

**Statement Presented to the New York City Council Parks Committee  
Regarding the Proposed Randalls Island Ball Fields Franchise  
Robert Jereski, Friday, November 3, 2006**

My name is Robert Jereski and I am an alumni of St. Bernard's School, a private boys school on the Upper East Side, which has made the unfortunate decision to consider taking part in the public lands long-term lease scheme. I enjoyed Randalls Island ball fields as a participant in the sports programs of the school twenty years ago and continue to enjoy the island's fields and river front today.

As St. Bernard's website notes, "service to our community is an important and popular aspect of school life, and that [for instance] boys take part in projects for such causes as the Yorkville Common Pantry". I took part in support for the Yorkville Common Pantry serving food to homeless and hungry twenty years ago. I am certain that each of these private schools participating in what has been for months secret negotiations with the City Parks Department and the Randalls Island Sports Foundation, the secretive private-public partnership which manages the island, has a similar mission to cultivate an ethical young student into an ethical and well-rounded citizen of our city and world.

It is critical that you understand that the scheme for ball fields leasing to privileged schools is tied to the scheme to build a private water theme park on the island. Both of these schemes have been presented to the public as a fait accompli by RISF and the Parks Department. It is critically important that you, the City Council Parks Committee represent the public's interest in this public land by obtaining all information about both of these schemes from the Parks Department and RISF.

The 26 acres of park land which would be alienated by the water park currently holds 10 ball fields. Although RISF is promising more (if more compressed) ball fields, as a result of the water park scheme, the expanding needs of the city for even greater access to public parks/fields would be better met without the theme park. So there is a direct relationship between the water park and the lease scheme.

Furthermore, as a direct result of the ill-conceived deal being hatched by RISF, some private schools and the Parks Department, access to public lands would be restricted except for those private schools paying for it.

I am very disappointed to learn that St. Bernard's School is one of the twenty schools, which has been negotiating to lease public park land from the city. I cherish my experience at St. Bernard's, my past and on-going friendships cultivated there, my memories and even my thoughts of sending my future son to study where I did for nine years.

Perhaps it is a mark of the times, that the Board of Trustees of important and cherished private schools of our city are money managers and bond traders steeped in a world view of privatization and returns on moneys invested.

I urge the Parks Committee of our City Council to demand transparency and accountability from both the City Parks Department and the RISF, and to work with good government committees in the Council and in the State government to demand real accountability from public private organizations or partnerships which take on the important public responsibilities of maintaining and preserving our parkland while they sell it to those unscrupulous enough to purchase privileged access.