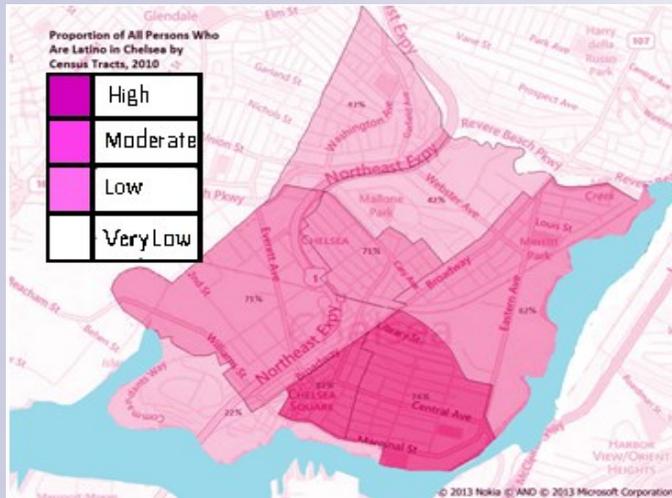


Promoting Public Access to the Chelsea Waterfront

Purpose

The City of Chelsea is currently working on a Master Harbor plan to guide the development of waterfront areas that are being released from the regulatory program which determines allowable uses along industrial ports in Massachusetts. Community-based organizations like GreenRoots, Inc. are working to ensure that the preferences of disadvantaged residents are accounted for in the plan.



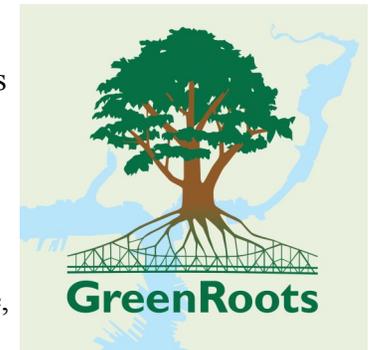
Latino Residency in Chelsea

2016;Wessell, 2014; Ou, 2016). These areas are susceptible to industrial and noise pollution making them less desirable, therefore they are populated by people of lower income who are often minorities. The majority of Chelsea’s Latino and low-income residents live in these cramped, rundown areas near the waterfront (Bash, 2000; US Census, 2010). Therefore, minority residents experience environmental injustice, defined as the increased risk of pollution, negative health effects, poor living conditions, and the lack of empowerment and voice primarily in low-income areas.

Background

The Chelsea waterfront falls under the Massachusetts’ Designated Port Area program, which prioritizes “physical and operational features needed to support businesses” and industries that require “marine transportation or large volumes of water” (Bowles, 2010; City of Gloucester, 2012; Massachusetts Government, 2016). DPAs allow industries in Chelsea, MA to occupy the majority of waterfront land, which leaves few areas for public use, such as parks, near waterfront neighborhoods. Physical barriers such as distance from their neighborhoods, few crosswalks, and few stop lights, also inhibit the use of and access to the Chelsea waterfront (EPA,

The Chelsea Waterfront



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Sponsor: GreenRoots, Inc.

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Goal

From knowledge gained through our literature review and communications with our sponsor, we developed a primary goal to guide our efforts. The goal of our project was to determine ways to promote public uses on the industrial waterfront of Chelsea, MA that express the vision of stakeholders, especially low-income residents living around the Chelsea River. In order to accomplish the goal we completed the following objectives:

1. Examined industrial and working waterfront cities in North America, which have redeveloped their waterfront, to learn how they have promoted public access along their waterfronts and involved the public in that process.
2. Identified the preferences of Chelsea's stakeholders, primarily low-income residents living on the waterfront, local government, industries, and property owners, about Chelsea's waterfront development and public access.
3. Determined best practices for increasing public access on Chelsea's waterfront with input from local stakeholders.



Our Team and the ECO Team



Eastern Mineral Salt Company

Methods

We used a number of different methods to achieve these objectives.

First, we investigated other working waterfronts in North American cities to generate ideas and techniques for waterfront development that can be applied to Chelsea based on their similarities. We conducted interviews with key local government officials in Lynn, MA, Gloucester, MA, New Bedford, MA, Vancouver, WA, Astoria, OR, and Baltimore, MD

Second, we conducted interviews and surveys to understand the preferences of local stakeholders and to ensure that their preferences are satisfied by the City's upcoming Master Harbor Plan. This was done in two steps: interviewing leaders in Chelsea and surveying Chelsea residents. We conducted 86 in-person intercept surveys with local residents of Chelsea in both English and Spanish to accommodate Chelsea's diverse population, with the help of the high school group, Environmental Chelsea Organizers (ECO).

Third, to gather more insight on the public's opinion for waterfront opportunities, we presented the information gathered from interviews and case studies to a focus group.

Findings

The findings, listed below, are from our surveys, interviews and case studies of other waterfront cities. They are organized into three themes: how Chelsea residents feel about their community, public preferences for the waterfront, and best practices for waterfront redevelopment. In total we had eleven findings, of which we have included five below.

How Chelsea residents feel about their community

A majority of Chelsea residents we interviewed generally felt that their opinions are not heard by local government.

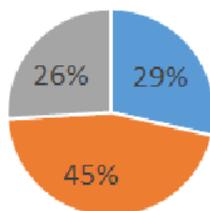
Of 38 residents surveyed, 55% did not believe that the Chelsea government would acknowledge their opinion about the decision making process in the city. They felt that the local government was going to act based on its own needs and that they only listened to large landholders and businesses in the city.



