of housing, economic development, community facilities, transportation, open space and the waterfront, landmarks, zoning and quality of life.

The Red Hook community called for a comprehensive community development plan by the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development. The community identified a need for affordable housing as well as a range of mixed-income housing opportunities with priority given to Red Hook residents. Specific recommendations included the improvement of Red Hook houses, both in terms of security and repairs; the construction of 2,600 units of housing to return Red Hook to its 1950 population; affordable infill housing at Conover Square (roughly bounded by Conover, Van Dyke, Van Brunt, Coffey, Dikeman, Wolcott, Sullivan, and Richards Streets); and the rehabilitation of city-owned buildings throughout Red Hook.

The plan also identified a number of community needs in terms of economic development. Generally, the community called for the creation of jobs and job training programs, the promotion of compatible industry to grow at Red Hook, and to maintain the mixture of housing and industry which has historically defined the neighborhood. Specific recommendations included the preservation and upgrading of the Red Hook Marine Terminal as well as developing the Erie Basin and the waterfront just south of the Gowanus Creek as significant industrial and maritime areas; that one percent of all public investment in Red Hook go toward economic development; the expansion of funding for commercial revitalization along Van Brunt Street, Columbia Street and Clinton Street; the creation of industrial and commercial incubator programs to encourage Red Hook residents to start their own businesses; to develop Red Hook as a cultural and historical attraction; to redevelop the Revere Sugar Refinery site and Red Hook Grain Terminal in a way that would create local jobs; to develop the New York Shipyard site so it is used more intensely; and to develop the film and media support industries at Red Hook.

Red Hook’s 197-a plan identified a number of specific ways to develop community facilities, with an emphasis on the needs of the large youth population. The four blocks bounded by Lorraine Street, Hicks Street, Bay Street and Otsego Street were proposed to become an educational and commercial center called Education Plaza. This area would be the home to a new school. Funding for afterschool programs at Public School 27 and the Patrick Daly School were also recommended, in addition to increased funding for youth programs generally. The Red Hook community also
called for the establishment of three library satellite reading programs. In addition to the needs of Red Hook youths, the plan also addressed the general needs of the community, calling for a program for environmental monitoring and the establishment of specialized family health care services.

A number of transportation recommendations were also put forward. The plan identified improved transportation to and from Red Hook as key in its revitalization. It was proposed that Red Hook become a one-fare zone, thus eliminating a transfer fee when connecting from the subway to the bus at Smith/9th Street and/or Fourth Avenue. The plan also called for increased maintenance at the Smith/9th Street subway station, specifically the repair of the escalator. In addition, the B61 bus route should be extended. The community recommended that a truck route be moved from Van Brunt Street to Conover Street, and that Columbia Street and Clinton Street should not be truck routes. In addition to these route modifications, the plan called for the increased enforcement of truck routes throughout Red Hook. The community also proposed a new ferry linking Red Hook with the rest of the New York waterfront and a new bus service from Red Hook to Lower Manhattan via the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel in order to increase Red Hook’s accessibility. Additional recommendations include general traffic calming throughout the area, the improvement of intersections so as to be more pedestrian friendly, and the addition of bicycle ways.

Open space and waterfront access were another section of recommendations included in the 197-a plan. The plan proposed the creation of Ecology Way, a greenway which would link all of Red Hook running along Lorraine Street, Wolcott Street, Van Brunt Street and Coffey Street. The community asked that Coffey Park be rehabilitated with a community center. The plan identified the waterfront between Van Brunt Street and Wolcott Street as an area which should be perpetually accessible by the public. The Coffey Street Pier, which falls within this boundary, was recommended for reconstruction as a recreational pier. A trolley line linking Red Hook with the rest of the Brooklyn Waterfront was also proposed.

A number of the historic resources of Red Hook were identified as important and deemed worthy of protection. The plan asked that Red Hook’s Belgian block streets be preserved and historic lighting installed. Several buildings were identified as potential New York City Landmarks, including the Brooklyn Clay Retort and Fire Brick Works Storehouse, Christ Child Church, Visitation Church and Parish House, the Beard Street warehouses, the Erie Basin, the Red Hook Grain Terminal, the Red Hook Pool and Recreation Center, Coffey Park, Red Hook Houses, New York Shipyards, New York Dock Company Warehouses, 202–240 Coffey Street, 353 Van Brunt Street, 205–217 Conover Street, 174 Beard Street and 203–207 Van Brunt Street.
The Red Hook 197-a plan proposed changes in zoning that supported the community’s proposals for the development of housing as well as the general economic development of the area. These changes called for the establishment of a mixed-use zone which would permit housing with compatible industry; to rezone Van Brunt Street between Seabring Street and the waterfront as R6A with a commercial overlay; to rezone the R5 districts around Van Brunt Street to R5B in order to ensure contextual residential development; to maintain light manufacturing (M1) as a buffer between residential areas and areas of heavy industry (M3); and to rezone the area previously identified as Education Plaza in order to allow for appropriate development.

