Nine days after Hurricane Sandy devastated Staten Island, the New York City Economic Development Corporation held a public meeting to present their proposal to build the world’s largest Ferris Wheel on Staten Island, just north of where Sandy’s surging waters washed 712 ton oil tanker ashore. This paper suggests that this example is emblematic of NYC’s schizophrenic development agenda.

While the Bloomberg administration put forward a famously “green” agenda for NYC, it also aggressively promoted development along the city’s waterfronts and into its natural wetlands. Focusing on Staten Island’s North Shore, I show how local environmental justice activists contested this development. Not only did this area house a cluster of toxic waste producing facilities in close proximity to residential areas, but it also contained few buffers or flood protections. For years, local activists warned that sea level rise and increasing storms would have drastic consequences for their neighborhoods, and new developments would only exacerbate those issues. I argue that this situation illuminates a series of dialectical relationships that define sustainable urban development in a post-political, neoliberal era, and which ultimately endanger the health and safety of local residents as well as the democratic process itself.

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