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CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF NEW YORK

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THE TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS And RECREATION

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January 31, 2007
Start: 10:10 a.m.
Recess: 12:59 p.m.

City Hall
250 Broadway, 14th Floor
New York, New York

B E F O R E:

HELEN FOSTER
Chairperson,

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Alan Gerson
Letitia James
Dennis Gallagher
Melissa Mark-Viverito
Charles Barron
John Liu

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- 1
- 2 A P P E A R A N C E S
- 3
- 4 Adrian Benepe
Commissioner
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation
- 5
- 6 Liam Kavanagh
Deputy Commissioner
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation
- 7
- 8 Bess Matassa
Office of Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick
66th District, New York County
- 9
- 10 Scott M. Stringer
Manhattan Borough President
- 11
- 12 Richard Davis
Chair
Randall's Island Sports Foundation
- 13
- 14 Dr. Gregory Hodge
Assistant Principal
Frederick Douglas Academy
- 15
- 16 Patrick Mangan
Frederick Douglass Academy
- 17
- 18 Eugenia Simmons-Taylor
President
District Presidents Council of East Harlem
District 4
- 19
- 20 Marina Ortiz
East Harlem Preservation
- 21
- 22 Matthew Washington
- 23
- 24 Julio Munoz
Bold Eagle Association
- 25
- 26 Arlene Virga
Yorkville Youth Athletic Association
- 27
- 28 Jai Nanda
Urban Dove

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2 A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

3

Robert Jereski

4

Geoffrey Croft

5

NYC Park Advocates

6

Elizabeth Cooke Levy
New Yorkers For Parks

7

Emily Horowitz

8

CEC Member, District 6

9

Leonie Haimson
Class Size Matters

10

Richard Barr

11

Stuart Johnson

12

Principal
St. Bernard's

13

Bob McCullough

14

Each One Teach One

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2 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: As you can see,
3 the room is a little tight, so for overflow, and for
4 those that have to stand, if you can stand in this
5 corner with the father and the daughter -- son. I'm
6 sorry. I just saw all the hair. Sorry. Father and
7 his son, that's the standing corner, because we're
8 going to need to keep that clear.

9 I'm going to start in about three
10 minutes. Just a couple of things. There is another
11 hearing at 1:00, so we have to be out of this room.
12 So I'm going to ask that once we start the
13 testimony, we will probably use the clock. I am
14 going to have to excuse myself and take a couple of
15 calls because there is a major fire in my district
16 and I'm just waiting to hear. So, if I get up or if
17 I answer the phone or if I'm on my blackberry, it's
18 not rude or not paying attention, I'm handling an
19 issue.

20 And number three, what I'm going to
21 ask is, we started the meeting on November 3rd, we
22 know that there are a lot of opinions about this
23 deal, and if we can stick to facts and opinions and
24 not name calling, that would be very helpful, and as
25 Chair I'm going to take privilege, if I think we're

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2 engaging in name calling behavior, I'm going to ask
3 you to stop and I'm going to ask that you respect me
4 when I ask you to stop and just continue with the
5 testimony and not the name calling.

6 I'm going to give the
7 Sergeant-At-Arms a minute to get the tape going, and
8 then we should be started.

9 I'm Council Member Helen Diane
10 Foster, I guess I should have started with that,
11 Chair of the Parks Council Committee, and this is
12 Melissa Mark Viverito from Manhattan, who is not on
13 the Parks Committee, but this sits in her district,
14 and obviously is concerned.

15 We have four other Committee meetings
16 going on and two of those are joint with two other
17 committees, so we are going to have members coming
18 in and out.

19 Can we start? Do you have the tape
20 ready? Great.

21 We are going to hear from the Parks
22 Department first. We have Commissioner Adrian Benepe
23 and Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanagh.

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well, good
25 morning, Chair Foster, and Council Member Melissa

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2 Mark Viverito, and other members of the Parks
3 Committee who may join us. And on behalf of Mayor
4 Bloomberg and our First Deputy Mayor Patty Harris,
5 I'm Adrian Benepe, I'm the Commissioner of the
6 Department of Parks and Recreation. And joining me,
7 or sitting with me, is our First Deputy Commissioner
8 Liam Kavanagh. Also here with us is the
9 Administrator of Randall's Island Park, Amy Boden,
10 who is in the audience, and a number of other
11 people, and I just want to say how pleased we are to
12 be here, and to have this opportunity to discuss the
13 plan for the Randall's Island sports field, and to
14 say how pleased I am at this great turnout. Parks
15 are very important for people in the City of New
16 York, increasingly important, and it's always
17 personally rewarding to see the great interest
18 people take, and I want to thank all the citizens
19 who took time out on their busy days from their
20 jobs, from work, from taking care of kids, and have
21 come out to care about parks.

22 Parks and Recreation, as you know, is
23 the steward of almost 29,000 acres of land, which is
24 14 percent --

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I'm sorry, excuse

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2 me just a minute. Do you have printed statements for
3 us?

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: You should have
5 them.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay. We don't
7 have them yet. Can you check with the Sergeant, see
8 if he has them? And if you have a seat next to you
9 that someone is not in it, can you just raise your
10 hand, because we have overflow. There's one seat. I
11 feel like a church usher. There's one seat. All
12 right, and then the rest are going to have to go in
13 the overflow corner.

14 Thank you. I'm sorry.

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Okay. So, we are
16 stewards of 29,000 acres of land, which is 14
17 percent of New York City, that's approximately 4,000
18 individual properties, ranging from Pelham Bay Park
19 in the Bronx, which is our largest park, to the
20 smallest named park, which is McCarthy Square in the
21 West Village.

22 And we manage on behalf of the
23 citizens of New York one of the largest networks of
24 athletic fields and facilities in the nation, which
25 range from championship caliber tennis and baseball

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2 stadia, and Olympic quality track and field center,
3 legendary cross country trials, indoor and outdoor
4 pools and open water swimming beaches to the
5 thousands of basketball and handball courts that
6 provide active recreation in neighborhoods across
7 the City. But at the heart of the system are over
8 800 ball fields that host millions of hours worth of
9 organized competition for youth and adult leagues
10 each year.

11 Now, demands for field time has grown
12 dramatically in recent decades in response to
13 changes have occurred in society at large, and
14 specifically here in the City.

15 This is a phenomenon that was the
16 subject of a report and national public radio
17 yesterday, describing how more young families are
18 choosing to raise their children in cities, while at
19 the same time demanding the amenities associated
20 with suburban life. For example, well-organized
21 sports leagues and good fields for their children.

22 Now, over this same period the City's
23 population has grown by a million people, with much
24 of the increase due to new immigrants who brought
25 the sports they grew up with, such as soccer,

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2 Cricket, Netball and Volley Ball and others with
3 them, and these are welcome developments and have
4 brought new life and vitality to the neighborhood in
5 all five boroughs, but they have put a strain on the
6 parks system which was designed in the 1930s,
7 largely to support two primary sports, baseball and
8 football, which were played by a much smaller group
9 of participants.

10 Also sort of gone are the neat little
11 seasons traditionally assigned to different sports.
12 Seasons now extend almost year-round, interrupted by
13 only the worst weather. Ballfield permit slots
14 issued by the Parks Department have doubled in the
15 last eight years, going from 66,000 eight years ago,
16 to over 136,000 permits issued.

17 So, how has the City responded to
18 this demand? We have responded in three ways: we
19 have invested \$242 million in building new and
20 renovating existing ball fields since 1994, with
21 more than 157 million committed during the Bloomberg
22 Administration alone. We have made judicious use of
23 the new generation of synthetic turf to accommodate
24 the most demanding field sports, and creating new
25 opportunities for youth sports by replacing asphalt

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2 yards with synthetic turf, and by joining in
3 partnerships with citizen organizations that have
4 leveraged private funds to support public recreation
5 facilities.

6 The Randall's Island sports field
7 project, the subject of today's hearing, combines
8 all of those elements in exciting development that
9 will result in the largest complex of athletic
10 fields in the City and provide generations of New
11 Yorkers the chance to compete, play and stay fit on
12 some of the finest fields available anywhere.

13 Now, over the past five years, Mayor
14 Bloomberg has been committed to promoting healthy
15 lifestyles for all of our City's residents. Whether
16 that has included increasing waterfront access,
17 adding over 300 acres of new park land, or mandating
18 that his long-term sustainability plan for 2030
19 include a playground and park within ten minutes of
20 every home. This Administration recognizes the
21 responsibility of the City to provide the public
22 places to recreate.

23 The Randall's Island Sports
24 Foundation was founded in 1992 under Mayor Dinkins
25 and then Parks Commissioner Betsy Gotbaum, as a

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2 public/private partnership for the improvement of
3 Randall's and Wards Island, which are located in the
4 East River between East Harlem, the South Bronx and
5 Astoria, Queens. The Randall's Island complex was
6 built in the 1930s when they filled in wetlands to
7 join together the existing islands as part of the
8 construction of the Triborough Bridge.

9 And over the years, the City added a
10 large water treatment plant, a Fire Department
11 training complex, a police harbor unit, the
12 headquarters of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel
13 Authority, and a large State mental hospital.

14 In fact, the promises of the 1930s to
15 build a complete park were never fully realized. So,
16 for more than 15 years the Randall's Island Sports
17 Foundation has worked with parks to develop and
18 expand sports and recreational facilities, to
19 protect natural environments, to maintain parkland
20 and sponsor community programs for the children of
21 New York City.

22 The foundation worked with parks,
23 local elected officials and the community to create
24 a master plan to guide the development of this
25 island.

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2 The plan focused on three key goals:
3 to make the park a regional destination for active
4 recreation, to promote environmental stewardship,
5 and to present popular entertainment. And implicit
6 in each of these goals is a commitment by the
7 foundation in parks to provide services and programs
8 for the communities bordering the park.

9 For example, icon stadium, the
10 cornerstone of the active recreation plan and the
11 beneficiary of generous private donations, host
12 dozens of events each year for local school groups,
13 including the Public School Athletic League and the
14 Citywide Mayor's Cup Track and Field Championships.

15 It also provides professional
16 coaching to 550 youth in the surrounding community
17 through the Randall's Island Sports Foundation's
18 Jessie Owens's Track Club. The new tennis center,
19 which is in development, will provide scholarships
20 for local youth, and free tennis instruction for the
21 Randall's Island Summer Camp.

22 The water park has a substantial
23 community benefits component. The water park which
24 is planned, that is, has a substantial community
25 benefits component that emerged from our discussions

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2 with the community and local elected officials in
3 providing jobs and revenue.

4 Similarly, the construction of the
5 little Hell Gate Bridge, restoration of the
6 adjoining wetland and completion of the first phase
7 of the waterfront esplanade, has made the Island an
8 outdoor environmental education classroom, for
9 hundreds of kids in the Randall's Island Kids'
10 Nature Program.

11 Some of you may have heard of the
12 recently announced wind, water and solar power
13 demonstration project, how it will attempt to
14 produce energy from the tides of the Hell Gate and
15 from the winds and the sun on Wards Island, which
16 will increase interest in the environment. And the
17 island has provided entertainment from rock to
18 Reggae, dance, art and circuses galore that have
19 been enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of spectators
20 from all walks of life.

21 Currently, there are 36 fields
22 available on the island that are heavily used and
23 are in need of repair. Ninety-five percent of the
24 weekday playing time from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. is
25 permitted currently to about 20 independent schools,

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2 allowing only 540 access of hours a year, or an
3 average of two fields per day during the spring and
4 the fall to other users. Existing City practice
5 renews permits from year-to-year to responsible user
6 groups. This practice exists for leagues throughout
7 the City, including leagues which have been
8 receiving permits in Flushing Meadows Park for more
9 than two decades.

10 It is important to note the current
11 usage by the private schools is only 16 percent of
12 the total prime hours of field use. The other 84
13 percent of the time are nights, weekends and
14 throughout the summer. The fields are used by youth
15 leagues, adult leagues, public schools,
16 community-based organizations and families.

17 After the new fields are built, the
18 private schools' share of overall fields can drop as
19 low as 11 percent and may be further reduced when
20 lights are added to the fields and adult leagues to
21 play either later in the evening.

22 What has become most clear through
23 all of this is that there is a demand for more and
24 better qualify fields on the island.

25 The proposed field expansion project

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2 will create an additional 27 fields, and renovate
3 the existing 36, yielding 63 state-of-the-art sports
4 fields on Randall's Island. Upon completion,
5 Randall's Island will have almost twice the number
6 of playing fields and will host the single largest
7 athletic complex in the City.

8 This project represents the largest
9 addition of new playing fields to the New York City
10 Parks Department's inventory in at least three
11 decades. The ball field's project will create a
12 total of 48,000 hours, or 24,000 additional games or
13 practices, additional playing time annually, a
14 historic 75 percent overall increase. Complementing
15 the increase in the fields capacity, the significant
16 additional public amenities will include new
17 restrooms that don't currently exist. Designated
18 parking, benches, water fountains, lighting,
19 bleachers, dug-outs, backstops, signage to get you
20 around the island and staffed information booths.