*Red Hook: A Plan for Community Regeneration* concluded with a chapter on quality-of-life issues. It was recommended that truck routes be further enforced, and that sidewalks be installed and maintained throughout the neighborhood in addition to upgrading the bus stops with shelters and bus schedules. The plan called for an increase in enforcement of illegal dumping as well as the prohibition of dumping on vacant lots. Furthermore, vacant lots should not be used as open industrial storage when proximate to residential buildings. The plan prohibits the parking of cars in Coffey Park and the Red Hook recreation area as well. In addition to these recommendations, the community promotes the general greening of Red Hook.

The Red Hook 197-a plan was submitted in 1994 and adopted on September 11, 1996, by the City Planning Commission. The Commission received many letters of support from members of the community including activism groups, private landowners, artists, parishes, a not-for-profit development corporation, local businesses, the Red Hook Business Improvement District, state assemblypersons, and Red Hook residents. More than a decade later, despite some implementation of some of these recommendations, many of the issues which this plan sought to resolve remain.

Sources:
1. §197-a, New York City Charter
2. Community Board 6, Borough of Brooklyn, New York City, *Red Hook: A Plan for Community Regeneration*
Industry & Jobs

Red Hook is a vibrant industrial and business community that harkens back to New York City’s maritime history as a cacophony of small-to-midsize companies that somehow create a synergistic commercial environment.

There are only four local businesses that seem to have more than 100 employees. These are DiFama Concrete, Time Moving and Storage, Ikea and Fairway. While well known, Ikea and Fairway are exceptions to a description of the community. Ikea and Fairway, the two “mega stores” in the area, have taken advantage of Red Hook’s natural abundant space, availability of labor, and proximity to Manhattan. However, because Ikea and Fairway are self-contained destination stores, they tend not to offer as much benefit to the derivative businesses that give the community life. Both stores have also had to grapple with one of the primary downsides of the area—the lack of direct public transportation. For a destination store, this is a major drawback and Ikea has invested in private water taxis from Manhattan to mitigate this disadvantage. Additionally, both Ikea and Fairway have responded to this lack of public transportation by building large parking lots. The entry of the two stores has unquestionably increased the name recognition of Red Hook, which is advantageous to business growth.

Middle market, family-owned concerns predominate in the area. Several industry themes can be used to describe Red Hook. The first is construction, which as a category in and of itself comprises only thirteen companies. However, a closer review of the data indicates that a preponderance of the eighty-four service companies are within or related to the construction industry. These businesses include skilled trades such as carpentry, electrical, HVAC, plumbing and woodworking. In fact, highly skilled labor is a chord that connects a number of otherwise disconnected businesses in the area.

Many of the service companies need specially trained labor for these industries, which range from refrigeration to engineering. This creates an atmosphere in which companies must invest in their employees’ training and are thereby incentivized to retain employees for long periods of time. The availability of large space in proximity to Manhattan also allows many companies to use the area for warehousing needs and provides attractive space for several moving and storage operations. While only one of these firms employs more than 100 people, the companies tend to use space disproportionate to their employee censuses. The availability of these larger spaces means that Red Hook is a convenient place for sales operations to be located in the same place as order fulfillment. Thus there are twenty-three sales or sales/manufacturing companies in Red Hook. Red Hook also hosts a variety of businesses such as restaurants and barber shops, which primarily serve local employees and business visitors to the area. While these service businesses do not provide real industry to the area, they do offer the community a liveliness and enhance the attractiveness to employees.
Incentives for Business Growth

Businesses can be encouraged to relocate to Red Hook through the creation of direct state, local, and federal tax incentives. The existing Industrial Business Zone Plan can be strengthened through community lobbying of local representatives. Tax incentives can be developed for relocation to Red Hook so that existing buildings can be repurposed and light industry can affordably remain in New York City. Tax deductions for moving expenses would greatly encourage industries that rely on heavy equipment to relocate, as such moves are very costly.

