



# Greenbuild and Cross-Collaboration: Now More Than Ever

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Written by [Aaron Yowell](#), [Aaron Yowell](#)Posted in [Industry](#)

Gas lines after Hurricane Sandy. Photo credit: WarmSleepy via Flickr

From the warmth and comfort of my brownstone apartment, about 30 feet above the [Gowanus Canal](#) in Brooklyn, it has been shockingly easy to forget the calamity that Hurricane Sandy has brought to my favorite city. This reality is more difficult to block out – impossible, really – once you drive out to the peninsula of Far Rockaway or walk down to the Red Hook waterfront.

It took only a day for elected officials and others to [connect the dots](#): the storm and its [dire consequences](#) have more than a tangential connection to global climate change. This is difficult to argue with, not because we should be certain of the cause of this particular storm, but because it has laid bare glaring weaknesses in our transit, energy and social systems, which were designed for different times and different problems.

What will surely be one of the lasting images of the storm, on view for anyone walking or driving the streets of Brooklyn: lines miles long have accrued at gas stations throughout the region. It took only a couple of days of tankers failing to enter New York Harbor, a brief interruption of supply, for our tremendous demand to be laid bare. Lines grew to blocks and then to miles, with many waiting three hours for fuel at all hours of night. People didn't just want a full tank of gas for a spin around the block. They needed to get to their jobs, in many cases, in order to keep them. They needed to get to disaster areas to help those in need.

The New York City subway system shut down for days because in 1908, when the [first subway tunnels](#) under the East River were laid, the 14-foot storm surge we experienced last week was inconceivable.

In Far Rockaway, local affordable housing residents clamored this weekend for basic household necessities, not only because of Sandy but also because of the social policy failures that came before. They, much like the gas stations and the subway, weren't ready for this disruption. They had no margin to absorb it. To go to Rockaway is to confront clear evidence that we need to address much more than our failing infrastructure. Any solution that fails to address issues of inequality will be incomplete.

More than ever we need true cross-policy and cross-discipline collaboration – collaboration that recognizes that our cities are an open system, and that we can't address our issues with one approach and one solution.

That is what the [National Affordable Green Homes and Sustainable Communities Summit](#) at [Greenbuild](#) should provide – an opportunity to break down the barriers between professions, industries and disciplines in order to devise solutions to the complicated, multi-faceted and dire challenges we face. This broader dialogue will be front and center in Carlton Brown and Jamie Blosser's timely panel, ["Addressing the Needs of Diverse Populations through Green Development."](#)

[Greenbuild](#) gives us the opportunity to step out of our respective silos during a time of remarkable need. Despite thousands of miles of separation, I trust we'll keep the challenges we face at the front of our minds next week in San Francisco.

**Aaron Yowell**Affordable Housing and Real Estate Development Attorney  
Nixon Peabody LLP

1 comment

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**Laurie Schoeman**

Director of Sustainability Initiatives, Junto Consulting Group

2 years 16 weeks ago

Very interesting. We need to focus on interagency coordination more than ever and find a way to bridge form and function in a world that is ever changing and will require alot more creativity and a greater understanding of changing weather patterns. The 100 year storm event might become an annual event!

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