21 The new fields will accommodate a
22 wide range of sports, including soccer, softball,
23 baseball, little league, as well as football,
24 Lacrosse, field hockey, Rugby and Cricket.

25 The new playing field will include

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2 irrigation systems and lighting which will extend
3 usage of play.

4 As you know, 20 independent schools
5 are currently the major users of the fields during a
6 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. time from September to June,
7 have agreed to pay \$52.4 million for 20 years to
8 help fund a fields project, which will increase
9 athletic field availability and extend use for all
10 current stakeholders.

11 These schools will provide \$2.62
12 million annually to support the expansion of
13 long-term maintenance of the island's new
14 ballfields. The willingness of the schools to offer
15 their financial support was an important factor in
16 the City's decision to commit to this expansion
17 project.

18 And the City's commitment does not
19 limit it to the ballfields.

20 In addition to the field expansion,
21 the City is committing \$53 million to substantial
22 infrastructure improvements on the island, including
23 new gas, water, sewer and electric services to
24 support all the organizations on the island.

25 These include the wastewater

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2 treatment facility, the headquarters of the MTA, the
3 Fire Academy, the State Office of Mental Health
4 Campus, the Volunteers of America's Homeless
5 Shelter, as well as the new water park, tennis
6 center and ball field project.

7 Over the course of the next five
8 years, the City, through direct capital
9 contributions and commitments from concession
10 agreements, is committing \$284 million to new public
11 facilities on the island that will guarantee a first
12 class recreational destination spot for generations
13 of New Yorkers.

14 After much input from elected
15 officials in the community, including Manhattan
16 Community Board 11, the terms have changed
17 substantially from what was originally proposed. The
18 current proposed terms of the agreement with the
19 independent schools will now be only 20 years, and
20 will be reviewed every five years by the Parks
21 Department.

22 If it is determined that community
23 needs are not being met under this agreement, Parks
24 holds the right to adjust the field distribution
25 formula and ultimately to terminate it at will at

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2 any time for any reason. The independent schools
3 will now receive 66 percent of the fields on
4 weekdays from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. for
5 approximately 20 weeks out of the year.

6 Public schools will have preference
7 for use of all the remaining fields during the 3:00
8 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. time slot, which is 320 hours a
9 week. After all public school permit requests have
10 been fulfilled, the independent schools can apply
11 for an additional 13 percent of the fields, but will
12 never get permits for more than 80 percent of the
13 available after school field time, and none of the
14 time above the 66 percent specified in the agreement
15 will be renewed for future years automatically.

16 I should reiterate that the
17 independent schools only get more than 66 and
18 two-thirds percent, if some of the remaining fields
19 are unused by public schools and other
20 community-based organizations.

21 Under the new plan, public schools
22 have priority access to 20 ballfields, against the
23 current two fields that are now available to all
24 other applicants at Randall's Island in that 3:00
25 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. school day slot.

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2 Additionally, Parks and the
3 Renaissance Sports Foundation are working with the
4 Department of Education to increase the public
5 school Athletic League use of the fields on
6 Randall's Island.

7 The City is committed to working to
8 bring better access to the Island. In fact, in
9 response to recommendations from the local
10 community, we have proposed creating a
11 transportation task force, chaired jointly by the
12 local Council member and the Parks Department to
13 develop a comprehensive plan to improve public
14 access to all of the great new attractions Randall's
15 Island will offer in the coming years.

16 It is important to note that with the
17 increased ball fields the share of time allocated to
18 the independent schools will decrease. I stated
19 earlier these schools currently have permits for 16
20 percent of total playing hours annually.

21 After the project, their share of
22 overall fields drops to 11 percent, and may be
23 further reduced when its lights are added to the
24 fields and adult leagues can play even later into
25 the evening.

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2 The independent schools are
3 committing millions of dollars to a project that
4 will actually decrease their share of overall
5 available playing time and increase the number of
6 fields available to other players.

7 For the additional fields, we will be
8 able to host more schools in the year, leagues in
9 the weekends and camps and community programs in the
10 summer.

11 We believe this proposal serves the
12 public interest, and is a significant and worthy
13 investment for all current and future park users.

14 The existing permit holders help
15 finance the projects, and our public school children
16 get a new opportunity to use large numbers of new
17 fields, while members of the public get
18 significantly increased amounts of weekends and
19 summer playing time on new, safe, clean and
20 well-maintained fields.

21 This innovative public/private
22 partnership is a great opportunity for Randall's
23 Island. Park users will enjoy these fields for
24 generations to come.

25 I would be happy to answer any

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2 questions at this time.

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

4 We've been joined by Council Member
5 Letitia James, from Brooklyn.

6 I'm going to let Council Member
7 Viverito start with questions. I just have concern,
8 I always find it, and it's not the first time I've
9 said this, difficult wrapping my head around the
10 public/private relationship, because it, in my
11 opinion, has the potential to create a two-tiered
12 system of parks, and we are asking private funds and
13 private donors to do what I think is the City's
14 obligation, in terms of the fields and having public
15 space available.

16 That having been said, I am happy to
17 hear some of the modifications that have occurred
18 since our last hearing, but I know there is
19 definitely still some concern about the community
20 involvement piece access while it doesn't fall
21 directly under the Parks Department, is a huge deal
22 and, again, goes to that two tier and access. And as
23 I said at the last hearing, and you weren't here,
24 but you know, everyone knows that I went to one of
25 the private schools that is in the 20 independent

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2 schools consortium, and so we're taking, while we're
3 opening fields to public schools, if we're not
4 creating a way for them to get out there, then the
5 part about the five-year review and the usage, has
6 the potential to increase the number of fields that
7 the private schools are going to be able to access.

8 Good morning, we've been joined by
9 Council Member Gallagher from Queens.

10 That having been said, I'm going to
11 let Council Member Viverito start with questions,
12 and I am going to step out for a moment.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
14 you, Madam Chair. And I want to take a moment to
15 really thank you and thank the Speaker for having
16 the second of two hearings on this matter, and I
17 want to thank all of you that are here today,
18 because obviously this is an issue that is important
19 to the immediate surrounding community, but I think,
20 as we indicated in the first hearing, that the
21 interest that this is generating Citywide is because
22 of the example that this contract in the end will
23 set up with regards to how parks are going to be
24 treated in general moving forward. And there's a
25 greater Citywide concern with the possible

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2 implications and what kind of precedent is being set
3 with what happens here.

4 So, under this magnifying glass that
5 we find ourselves in, I want to be brief because
6 there is a time limitation, as we said, with regards
7 to the hearing, and we have the Commissioner here to
8 kind of explain a little bit further this contract
9 that's happening, but I also definitely want the
10 opportunity to hear from the people that are out
11 here today.

12 Let me just ask you a question,
13 Commissioner, that maybe is a little out of line --
14 not out of line, but maybe not what you're used to.

15 What do you think -- why do you think
16 that this is generating the kind of reaction from
17 the community in terms of the opposition? What is
18 your interpretation of that opposition? What does it
19 stem from?

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: As the City, as
21 conditions in the City have improved, as issues that
22 used to consume us older people, when you couldn't
23 walk to the corner without getting robbed, your car
24 would get stolen or broken into every night, as
25 things have gotten better, it's allowed people I

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2 think to spend a lot more time worrying about issues
3 that are more quality of life, as opposed to life
4 and death.

5 So, I think that there has been a
6 tremendous up surge in interest in participating in
7 the life of parks. I don't think it, I know it,
8 because when I started in the Parks Department 28
9 years ago, you didn't have 2,000 volunteer groups
10 working in parks, you didn't have all the private
11 partnerships, you didn't have partnerships with
12 parks organization with 55,000 volunteers. There is
13 a great deal of interest in parks, and there has
14 also been, I think New York City has become somewhat
15 of a global leader in working with citizens and in
16 working with civic groups and non-profit
17 organizations and community groups for develop new
18 models for parks, and to aggressively expand the
19 park system and to push as much as possible the
20 acquisition of open space and sometimes we will move
21 faster and do more if you develop new models, and
22 I'll give you some examples.

23 When the City agreed to settle the
24 loss of the litigation over Community Gardens,
25 suddenly the Parks Department acquired 500 new

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2 public open spaces that are essentially
3 semi-exclusive use. If you have a key, you can go
4 in. It's open a few hours a week during the warm
5 weather to the general public, but it's basically
6 there for the neighbors. Does that mean it's
7 privatized, or is it something bad about it? No.
8 Quite to the contrary. It means that citizens are
9 getting involved with creating new models for public
10 participation life of parks, and as I often say,
11 even if we had so much money we didn't know how to
12 spend it, you'd still want to have participation of
13 citizens and elected officials and civic groups in
14 the life of the park.

15 So, I think there is just a
16 heightened interest in parks, and because we are
17 working on so many fronts and so many parks are
18 being built now across the City in so many different
19 partnerships, that this sort of reflects the general
20 idea that parks are great, and everybody should be
21 involved in the life of parks.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: Well, I
23 guess I would differ with that perspective in the
24 sense of what is the reaction, and clearly I think
25 it speaks to what my colleague was mentioning about

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2 the implication of potentially creating a two-tiered
3 system. And I think what the concern may be is that
4 as a City we're demonstrating that we're being very
5 quick to want to do a contract with the private
6 schools to really kind of let them know everything
7 we're going to do for them, I think what would be
8 something that would be innovative and creative as
9 we should get a contract from the City with the
10 community to really outline to us as a community
11 what the commitments are going to be monetarily over
12 the years, because we don't have a contract. As a
13 community we don't have a contract on what the
14 commitments are to improving our parks in terms of
15 Randall's Island in particular, and I think that
16 that's something that when you talk about creative
17 and innovative models, maybe that's something that
18 we should factor in.

19 But having said that, I think we
20 wanted to get to a couple of questions, then we're
21 going to I think go to the people that are here and
22 I hope that the Parks stays to hear some of the
23 concerns.

24 I wanted to touch a little bit on the
25 article that came out last Friday, by Juan Gonzalez

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2 and the Daily News that outlines the demands that
3 were being made by the public schools to capital
4 improvements and infrastructure repairs to Randall's
5 Island as a way of that they needed that assurance
6 from the City prior to them making this commitment
7 on their part. He wrote a pretty great article last
8 Friday. So, I wanted to know how you would respond
9 to that.

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I'm not sure
11 what the question is, but --

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: Well,
13 he lays out in the article that the only way that
14 the private schools were willing to engage in this
15 contract with the City is by getting an assurance
16 that there was going to be an additional \$70 million
17 of capital infrastructure repairs by the City of New
18 York, and they were not going to sign a contract
19 unless that was the case. I mean, that is what he
20 lays out, among many other issues.

21 Was there that kind of a discussion
22 between the City and the private schools? That kind
23 of a commitment that was made?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Hi. I'm
25 William Kavanagh, Deputy Commissioner of Parks. The

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2 total infrastructure commitment by the City to
3 Randall's Island is \$53 million. It is intended to
4 bring trunk infrastructure, water, sewer, gas and
5 electric to the island, stuff that hasn't existed
6 since the island was built, or existed minimally,
7 and it is intended to support all of the users of
8 the island. It's not just for the sports field
9 contract.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: I

11 understand that. I understand that.

12 Let me just say, you know, we are not
13 saying that -- we know, because I've met with RSF
14 many times, that there are capital infrastructure
15 repairs that are needed, and as a City we do have a
16 commitment and we need to do that.

17 But I guess the issue here, that was
18 one of the parameters that they laid out, then this
19 contract actually, the amount grows in terms of what
20 it is that we're losing out on.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes, a
22 certain percent of that \$52 million will support the
23 ball fields, but the fact is, the ball fields could
24 not be built without having that infrastructure in
25 place. You have to have a place for the water to

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2 drain, you have to have water basically to deliver
3 it to the field.

4 Right now there are four drinking
5 fountains on Randall's Island to support 36 ball
6 fields. There isn't electricity to power the one
7 comfort station on Ward's Island. You have to have
8 those systems in place for the fields to connect to,
9 in order for them to provide the services that the
10 public demands and expects and for the fields to
11 survive in the long term.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.
13 Now, in the November 3rd hearing, we heard from some
14 of the private schools, and one of them actually
15 testified that it was the sports foundation that
16 approached the private schools first about doing
17 this type of an arrangement. Is that, in fact, true?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I
19 believe so.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: So,
21 basically it was something that the City requested.
22 Because this is, I mean RSF has a partnership
23 between Parks and it's a public/private partnership,
24 so basically in essence we could say that the City
25 approach to private schools first as a way of doing

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2 this.

3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The City has
4 long sought to work with various user groups to
5 improve parks. So, yes, the City has placed a
6 priority in trying to do everything it can to
7 improve parks.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.