To determine what leads to success with the use of old industrial buildings for current manufacturing as it is practiced in New York City, we examined two other waterfront industrial spaces in Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Navy Yard Industrial Park and The Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC). Both of these organizations operate as non–profits to create and manage significant inventories of industrial space around Brooklyn’s waterfront, much of it located within historic industrial buildings. Both are fully leased with waiting lists for openings.

GMDC provides small and large spaces for custom cabinet makers, artists, food production, metal working, glass & ceramics, antique restoration, interior design, and display fixture production. They have recently used historic preservation tax credits to help finance the rehabilitation of a National Register-listed industrial complex in East Williamsburg. The Navy Yard is an industrial park where sustainability and security are the selling points. A few businesses, including an aggregate supplier, use the existing piers to transport their goods. Ship repair projects use the historic graving and dry docks. Other Navy Yard businesses include dry cleaners, furniture designers, printers, home prefabrication, and film studios.

There are already numerous companies using the historic industrial spaces of Red Hook, but unlike at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and the GMDC, much of Red Hook’s industrial space is privately owned and there are numerous vacant and underutilized spaces. A good example of successful redevelopment in Red Hook can be found at Pier 41, a mixed-use Civil War-era warehouse that is now home to cabinetmakers, a wholesale pet food company, an architectural glassworks company, distribution centers, and the famous pies of Key Lime Steve. The space was also used for TV production as the site of MTV’s *The Real World* in 2008.

It is our hope that Red Hook’s historic warehouses, factories, and manufacturing spaces will remain industrial. However, these buildings are perpetually under threat because of the misperception that they are not viable for modern industrial needs. Manufacturing in New York City has changed, but the assets of old buildings are still marketable and viable for today’s industry. In addition, many older industrial buildings are overbuilt – if you tore them down, you couldn’t build that big again.
In recent years, Red Hook has become a haven for artists seeking large, inexpensive live-work spaces. As a group, these artists and organized groups with outdoor shows brought people to the Red Hook area and changed the perception of the neighborhood. Portside New York is one group trying to integrate cultural development and the waterfront resources of Red Hook. In 2007, the group staged Puccini’s opera *Il Tabarro* on the historic vessel *Mary Whalen* in the harbor. Another group, the Waterfront Museum and Barge, provides educational programs that raise awareness of New York Harbor as a space for commerce, culture, and recreation. It is located in the *Lehigh Valley Railroad Barge*, a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Recently Tom Fox, proprietor of New York Water Taxi, proposed building a beach as part of his Atlantic Basin redevelopment. Abe Schoener’s Scholium Project, which will soon begin producing wines in the old Beard Street warehouse from Hudson Valley grapes brought in by ship, has the potential to draw more people into the neighborhood for tastings.

Most cultural projects in Red Hook maintain and enhance the historic connection of the area to the waterfront and make an effort to preserve historic maritime structures, such as the *Mary Whalen* and the *Lehigh Valley Railroad Barge*. Fox’s plans for a beach would connect people to the waterfront, but with little regard for the historic uses of the Atlantic Basin. However, few historic resources remain on the Basin and it is important to maintain the connection to maritime commerce and public access to the waterfront, as Fox’s plan proposed. Tax incentives should also be used to encourage projects that preserve the connection to maritime commerce and public access to the waterfront.

Cultural events in Red Hook take place in open spaces such as Coffey Park, Louis Valentino Jr. Pier, Pier 41, and the Beard Street Piers. These spaces, publicly and privately owned, provide accessible and flexible space near the waterfront for the public to enjoy. It is essential that these spaces remain open to the public and not closed off for private interests such as upscale housing. One of the advantages of Red Hook’s abundant flexible open space and vacant land is that it is attractive for the daily needs of industry, such as parking trucks; and the requirements of special cultural events, such as the annual Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition spring pier show.

