



## WE ACT – Dedicated to Empowering Communities to Fight for Environmental Justice

### Calendar of Events

- ❖ **Roundtable Discussion with Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice regarding Mayor Bloomberg’s PlaNYC:**  
Monday, October 4<sup>th</sup> from 1:00pm-3:00pm at City Hall
- ❖ **Harlem Harvest Festival Fresh Food Summit:**  
Saturday October 9<sup>th</sup>, A. Phillip Randolph Square: 116<sup>th</sup> St & St. Nicholas Blvd
- ❖ **Food, Faith & Justice Disparities Summit run by Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice:**  
Friday, October 29<sup>th</sup> from 7:00-8:30pm and Saturday, October 30<sup>th</sup> from 8:30am-7:00pm at Riverside Church 490 Riverside Drive
- ❖ **Mother Clara Hale Task Force:** Last Thursday of every month.

### Mother Clara Hale Task Force Advances a Vision for the New MTA Bus Depot

*On the evening of Wednesday, September 22 community members, task force members, and MTA officials came together at the A. Philip Randolph Senior Center for the “Green” Vision Town Hall Meeting to discuss the status of the new Mother Clara Hale bus depot. The task force has been meeting for over two years to ensure that members of the community are involved in the decision making for the creation of this state-of-art facility.*



The evening started out with the presentation of awards of appreciation for effort and dedication to members of the community. Merle Carroll, a Central Harlem resident and task force member, presented awards to Tina Ashley, Kwame Ajole, Gloria Thompson, Marcus Book, and Charles Callaway.

cess for Mother Clara Hale Bus Depot. MTA has followed through with many of its promises: meeting with the task force for two years, the negotiations with MTA (specifically Marcus Book), LEED Certification (a great achievement for a bus depot), and safe hazardous material removal.

Tom Abdallah, NYC Transit’s Environmental Engineer, also highlighted some of the precedence-setting features of the building: 99.45% of ground material has been detoxified and recycled in the new construction, and 50% of the roof will collect a source of water called “grey water” that can be

*Cont’d on 5*

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### About WE ACT

WE ACT for Environmental Justice (West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc.) is a non-profit, community-based, environmental justice organization dedicated to building community power to fight environmental racism and improve environmental health, protection and policy in communities of color. WE ACT accomplishes this mission through community organizing, education and training, advocacy and research, and public policy development.

## Composting: We Can “Recycle” Food Waste While Fighting Pests

New York City is facing a trash crisis! As our population and consumption increase, we are producing more and more trash – and we don't have room to store it all. We do have ways to decrease the amount of garbage we make. One of them is to make use of our food waste. Instead of putting food in the trash or out in the street for the stray animals, where it can attract bugs and rats, we can turn our leftover food into compost.

Compost is a nutrient-rich “fertilizer” that is produced when food and plant parts are broken down. Because of its many nutrients, compost can be used as fertilizer to enhance the growth of plants and as a pesticide to kill unwanted bugs. Over and above these benefits, composting enables the reuse of a large part of our garbage that would otherwise be sent to landfills and incinerators and contribute to the many environmental problems facing New York City.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that New Yorkers throw away about 36,000 tons of trash every day. All of this trash has to go somewhere (like landfills and incinerators) and it has to have a way to get there (like trucks and barges). The way NYC transports and disposes of waste negatively and

disproportionately impact low-income communities of color. This system causes numerous problems for people who live near garbage facilities such as toxic materials such as pesticide and paint containers, air pollution from the trash and diesel garbage trucks that carry them, and rats and insects that congregate at transfer stations and garbage truck depots.

Of the tons of trash produced everyday, the New York Department of Sanitation reports that about 60% to 70% of it is food waste that we throw away could be turned into compost. If all Manhattan residents were to compost their food waste there would not be as many waste disposal related issues. Currently, more and more New Yorkers are beginning to compost. The Lower East Side Ecology Center produced a map of Manhattan that shows the many places on the island where residents can compost. However, just as Northern Manhattan has a disproportionately large amount of transfer stations, it also has a disproportionately small amount of composting sites. WE ACT is starting some exciting composting projects that could help get us to the goal of everyone in Manhattan having the ability to compost their food waste.



Composting turns this ...



to this!



## Vandana Shiva Energizes Harlem's Environmental and Social Activists with a Call for Collective Struggle Against Globalization

*On Wednesday, July 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:00p.m, Vandana Shiva presented a lecture, "Earth Democracy".*



Vandana Shiva, a renowned environmental and social activist from India, visited Harlem in July at the invitation of New York's own Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice. Originally trained in nuclear physics and the philosophy of science, but as a result of her study of environmental policy, Ms. Shiva quickly became an activist. Vandana Shiva has led many global campaigns, supported grassroots organizations, and written more than a dozen books and hundreds of articles in advancing environmental protection. A long-time critic of large agribusiness and globalization, she argues that the current model of economic development is not the solution to end poverty, and questions the validity of its single-minded

*Cont'd on 3*

## ***WE ACT Initiates Campaign to Identify Climate Change Planning Needs of Northern Manhattan***

Over the last 20 years we have learned that the world's climate is changing. Climate change has resulted in more severe storms, extreme temperatures, and sea level rise. The US Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the sea has already risen 4.8 to 8.8 inches within the last 100 years and is expected to continue rising. New Yorkers watched the consequences of serious storms like Hurricane Katrina and it is time to plan for our own protection.