9 All right.

10 You know, I do want to say that I
11 want to thank, you know, yourself and this
12 foundation for at least willing to engage in the
13 conversation. And, yes, the proposal has gone
14 through major modifications and improvements, but I
15 still think that it's not -- I still have concerns,
16 and at this point I don't believe I could support
17 what has been presented.

18 So, having said that, unless any
19 colleagues have any additional questions at the
20 moment --

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I'm going to jump
22 in with questions?

23 What is the formal relationship and
24 the document that reflects the formal relationship
25 between the Parks Department and Randall's Island?

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2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: There is a
3 license agreement between the Parks Department and
4 the Randall's Island Sports Foundation, for
5 management and operation of Randall's Island.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And is this, the
7 license agreement, how does this license agreement
8 then play into the agreement between the private
9 schools and Randall's Island?

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well, the
11 private schools function under the authority of the
12 Randall's Island Sports Foundation, which functions
13 under the authority of the City.

14 The City always has the final say in
15 all matters.

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: So, would this
17 possibly come under, because of the square footage,
18 would this fall under the concession part of the
19 Charter, major concession issue of the Charter that
20 has to do with the land being ULURP'd or becoming
21 before the Council?

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well, we've
23 discussed it with both City Planning and the Law
24 Department. And because what you essentially have is
25 an existing use, which is ball fields, only being

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2 modified to the extent that ball fields are being
3 expanded in numbers and improved. And the use isn't
4 changing in any way, that the permit holders will
5 continue to be permit holders. They don't gain
6 anything beyond being able to play baseball there.
7 They don't own the fields. It is not a lease that is
8 the opinion of both the Corporation Counsel and the
9 New York City Planning Department, it does not fall
10 into the category of a major concession.

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And if you can,
12 can you break down how many fields currently, I
13 think you said 35 currently are being used or at the
14 island now and the private schools have access to
15 exclusively from three to six?

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes, there are
17 36 fields currently on the islands, and because of
18 the historical development of the island, the
19 private schools came out there when nobody else was
20 using the islands, and they have 95 percent, so say
21 they have 34 out of the 36 existing fields, between
22 the hours of three and six. But, again, that's a
23 very small percentage of the overall prime time use.
24 It's 16 percent, the rest of the use is others, it's
25 public schools, it's community-based organizations,

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2 its little leagues, it's adult leagues and so on.

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Well, then let me
4 go back. What is considered prime time use? I would
5 assume, and clearly, you know what happens when you
6 assume, but I would assume three to six is prime
7 time use.

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Oh, no, prime
9 time usually includes three to six and it goes much
10 later for lit fields, when the adult leagues, and
11 people get out of work and can play softball. It's
12 the weekends in particular when all the little
13 leagues are out playing. When Harlem RBI comes out
14 to play it's on weekends, when the summertimes, when
15 kids are out of school and can participate in summer
16 camps, it's when the Randall's Island foundations
17 runs its kids programs and brings out 3,000 kids a
18 day to play in those fields, so prime time use is
19 the time when people play. I would say the busiest
20 time, frankly, of all, in all of the parks fields,
21 you have to remember that this is a small piece of
22 an 800-field system, the busiest time is really the
23 weekends when the little leagues are out and the
24 adult leagues, and when you have some of the bigger
25 games being played.

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2 So, prime time includes the after
3 school the after school period, but it absolutely
4 includes the weekends and the summers.

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Let's take
6 weekends and summers out of the equation, and if
7 we're just dealing with -- if we take weekends and
8 summers out, would prime time use then be, the bulk
9 of it would be three to six?

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Currently, yes.
11 If you took out the weekends and the late evenings
12 for the lit fields and the summers. If you wanted to
13 take that out for argument's sake. Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yes. That's what
15 I would like to do for argument's sake, take it out.
16 And what is the, not just with Randall's Island, but
17 across the board with public school leagues and on
18 and on in terms of baseball and softball field use,
19 I know you said in your testimony permits are up, do
20 public schools, when they have, you know, playing
21 against other schools, do they get permits for these
22 parks?

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: So, if you have
25 public schools playing against each other, and I

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2 would assume you would know the answer, do they play
3 the majority of their games between three and six?

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Probably.

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And what is the
6 usage, taking out these 36 fields, which are now, my
7 understanding, these are not lit fields.

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Some of the
9 fields are lit. One lit field. It would be lit if we
10 had electricity.

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Right. So, one
12 lit field, so we can take the night games out,
13 because that really doesn't factor in if we only
14 have one lit field. What is the request then demand
15 for, like I know, for example, in the Bronx, because
16 of this new stadium deal, we're in need of little
17 league and playing fields. But what's happening in
18 Manhattan, in terms of requests? Are there more
19 requests for permits than we have fields available,
20 if you know?

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well, it's a
22 complicated picture. I'll try to give a simple
23 answer. First, as sort of the grand scheme of
24 things, the public school athletic league currently
25 uses and receives about 2,000 permits each season,

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2 so about 4,000 games or practices a year are held in
3 City parks fields.

4 Now, that's in addition to all of the
5 fields that the Department of Education has, which
6 many of which are now in great condition because
7 they're fixed through public/private partnerships,
8 and uses restricted to just those schools that have
9 those fields. So, we provide an enormous sort of
10 supply of fields for public schools, parochial
11 schools and other groups across the City, and it's
12 hard to say really what the demand is, is it more
13 than we can accommodate? Probably not. I think the
14 public schools are being pretty fully accommodated
15 between their fields, our hundreds of fields across
16 the City and, you know, the question is, is there a
17 demand which is not being met, I'm not sure of the
18 answer. But I can tell you that we have expanded
19 dramatically the number of fields available, and the
20 condition of fields across the City. So, for
21 example, in East Harlem there are now 14 fields, all
22 but one have been totally renovated, and that one is
23 under renovation, and we have turned a number of
24 formerly asphalt fields into synthetic turf. So,
25 we're meeting a lot of the demands now in the

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2 neighborhoods that we weren't.

3 This is a map of ball fields across
4 the City, showing not all the ball fields, but many
5 of the ball field complexes, and I think we have a
6 map showing --

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I'm impressed
8 that you think we can see that.

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well, I'll pass
10 it around there. And in fact the map of synthetic
11 turf fields.

12 .

13 This is a map showing all the new
14 fields that have either been built or been
15 developed, and you can see a large cluster in
16 central and East Harlem and also the Bronx, and with
17 all of the Croton Filtration money, they can be
18 doing a lot of work dramatically improving many of
19 the fields in the Bronx and adding new fields, the
20 Harris Fields Complex is being completely restored,
21 the Parade Grounds of Van Cortlandt is being
22 completely restored. A number of what are currently
23 asphalt fields are being turned into synthetic turf.
24 In fact, it's been a great boon, and I mentioned it
25 briefly in testimony, I should speak on that. We

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2 have more than 60 fields that have either been
3 created or are in the process of creation, which
4 enhances enormously our ability to provide fields.

5 For example, in East Harlem at Robert
6 Wagner Park, right next to Robert Wagner, I think
7 it's a junior high school, there is a brand new
8 state-of-the-art synthetic turf field. A few blocks
9 away on 120th Street is McCabe Field, which is also
10 a new synthetic turf field. We have four new class A
11 fields in Thomas Jefferson Park on East 112th
12 Street, and we're in the process of creating a
13 spectacular new football and soccer field at Harlem
14 River Park and 129th Street. So, we're creating a
15 constellation of new fields all around the island.

16 So, I think the answer is, I don't
17 think anyone will feel satisfied until we can create
18 so many new fields that there were fields that are
19 sitting empty parts of the day, especially in the
20 after school hours. And I think we're well on our
21 way to doing that as a city and as a society.

22 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: So, you would say
23 then that you believe right now, taking Randall's
24 Island out, that we have satisfied the demand --

25 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: No, I didn't say

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2 that. I said we don't know, but certainly if we add
3 these additional 20 fields that will be available
4 priority basis for public schools, we will increase
5 dramatically the number of fields in this very
6 built-up section of the City.

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: But that demand
8 in terms of permits and requests would come through
9 the Parks Department?

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes, it would.

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And that's just a
12 number you don't have with you right now, in terms
13 of the demand?

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We don't know
15 what the unsatisfied demand is. We do know that the
16 public school athletic league is able to complete
17 its schedule somehow, and whether they're doing that
18 on their own fields or our fields or how they're
19 doing it is not clear to me. But I can tell you just
20 looking at the permit holders in some of the East
21 Harlem and Central Harlem fields, it's a real mix.
22 You've got community leagues, you've got the East
23 Harlem Little League, you've got parochial schools
24 and public schools, public school Athletic Leagues,
25 you've got the Harlem Hell Fighters, it's a great

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2 mix. And, you know, the main priority, and our
3 priority as a City is to create as many great
4 recreational spaces as we can for our kids because
5 we have to. You know, the City is growing, and we
6 have to -- we've just read that there is a much
7 higher rate of diabetes than anyone even imagined
8 and one sure fire way to prevent the onset of
9 diabetes is to let people get exercise, and the
10 Parks Department and the City are absolutely
11 committed to that.

12 And just to continue, by adding these
13 20 fields we enhance dramatically the City's ability
14 to provide great spaces for people to get exercise.

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I don't think
16 anybody would argue with the need to add fields. I
17 think the question becomes how we're adding it and
18 then the access to it. So, you definitely won't get
19 an argument about adding of fields. So, with this
20 potential new proposal, 20 fields will be added to
21 the 36 fields?

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: What you get is
23 you go from -- it's a lot of numbers, so forgive me
24 if I refer back to my notes. What you get is a net
25 gain of 20 fields that will be opened that are not

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2 currently available. Actually more fields than that
3 are actually being created.

4 Sixty-three total fields will be
5 created up from 36. So, it's nearly a doubling of
6 the fields.

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Was, when we saw
8 the need for this private/public partnership, was
9 this a sole source deal? Did we look to see if other
10 private entities were interested in maybe donating
11 the money, fixing it up and saying we'll open it to
12 everyone based on a permit basis as opposed to going
13 to, because now that we know the Randall's Island
14 Sports Foundation approached the private schools to
15 create this partnership or this deal, did we look
16 beyond these 20 private schools?

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well, I suppose
18 in some ways it's -- you know, this was the natural
19 group with whom to set up a partnership. I think the
20 thing we wouldn't have wanted to do is just go to
21 the open market and say, hey, anybody who wants to
22 give us all the money in the world can come and
23 control these fields. That wouldn't have been the
24 appropriate thing to do. To look at people who are
25 currently using the fields, and I should point out,

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2 if we were to do nothing, if we decided we didn't
3 want to go ahead with this project, and just left
4 the status quo, the independent schools would
5 continue under the long-standing practice to have 95
6 percent of the fields out there.

7 So, the great virtue of this project,
8 and what makes it such a win for everybody is that
9 everybody gets improved fields and you get much
10 greater public access for the public schools and the
11 general public than you currently have, and in
12 effect the private schools are subsidizing in a
13 pretty large measure the public use and the enhanced
14 public use of the space.

15 So, it's really quite a good deal for
16 the City, and we've worked very closely, and
17 certainly, you know, our long-term working
18 relationship with the elected officials in the
19 community was important to us, and in reframing the
20 overall shape of the deal, we listened to people.
21 And I think the Transportation Access Task Force
22 will be crucial to getting more people out there.

23 We already have a commitment from the
24 Department of Education, and I've talked to the
25 people in charge of the PSALs and said, look, you

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2 know, just because we think this is the current
3 demand, isn't there some way to increase the demand
4 for these fields and get the schools out there. What
5 can the Department of Education do to make more
6 buses available? What can the Randall's Island
7 Sports Foundation do to do even more than they're
8 already doing?

9 Randall's Island Sports Foundation
10 right now works actively to bring kids on buses out
11 for their athletic programs and for their
12 educational programs. You know, there are things we
13 can do to enhance that.

14 So, we absolutely want to work with
15 the Council member, with other interested Council
16 members and the Committee, to enhance the access. I
17 think it's always been problematic. It's on an
18 island and that's why part of the reason for the
19 creation of the Randall's Island sports foundation,
20 was to increase access across the board for everyone
21 to come to the island and make it live up to its
22 promise it had never lived up to.

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: We've been joined
24 by Council Member Gerson from Manhattan.

25 Let me take a step back, and this

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2 question might be better for when the Randall's
3 Island Sports Foundation testifies, but you may
4 know: When the idea first came to address these
5 private schools or go to these private schools, do
6 you know if at that point community boards were
7 involved and elected officials were involved? Or was
8 this an after the fact, meaning after the private
9 consortium was already approached?