For Red Hook to continue as a haven for artists within New York City, it will be essential to maintain affordable housing and alternative live-work situations. Efforts should be made to control development that may push out those attracted to the area for its industrial nature, waterfront access, and low rents. One way for this to occur will be to incentivize developers to create projects that maintain affordable housing and alternative live-work situations with inclusionary housing bonuses. Utilized by developers, inclusionary housing is the process by which a percentage of a development is allotted to affordable housing in exchange for an increase in Floor Area Ratio (FAR) or tax-related incentives. Red Hook’s cultural assets are enhanced by its ability to continue to attract and retain a diverse population and it is important to maintain this characteristic of the area.
Issues & Stakeholders

Though our study area is largely industrial, there is a population of 11,000 residents in Red Hook. The issue of housing in Red Hook is one of balancing the competing interests that affect many industrial areas of New York City: the need for affordable housing and the need for flexible manufacturing space to create and maintain jobs.

Citywide, advocates for the creation of jobs must often fight against those demanding that space be used to create affordable housing. Businesses, manufacturers, and residents have different expectations for the development of underutilized and vacant land. Long term, more jobs will be created through manufacturing than through residential development in Red Hook. All stakeholders in Red Hook have different hopes for the development of the community. Plans for housing in Red Hook must balance these desires with the future of Red Hook as an industrial, manufacturing and maritime center.

The 7,000 public housing occupants of Red Hook Houses East and West seek more jobs for the neighborhood. Dependent on public transportation, their priority is to create a community with better access to goods and services. They would like to increase their chances for home ownership and entrepreneurial activities without needing to leave the Red Hook area. The homeowners, landlords, and market-rate renters in Red Hook desire a more active street life. Public transportation and local jobs are less of a priority for them, though property owners would like to see people drawn to the area so that they could increase rents. Homeowners would like to see the values of their homes rise as the neighborhood becomes more desirable. The homeowners and landlords’ desires work somewhat in tandem with the business community, especially bar, retail, and restaurant owners. While this group would like to see a more active street life, they also do not mind increased traffic and the customers it will bring. Manufacturers object to plans for active street life. They believe rents will rise as retailers move into the area. Market-rate renters and non-retail business that lease space would like to keep their rents low, so they would prefer if Red Hook remained off the beaten path. They object to developments like Ikea, which increase traffic in the area.

Recommendations

Historically, the residents of Red Hook worked on the waterfront and tolerated the noise and rhythm of industry because it was necessary for their jobs to exist. These residents walked to work on the docks and in the surrounding manufacturing areas. Commuters who work from nine to five may not tolerate the noise of industry, or, as rents rise, they may be less willing to tolerate the noise. Artists who moved into Red Hook also accept the noise from industry. The isolation and
interruptive industrial aspects of Red Hook kept their rents low. However, the isolation also limits job opportunities for residents of the public housing units.

Red Hook’s waterfront is predominantly industrial in use, though clusters of historic housing abut the industrial buildings and vacant lots. Within the spaces zoned M-1 are rowhouses and other residential structures from the later-nineteenth century that were grandfathered into the manufacturing areas. The physical proximity of the residential community to the water is an important element of historic Red Hook, but the current zoning should be maintained to avoid spot zoning and mixed uses that lead to conflicts between residential and industrial interests.

Parking lots and unused warehouses provide an opportunity to rehabilitate buildings and construct new housing in empty spaces. One way to accommodate affordable housing for the area in the future will be to create inclusionary housing bonuses in any inland areas already zoned for residential use.

The creation or preservation of housing must be consistent with the need to maintain industry and jobs in Red Hook. As a waterfront district with historic warehouses, the area is highly attractive for its potential loft conversions that would create more market-rate housing with views of the Statue of Liberty and Lower Manhattan. As the area attracts gentrification and development, transportation networks and the byproducts of industry become a source of contention between competing residential interests. It is our hope that the waterfront will be maintained for jobs and public access instead of being used to create market-rate housing.
While the majority of the study area is devoted to industrial/commercial use, the Red Hook community has a significant number of public park amenities that is disproportionate to the number of housing units in the area. Some of the privately developed piers and waterfront businesses have walkways and public pedestrian access, although a continuous waterfront path between redeveloped piers has not been constructed. Several public access points to the water are available. Valentino Park, for instance, is a small waterfront green open space with spectacular views of the harbor, Statue of Liberty and Manhattan, and contains one of Brooklyn’s few official kayak launch sites.

Coffey Park is centrally located in Red Hook, and comprises more than eight acres of tree lined pathways with four handball courts, a playground, and barbeque area with picnic tables. The Red Hook Recreation Area, at 58.5 acres, is the most significant open-space asset of the area. As an open space resource, it serves the greater Brooklyn community. With nine baseball fields, eight handball courts, a soccer field, football field, basketball courts, the Sol Goldman pool and recreation area (a New York City landmark), the Red Hook Recreation Center, and the well-known Latin American delicacies of the Food Vendors Committee of Red Hook mobile restaurants, Red Hook Park provides a cultural, gastronomical, and social component to this industrial-based neighborhood.