Traffic along Marginal Street

Do you know about current plans to redevelop the Waterfront?

N=77



Yes No Don't Know About the Waterfront

Survey Responses on Waterfront Knowledge

A large portion of Chelsea residents, Latino residents in particular, do not know about efforts to redevelop the waterfront or they do not know about the Chelsea waterfront itself.

Chelsea residents are unaware of the waterfront and its possibilities for redevelopment because the waterfront has been limited to industry and is unattractive. Many residents said that they only see the waterfront when they commute to and from Boston. Even then some residents said that they “did not even know that was part of Chelsea” when we described the salt piles along the Chelsea River.

Public preferences for the waterfront

Residents and the youth of Chelsea prefer parks and public uses that enable physical activities on the waterfront.

A majority of the residents of Chelsea that we surveyed prefer a waterfront that is “active”, a place that has walking paths, open spaces and parks for public use and recreation. The public’s desire for parks and recreational facilities on the Chelsea waterfront was a recurring theme as 42 of 56 participants asked during our survey wanted more parks along the waterfront.

Residents of Chelsea are concerned about pedestrian access to the waterfront on Marginal Street.

Pedestrian access to waterfronts and perceived pedestrian safety around waterfronts significantly affect public use along the water. According to James Marsh, Community Development Director of Lynn, MA people have been killed trying to cross highways to parks. Chelsea’s Marginal Street hinders access to the waterfront for most residents because it has no crosswalks or stop lights along the entire street. Approximately 25% of 56 residents that we surveyed about changing the waterfront wanted better pedestrian access to the River along with signage for crossing because they feel Marginal Street is too dangerous to cross.

Best practices for waterfront redevelopment

Continuous walkways from within cities to waterfronts have been shown to promote public use and facilitate access.

Waterfront walkways are inviting to most members of a city’s population because it does not cost anything to use them and enables pedestrian travel to the waterfront. We found that Boston’s harbor walk, spanning almost 40 miles along the shore, connects the community with the harbor by maintaining continuous public access along nearly all of the waterfront (Boston Redevelopment Authority). Most of the walkways do not have recreational facilities or open spaces but the lighting “makes it feel nice” according to a member of our focus group.

In waterfront areas visual enhancements have been shown to improve public opinion and use of waterfronts.

Small, but impactful, visual improvements, such as tending plants, cleaning trash, and art displays, can improve public regard for the waterfront and begin the process of redevelopment. Through our interview with the director of the waterfront partnership of Baltimore, we discovered that visual enhancements increase public use in the waterfront of the City. To start the waterfront development process they brought in mulch to make the waterfront more aesthetically appealing to the residents, which led to an increase in waterfront use.

Recommendations

Through analysis of our findings and literature review we developed several recommendations that would help the local government understand the preferences of Chelsea populations for the development of Chelsea’s waterfront.

We recommend that GreenRoots, Inc. and the City of Chelsea collaborate to inform low-income and minority residents about the waterfront parks and the redevelopment process.

Informing low-income and minority residents about the waterfront along Marginal Street and its benefits is the first step in the goal of increasing public participation in the redevelopment process. This can be done through bilingual meetings, documents, and online communications to the general public about the benefits of parks and walkways along the water and the potential beauty of the waterfront.



The Chelsea Community Garden

We recommend that the City of Chelsea and GreenRoots, Inc. collaborate with the uninformed and marginalized public and include their voice in the upcoming Master Harbor Plan.

Investigating other waterfront cities in North America has shown that including the marginalized populations is important and promotes better planning and development that the public approves of and uses. Gloucester, MA implemented direct resident involvement by conducting meetings with different communities in the city and conducting a citizen’s panel that recorded the outcome of events (City of Gloucester, 2014). The City of Chelsea and GreenRoots, Inc. should then attempt to increase attendance of low-income and minority groups to public hearings and events.

We recommend that the City of Chelsea collaborate with the MA Department of Transportation (DOT) to invest in pedestrian access to the waterfront by creating crosswalks, traffic signage, street lights, and improved sidewalks.

Residents of Chelsea do not feel safe crossing Marginal Street and would not feel safe going to any parks along the waterfront without a means of crossing. However, Chelsea’s Marginal Street is not under the jurisdiction of the City of Chelsea because Marginal is a major trucking route, therefore their ability to change access is limited, according to Ms. Power of GreenRoots, Inc. As a result, the local government of Chelsea should work with the Massachusetts DOT, which manages the roadway of Marginal Street, to find and enact solutions for pedestrian access to the waterfront.

We recommend that the City of Chelsea implement improvements, such as cleaning the sidewalks, tending the plants and creating small events, along the waterfront to make the area more inviting.

Creating free or low-cost events along the waterfront could attract people and would enable residents to witness the current state of the Chelsea River, while introducing them to new possibilities. Small events should be held at PORT Park and other sites along the waterfront with the collaboration of GreenRoots, Inc. in order to familiarize local residents with the waterfront and create a culture of waterfront use within the community.

Conclusions

The case studies we investigated will help the City of Chelsea and GreenRoots, Inc. determine the best ways to redevelop the waterfront while including all residents in the process. They must also collaborate to inspire and inform the public about the potential of the Chelsea waterfront.

At the end of our project we delivered the following to GreenRoots, Inc.:

- Documents detailing public opinion regarding waterfront usage and development.
- A comparative matrix of waterfront locations that we investigated.
- An article in the newspaper “El Planeta” that will introduce GreenRoots, Inc.’s vision.



GreenRoots Commemorative Wall