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I wasn't a
11 participant in all the meetings, but I have attended
12 many of the Board meetings for the Randall's and
13 Sports Foundation, and many events, and my feeling
14 about this was that there was a great deal of
15 discussion and I was present at many of these
16 presentations, where the Randall's Island master
17 plan and the Sports fields project was presented to
18 and discussed with members of the community,
19 Community Board 11, with the elected officials who
20 represented the former Borough President Virginia
21 Fields was very involved with and supportive of the
22 work of the Randall's Island Sports Foundation, and
23 Council Member Philip Reed was very involved. I was
24 there, many events and presentations where members
25 of Community Board 11 were present, so I can't tell

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2 you absolutely that every detail was discussed, but
3 I can tell you that the master plan for Randall's
4 Island and all the components were probably
5 discussed in some detail and on many occasions with
6 members of the community or elected officials who
7 represent the district as the plans were being
8 developed.

9 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: We've been joined
10 by Council Member John Liu, who is not on the Parks
11 Committee, but is reviewing the class, and Council
12 Member Charles Barron from Brooklyn.

13 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Is it for credit
14 or non-credit, Council member?

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Non-credit and
16 non-matriculated.

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE:
18 Non-matriculated, okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Is there a master
20 plan for the development of Randall's Island as a
21 whole that includes the water park and everything
22 else?

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes. Another map
24 that you can't see, but we'll pass it around. This
25 is the master plan for Randall's Island that

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2 addresses the athletic fields. As you can see, the
3 new Icon Stadium which is part of the plan has been
4 realized, the tennis center over here, the new
5 complex at Sunkin Meadow, the new complex at Ward's
6 Island, the new sports fields that have already been
7 developed outside of Icon Stadium and the water park
8 at the northern end.

9 And also the perimeter pathway to
10 create a greenway system around the entire island,
11 parts of which have already been developed, along
12 with the bridge through the wetland area.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And does this
14 master plan include these new fields?

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes, this shows
16 the fields and the new field layout.

17 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And can you point
18 that out again.

19 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: There are a
20 number of fields down in Ward's Island. You can see
21 where it says Ward's Meadow Fields, East River
22 Fields, Central Garden Fields, Central Fields,
23 Harlem River Fields and Sunkin Meadow Fields. So,
24 the spread across the 450 acres of the island.

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Now, did this

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2 master plan already -- or did this master plan
3 include, when it was put together, this agreement
4 between Randall's Island and the consortium?

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well, the
6 agreement has been developed in the past year or so,
7 but it would include the possibility of such an
8 agreement, that there would be private funding to
9 develop the fields.

10 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: So, we created
11 this master plan with the assumption that we were
12 going to get private funding to get these ball
13 fields completed.

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes, that has
15 always been part of the discussion.

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And how long has
17 this master plan been --

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 1998.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: 1998. Wow.

20 Is it possible that we can get copies
21 of the maps in a smaller format?

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Absolutely, yes.

23 Anything we have you can have in
24 small or large format, whatever works.

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: No, small will

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2 work.

3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: If it's small it
4 will be really hard to read. That's the only
5 difficulty.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And if you have a
7 master plan document that outlines what we're
8 actually seeing, that would help also.

9 I know Council member has more
10 questions, I just want to touch on a few more
11 things.

12 Could you go explain again, and I
13 know last night when we talked, Deputy Commissioner
14 Kavanagh, I asked again about this five-year review
15 process, can you talk about the review process
16 again, and if there are any objective standards
17 already in place to define usage or define if it's
18 working or not working so that when five years comes
19 and we look at this and there might be a concern in
20 the community that it's not working and it might
21 look from Randall's Island perspective, the Parks
22 Department, that it's really working; are there any
23 objective standards or mechanism in place that it
24 doesn't require a subjective view in terms of this
25 is working?

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2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I think
3 Commissioner Kavanagh is better versed in this. But
4 the only thing I'll say is, once this project gets
5 underway, five years later I probably won't be here
6 to review it, and you'll have to take that up with
7 the next Commissioner.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I probably won't
9 be here either.

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I would agree
11 that we need to put in place mechanisms to have a
12 broad review. Certainly I agree to that. Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I know you guys
14 will be here. I like this audience participation.
15 That is exactly why I am asking the question, so
16 that we have actual objective, tangible standards by
17 which we can say if it's working or not, because
18 there is the potential that it will work well for
19 the private schools because we're enhancing their
20 use, but it may not be working well for the
21 community, and at this point, as public officials,
22 we've got to make sure it works for the whole and
23 not a selective group.

24 So, that's why we're very concerned
25 with this review process because this is actually

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2 the only way we can make sure that all of us have a
3 role in this.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I think
5 there are two primary issues that need to be
6 considered when we're doing our five-year review.
7 One is the unmet demand, and frankly, that is not
8 something we trap at the moment, and it is data that
9 we're going to have to collect on an annual basis
10 and have it form the basis of our analysis.

11 We suspect there is unmet demand
12 throughout the system, but it has never been part of
13 our data collection process, and will have to be to
14 make this --

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Hold on just one
16 second.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I'm
18 sorry.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I can't listen
20 and talk at the same time.

21 Thanks.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: There
23 are two major things that I think we have to
24 consider, two major things, and that is the unmet
25 demand, and, again, that is not something we

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2 typically track now, and it is something we have to
3 develop a mechanism to do on an annual basis to make
4 sure that we are capturing all of the people who
5 have requested space at any ball field, whether it's
6 in East Harlem or at Randall's Island, and determine
7 what is the level of that demand and whether any
8 adjustments have to be made in this particular
9 agreement.

10 The other thing is something that we
11 do routinely, even though we do have this
12 long-standing practice of renewing permits from
13 year-to-year, construction happens throughout the
14 system and it displaces throughout the system, it
15 displaces, you know, long-term permit holders.

16 We have, and we continue to make
17 adjustments in other field complexes to accommodate
18 some of that lost time, and for the most part
19 leagues understand the need for that and cooperate
20 with it when it occurs. The most recent and biggest
21 examples were the renovations of the Great Lawn in
22 North Meadow in Central Park, which displaced many
23 leagues for quite a number of years.

24 We were able to work with leagues and
25 place teams in places where they didn't normally

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2 play. So, those are the two things I think we need
3 to consider. This is a cooperative venture. We would
4 certainly look for other things that the community
5 thinks will be important to include in this review
6 process, and we're committed to doing it and making
7 it work, and ultimately, aside from our ability to
8 adjust permit time, you know, the contract, as all
9 of our contracts, includes a provision to terminate
10 it well, and, you know, that is sort of the
11 fail-safe mechanism to ensure that, you know, the
12 public needs are being met.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Have you ever
14 terminated a contract at will?

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes. We just did
16 in fact.

17 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The other thing
19 I should point out is that, you know, we have a
20 number of precedents for things like this, but
21 they're generally working pretty well. There are at
22 least 23, it could be more than that, community ball
23 fields in various neighborhoods, including two in
24 East Harlem, where the primary user, not completely
25 exclusive but semi exclusive, are the local little

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2 leagues or community-based organizations, where they
3 have an agreement with us, you know, legal agreement
4 in the City, where they are the primary user, they
5 provide the bulk of the maintenance, they may have
6 been involved with the creation of the fields, may
7 have done a public/private partnership to raise
8 money to do so, and they function under licensing of
9 the City. They are doing great work, are providing
10 structured youth programs for kids, these are
11 primarily little leagues, like the Harlem Little
12 League or Harlem RBI, or the 68th Police Precinct
13 Council or Morris Park Community Association or the
14 West Indian Alliance Sports Club, these are all
15 community-based organizations that have some
16 exclusive use of the fields that are providing good
17 programs, but they're not open to the general public
18 on a regular basis.

19 But it's part of this continuum of
20 providing fields. And as I mentioned when we started
21 this, the whole idea that you never take for granted
22 what you have. You never sit on your
23 accomplishments, you're always pushing to say what
24 can we do to make even more fields? Here is a new
25 committee that sprung up. It's suddenly become a

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2 residential community where it used to be a
3 manufacturing community. You know, how can we turn a
4 pier into a sports field complex, as in Commissioner
5 Gerson's district, or they turn an old pier and
6 suddenly they have like eight new fields in the
7 middle of the pier. You have to push the envelope
8 and work with community groups. You know, do
9 everything you can within reason to make more sport
10 fields, and that's the bottom line, making as many
11 fields as we can and some of it is, you know, in a
12 traditional way. Council Member Barron has been a
13 very generous funder of parks in his community. He's
14 got some great state-of-the-art athletic fields
15 through his commitment through public funds. And
16 that's the traditional way, but sometimes we work in
17 non-traditional ways, the ultimate goal being to
18 make more fields for our kids.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Madam Chair, I
20 wanted to say that don't think that compliment is
21 going to stop me from beating him up when I get a
22 chance.

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, I'm sorry.
24 You didn't know?

25 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I look forward

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2 to the beating.

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I'm only letting
4 Committee members ask questions. I'm joking. You
5 didn't even get my joke.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Oh, okay.

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I don't think
8 anybody would disagree again in terms of the need to
9 increase ball fields and that everybody has access
10 to it. I think again there are some concern about
11 how we get to that increased ball field.

12 We've talked a lot about the private
13 public relationship and partnership. Can you point
14 to areas, not with CBOs but with areas in less
15 affluent districts where you have this
16 private/public partnership?

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well, I can
18 point you to a number of examples, again the ones I
19 just cited, most of them are in, you know, working
20 in middle class communities. The Harlem RBI is a
21 public/private partnership. And it's got an
22 independent 501(c)(3) with its own board of
23 directors. It raises hundreds of thousands of
24 dollars to allow 400 kids in East Harlem to learn
25 baseball skills. They took, you know, what was an

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2 empty lot and turned it into a great field, which is
3 now, it's a mapped public park. Is it open to the
4 public on a daily basis? No, because it's mainly for
5 the use of those kids, and if we left it open,
6 people might let their dogs on it or something, so
7 it's a premiere field in the middle of East Harlem.
8 And that kind of thing exists across the City.

9 Whether it's a Joe Tori Little League
10 in Council Member Fidler's district, or in Council
11 Member Dickens district the Harlem Little League, or
12 in Council Member Recchia's district, so those are a
13 smaller scale. We have a larger scale, you know, the
14 Bronx River Alliance is a public/private partnership
15 where private citizens are involved with raising
16 private money and getting government grants to help
17 improve the public parks for the public benefit.

18 The Prospect Park Alliance is a
19 public/private partnership, and one of their major
20 projects was to create the sports fields, this great
21 sports field complex, which is, I guess, it's not as
22 big as what we'll be doing on Randall's Island, but
23 it's probably the second biggest sports field
24 improvement, and they let an initiative to improve
25 dramatically the parade grounds complex, which is

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2 now, until this next one gets built, is currently
3 the finest sports field complex in the City, which
4 is widely used by people of all walks of life, I
5 suspect a great many of them are less affluent, as
6 you say.

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: But in that
8 situation with Prospect Park that you just cited, is
9 there exclusive use a specific time of the day for
10 the people that specifically gave the money?

11 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Not in that
12 particular case, but there are -- I guess a closer
13 example would be that, you know, the Prospect Park
14 Alliance would restore the tennis courts and people
15 who pay money may get to use the tennis courts at
16 certain times of the year, and the money goes back
17 to the park, which is a good thing.

18 There were not significant amounts of
19 private money. We didn't have tens of millions of
20 dollars. What happened there was much more publicly
21 oriented, but the maintenance is being somewhat
22 privately funded through the Prospect Park Alliance,
23 which is again, serving the public good.

24 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And I get that in
25 terms of maintenance, but access is for everyone.

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2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I'm sorry, just
3 to get back to, to restrict the access, the other
4 examples would be in the 23 little league fields
5 that are around the City.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: The 23 little
7 league fields around the City that are exclusively
8 for the use of the little league?

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I have a few more
11 questions and then we're going to go to Council
12 Member James, and then back to Council Member
13 Viverito.

14 Can you break down again for me, and
15 I know it's in your testimony, but break down the
16 money that the City as in place for these fields and
17 what that's being used for, and then how much the
18 private schools are putting in over the time period,
19 and then what it's being used for?

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The private
21 schools will contribute a total of \$52.4 million
22 over 20 years. Roughly \$2.6 million a year, 2.2 of
23 which will go back to the City to in fact repay the
24 City for it's up-front investment of capital
25 dollars, and 400,000 which will go to a capital

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2 reserve fund, or toward maintenance, which ever is
3 necessary. So, in any event, a total of \$52.4
4 million from the private schools consortium.

5 The City will put in toward the ball
6 fields themselves about \$20 million, and then the
7 City, through its various agencies, through the
8 Parks Department, through EDC, through Environmental
9 Protection, through MTA, will fix up the
10 infrastructure that will allow these ball fields to
11 be complete, and also to allow an upgrade of the
12 infrastructure for all the vital City services that
13 are out there. But the actual cost of the fields
14 themselves, separate and apart from the
15 infrastructure, is 70 million, of which 52 million
16 is coming from the private sector.

17 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Just to make sure
18 I understand, 52 million is just for the ball
19 fields?