The introduction of publically financed community gardening in Red Hook began in 2003 with a joint venture between the State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the City of New York. The first Red Hook Farm is named Added Value Farm and is located on what was an abandoned three-acre asphalt ball field, next to Red Hook Park. It is operated by local public high school students and neighborhood residents under the tutelage of the staff of the Council of the Environment in NY and their youth leadership team. It is considered to be an “experiential educational environment” by the City of New York. The food grown is sold at local farmer’s markets and to local residents, and is a valuable resource to the community as an educational opportunity for teens, a community development initiative and a provider of fresh, locally grown produce. Last year it sold $25,000 in local produce.
The private group Partnership for Parks, one of the original sponsors of Added Value Farm, has developed a program called the Partnership for Parks’ Capacity Fund to help community-based groups and organizations gain knowledge for the maintenance and development of local parks. This includes financial and technical assistance for community groups to become non-profit 501c3 corporations to qualify for additional funding. This assistance could be used to develop a local initiative using empty lots and empty buildings for winter training, seedling growth, food distribution, and ultimately jobs in related food industries.

Red Hook Park Mobile Restaurants.
To many, Red Hook is considered inaccessible. However, this is not necessarily the case. Red Hook is, in fact, advantageously located for the transportation of cargo, a fact that is important to the ongoing viability of manufacturing in the area. We will investigate Red Hook on a local, citywide, and international level in order to truly understand where Red Hook stands in terms of transportation.

As a Neighborhood

Many of Red Hook’s streets were once paved with Belgian block. However, over the years, much of this historic paving has been lost as a result of the installation of utilities and other street repairs. In its place, asphalt was used. Some of streets remain paved with Belgian block but there is currently no plan to ensure their continued existence.

Local truck delivery is a point of contention amongst Red Hook residents. Many contest that the vibrations caused by trucks contribute to the structural instability of their historic homes. Currently, local truck routes exist along many local streets in the neighborhood (see map). Residents complain that trucks sometimes diverge from these sanctioned routes.

As Part of New York City and the United States of America

Red Hook is connected to the rest of Brooklyn and the city beyond principally by bus. The B61 line runs from Long Island City through Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Clinton Hill, Fort Greene, Downtown Brooklyn, Cobble Hill to Red Hook. The B61 makes several stops along Van Brunt Street, turns up Beard Street and terminates outside of Ikea, where it turns around. The B77 line runs from Park Slope through Gowanus to Red Hook. It has stops along Lorraine Street between Court Street and Dwight Street, as well as on Dwight Street between Dikeman Street and Beard Street, and Otsego Street between Beard street and Dwight Street. The B77 stops at Smith Street and Ninth Street, where there is also a subway station. The F train and the G train stop at Smith/Ninth Street. The F train runs from Queens through Manhattan to Brooklyn, stopping at Smith/Ninth Street and continues to Coney Island. The G train runs from Smith/Ninth Street to Clinton Hill, Greenpoint, and terminates in Long Island City.

Red Hook is served by the New York Water Taxi stop that provides free service from Ikea at the Erie Basin to Pier 11 in Lower Manhattan. This ferry is open to the public. However, service is limited during the week and the ferry does not run during the morning rush hour. Considering the size of Red Hook’s waterfront, Red Hook is underserved by ferry service.
In terms of automobile traffic, Red Hook is ideally situated to take advantage of the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel that is located at the terminus of Hamilton Avenue. The Brooklyn Battery Tunnel allows Red Hook residents and businesses access to Manhattan in mere minutes, provided they are willing to pay the toll fee.

Red Hook is also served by the Gowanus Expressway, which feeds into the Prospect Expressway serving Park Slope and Windsor Terrace, as well as the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel (which is part of Interstate 478). The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway is also accessible via the Gowanus Expressway. The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (which is part of Interstate 278) leads to the Long Island Expressway (which is part of Interstate 495) as well as the Grand Central Parkway. The Gowanus Expressway also feeds into the Belt Parkway which circumnavigates Brooklyn and provides connection to Staten Island via the Verrazano Bridge, as well as connection to the Van Wyck Expressway (which is part of Interstate 678), the Cross Island Parkway and the Southern State Parkway. Red Hook is incredibly well served by the highway system on both a city level and interstate level.

