



**THE COUNCIL**  
OF  
The City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, N.Y. 10007

June 8, 2009

Testimony of Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito  
before the Franchise Concession Review Committee

Good afternoon Franchise Concession and Review Committee Members.

Like most people I support the development of additional sports fields on Randall's Island because I believe in the need to expand health and fitness opportunities for our youth and because I understand the desperate need to revitalize and enhance our public parks. I also understand the important role private/public partnerships can play in supplementing capital funding for public projects. Ultimately, my greatest concern is equity and fairness in who is given access to the fields and how they are accessed.

When the details of the Randall's Island Ball Fields project were initially revealed, I joined Comptroller Bill Thompson, Borough President Scott Stringer and community advocates in opposing the plan as it stood, which would have dedicated nearly all of the available field space to use by private schools. This configuration shut out low-income students in our public schools, who have largely been unable to take full advantage of this space.

Subsequent negotiations with the Mayor's office and the Department of Parks (DPR) have increased the proportion of land which will be made accessible to public school students, and this progress is to be commended. Furthermore, Borough President Stringer and I will be working with the Parks Department to provide bus service to New York City students who wish to make use of the ball fields but would otherwise have no way to access Randall's Island.

Still, very serious land use issues remain and it is these concerns that cause me to hesitate in signing off on the plan you are being asked to vote on today. The plan before you seems to suggest that the City is seeking to push the most recent agreement through without completing critically important land use and environmental reviews, reviews I believe should take place.

According to DPR and Randall's Island Sports Foundation, the planned park reconstruction, in its totality, represents the building of the "largest outdoor athletic complex in the City," comprised of sixty-six playing fields, rest rooms, lighting, designated parking and staffed information booths. At 170 acres, the City has undertaken one of the largest, if not the largest, park reconstruction project in its history. So far dozens of acres of flora and fauna have been destroyed, the island's wildlife habitat has been seriously disturbed, and it has been estimated that more than a thousand trees have been removed. Furthermore, the plan calls for the installation of the city's largest concentration of the environmentally questionable and highly controversial artificial turf. Despite the scope of the construction no City Uniform Land Use Review Procedure ("ULURP") analysis has been undertaken, no Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been requested, nor has any analysis under the City Environmental Quality Review Act ("CEQRA") been done. An essential element of the public's ability to assess whether the current project is desirable for the local East Harlem and South Bronx community and the City as a whole is a firm grasp on the

scope of the project, which unfortunately has not happened. DPR has never publicly presented any master plan guiding all the construction on Randall's Island. Clearly, this is troublesome.

Additionally, despite repeated requests over the last 2 and a half years, we have yet to be shown the plans for a \$13 million dollar tennis concession by a private developer that has already begun and almost completed construction which includes building a 30,000 square foot covered tennis building, and according to company promotional materials, a 20,000 Sq. foot club house complete with bar and seating for up to 4,000. Each one of these project elements should have also triggered a ULURP and in all likelihood an EIS. Yet this project has managed to by-pass all environmental reviews as well as public transparency.

All of these projects, if allowed to proceed, will dramatically alter the Island. The city has invested tens of million of dollars in infrastructure upgrades on Randall's Island, much of it in anticipation for the water park project which was cancelled in September 2007. In all, the cost to the taxpayers is \$127 million and climbing. This project has gone unchecked and largely without public transparency and scrutiny. This is extremely troubling to us. Important land use decisions must have significant public input. Even after a lawsuit where the judge ordered that this project should be reviewed under ULURP, there are still no plans to do so.

It is also true that the parks department misstated the scope of work being performed as part of the sports field development. Instead of a Type 1 Memo which would have triggered an environmental review, the DPR filed a Type 2 which dramatically under reported the scope of work being performed and did not mandate that an EIS be completed.

Although much progress has been made as a result of a concerted community effort, I am cautiously optimistic about the latest deal for the Randall's Island Ball Fields. I commend the Parks Department's responsiveness that has resulted in the changes to the original plan. I also commend the work of the Task Force chaired by Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott and which I vice chair. But, I believe there is a continued need to remain vigilant and I feel that greater progress must be made as it pertains to the overall concerns on Randall's Island.

Therefore, until these greater concerns are addressed, I do not feel I can be supportive of this or any other plan that comes before the FCRC. I am committed to working arduously with the Department of Parks as long as there is a willingness to allow for and respond to community input. Progress has been made, but more work on all our parts needs to occur in order to ensure greater transparency and accountability. I thank you for your time and attention to this matter.