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: 52 million is
21 just for the ball fields. A combination, just to
22 clarify, each year it's a payment of 2.6 million, of
23 which 2.2 million is for capital. It goes back to
24 the City to reimburse the City for its -- the City
25 will upfront the capital dollars for this.

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2 Four-hundred thousand goes toward a reserve fund, or
3 for the maintenance of the fields. So, it goes in a
4 fund to either pay, you may have to do further
5 capital improvements on the field, you know,
6 electrical lines go down, or it goes for the general
7 maintenance.

8 So, in addition to subsidizing the
9 construction of all these extra fields that will be
10 used by the non-private schools, by everybody else,
11 the private schools will also be subsidizing the
12 maintenance of all the fields, such that everybody,
13 all of the users will enjoy better, safer fields
14 because of the subsidy from the private schools.

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And if this deal
16 were to happen, what is the time line? And how long
17 will fields be out, and when fields are out, then
18 that exclusive three to six I assume would just be
19 for the private schools, would give us less fields
20 as we're building? Or how is that going to work?

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I think, you
22 know, it's as Commissioner Kavanagh mentioned
23 before, the good news is we are fortunate to have a
24 great deal of money in the capital budget right now
25 for building and rebuilding fields. The pain that

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2 comes with that is that you have to displace normal
3 users. So, everybody who is currently a user at
4 Randall's Island will feel the pain, and, again, I
5 can't emphasize this point enough, the private
6 schools are very much the small player in the total
7 use of the fields. The vast majority of field time
8 right now before any deal is made is by
9 community-based organizations, little leagues,
10 public schools, parochial schools, and everybody
11 else who uses the fields on the weekends and the
12 summer when the demand is greatest.

13 So that when the fields are taken out
14 of commission to be rebuilt, those people will have
15 to be accommodated some place else. They will have
16 to travel. It may mean that we'll have more people
17 using the fields in East Harlem. Some of the fields
18 in East Harlem have a small number of permit holders
19 right now, so we may be able to make accommodations
20 with them. It may mean that we'll have to use some
21 of the new fields in the South Bronx that we're
22 building.

23 You know, it's not clear where we'll
24 move everybody to, but we'll do our best to
25 accommodate all of the current permit holders,

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2 again, the vast majority of whom are not the private
3 schools.

4 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Let me just shift
5 gears a little because it's not really a subsidy
6 because the private schools are paying to play on
7 these fields, so it seems to me that it's just a
8 question of semantics. But to switch gears, because
9 we have other questions here, what is your opinion
10 on the possibility of this three to six exclusive
11 time falling under the -- coming under the charter
12 having to do with alienation of park land?

13 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I would
14 completely disagree that it's alienation of park
15 land.

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Because?

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Because it's an
18 existing use. It's a perfectly legitimate park use.
19 And it's no more an alienation of park land than
20 having limited use for community gardens or limited
21 use for little league ball fields or limited use by
22 botanical gardens and zoos or park lands, it's
23 totally in keeping with a reasonable and traditional
24 use of park lands.

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I just wanted to

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2 hear you say that, because I thought that was the
3 case.

4 I will disagree to some extent
5 because of the prime time exclusiveness is three to
6 six, and it's not a question of being able, you
7 know, with these community gardens, people can come
8 in, come out, the gardeners, and I have tons in my
9 district, it's a lot different than prime hours
10 three to six ball fields for the exclusive use of
11 private schools that are paying to use the field.

12 But I am going to -- Council Member
13 James, Council Member Viverito and then Council
14 Member Barron.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Thank you.

16 I had a series of questions, I now
17 have to leave to go to a hearing on little girls who
18 are committing suicide more and more, particularly
19 Latino and Asian young ladies, and also two other
20 press conferences.

21 But, Commissioner, you know you're
22 like one of my favorite commissioners. We've done
23 great work in downtown Brooklyn, in Fort Greene. I
24 think we have completed at least five parks in my
25 district. By the time that I leave this great

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2 institution, we would have renovated every park in
3 my district and I just want to thank you for that,
4 and the entire staff of the Parks Department.

5 But I do have some serious, serious
6 concerns with regards to this project, and at the
7 outset when Council Member Viverito asked you the
8 question with regards to why do you think so many
9 people have come out, why has this project been so
10 controversial, I sort of respect your thoughts but
11 my thoughts are the following: I believe that a
12 significant number of poor and moderate and working
13 class people in the City of New York are
14 increasingly feeling that they are being priced out
15 of New York City, and that the City of New York,
16 unfortunately, is privatizing too many public
17 projects in the City of New York, and that this
18 whole balance of public private partnership,
19 unfortunately, the balancing of that and the
20 weighing of that unfortunately has weighed too
21 heavily on the side of privatization, and I think
22 that's why so many people have come out and have
23 concerns.

24 In the Borough of Brooklyn, some
25 constituents in my district and the constituents in

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2 downtown Brooklyn share similar concerns with the
3 Brooklyn Bridge Park, with Atlantic Yards, with some
4 other projects in the Borough of Brooklyn where the
5 notion is that the City is privatizing and, again,
6 has ignored the concerns of working class people.

7 Let me also go on to say that
8 juvenile diabetes, asthma and obesity continues to
9 be a problem, and I would dare say that the vast
10 majority of the residents, or the children who
11 attend public schools suffer from this problem in a
12 disproportionate number than those who attend
13 private schools, simply because of economics.

14 So, I believe, as you look at this
15 project, because in the past the private schools
16 have used this three to six, this prime time more
17 than public schools, and that they use it more than
18 the public school students, I think at this point in
19 time, since we are investing public dollars, and we
20 really should look at this from the beginning and
21 that everything should be put on the table, and
22 everyone should negotiate and that we should start
23 from scratch. And that's what we should do,
24 particularly since this is large public investment.

25 I don't think that we should

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2 grandfather in or respect past practices, but
3 because of this large infusion of public dollars, we
4 really need to examine this entire project from
5 scratch, and not again look at past practices.

6 And let me also go on to say that I,
7 too, join with the chair and question this
8 alienation of public park land and believe that it
9 should be approved by the State Legislature, believe
10 that because prime time is only going to be used by,
11 or 80 percent of it is going to be used by the
12 private schools, that it is an alienation of public
13 park land and that it really raises some legal
14 issues and I don't really have a question other than
15 is this an EDC project or is this a parks project?

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's a parks
17 project, but as with other projects, it may be built
18 for us by EDC. They built the stadium for us, did a
19 great job, and now the stadium is available for
20 public schools and other use.

21 I just at first want to thank you,
22 Council member, because you have been a very good
23 supporter of parks, and I hesitate to do so, but I
24 just want to correct one misunderstanding.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Sure.

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2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's not 80
3 percent. The new proposal is --

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Sixty-six.

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: -- 66 percent..

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: But that's
7 still disproportionate and it still weighs heavily
8 on the side of private schools. And, again, I just
9 think everyone should be put on equal footing, and
10 everyone should compete at the same level, and I
11 don't think anyone should be given a preferential --
12 should be given preferential treatment, particularly
13 at a time when juvenile diabetes is at an all-time
14 high, when so many children are obese, and so many
15 children are suffering from asthma. I think that
16 everyone should compete with these ball fields, and
17 that's my opinion, but I will defer to the Council
18 member of this district, Council Member Viverito,
19 and how ever she advises me, I will stand with her
20 and just want to respect you for your thoughts and
21 all that you do for the City of New York.

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Thank you. I
23 appreciate all that you do for the parks.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: I reserve my
25 concerns over this project. Thank you.

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2 ACTING CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

3 Thank you very much, Council Member James. I think
4 she speaks for a lot of us, with regards to the
5 concerns.

6 I want to speak specifically to the
7 contracts which at the recommendation I think
8 obviously a lot of us feel that we would like this
9 to be scrapped, but in some of the things that were
10 raised by Foster, that it would have been great to
11 kind of try to nurture some sort of relationship and
12 give opportunities maybe to community organizations,
13 that in and of themselves have also raised money to
14 basically, if they want to make a contribution, or
15 be part of the consortium, that why does it have to
16 be exclusively private schools, that's one
17 discussion.

18 But I think also as a City we're
19 probably not making enough of a commitment,
20 considering the large implications on how many ball
21 fields we're talking about and the size of this
22 project that as a City I don't think we're making
23 enough of a contribution to the renovation of these
24 fields. And I think to general to parks in this
25 City, I know we have done a lot, but I think when

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2 you talk about the percentage per individual, we
3 probably could be doing better.

4 Specifically with regards to the
5 contract that has been presented, is there a
6 document that we can review?

7 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes, it's
8 available for public review. Yes.

9 ACTING CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
10 Okay. Do you have a copy with you?

11 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I happen to have
12 that in my hand.

13 ACTING CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Can
14 we have that?

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes.

16 ACTING CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
17 Thank you. It's one thing that people have been
18 concerned about that in fact this had not been seen
19 for some time.

20 With regards to the 20-year, now
21 20-year, originally it was 30-year, based on the
22 community response it's now been considered for 20
23 years, five-year review, how about a five-year
24 renegotiation. The thing here, the issue has been,
25 one is that we've discussed in our meetings with the

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2 Borough President, who is here, as well as the
3 Comptroller, is that we as a community have really
4 not seen any sort of information on the permit
5 requests and use by their local community of the
6 fields, and we need to get some -- and I know in the
7 MOU that is now being delineated, that there is
8 going to be that yearly providing of that
9 information to us so we can review how many requests
10 are coming from local communities from the requests
11 of the fields, and how many are being honored, our
12 intent here is to increase the percentage by the
13 local community.

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We share that --

15 ACTING CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: The
16 problem is that with the contract, and with my
17 understanding, we cannot predict the future, and in
18 your testimony you say if it is determined that
19 community needs are not being met under this
20 agreement, parks holds the right to adjust the field
21 distribution formula, and ultimately terminated at
22 will at any time for any reason. We cannot control
23 the future. Five years from now, you know, we don't
24 know how receptive, not receptive, the new
25 administration will be, and a lot of this is based

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2 on a willingness from individuals to either
3 terminate a contract or not terminate a contract,
4 and we can't control that. That's very much an
5 uncontrollable parameter and factor.

6 So, we need I feel some sort of other
7 assurances or ways that we can control that if, in
8 fact, the community usage increases, that this
9 percentage of private use will decrease. And the way
10 it's presented, if it's a 20-year contract that is
11 not renegotiable at any point, it doesn't allow for
12 that.

13 So, in that review of five years, if
14 in fact community use has improved because we are
15 working diligently together to ensure that access
16 improves, why can't we renegotiate the contract at
17 that point?

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I suspect the
19 answer is that the schools will probably not have an
20 interest in having such a short window to be part of
21 this process, and the City probably wouldn't have an
22 interest in having less of a guarantee.

23 Again, I want to point out that the
24 City --

25 ACTING CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: But

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2 if we have such a commitment to parks, if, in fact,
3 the community use increases, then that would put the
4 onus on us as elected officials, as a City Council,
5 as an Administration, to take care of that, right?
6 We have a responsibility to the community and to the
7 improvement of these parks.

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: And so do we, so
9 does the Parks Department, which you know is in
10 response to the Mayor and the Mayor is selected by
11 the people, feels very strongly the same obligation
12 to respond to the demands. That's why each year we
13 issue tens of thousands of permits primarily to
14 community-based organizations and public schools,
15 the private schools are really a relatively small
16 portion of the overall permits we give, and they are
17 a very small portion of the overall permits given
18 out for Randall's Island. They are right now, they
19 will continue to be so. In fact, there will be an
20 even smaller percentage when you build a new field,
21 so I think it's worth repeating that we share and we
22 lead in the efforts to provide exercise and fitness
23 for kids and that by entering into this arrangement,
24 we will very quickly produce a large number of first
25 class fields, 20 of which will be new fields

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2 available for others in the private schools right
3 away.

4 So, it's a win for everyone. The
5 private schools get better fields to play on, they
6 contribute a great deal of money which pays the
7 fields that everybody else will use, and it happens
8 very fast.

9 ACTING CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: 2.3
10 million is bottom what they're contributing in here.
11 I don't think that's an incredible amount of money.

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The total of
13 52.4 million is a large amount of money --

14 ACTING CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
15 That's long term. I'm talking about yearly, on a
16 yearly basis, 2.3, whether we raise it privately or
17 raise it from local organizations or from the
18 community, you know, this is a collaborative effort.
19 You know, let's not give so much to the public
20 schools -- to the private schools that they're being
21 so benevolent and so understanding in this process.
22 You know, it really is a pittance as compared to Mr.
23 Gonzalez clearly delineated in some of his articles,
24 compared to the assets that they control. So, really
25 they're getting quite a sweet deal.

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2 And the fact that they would not be
3 willing to sign onto this contract, if in fact it
4 entailed a renegotiation after five years, because
5 they can't get their exclusivity, it gives me
6 additional concerns.

7 But I will leave it there. I know
8 that Council Member Barron, and we do have other
9 people, and I want to thank you for your time.

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Thank you,
11 Council member.