WE ACT has begun to collect information about the vulnerable neighborhoods in Manhattan and, not surprisingly, Northern Manhattan is particularly susceptible to damage from sea level rise and storms. We hope to use this information and work with community residents and stakeholders to create a plan to ready ourselves for extreme weather events.

In order to create a plan that makes sense for Northern Manhattan we have to be able to identify the issues that are important to the people who live here. For example, we need to ensure enough first responders such as police officers and firefighters are available to respond to a large-scale emergency. We also need to ensure we have enough capacity



***We have to make sure vulnerable residents are well protected. This means caring for them before an event occurs as well as having special services available to them should an extreme weather event takes place.***

## Faith Leaders for EJ Sketch Plan for Achieving Food Justice

The Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice will begin focusing on achieving food justice. On the morning of September 23<sup>rd</sup>, members and people interested in equitable food access gathered for a meeting of prayer, discussion, and planning.

The keynote speaker for the event Dr. Nick Freudenberg, Professor of School of Public Health at Hunter College, discussed his study comparing the infrastructures of New York City and London affected their citizens' health. He found that both

“food cities face similar problems; that is, people faced insecurity (1.3 million in NYC) and many live in “food deserts,” (750,000 in NYC) areas with poor access to fresh and healthy foods. Even in NYC where 23,000 restaurants and 15,000 groceries are located, access to food is a struggle to many low-income residents. Freudenberg pointed out that, despite popular belief, obesity, diabetes, and other diet related illnesses result “not from personal choices” but from the way our city is constructed and the way that it is run.

*Cont'd on 5*

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## Faith Leaders for EJ Sketch Plan for Achieving Food Justice

*CUE is a week-long service opportunity intended for incoming freshmen at Columbia and Barnard. The program takes place before orientation and classes, intending to give interested students that opportunity to get to know their new city. Through CUE, students engage in community work with various non-profit organizations. Below is a personal reflection on the experience written by freshmen Naomi Senbet.*

**CUE and WE ACT** – I vividly remember the day we were first making our way to the sight, fresh-faced and emboldened with a naiveté that comes along with young adulthood. WE ACT was an option of many sites to choose from. Although other sites included direct service, the long term vision of this twenty-two year old non-profit and independent environmental justice group just made our team all the more excited.

**Gaining Confidence** – Despite what I believe to be our collective initial eagerness, the first thing we learned on site was to deal with rejection. While surveying people in what were unfamiliar neighborhoods at the time- Harlem and Washington Heights- I often had unreciprocated smiles as with any other urban area. Perception often feeds into reality and you may not feel like you are making a difference, but when you finally have the chance to survey someone and truly have discourse on the subject, you slowly start to gain confidence. What I found most striking were the personal connections people had with environmental issues. One young man in West Harlem told me that climate change started to mean something to him as he connected it with the extremely hot weather that killed his friend over the summer. Another older woman in Washington Heights, who works in advocacy, shared how her son was going to school for a so-called



“green” job so that he can achieve both job and environmental sustainability.

**Connecting with People** – During my survey, I also came across people who did seem to feel connected to environmental issues. I was impressed by how much WE ACT has done in this field of study, specifically with their mapping programs. It allows people to see how many problems are located in their neighborhood, street, block or even particular apartment building. In addition, I believe that testimonials from community citizens like I mentioned before are also a great tool of encouragement.

## Climate Change Planning, *Cont'd from*

hospitals and clinics to manage the needs of the more than 600,000 people living in our uptown neighborhoods. From watching Hurricane Katrina, we know those who suffered most were people who were unwell before the storm. To learn from our experience, we have to ensure we protect the most vulnerable first; this means caring for them and treating them before as well as having special services available to them should an extreme weather event occur.



Before we can make an effective readiness plan, we have to know more about the risks we face. Last summer, WE ACT surveyed some of these planning needs. We walked Northern Manhattan on foot noting resources like hospitals and health clinics, fire and police pre-

sence, and air and vulnerabilities like businesses or facilities where toxic materials are used that may pose a pollution threat to our health or the health of our waterways, and locations of brownfields (areas where toxic conditioning availability; materials have been used in the past). We tried to answer these questions: 1. If there were sea level rise or a could flooding event, where would residents go for safety and who would be able to help them if they were injured? 2. What areas would pose the greatest environmental or health risk to Northern Manhattan community members? 3. What additional social and family networks maintain our resilience?