International

Perhaps most unexpected, Red Hook is accessible on an international level. The Brooklyn Cruise Terminal, located at the Atlantic Basin, provides access via cruise ship to Europe, the Caribbean and other locales assuming cruise ships travel there. However, this cruise terminal is only used on approximately 40 out of the 365 days of the year.

Recommendations:

- Create a Belgian Block Conservation Plan to deter further destruction of the historic paving stones.
- Increase the enforcement of truck routes or modify truck routes to avoid residential areas.
- Implement a new express bus line to Manhattan via the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel.
- Establish commuter ferry service, either from New York Water Taxi or another ferry company, subsidized by New York City.
- Find a suitable use for the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal when it is not in use.
The goal of this preservation plan is to integrate historic preservation principles into the local land use regulations and practices for the purpose of promoting and focusing future development that utilizes the area’s historic urban core in a respectful, contextually relevant way. Red Hook’s historic and cultural significance are due to the area’s role in the development of the maritime industry in the New York metropolitan area in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and its architecture represents a tangible link to Red Hook’s past.

**Historic Designations**

Through our careful survey of the study area and extensive research we have determined that there are four distinct designations that can be given:

- National Register Thematic District
- New York City Waterfront Historic District
- Individual New York City Landmarks
- Individual New York City Landmark Sites

Individual buildings are eligible for National Register designation under Criteria A and C for their association with the development of New York City’s shipping industry in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and exemplification of industrial and residential architecture during that period.
Significant Buildings within the Proposed Red Hook Waterfront Historic District

**Lidgerwood Manufacturing Co.**
84 Ferris St
Year: 1882
Architect: J.V. Beekman

**German American Warehouse**
106 Ferris Street
Year: pre-1869
Architect: Unknown

**200 Conover Street**
Year: pre-1869
Architect: Unknown

**Pier 41**
Year: 1873
Builder: Colonel Richards

**Beard Street Pier**
Year: 1869
Architect: Unknown

**Brooklyn Clay Retort & Fire Brick Works**
76-86 Van Dyke Street
Year: 1854-1859
Architect: Poss. Joseph Brick

**Revere Sugar Refinery Warehouse**
81-115 Beard Street
Year: 1880-1886
Architect: Unknown

**LeComte Building**
55 Ferris Street
Year: 1899-1926
Builder: Morris Building Company

**Lehigh Valley Barge #79**
Year: 1914

**Red Hook Stores**
480-500 Van Brunt Street
Year: 1869
Architect: Unknown

**Belgian Block Streets**
19th and 20th Century

**Coffey Street Residential District**
Year: pre-1886
Architect: Unknown
Individual New York City Landmarks & Sites

American Marine Paint Company
42-52 Richards Street
Year: 1920-1921
Architect: Unknown

Bowne Stores
Smith Street
Year: 1886
Architect: Unknown

80 Richards Street
Year: 1916
Architect: Unknown

Atlantic Basin

Red Hook Grain Terminal
685 Columbia Street
Year: 1922
Builder: New York State Department of State Engineer and Surveyor

American Can Co. Stopper Factory
20-30 Verona Street
Year: 1892-1911
Architect: E.G. Brown and Others

New York Dock Co.
100 & 160 Imlay St.
Year: 1911-12
Architect: Maynicke & Franke

A Preservation Plan for Red Hook, Brooklyn
Recommendations

Based on our research over the semester and issues cited by the community, we have devised the following strategies to regulate and protect the historic fabric of Red Hook while also suggesting mechanisms that can both encourage and regulate new development.

ZONING

• Manufacturing zoning along the waterfront should be standardized to light or medium manufacturing. Areas that carry a heavy manufacturing district designation should be downgraded to ensure that heavy industrial uses do not infiltrate the area as requested by the community at large.

• The creation of a regulatory framework—such as a Neighborhood Conservation District—to regulate the context and aesthetic appearance of new development.

• Areas that retain residential uses within manufacturing zones should be examined to determine whether an M1-5A-M1-5D zoning change to promote live-work housing would be appropriate for the area. Otherwise, residential development should be limited to the R5 and R6 districts in the community.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

• Zoning variances should be avoided in order to maintain a working waterfront.