12 ACTING CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
13 Council Member Barron.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Well, needless
15 to say I am profoundly disappointed in this deal
16 here. You know, on the real side, Commissioner, we
17 have committed a lot, as you said, Tish, and other
18 Council members.

19 Let me ask you this, just a
20 fundamental question: What is the ethnic breakdown
21 of the 20 private schools? How many people of color
22 in those schools?

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I couldn't tell
24 you, Council member.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: You couldn't

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2 tell and don't care? You know why? Because that is
3 critical. It is critical. The new majority in New
4 York City is people of color. We have a \$56 billion
5 budget, we have a \$3.6 billion surplus. The 2.123
6 million that you're getting for these private
7 schools, to cater to 66 percent of the parks going
8 to the minorities in this City is absurd.

9 And as much as our public schools
10 need recreation, a lot of the recreation programs
11 were cut in public schools, arts and crafts, all of
12 that is cut. We have an opportunity to give us 80
13 percent and let them use 20 percent of it, because
14 we are the new majority, and then we come up with
15 this deal and saying like they're putting in a whole
16 lot of money. They're not putting in a whole lot of
17 money. I see that budget. There is plenty of money
18 in that budget for the City to make a commitment to
19 its public schools and use these fields for its
20 public schools.

21 And I just think what you and the
22 Mayor is doing is a disservice to the majority of
23 the people in this City, and we're trying to make it
24 seem like a sweet deal. It is a great disservice.
25 I'm very disappointed in you. You know, we've had

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2 some good relationships on issues. But to do
3 something like this, and then for us not to have a
4 hearing, and I think they did well, so I'm not going
5 to be long in getting into the technical aspects of
6 it, but to pull this thing off, present this as some
7 mutually beneficial arrangement here, you're way, no
8 pun intended, you're way out of the ball park with
9 that. This is not a mutually beneficial -- I mean,
10 this is totally beneficial and overly beneficial to
11 the private schools. And we've got to stop
12 privatization. I'm sure that courts will deal with
13 the alienation question, because I do think it is.
14 But I'm just, I don't even know what to say to you,
15 other than I'm disappointed. They asked the right
16 questions. I hope we can stop it and make this thing
17 fair, because it's not fair to the people of color,
18 in particular, who make up the majority of these
19 students in public schools, and the majority of
20 people in this City who pay more taxpayer dollars
21 into this City's budget, and I just don't know how
22 you can come before us with a plan like this and
23 really not see how bad it is.

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well, as you
25 know, we agree on a lot of things, Council Member,

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2 and we agree on the importance of these parks, at
3 least, I would respectfully disagree with a lot of
4 your characterizations, and I would point out that
5 right now the vast majority of the use of Randall's
6 Island are in fact not the private schools, but
7 others, public schools, community-based
8 organizations --

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: We're talking
10 about this project here?

11 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I'm talking
12 about this project.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: The vast
14 majority --

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The vast
16 majority of the current users are not the private
17 schools.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So, with this
19 project, the vast majority of the use will go to the
20 private --

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: No. In fact, the
22 percentage of private schools used will decline
23 under the new proposal.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: The 66
25 percent, how do you explain that being more than --

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2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Unfortunately,
3 you were not here at the beginning. As I explained
4 before, currently of the prime time use of the
5 hours, which is --

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Three to six?

7 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: After school,
8 weekends and summers. Because actually the heaviest
9 demand for fields, as you can imagine is on
10 weekends, when everybody is off work, and the kids
11 are off in little leagues and so on, and so of the
12 total permit time, prime time permit time, I'm not
13 talking about the middle of the day and weekdays,
14 prime time, the total prime time currently the
15 private schools are using 16 percent. Under the new
16 plan that will be reduced to 11 percent, or perhaps
17 lower because we may add some lights so that other
18 uses can come on, so that this in fact will be a
19 major benefit for other users. It will in effect
20 create 20 new fields reserved for public schools
21 that don't currently exist. And I guess I have to
22 disagree with you a little bit more, in terms of the
23 overall perspective. The City has invested record
24 amounts of money in the creation of new fields
25 across the City, in the public schools, through the

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2 public schools' budget and through the Take The
3 Field project, where private donors contributed
4 making really nice athletic fields that are
5 exclusively used by the adjoining public schools,
6 the City has invested \$156 million to make new
7 fields all across the City, in your district, and
8 all the Council districts. Council Member Gallagher
9 has a wonderful collection of fields out in College
10 Point.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Yes, I know
12 all that, but I'm talking about this particular
13 project does not benefit the public schools more
14 than the private schools.

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It actually --

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: It simply
17 doesn't. No matter how you slice it, it simply
18 doesn't. And when we look at what's going on now,
19 which is why a lot of people are outraged by it, a
20 lot of people looked at it very closely, this does
21 not benefit the public schools more than the private
22 schools. And you will see, when the opposition, when
23 they go to court or whatever, that this thing is not
24 benefitting us more. As a matter of fact, they had
25 to bring it down from 80 percent to 66 percent in

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2 the first place because it just simply was not fair.

3 And I think we're looking for fairness in this,

4 we're looking to make sure that the process is done

5 properly in terms of the use of park land, and I

6 just think that when all is said and done, if this

7 project goes through it's going to benefit the

8 private schools more than the public schools.

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I think we'll

10 probably continue to disagree, but I think when it

11 does go through, which we hope it will --

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Well, it's not

13 going to go through because we're going to stop --

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I'm going to just

15 jump in because we have to be out of here at 12:45.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you,

17 Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

19 Council Member Gallagher has a

20 question or a comment.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GALLAGHER: Well, I'll

22 make it short because I know that there are a lot of

23 folks who are here to testify on this, other than

24 listening to City officials.

25 Commissioner, I want to ask you a

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2 question about when fields are renovated all
3 throughout the City in College Point and Middle
4 Village and Glendale and Brooklyn and the Bronx and
5 Staten Island, who is the first person when those
6 fields are reopened that has the opportunity to
7 utilize those fields?

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I'm not sure I
9 follow the question.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GALLAGHER: When we
11 invest capital money to fix up baseball fields, fix
12 up football fields, and soccer fields all throughout
13 the City of New York, and after the fields are again
14 reopened, isn't the first opportunity for permits to
15 be issued to those who had the permits prior to?

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That's correct.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GALLAGHER: Since, from
18 what I see from this deal, is the private schools
19 have been using these fields for a great number of
20 years, they would be upon the completion of the
21 fields the persons that you would go to, under your
22 grandfathering clause, to have an opportunity to
23 continue to use these fields; is that correct?

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That's correct.

25 The grandfather clause, particular fields are

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2 restored, we try to take care of all of the previous
3 permit holders.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GALLAGHER: That's the
5 same thing that you do in every borough, in every
6 renovated field throughout the City of New York,
7 correct?

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That's correct.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GALLAGHER: So, the
10 fact, what differs here is that you've entered into
11 an agreement where the parochial schools are going
12 to cough up 2.62 -- I'm sorry, the private schools
13 are going to offer up \$2.62 million a year, in
14 addition to the \$2.62 million a year they are going
15 to maintain the ball fields?

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's part of the
17 2.6. Out of the 2.6, 400,000 is for maintenance or a
18 reserve fund.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GALLAGHER: They will
20 be responsible for maintenance of the ball fields.

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: They will fund
22 the maintenance that will be done by the Randall's
23 Island Sports Foundation.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GALLAGHER: All for
25 fields that under the existing Parks Department

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2 regulations are grandfathering that they would be
3 granted an overwhelming majority of the permits --

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That's correct.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GALLAGHER: -- Because
6 this is the usage that they have.

7 So, I guess the way I see things may
8 be quite different from my colleague, Council Member
9 Barron, and others, that is that we're consistent.
10 Normally I don't stand at a Parks Committee meeting
11 and say, you know, I support this. I think it is a
12 good deal, as you stated before, in the City, to the
13 City, especially in light of the fact that these
14 permits would have been granted to these same
15 organizations anyway by existing Parks Department
16 rules and regulations.

17 Okay, thank you, Commissioner.

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Thank you,
19 Council member.

20 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

21 We have a lot of people here to
22 testify. I think that grandfathering sometimes has a
23 way of just maintaining the status quo, and because
24 things have been grandfathered doesn't mean that
25 it's best for the community as a whole. And while I

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2 understand in terms of the permit holders, if we are
3 truly interested in making especially this Randall's
4 Island the premiere sports field, and it seems that
5 we would do a better job in making it accessible to
6 everyone and not an exclusive group of people.

7 But that having been said, thank you
8 very much, Commissioner Benepe, Deputy Commissioner
9 Kavanagh. I know Parks people will stay so we can
10 hear the rest of the testimony.

11 What I'm going to ask, as I said, we
12 have a number of people here to testify. The next
13 panel is going to be Borough President Scott
14 Stringer, and Bess Matassa, who is representing
15 Assemblymember Deborah Glick.

16 I'm going to ask if possible for
17 those of you that have written testimony, you can
18 submit the written testimony but just talk from the
19 top of your head. We're going to give everyone two
20 minutes, because again, we have to be out of here
21 and we have about four or five different hearings
22 going on right now.

23 You can get started whenever you are
24 ready, Borough President Stringer.

25 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: I have

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2 two minutes?

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: No, you don't
4 have two minutes, but I'm going to ask that you be
5 mindful of our time constraints.

6 Thank you.

7 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: Always.
8 Always.

9 Well, thank you, Chairperson Foster
10 and members of the Committee for your continued
11 oversight over the Randall's Island ball field
12 development project.

13 As I have said before the goal to
14 renovate and create 65 ball fields on Randall's
15 Island is laudable. However, there continues to be
16 significant problems with --

17 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Excuse me. Let me
18 stop. We've been joined by Council Member Lappin,
19 who has been here, and I keep forgetting and thank
20 you for reminding me, I don't want to not recognize
21 anyone.

22 Excuse me now. Continue, please.

23 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: Okay. In
24 September 2006, the New York City Parks Department
25 and the Randall's Island Sports Foundation proposed

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2 funding the ball fields expansion through payments
3 of \$2.85 million annually by 20 independent schools
4 over a 30-year period.

5 The exchange of schools would receive
6 exclusive access to 80 percent of the fields during
7 the prime after school hours between three and six
8 p.m. As a member of the governing body that must
9 approve this proposal, the Franchise Concession
10 Review Committee, which I sit on with Comptroller
11 Thompson and Mayor's representatives, we joined
12 Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito and talked
13 about a more transparent process. The Committee
14 stakeholders' meeting we held made it very clear to
15 us that this deal, as constituted the 80 percent,
16 was simply an outrage of historic proportions and
17 would set a tremendous precedent that would injure
18 the poorest people in New York City.

19 The Administration, the proposal has
20 come down to 66 percent, and I believe very strongly
21 that as it stands right now, with a vote on
22 Valentines day, that this is the equivalent of the
23 "Valentines Day Massacre," because the reality is
24 there is no real access plan. Poor people cannot get
25 to this island. There isn't a bus plan. There isn't

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2 a commitment to this. The 66 percent is way too
3 high. It is wrong to simply give away and privatize
4 these ball fields, especially from three to six
5 p.m., which is prime time for any child who is in
6 danger of not having an after school program to go
7 to. And right now there is 500,000 young people in
8 the City that do not have places to play and places
9 to go. It's no wonder that that's the time the
10 parents are worried about them.

11 That was true in my neighborhood
12 growing up in Washington Heights, it is true in the
13 South Bronx and East Harlem and around the City. So,
14 before we move forward, we need a discussion on a
15 real access plan, who is going to benefit from this.
16 We need to bring down that percentage, if we're
17 going to strike a compromise.

18 I represent public school and private
19 school kids, and I want very much for private school
20 children to have access to ball fields as well. Make
21 no mistake, this is not about black and white or
22 rich and poor. This is about all our children. But
23 right now there is a class of kids that will not
24 have access to these fields, and unless we seriously
25 scale back this proposal, unless we really give

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2 access to everybody, whether you go to private
3 school or public school, then we will have set a
4 precedent which will have monumental implications.

5 Council Member Viverito and
6 Comptroller Thompson have really tried to work to
7 say what's fair and how do you balance that?

8 This Committee should understand that
9 right now today the private schools have 95 percent
10 of the fields, because there is no way for the
11 public schools to get to the island. There is no
12 funding available for the public schools to create
13 leagues and to get kids to that island.

14 But help is coming. CFE lawsuit, the
15 Spitzer budget, may create historic monies coming
16 into New York City. And wouldn't it be insane if we
17 locked into a deal for 20 years and gave this, yes,
18 you're going to pay to play on these fields, when
19 three, four, five years from now we may be able to
20 have a real equity position, 50 percent for the
21 private schools, 50 percent for the public schools,
22 what a great win for all the children in this City.

23 So, as a voting member of the FCRC,
24 the clock is now ticking. We have 14 days to really
25 come up with something that's fair and just and that

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2 will set a good precedent for dealing with Randall's
3 Island.

