

Statement Presented to the NYC Franchise and Concession Review Committee
Regarding the Proposed Randall's Island Concession Agreement
Submitted by Marina Ortiz, Monday, June 8, 2009

My name is Marina Ortiz. I am a resident of East Harlem and the President of East Harlem Preservation, Inc. My organization monitors large-scale developments in East Harlem. We have been chronicling the concession agreement known as the Randall's Island Sports Fields Project, and we see that the City is ignoring the rule of law with this unfair and environmentally unsound plan.

I often frequent Randall's Island, and the Project is affecting my ability to visit the park as often as I would like. I spend time on Randall's Island during the weekends, spring through fall, and make it a point to go to every part of the island. As a photographer, I try to cover everything from the shoreline to the bridges, points of interests, and the *natural* beauty of the island. If it was, as others choose to call it, a "wasteland" then we have the city to thank for that.

I have been harmed by the Project because of its destruction of the island's natural landscape, including the removal of hundreds of trees and waterfront brush, and it has limited my access to parts of the island that I have enjoyed visiting in the past. For example, the new sports fields do not support passive use as they have limited entry points and the only major footpath on the island has been segregated from the playing fields by dense landscaping. In the past, I have enjoyed sitting in the shade on the island under its many large trees, but now there are very few shaded areas on the fields, and little to no benches.

I have also been harmed by the lack of transparency by the NYC Parks Department and the Randall's Island Sports Foundation ("RISF"). I have asked repeatedly for information about funding for the construction of the new fields, how construction has been scheduled, and whether the RISF has adequately considered all of the risks associated with installing artificial turf at City Council hearings, community board meetings, and in other public settings. The RISF and the Parks Department have not responded adequately to my inquiries, nor have my concerns been adequately addressed in the EAS.

Everyone has to obey the rule of law, including the City. It should not be allowed to avoid local land use laws or ignore state environmental laws. The City and its officials seem to think that those laws don't apply to them with regard to Randall's Island, and low-income communities and the environment are suffering as a result.

Just as citizens are expected to follow the rule of law, government/city agencies should be held to the same standard under ULURP & SEQRA.

For huge projects like this, the law requires that the City consider community input, but the City has done no such thing. Instead, the City has done everything it can to avoid having to consider the needs of those communities closest to the island. Randall's Island is public parkland that should be freely accessible to all. But instead of including the

input of the people that will be affected most, it has decided to give away half the fields to a handful of private schools for the next 20 years. The City and the Randall's Island Sports Foundation haven't asked us what we think about their concession agreement, but we're going to tell them anyway: The way they are handling the Randall's Island Sports Fields Project is unfair and illegal – and tantamount to recreational and environmental redlining.

It is simply unfair to give 20 wealthy private schools (representing less than 1% of the school population that could benefit from access to Randall's Island) EXCLUSIVE access to such a large percentage of playing fields.

Residents in East Harlem and the South Bronx should be able to meaningfully access Randall's Island especially because of the lack of available open recreational space in these communities and persistent health problems such as Asthma and obesity.

I strongly believe that the magnitude of the RISFP should trigger the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement with the requisite public comment mechanisms to ensure some measure of community input before and not after the fact.

I therefore ask the Franchise and Concession Review Committee to follow the law and put the Randall's Island project through ULURP. The communities around Randall's Island deserve to be heard.

Thank you.