Our survey revealed that Northern Manhattan is clearly underserved by resources like hospitals, and some neighborhoods are poorly covered by police and fire responders (compared to the number of people who could be affected). The large number of polluted areas from industrial facilities to numerous auto body shops, as well as the two waste treatment plants in close proximity to East and West Harlem residents, would put the entire Northern Manhattan area at risk of waterway contamination and water-borne diseases.

But our problems are not unsolvable. With thoughtful community planning and City support, we could ensure our readiness and maintain the safety and resilience of our community.

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## Vandana Shiva, *cont'd from 2*

single-minded drive for profit at the cost of ecological and social systems that had maintained humankind through the ages (contrast industrial agriculture which supports only “the most profitable” crop and encourages monoculture while decimating biodiversity, which is more sustainable.

Biodiversity yields crops that are more resistant to the elements and disease yet can be practiced in-place by small-scale, Ms. Shiva’s latest book, *Soil not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis*, argues that the solution to climate change and the solution to poverty are the same – both can be achieved by preserving indigenous knowledge and culture. In 1982, she founded the Research for Science, Technology and Ecology in order to conduct high quality research in conjunction with local communities and social movements. One of

the foundation’s most successful initiatives is Navdanya, which promotes organic agriculture and has created a large community seed bank. For the last two decades states all across India and Navdanya have served four million men and women across India, and helped conserve more than 3,000 rice varieties.

Vandana Shiva is a leader in the Ecofeminist movement and believes women should be more engaged in a sustainable approach to agriculture. She received the Right Livelihood Award for her work in 1993. She is also an outspoken critic on biopiracy, which is the process through which international companies often patent and exploit indigenous resources, essentially taking claiming ownership of indigenous knowledge of traditional medicines.



## Mother Clara Hale: “Vision Meeting”, *Cont’d from 1*

rain water, preventing run-off while simultaneously creating used to clean buses. The depot will also have a highly efficient heat exchange system and a “solar wall” that will use energy from the sun to heat and cool the building. MTA has yet to officially choose a contractor, but Mr. Abdallah assured residents that the trees for shading and windows that serve as “eyes to see outside” that the community had asked for would be part of the final plan. In all, twenty-three of the twenty-five total requests made by the community will be implemented. The remaining two, solar panels and wind energy, had site constraints.

Although this project is “writing the handbook on how to work with communities,” as the design manager Phil Cross mentioned, there are numerous issues that the community is still concerned about, some of which were highlighted by Mr. Callaway and some brought up by residents during the Q&A session. These included air monitors, whether tests account for noise control, the hours during which the workmen are on-site, Women and Minority Business Enterprise (WMBE) inclusion and community employment, and the building art installations, and, finally, the increased traffic around Lenox Avenue. Some issues are still be-

ing negotiated and will be resolved soon. For example, concerns about employment for locals be addressed until the contracts have been issued. Michael Garner, an MTA representative, assured the community that the 15% WMBE workforce participation is simply a baseline from which to grow the site’s minority work force.

In response to a request for update on the site’s status, MTA stated soil remediation is in full swing to remove contamination. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has approved the soil condition thus far, and MTA will continue this process until October.

As a final note, both WE ACT’s Mr. Callaway and MTA representatives emphasized the need to maintain clear and consistent communication. MTA expressed a desire to hear about community concerns as they arise so as to ensure timely resolution; the best way to communicate concerns is to share the information with Mr. Callaway or a task force member. On the other hand, residents who have questions should look at the MTA website to get project and air quality updates. That website is: [mta.info/nyc/bus/MH\\_depot](http://mta.info/nyc/bus/MH_depot).

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## Food Justice, *con’t from 4*

Dr. Freudenberg identified ten priorities for the Food Justice Movement:

1. Eliminate hunger and food insecurity
2. More available and affordable healthy food
3. Restrict promotion & availability of unhealthy food
4. Eliminate disparities in access—public policies should “green” the food deserts
5. Improve school and other institutional food
6. Increase sustainable and local production—policies to protect local growers
7. Develop food system that does not contribute to climate change
8. Local agriculture as opposed to agribusiness
9. Improve education about nutrition and skills necessary to live a healthy life (i.e. cooking)
10. Level the playing field so that there is more participation from people in food policy making and less participation and influence from corporate lobbying



***The challenge is before us – let’s get to work!!!***

## ***Take a Look at WE ACT's Community Members in Action***



## About the Harlem Community Voices Newsletter



### **WE ACT for Environmental Justice**

WE ACT for Environmental Justice  
P.O. Box 1846  
New York, NY 10027  
Phone: (347) 465-8492  
Fax: (212) 961-1015  
E-Mail: [charles@weact.org](mailto:charles@weact.org)

We publish this newsletter to keep you informed about WE ACT's organizing campaigns and our progress toward a more healthy, sustainable and just environment. We are working for you, so please let contact us if you have any concerns or issues you want to address in the community.

We also always look forward to hearing your comments on the work we do.

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***Please contact us if you are interested in  
getting involved with any of our  
Campaigns!***

### ***Harlem Community Voices***

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**Name  
Street  
City, State Zip**