Introduction

Since Superstorm Sandy struck the Northeast coast almost three years ago, City, State, and Federal agencies, hundreds of organizations, and thousands of individuals have mobilized to aid affected communities in their recovery efforts, increase preparedness, and develop new ways to make New York City and the surrounding region more resilient.

MAS has long advocated that the resilience of urban areas – including their built, natural, social, and economic infrastructure – is strongly linked to the everyday livability of neighborhoods and the cities they comprise. The same shared spaces that provide everyday opportunities for social interactions and chance encounters that foster neighborhood cohesion, cultural understanding, a sense of belonging, the ability to source the ingenuity of others, and advance economic pursuits – our civic assets – are particularly critical in communities battling ongoing stresses and acute shocks.

Since Superstorm Sandy, MAS has been at the forefront of the post-Sandy effort to connect civil society leaders, government officials, grassroots community organizers, academics, and a host of other community leaders and urban practitioners through forums, convenings, and other programs. These dialogues fostered comprehensive and early conversations around the lessons learned from the Sandy response.

Starting in the spring of 2015, MAS has worked with local partners and City, State, and Federal agencies to identify challenges to and develop next steps for city-wide community based resilience building.
MAS Community-Based Resilience Convenings

Beginning in April 2015, MAS worked with local partners including the Long Term Recovery Organization in Staten Island, Urban Upbound in Queens, Public Service Action in the Bronx, and the Kings Bay Y in Brooklyn to bring leaders from local community and faith-based organizations, businesses, and service providers together to discuss successes, identify persistent challenges, and develop a shared city-wide framework for support of community-based resilience building efforts.

RESILIENCE PLANNING

- Participants expressed concern about the decreased sense of urgency around resilience planning and a lack of retention of lessons learned.
- There are inequities within the recovery process; those still in “recovery mode” may not be engaged in resilience building efforts. There is concern that the same people not being engaged in and served by disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts are being excluded from resilience planning.
- Communities are not homogenous entities, and resilience building efforts should be tailored to local cultures and conditions. Recovery and resilience initiatives should be developed by and with the communities they impact. Place-based coordinated efforts between organizations within a community are important to identify and work towards shared goals and metrics.
- Resilience must also be approached on a regional level and does not stop at the five boroughs. Efforts need to be both long term and short term so that there are visible signs of change. Additionally, flood mitigation strategies alone, such as raising houses, are not sufficient to build resilience.

COMMUNITY NETWORKS & RESOURCES

- Participants emphasized the importance of organizations and institutions which have pre-existing and long-standing relationships within communities and gathering places.
- A strong network of community based organizations is crucial to increasing the social cohesion that aids in strengthening resilience. It is important for the City to understand these networks so that greater communication and collaboration can be achieved. These local entities can help identify and mobilize existing leadership within community networks during times of stress.
- Everyday civic assets become resource and information hubs during and following a disaster, and can serve to build resilience on an ongoing basis. Participants identified a wide variety of spaces, including: hospitals, parks, community centers, food pantries, universities, libraries, high schools, plazas, churches, fields, nonprofit service organizations, warehouses, bars, bodegas, offices, firehouses, and residents’ homes as gathering places and hubs.

COMMUNICATION

- Better communication and collaboration between City agencies, community-based organizations, and people in communities is critical to strengthening New York City’s urban resilience. Communication efforts need to be long term and revolve around trust building. Lack of coordination and communication creates “recovery fatigue”.
- There is a challenge in getting the word out about recovery and resilience initiatives, and providing critical information to vulnerable and marginalized populations, including the elderly, people with mobility, mental, and physical health issues, and people facing language barriers.
- Utilizing digital forms of communication is important, but the digital layer cannot replace face-to-face communication.
Talking Resilience: NYC

Building on what was learned at the MAS Community-Based Resilience Convenings, MAS hosted Talking Resilience: NYC, a city-wide event in partnership with the Mayor’s Office of Recovery and Resiliency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Governor’s Office of Storm Recovery, New America, Enterprise Community Partners, Rebuild by Design, and AIA’s Design for Risk Reduction Committee. This event brought participants from the MAS Community-Based Resilience Convenings together with the broader MAS resilience network of designers, planners, architects, policy makers, and City, State, and Federal agency representatives to discuss next steps and hear updates on city-wide resilience planning.

Talking Resilience: NYC served as a platform for the City to share its application for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC). The City’s proposed project, “Protect and Connect,” will focus on coastal resilience in Lower Manhattan. This project aims to integrate physical and social resilience into the diverse communities of Lower Manhattan and Two Bridges through physical projects, programs, and policies that will provide integrated flood protection to maintain the social and economic viability of neighborhoods while investing in resilient affordable housing by adapting building systems and neighborhood infrastructure to protect homes from climate stressors.