4 And I ask the Committee, as you
5 continue your oversight, to push City officials to
6 the place where we recognize that we want to
7 renovate the fields. We respect the Parks Commission
8 or the Parks Department, we don't seek a fight with
9 the Administration, but we do not want to be part of
10 something that five or ten years from now other
11 elected officials will look at what we did, and we
12 realize that we locked out three generations of
13 young kids who only want to have an opportunity to
14 be like any other kid, regardless of how much money
15 their parents have.

16 Thank you very much, and I'll be
17 happy to take any questions.

18 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

19 MS. MATASSA: Good afternoon. My name
20 is Bess Matassa, and I'm here representing State
21 Assemblymember Deborah Glick, and I'd like to read a
22 statement on behalf of the Assemblymember.

23 As a firm advocate for public
24 accessibility to all of our City's precious
25 recreational spaces, I am deeply disturbed by the

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2 proposal to limit public use of athletic fields on
3 Randall's Island, a negotiation that unfortunately
4 mirrors the growing dependency on public/private
5 partnerships in parks throughout our City.

6 This Citywide trend perpetuates the
7 misguided belief the parks must be self-funded and
8 self-supporting, rather than a vital municipal
9 responsibility for the benefit of all New Yorkers.

10 Not surprisingly, the reliance on
11 such partnerships exacerbates the economic
12 disparities between communities that are able to
13 self-fund, which should be City-supported public
14 spaces, and those that are left at the mercy of an
15 administration that has continually abdicated the
16 responsibility to provide these services.

17 As we marvel over the cleanliness and
18 aesthetic merit of parks heavily endowed by private
19 funding, our attention has diverted from the
20 Citywide crisis that affects our most vulnerable
21 communities.

22 The latter neighborhoods are left to
23 depend on the less than one percent of the City's
24 budget dedicating to operating its parks, resulting
25 in disrepair and abandonment that leaves children

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2 throughout the five boroughs with no safe places to
3 play.

4 Sadly, this seems to be part of the
5 City's practice of ignoring the affordability crisis
6 that threatens our communities in a myriad of ways.

7 The Randall's Island proposal is
8 particularly disturbing, considering that the nearby
9 communities of East Harlem and the South Bronx are
10 already severely park deprived. The idea of offering
11 20 private schools near-exclusive use of any portion
12 of the new fields for upwards of 20 years is
13 completely outrageous.

14 Presently, the seemingly lack of
15 competition by some of these public schools for the
16 use of the current fields has solely been a symptom
17 of the Island's geographic inaccessibility.
18 Ironically, as plans move forward to finally link
19 these communities to Randall's Island, residents of
20 East Harlem will cross a bridge only to find that
21 what awaits them on the other side, are closed gates
22 and compromised access to what should be a public
23 park.

24 As disturbing as the proposal is
25 itself, it was incredible that the City had been in

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2 negotiation with private schools for close to a year
3 before any information was available to City and
4 State elected officials, or local community boards.

5 This Administration has developed an
6 unfortunate approach to decision making in which it
7 limits access to information. When all levels of
8 government work together to shape decisions, better
9 results are produced for the public.

10 Unfortunately, this Administration
11 believes no other elected officials need to know
12 what it plans to do with our public assets.

13 The quality of our parks were once
14 proof of the City's dedication to maintaining truly
15 democratic public spaces, places where we played
16 together, protested together and idled away an
17 afternoon together, enjoying chance encounters with
18 the natural world and most importantly with each
19 other.

20 Seemingly, this legacy has been
21 buried beneath the budget cuts, private interest,
22 and the unfortunate belief that any City can sustain
23 itself on commercial profits while robbing average
24 New Yorkers, particularly children, of open space.

25 The provision of parks services

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2 should never be contingent on the ability of a
3 particular neighborhood to solicit private funding.
4 If this proposal goes forward, the City will once
5 again fail New Yorkers in providing this critical
6 municipal service. It will also continue its pay to
7 play mentality that deprives our communities of the
8 public park space they so sorely deserve.

9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

11 Council Member Lappin.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LAPPIN: Thank you,
13 Madam Chair. Particularly since I am not a member of
14 this Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to make
15 some comments.

16 And I wanted to thank our Borough
17 President for his leadership on this issue.

18 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: Thank
19 you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LAPPIN: And just to
21 say that this is something that is not unique to
22 Randall's Island, in the sense that this
23 Administration seems to have a philosophy that they
24 shouldn't have to pay to build new parks, maintain
25 parks, new or even some that are existing.

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2 And I just wanted to state on the
3 record that I couldn't disagree more that we, I
4 think as a City, have an obligation to fund and
5 maintain our parks in all five boroughs, and whether
6 it's the outer detour roadway that we're working on,
7 the East River, or other parts of Manhattan where we
8 have opportunities to build new park land, it
9 shouldn't have to be who is going to pay for it.
10 We're only going to build it if somebody in the
11 private sector will pay for it or maintain it, I
12 don't believe. I think we have an obligation to
13 build and maintain parks and that's what people pay
14 taxes for.

15 So, I just wanted to thank you for
16 your work on this, and mention that this is
17 happening all over the place, in other areas as
18 well, and I hope we can continue to work together to
19 make sure that new parks that are built that we
20 desperately need are not private parks.

21 Thank you.

22 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: Can I
23 make one comment? One just to say that a lot of
24 people like yourself have committed to the creation
25 of parks because you put up capital money and work

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2 with your communities.

3 I want to just say that private and
4 public partnership in and of itself is not
5 necessarily bad. The Central Park Conservancy has
6 done great things in our borough, spending and
7 raising private money to create trees and a
8 wonderful quality of life in Central Park.

9 The distinction between that private
10 and public partnership, is when they finish creating
11 new trees or new access points in Central Park, we
12 all get to enjoy it. We all use it. That's the
13 beauty of getting people who are wealthy or people
14 who love our parks to contribute, and then we add
15 City dollars and a partnership. That's not happening
16 on Randall's Island.

17 Right now once the deal is made, 20
18 private schools have the franchise. We can't go to
19 those fields. And that is the difference that I
20 think we have to recognize here. This is not about
21 simply okay private/public partnership. This would
22 say, 66 percent of those fields for 20, 30 years,
23 that's it. We don't own that anymore. We can't walk
24 on those fields any more. We can't play on those
25 fields, and that is the big distinction here.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LAPPIN: And I agree.

3 And I think Asphalt Green is another example of a
4 public/private partnership.

5 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: Right.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LAPPIN: Where public
7 school children come and learn how to swim for free,
8 and they do a tremendous amount of work and are a
9 perfect example, I think, of a group that works
10 well.

11 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: You're
12 right.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LAPPIN: But I just
14 wanted to say, you know, there seems to be an
15 attitude when you approach this Administration about
16 a new park. The answer is, well, who is going to pay
17 for it, and who is going to maintain it.

18 My answer would be the City of New
19 York.

20 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: Big
21 surplus this year, right?

22 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And I think, you
23 know, as a City we have money for what we want to
24 have money for, and as you sit on that board, I
25 think it's important to be known that there appears

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2 to be no elected official at this point, especially
3 from the Council that's in support of this deal as
4 it stands, and when we look at this private/public
5 partnership, and I have said it all along, and I
6 will continue to say it, we create two tiers when it
7 comes to a parks system. Those that have get access.
8 When we look around the waterfronts that are
9 developed, they're all in the affluent areas of
10 Manhattan, and now with the Brooklyn Bridge, and if
11 we as a City are going to be committed to park land,
12 as you said, it has to be across the board, and stop
13 talking about this private partnership, because then
14 we'll have more money left over for the kind of you
15 people type of attitude that's absolutely incorrect.

16 And Charles, you promised to be
17 brief.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I don't know
19 why you felt the need to say that to a person who
20 really values brevity.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yes.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: No, I just
23 want to say excellent presentation on this. I hope
24 we don't go and put for 50/50. Because I don't even
25 think that's fair.

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2 I mean, especially with the statement
3 you just made, you know, with other partnerships
4 that no one has to own stuff because you're in
5 partnership with it.

6 I really think this is such a
7 horrific deal here, and I think very well laid out
8 by you. But I think the resolution is what I'm
9 concerned about. What possible resolution we can
10 come to and I just don't think 50/50 is a resolution
11 that we should be pushing.

12 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER:

13 Councilman, the only thing I would remind you is
14 that, I'm not the Mayor, so I don't control this.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I understand.
16 I'm talking about advocacy now.

17 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: Yes. But
18 here's the issue: The Mayor has four votes, the
19 Comptroller has a vote, I have a vote, Council
20 Member Viverito and Council Member Foster, that's
21 your district too, well, certainly she doesn't have
22 any vote, so we have to approach this with the
23 Administration. So, the more that we can contact the
24 Administration, with the Commissioner, we can't veto
25 this on the FCRC. The fact, as you know, part of

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2 what we have to now deal with are potential rules
3 changes on the FCRC, which would even limit our
4 ability to work on these issues in a more
5 transparent way.

6 This FCRC board is a very powerful,
7 potent board. We are in the minority on this issue.
8 So, while I agree with your goal, we're going to
9 have to work very hard to get some equity, and I
10 can't just be in the position of saying no to
11 anything, because then it could end up being 80
12 percent and no plan at all. So we have to balance
13 that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I understand
15 that. But that's part of the challenge in politics,
16 whether we're doing 421-A and other kinds of things,
17 and we do all of this fighting and then when the
18 dust is cleared, then we wind up just being hurt,
19 you know, saying that we have no choice.

20 But I think if we would start off, we
21 can always end up somewhere, but if we start off
22 really strong against this deal, period --

23 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: I think
24 you know from my comments, I've come here twice,
25 I've voted no on the FCRC.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Yes.

3 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: I --

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Just hold up
5 on the 50/50, that's what I'm saying.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

7 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: You and I
8 will be in contact.

9 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Great. Thank you
10 very much.

11 BOROUGH PRESIDENT STRINGER: Thank
12 you.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Rich Davis, Dr.
14 Gregory Hodge, and Jeanette Cesar.

15 We have 50 minutes to get through
16 maybe close to 30 people, so I'm going to again
17 please emphasize brevity.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Jeannette Cesar
19 had to leave.

20 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you. Pat
21 Mangan. You can get started.

22 MR. DAVIS: Hi. My name is Richard
23 Davis. I'm Chair of the Randall's Island Sports
24 Foundation. I have submitted testimony.

25 Let me just make a few points, as you

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2 say, in the interest of time.

3 First, the Foundation has always been
4 committed to bringing people from the community and
5 kids from the community to the Island. We currently
6 bring 14,000 kids to the Island. We spend hundreds
7 of thousands of privately raised monies to provide
8 free programming and get them there by buses. And
9 we've expanded that with Icon Stadium.

10 Now, why do I think this deal is a
11 good deal, and why do I disagree with some of the
12 criticism? There has been reference to the notion of
13 closed gates. What this deal does is create, this
14 development does, creates 48,000 hours of new
15 playing time on Randall's Island. Forty-five
16 thousand hours of that new playing time goes to
17 people other than people at the private schools. It
18 goes to community groups, public schools and others.

19 What is the current status quo? Which
20 we could have accepted but we chose the challenge
21 because we wanted to bring more people onto the
22 Island for public schools. They have very little
23 access to a few low-quality fields. After this, in
24 the three to six time frame, the after school
25 period, there is going to be 20 of these fields, or

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2 at least 20 of these fields are going to be set
3 aside as priority for the public schools. Those 20
4 do not exist today.

5 We talked about, we sometimes think
6 the only time the park is used is after school, the
7 heaviest use, as the Commissioner said, is in the
8 weekends, in the summers. We are adding 33,000 hours
9 of new playing time for weekend and summers, adult
10 leagues, communities. Again, that's not the private
11 schools. So, the private schools are going to end up
12 using this for ten, 11 percent of the time.

13 Now, this five-year review, I think
14 this is very important. Because I think we are all
15 committed to seeing what happens with public demand.
16 And a further demand develops, and the reason we put
17 in this five-year review, and I think the reason the
18 City is working on this task force is to try and
19 both stimulate public school demand and then have
20 the ability to assess it so that this deal can be
21 terminated after five years or ten years, or
22 frankly, at any time, but there is a formal
23 five-year review of the public demand.

24 So, I think that this is not, you
25 know, if things work out differently, if it becomes

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2 better policy to do something, if there's great
3 demand later, this deal can be terminated and people
4 can redo the allocation.

5 This project, you know, I think was
6 generated in keeping with our hope to expand use in
7 the Island. We think the deal has been made better
8 over the last months by working with elected
9 officials and the community groups and we're
10 prepared and committed to keep doing that to make
11 the future of this Island the best that it can be
12 for everybody. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

14 MR. HODGE: My name is Greg Hodge. I'm
15 the Assistant Principal with the Frederick Douglas
16 Academy. Ten years ago in New York City there were
17 very few small schools, and we were part of the New
18 Vision Schools, we were one of the first ten. Today
19 there is over 300 small schools in New York City,
20 and as the new schools are being created, they're
21 being introduced in places where we don't have
22 facilities, no gym, no science labs, and what
23 happens is the kids are shortchanged.