• Open dialogue between the community and large-scale new businesses should be fostered in the form of community benefits agreements to promote appropriate local economic development.

• A Neighborhood Conservation District should be implemented throughout the entire Red Hook neighborhood. In areas with loose regulatory practices, these districts ensure that new development, whether modification of existing infrastructure or on vacant land, is contextually appropriate with respect to the surrounding neighborhood. The district should have established guidelines concerning additions to historic structures, size and bulk limitations, and a list of appropriate materials for new construction. Neighborhood Conservation Districts are already functioning in other parts of the country and are typically enforced by the Department of Planning. The Red Hook Neighborhood Conservation District could approve the use of certain construction materials, such as brick, concrete and wood, and prohibit others. This designation would also ensure continued low-scale development in Red Hook. Currently, there is no local law enabling Neighborhood Conservation Districts in New York City.
INDUSTRY & JOBS

- Industrial Business Zones should be re-examined and strengthened through the addition of more effective tax incentives.

- Local community vocational programs should be created to provide job training for the residents of Red Hook Houses. Classroom and training space could be housed in one of the area’s vacant warehouse complexes such as the W.G. Creamer and Brooklyn City Foundry located on Creamer Street between Court and Smith Streets near the Gowanus Canal. The conversion of this warehouse to a community facility could take place if the zoning changed from M3 to M1.

- Increasing the IBZ employee tax credit would increase Red Hook’s desirability as a place of relocation for businesses. We also need to promote the IBZ in order to raise awareness of the program.

- Creating a new credit for employees specifically relocated to historic structures within the IBZ would strengthen the program.

CULTURE

- Educational projects that are related to the area’s history should be enhanced and maintained.

- Comprehensive maintenance plans to preserve and maintain the area’s historic maritime structures, such as the Lehigh Valley Railroad Barge and the Mary Whalen, should be created and implemented.

HOUSING

- Inclusionary housing programs should be incorporated in any projects that will include housing in manufacturing areas that allow for such uses.

- Care should be taken to protect and nurture the growing artistic community by maintaining affordable housing and/or live-work situations in the area.

- For projects that create housing in areas zoned for manufacturing, inclusionary housing programs should be incorporated.

- Care should be taken to protect and nurture the growing artists’ community by maintaining affordable housing and/or live-work situations in the area.
OPEN SPACE

• Public access to the waterfront should be maintained and encouraged, and waterfront spaces should be connected to one another whenever possible.

• Create and enhance local community organizations, such as the private group Partnership for Parks, that help community-based groups and organizations gain knowledge for maintaining and developing local parks.

TRANSPORTATION

• A Belgian Block Conservation Plan should be implemented to maintain and enhance the historic paving stones.

• Truck routes should be enforced in order to deter the disruption to the residential corridors of the neighborhood.

• Local and citywide circulation should be improved in the form of express bus lines to Manhattan via the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel and increased ferry service (by New York Water Taxi or other related service) that will be subsidized by the City of New York.

• Find appropriate uses for the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal when it is not in use.

REUSE

Red Hook’s vacant historic buildings provide an opportunity for bringing new and creative uses (other than residential) to the community. Other sites have the potential to be reused as community facilities such as vocational training centers for Red Hook residents.

Under our plan, many of these historic structures will be protected as New York City Landmarks. In establishing master plans for all the proposed landmarks at Red Hook, these structures would be able to function without the perceived burden of landmarking and with all of the benefit as contributing to Red Hook’s historic built environment. The creation of a Master Plan Fund which could issue grants to do so would seriously benefit Red Hook. The Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit program should be utilized in Red Hook. So many of its industrial buildings are eligible for these credits and they will further the viability of Red Hook’s historic structures. The creation of an industrial rehabilitation tax credit would incentivize the reuse of industrial structures as well. A local tax credit program would increase this viability. Neighborhood Conservation Districts would
further ensure the preservation of Red Hook if implemented.

Although many significant historic sites and buildings have been lost, there are still a large number that remain in varying states of integrity. It is our hope that the recommendations we have made concerning the preservation of the industrial waterfront will serve as a guide for civic and community leaders to consider when planning for future development in the area. It is our belief that historic preservation is not only a means for preserving the history and cultural heritage of Red Hook, but also serves as a viable tool for the region's economic development through the reuse of its historic industrial infrastructure. Thus, the future of Red Hook lies in the preservation and adaptive use of its urban fabric in a respectful and thoughtful manner.