A series of facilitated discussions in the afternoon provided opportunities for advocates and residents of the neighborhoods that would be impacted by the plan to weigh in. Participants felt that in order to increase resilience, there needs to be an increase in communication and collaboration between all parties. Additionally, there is a strong interest to make sure that waterfront access is maintained and enhanced. Suggestions for improvement include: active retail and concession while preserving natural space, seasonal activation with food trucks or farmers market, spaces that cater to both locals and tourists, and ecological and sustainable educational programming.
MAS Post Sandy Resilience Initiatives

Talking Resilience: NYC
September 29th 2015

Representatives from City, State, and Federal agencies shared updates and answered questions about their work to protect the city from acute shocks and chronic stresses. The City presented its Phase 2 application for the National Disaster Resilience Competition.

MAS Community-Based Resilience Convenings
March 2015- May 2015

In the spring of 2015 MAS worked with local partners in four boroughs to bring together members of community-based neighborhood organizations and local business, nonprofit and faith communities to discuss successes since Sandy, identify persistent challenges and develop a shared framework for support of community-based resilience work city-wide.

All Hands on Deck: Mobilizing New Yorkers for a Livable and Resilient New York
December 2013

In December of 2013 MAS released All Hands on Deck: Mobilizing New Yorkers for a Livable and Resilient City. The report outlined a policy and planning framework for creating a livable and resilient city, proposing four key principles to guide our resilience efforts — transparency, scalability, collaboration, and inclusivity — and four priorities for action moving forward: mobilizing existing resources and diverse expertise; strengthening local capabilities; investing in flexible and adaptive infrastructure; and establishing urban policies that foster resilience through local innovation.

Rebuild by Design
August 2013 - June 2014

MAS was a lead partner on the federal Rebuild by Design competition. Launched by the Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task force, with lead funding by The Rockefeller Foundation, the Rebuild by Design competition sought to inspire innovative and out-of-the-box solutions to protect communities from future storms. Ten design teams worked with MAS, the New York University’s Institute for Public Knowledge, Van Alen Institute, and the Regional Plan Association, to understand the resilience challenges the region faces.

The Road Forward: Putting Resilience into Action
June 19th 2013

Following the release of the SIRR report, MAS hosted The Road Forward: Putting Resilience into Action, providing a forum for the SIRR team to present their recommendations, and an opportunity for stakeholders and resilience practitioners to take a critical look at those recommendations and discuss strategies and for implementation and community engagement.

Mayor’s Special Initiative for Rebuilding & Resiliency (SIRR)
Community Workshops
March 6th - 19th & April 24th 2013

MAS supported the NYC Mayor’s Special Initiative for Rebuilding & Resiliency outreach program by helping to recruit over 150 volunteer facilitators for 11 community-based workshops conducted in key neighborhoods affected by Sandy. These workshops provided a step for affected communities to discuss their priorities for rebuilding.

MASNYC Resilience Roundtables
February 2013 - October 2014

Immediately following Sandy, MAS began to convene monthly and then quarterly Resilience Roundtables to provide a forum for information sharing concerning the various parallel and cross-coordinated resilience planning efforts occurring throughout New York, and to provide an opportunity to work together.

Charting the Road to Resilience: From the Ground Up
January 11th - 12th 2013

Beginning with community-led site visits in neighborhoods impacted by Sandy, and followed by a day-long convening of plenaries and working discussion groups hosted at The New School, this convening fostered a broad, comprehensive, early conversation around the lessons learned from the Sandy response.

Fostering Urban Resilience and Innovation
December 14th 2012

Bringing together a consortium of innovators, academics and foundation leaders from leading urban-focused organizations throughout the U.S. and Canada, MAS organized Fostering Urban Resilience and Innovation to discuss the challenges of merging the urban livability and resilience agendas in cities across North America.

New York City Sink or Swim: Principles and Priorities for Waterfront Restoration in a Post-Sandy Era
December 13th 2012

Less than two months after Sandy, MAS joined with the Center for Urban Real Estate (CURE) at Columbia University to co-host New York City Sink or Swim: Principles and Priorities for Waterfront Restoration in a Post-Sandy Era. Keynote speakers from the U.S. Federal government and the Netherlands Delta Commission presented ideas for technical infrastructure and financial strategies to mitigate the effects of future ‘shocks’.
In December 2012 - less than two months after Superstorm Sandy - MAS partnered with the Center for Urban Real Estate (CURE) at Columbia University to cohost New York City Sink or Swim: Principles and Priorities for Waterfront Restoration in a Post-Sandy Era.

In December 2013, MAS released All Hands On Deck: Mobilizing New Yorkers for a Livable and Resilient City. The document outlined a framework for resilience, including: mobilizing existing resources and diverse expertise, strengthening local capabilities, investing in flexible and adaptive infrastructure, and leading with policies that sustain resilience.
Thank You to Our Partners