



Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation March 22, 2007

Good Afternoon. Thank you Chairperson Foster and committee members for the opportunity to provide you with testimony today.

My name is Tom Lunke and I am here representing the Harlem Community Development Corporation, a New York State Public Benefit Corporation, and the Harlem River Park Task Force, a coalition of 27 community and citywide organizations and 5 elected city, state and federal officials.

The Harlem River Park Task Force's main mission is to assist the people of Harlem and East Harlem and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation in the creation of a state-of-the-art, environmentally-innovative waterfront park between 125th and 145th Streets. When completed, this park will improve the quality of life of area residents by helping clean the air, reduce storm water runoff, improve water quality and wildlife habitat, and provide an attractive area for recreation and relaxation. In addition, it will further the City's goal of a greenway around Manhattan.

I am pleased to report that with support from the Mayor, City Council, State and Federal officials, Phase 1 of Harlem River Park, between 135th and 139th Streets, has been constructed. Phases 2 and 2a, under the jurisdictions of New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the New York City Economic Development Corporation, between 139th and 145th Streets, will be under construction this year. Total cost for these phases is approximately \$15 million.

I am also pleased to report that with the Council's support, we were able to convince the New York City Department of Transportation not to build its proposed 5-block long, 50-foot high elevated highway onramp along the waterfront. This structure would have destroyed the park and had an extremely detrimental impact on East Harlem residents who already suffer from the highest rates of asthma and diabetes in the city. NYC DOT is currently reviewing two at-grade alternatives and will make them available to the public for review sometime this year.

With these successes, we ask for your support again.

NYC DOT is currently using the waterfront from 125th to 135th Street (Phase 3 of Harlem River Park) as a construction staging area during its redevelopment of the Willis Avenue Bridge and Harlem River Drive. It does not plan to transfer jurisdiction to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation until 2016. We ask your assistance in convincing NYC DOT to relinquish its hold on part of this site to allow for an interim pedestrian/bicycle path that would connect Harlem River Park north of 135th Street with the East River Esplanade south of 125th Street. This would improve safety within and accessibility to the park.

Speaking of access, there are three ramps over the Harlem River Drive at 135th, 139th and 142nd Streets that are the only means of access to Harlem River Park. These ramps are poorly designed and effectively discourage residents from using the park. We seek your support in working with NYC and NYS DOT to redesign these ramps and make them ADA compliant, along with providing new signage and lighting to make them inviting.

One final request is for funding of a state-of-the-art, high performance, "green" comfort station and administrative building for Phase 1. We have partnered with the Manhattan Waterfront Parks Coalition and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation on a \$350,000 grant submission to the Office of the Manhattan Borough President and are working with Council Members Melissa Mark-Viverito and Inez Dickens on obtaining \$700,000 in additional funding. Your assistance in these efforts will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time and support. I'd be happy to answer any questions.