

**Parent & Students, Park Advocates, Environmental Justice Advocates,
and Local Residents Decry City's Insulting New Concession Agreement
for Randall's Island**

*Parks Department Seeks to Evade Legal Obligations that Would Ensure Public Accountability and
Address Environmental Harms*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New York, NY, June 8, 2009 – Today, at a public hearing held by the Franchise and Concession Review Committee (FCRC), a group of parents, students, community members and environmental justice and park advocates from East Harlem and the South Bronx voiced their opposition to a new concession agreement regarding the Randall's Island Sports Field Development Project (RISFDP). The agreement gives a consortium of private schools exclusive use of a large number of playing fields during prime after-school hours for the next 20 years in return for annual payments. In an effort to skirt its legal duties, the City slightly modified the area covered by the 'pay-to-play' agreement in order to fit it into a legal loophole and avoid a 2008 court order. Community advocates, who filed a lawsuit last week, argue that the new concession agreement is still subject to the City's land use law (ULURP) and the public review and input that it requires. In addition, the suit alleges that the Parks Department has violated the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) by failing to adequately consider the environmental impacts of the Project. Full environmental review, would require the preparation of a detailed environmental analysis in the form of an Environmental Impact Statement, and would require that the public be afforded the opportunity to evaluate and comment upon potential impacts.

The concession agreement is between the City (through the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)), the Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF), a private not-for-profit charged with the management and development of Randall's Island, and 20 private schools known as the "Randall's Island Fields Group, LLC." This is the second lawsuit that community advocates filed to ensure that the City complies with the rule of law with respect to its actions on Randall's Island. In response to the first lawsuit, Justice Shirley Kornreich of the New York State Supreme Court ruled in January 2008 that the City's deal with the private schools was a "major concession." Under City law, a major concession is beyond the approval authority of the FCRC and must be approved through the ULURP process. This process requires, among other things, that the agreement be made available for public comment and that the agreement be reviewed by the local Community Board, the Borough President, and the City Council. .

In addition to accepting public testimony at today's hearing, the FCRC will vote on whether to approve the new agreement on Wednesday June 10, 2009.

Geoffrey Croft, President of New York City Parks Advocates said, "Public parks should be available to all, not just the wealthy. Our elected officials must protect the public from these types of land grabs. I find it unconscionable that the City has gone to such lengths to avoid its legal obligation to fully and openly evaluate the impacts from a project that will fundamentally alter one of the City's great open spaces."

"My family uses Randall's Island all the time and so do other members of my community," said Hector Nazario, a lifelong resident of East Harlem and President of the District 4 Community Education Council,

which includes East Harlem. “If the City is making plans for who gets to use Randall’s Island, and in what way, we should at the very least have a meaningful say in that process.” Yolanda Gonzalez, Executive Director of the South Bronx’s Nos Quedamos Committee agreed: “New Yorkers should be concerned greatly by the increasing privatization of public parkland, particularly when it benefits the wealthy to the detriment of other New Yorkers. This is fundamentally an issue of environmental justice.”

“Access to recreational space is a fundamental need of all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status,” said David Bloomfield, an elected parent member of the Citywide Council on High Schools. “It’s inappropriate to deny this vital resource to kids because their families or their schools aren’t wealthy enough to pay extra for it.” According to Hunter Reed Manuel, President of the District 4 President’s Council, the need for recreational opportunities is particularly great in communities like East Harlem and the South Bronx: “If anything, our communities should be given greater priority for playing fields because we’re working to overcome high rates of diabetes, obesity and other health conditions that can be improved through exercise.”

“I was born and raised in East Harlem and still call it my home,” said Marina Ortiz, an individual plaintiff and President of East Harlem Preservation, Inc. “Because I use Randall’s Island and live close to it, I have a number of concerns about the City’s plans for it, concerns that ought to be adequately addressed.

The protesting advocacy groups include District 4 President’s Council, the Citywide Council of High Schools, District 4 Community District Education Council, East Harlem Preservation, Inc., Nos Quedamos Committee, Inc., New York City Park Advocates, Inc., Marina Ortiz, and Hector Nazario by Stroock & Stroock & Lavan, LLP, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) and civil rights attorney Norman Siegel.

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