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Port Authority's Brooklyn Port Facilities Should Be Reimagined

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The port of New York-New Jersey is the largest container port on the East Coast. It's publicly owned by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and it consistently loses money (\$82 million in 2013). Two facilities within the port produced losses per acre above \$180,000 in 2013 (the latest data available): Brooklyn at \$205,718 and Red Hook at \$184,788. Adjacent to one another, both properties could be far better used if converted to other purposes desired by the community.

A new report by the Citizens Budget Commission - titled "[Righting the Ship: A Course Toward Fiscal Sustainability for the Region's Maritime Ports](#)" - explores the port's challenges and opportunities, and reveals that both of these facilities could be closed with little loss of capacity, while saving money that could be redirected to other regional priorities.

Neither of the two facilities is vital to the port's future. Together they make up only 5 percent of total port acreage. Repurposing them would reduce losses and spending by the Port Authority, saving it \$29 million annually by 2029.

If the facilities' 105 acres were made available for development, the amount of vacant land in Community Board 6 - including Red Hook, Gowanus, Carroll Gardens and portions of Cobble Hill and Park Slope - would increase more than 175 percent. Vacant land in the borough would grow by 10 percent. The space - roughly the size of the Coney Island Beach and Boardwalk - would open up options for enhancing the community: housing (affordable and market-rate), commercial space, schools and parks.

The process of engaging the community in envisioning how the property could best be used would be an exciting one. A thoughtful mix of uses would generate benefits for the community, the Port Authority, and the regional economy that would be far greater than the current use.

For example, the site could yield between 3,800 and 7,600 housing units. For commercial uses, a comparison with the Brooklyn Navy Yard's 300-acre site is useful. Today more than 330 businesses employ 7,000 people at that site. A similar job-per-acre ratio at the Port Authority facilities in



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Brooklyn would yield over 2,500 jobs, more than three times the number of direct jobs supported by the current facilities.

The Port Authority's maritime facilities have a long history of running deficits and no prospect of making money in the near future. It's time to rethink the use of the most underused and obsolete ones.

Why not imagine how this property could better enhance the community? What's the harm in thinking about ways to do that? Why continue to lose money at these two facilities when those losses are not necessary?

These questions offer a fascinating opportunity for city planning. Let's make the most of it.