24 Now, fortunately, the City Council
25 has devoted a lot of money to science labs and it's

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2 helped us in the small schools. But relative to the
3 students participating and having access to fields,
4 that was never really addressed. So, the Randall's
5 Island Foundation approached Community School
6 District 5 ten years ago, and then asked us if we
7 would like to be able to use the fields, and have
8 our students bussed from the schools to the fields,
9 so we could participate.

10 At that point in time, as a high
11 school we did not have any participation in the
12 public school athletic community because we were a
13 small school, we only had one gym, and we were
14 supposed to be small, we're up to 1,500 kids, and we
15 were able to, over a period of time, thanks to the
16 Randall's Island Sports Foundation, use the
17 facilities. Unbelievably, our small little school in
18 Harlem was able to win the Division Champs in
19 baseball because we had access to the field.

20 We also were able to have our girls
21 team have access to the fields, as well as recently
22 introducing LaCrosse, which is a sport that's
23 traditionally not played in the City. So, for many
24 small schools in the City, the Randall's Island
25 Sports Foundation has been really a God send because

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2 as they created the small schools, they never built
3 fields. And part of this is because the property.
4 When you build a new school, sometimes it's put into
5 a police station, the police station didn't have a
6 field, so what do you have? You have a building, you
7 have 500 kids, no facilities.

8 So, for us, in a small school
9 community, and now we're like three- or
10 four-hundred, we're always going to lobby for equal
11 access to fields, number one. Number two, have the
12 students have participation in the science
13 community, as well for CBOs. So we've been very
14 lucky that the Randall's Island Sports Foundation
15 also helped us with science projects as well. We
16 didn't have labs initially, until the City Council
17 gave us the money.

18 So, thank you, and I'm going to have
19 my athletic director speak briefly.

20 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you. Jump
21 right in.

22 MR. MANGAN: Okay. Dear Committee on
23 Parks and Recreation. Good morning. My name is
24 Patrick Mangan, and I'm an English teacher, Athletic
25 Director and Coach at the Frederick Douglas Academy.

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2 Frederick Douglas Academy is a grade
3 six to 12 public school in Harlem on 149th Street
4 and Seventh Avenue. I have worked at FDA for 13
5 years and in the Harlem Community for over 20 years.

6 Here are some facts relevant to the
7 topic, which is oversight, status of the possible
8 exclusive use of the athletic fields on Randall's
9 Island by New York City private schools. FDA, a
10 public school, had been using Randall's Island
11 extensively in the fall and spring since 1998.
12 Randall's Island Sports Foundation did an outreach
13 to public schools in the neighboring Harlem
14 community in 1997-'98 and we responded.

15 FDA, a public school, has used
16 Randall's Island for soccer, touch football, cross
17 country, softball, baseball, tennis, track and field
18 and field days since 1998.

19 FDA, a public school, was denied
20 entry into the public school athletic league, for
21 both a boys soccer team and a girl's softball team,
22 because of the lack of field availability in
23 Manhattan.

24 After obtaining a fields and New York
25 City Parks Permit at Randall's Island, FDA was

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2 granted a boys soccer team and a girls softball team
3 to play in the public school athletic league against
4 other public school in games on Randall's Island, in
5 the fall and spring respectively.

6 FDA, a public school, has been
7 competing against other public schools on Randall's
8 Island for the past three soccer seasons and the
9 past four softball seasons. We have played
10 approximately 30 other public schools on Randall's
11 Island during this period.

12 We were able to start a girls'
13 Lacrosse team and a boys' Lacrosse team this spring
14 and compete in the PSAL against other public school
15 teams because of the availability of fields and
16 metal spaces on Randall's Island.

17 FDA, a public school, has four teams
18 because of the use of Randall's Island, but can only
19 use these fields for games. We do not have fields to
20 use for practice.

21 All schools, public and private, need
22 more fields for games and practice because of the
23 lack of field space in Manhattan.

24 The Randall's Island Sports
25 Foundation Field Project would greatly increase the

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2 number of fields for public schools for after school
3 use, and increase the quality of the fields.

4 Three opinions I would like to
5 express are, when the City cannot find or provide
6 for public parks, it is fine to use private
7 resources to fund, if necessary, projects for public
8 use, and FDA, a public school, loves this Randall's
9 Island Sports Foundation Field Project.

10 And number three, the MTA public bus
11 from 125th Street to Lexington, 125th Street and
12 Lex, to Randall's Island, is great. It takes less
13 than ten minutes. I have taken it over 100 times.

14 Thank you very much.

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

16 Council Member Lappin, do you have
17 any questions?

18 Thank you very much.

19 MR. DAVIS: Madam Chair, may I just
20 say --

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Of course.

22 MR. DAVIS: I apologize. Ellen
23 Chestler, who is a member of the New Yorkers for
24 Parks, was here to testify in favor of the project,
25 but she had to leave and asked me to just say that.

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2 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

3 Our next panel is Marina Ortiz, from
4 East Harlem Preservation; Eugenia Simmons Taylor,
5 District President Council of East Harlem; Matthew
6 Washington.

7 Again, I'm going to remind you, it
8 doesn't matter who goes first. You can talk your
9 statement, because we are pressed for time and we'd
10 like everybody to be able to speak. And you can
11 start in whatever order you'd like.

12 MS. SIMMONS-TAYLOR: I have written
13 testimony that I'd like to submit to the
14 Sergeant-At-Arms here.

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay. Go ahead.
16 Pull the mike closer to you.

17 MS. SIMMONS-TAYLOR: My name is
18 Eugenia Simmons-Taylor, and I'm the President of the
19 Presidents Council in District 4, East Harlem. The
20 Presidents Council consists of representatives of
21 all the PTAs of schools in the district.

22 I'm here today to confirm that no one
23 ever reached out to me or any of the other parents
24 in our community to ask us how we felt about -- to
25 ask us how our schools might be able to use these

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2 fields, or what we thought about this proposed
3 contract.

4 Not the Mayor's Office, the Parks
5 Department, Randall's Island Sports Foundation,
6 anyone ever asked us the questions. We only heard
7 about it through an organization Class Size Matters
8 and the Media.

9 Right now schools in our district
10 desperately need access to more fields. We have 58
11 public schools in our community that are forced to
12 share only eight ball fields. This is why our
13 Council in the CDEC 4, for District 4 in East
14 Harlem, passed a resolution against allowing these
15 20 private schools to monopolize most of the fields
16 for youth for Randall's Island over the next 20
17 years.

18 I'm also the PTA President of the
19 Young Women's Leadership School in East Harlem, and
20 I could tell you that our school indeed could use
21 these fields tomorrow, if they were made available
22 to us.

23 The only team sports that we're able
24 to offer our girls is track because the students can
25 run in Central Park. But we would love to have other

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2 sports like Soccer, and football, if we could only
3 have access to these fields in which to practice and
4 compete.

5 We would want our students to be
6 well-rounded, and this means engaging them both in
7 academic and physical activities. We also could
8 afford to pay for transportation, staffing and
9 equipment, because we're lucky enough to have
10 private funds to flow into our school because of the
11 generosity and ongoing fundraising efforts of our
12 staff, as well as our founder and president and
13 Tish.

14 Other schools in the district or
15 elsewhere might need more financial support to form
16 teams, either through their own fundraising efforts,
17 or with the help of the Department of Education.
18 Surely, as we as a City, we could afford this (sic).
19 Given that the Governor has said we will receive
20 more than \$3 billion in aid over the next four years
21 for our schools, and the City is supposed to
22 contribute more than 2 billion in additional funds
23 as well.

24 Instead of selling away the rights of
25 these fields for 20 years, and selling our public

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2 school students short, our elected officials should
3 be helping them and providing them with resources
4 and the fields they really need.

5 We urge the City Council to take the
6 lead and reach out to all public schools in the
7 vicinity of Randall's Island, whether they're in the
8 Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, or anywhere else, and
9 serving them as to what their actual needs might be
10 in terms of access to the sports fields, and what
11 barriers might exist preventing them from becoming
12 or forming teams.

13 We cannot leave this important
14 problem to officials in the Department of -- in the
15 Parks Department, the Randall's Island Foundation,
16 sadly enough, to the Department of Education, where
17 none of them have showed any real interest in
18 providing our children with the opportunities they
19 need to place sports and engage in other physical
20 activities. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Go ahead.

22 MS. ORTIZ: Hi. My name is Marina
23 Ortiz, and I'm with the East Harlem Preservation.
24 Under the new deal, or under this new math, local
25 public schools would have priority access to 20 ball

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2 fields. What this actually means is that the
3 majority of children in East Harlem and the South
4 Bronx would have to skip their school lessons or
5 their dinner in order to play ball during daytime
6 hours throughout the school year.

7 More precisely, the contract would
8 mostly benefit students from out-of-district private
9 institutions during those crucial hours.

10 The names of those private schools
11 remain a mystery to folks uptown, since the
12 Randall's Island Sports Foundation has repeatedly
13 failed to provide a list of these schools in writing
14 during any meeting in East Harlem.

15 One can't help but wonder how many of
16 these private schools, which the foundation
17 described in their website as "responsible user
18 groups," have representatives serving on the Board
19 of Trustees for the Randall's Island Sports
20 Foundation. Or rather, how many members of the Board
21 of the Randall's Island Sports Foundation have a
22 human monetary or professional interest in any of
23 these institutions?

24 Even without these details, it's
25 obvious that the residents of East Harlem have

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2 offered a separate and an unequal playing field in
3 the planning of this new deal.

4 But just because something has always
5 been done a certain way, it does not necessarily
6 mean that it is right.

7 This was true during the Civil Rights
8 Movement and remains true today. Since at least the
9 latter part of the 20th Century, every citizen of
10 every age and income could enjoy free and public
11 access to City Parks.

12 Today, hundreds, if not thousands of
13 acres of park land are being systematically turned
14 over to private developers and institutions and in
15 many cases permanently removed from free and open
16 public use.

17 It would appear that we are moving
18 forward -- I mean, moving backward, especially since
19 public funding for parks remains at an all-time low,
20 despite the fact that we now enjoy a 3.9 billion
21 surplus.

22 East Harlem preservation opposes the
23 alienation of City parkland without due process and
24 recent moves by this Administration to restrict the
25 rights of other elected officials to review private

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2 concessions involving City property.

3 We support the call for a more
4 thorough annual accounting of private funding of
5 City Parks, including oversight hearing on park
6 concessions and greater transparency in
7 public/private partnerships.

8 Mayor Bloomberg's Plan the New York
9 City Project purports to design a City where every
10 child will be able to access a park within ten
11 minutes walking distance. The question is, will all
12 this park land be free, or will we have to pay to
13 play, as is now the trend?

14 For East Harlem residents, this new
15 deal is clearly a return to customs we fought too
16 hard to revisit.

17 Thank you.

18 MR. WASHINGTON: Good morning. My name
19 is Matthew Washington. I'd like to thank the
20 Chairperson, Council Member Foster, for having me
21 here, as well as the City Council.

22 Commissioner Benepe mentioned
23 something earlier. He said that we are constantly
24 looking for new ways for this public/private
25 partnership in dealing with parks, and if that new

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2 way means bad, as in this project, then I don't like
3 new ways. I like the Commissioner, and it's not to
4 attack him, but I want good new ways, not bad new
5 ways.

6 This project, it just blows my mind.
7 As a resident of East Harlem, born and raised my
8 whole life, it is unbelievable to me that we would
9 set a precedent for children that if you have the
10 money you can buy out the City. You can buy out City
11 land. You know, if I have \$10 million in my pocket,
12 I want one of those ball fields and nobody else can
13 go on that ball field. And it just doesn't make any
14 sense. I mean, this is ridiculous.

15 I thank the Council for speaking out
16 against this project, as most of them have. You
17 know, I'm just, I'm frustrated. I'm disappointed.
18 It's an unbelievable disgrace. This is something
19 that does not happen anywhere else. The City has
20 neglected this park and should put the money into
21 the park.

22 You know, I understand the Mayor
23 Michael Bloomberg only makes \$1.00 as his Mayor's
24 salary, but Michael Bloomberg, the businessman has
25 lots of money. And maybe he wants to make a special

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2 contribution to help parks, if he loves the parks so
3 much.

4 This is just, you know, and name it
5 for him, you know, Bloomberg Fields, I'm happy to
6 have it and happy to have all the children of New
7 York City use that park. I'm not against private
8 schools, they serve a great purpose.

9 I'm not here to say public schools
10 are so much better. But I care about the children.
11 And let's care about children and not set a
12 precedent for children where we are telling them, if
13 you have money we will rank you higher than other
14 children. It's ridiculous. It's sickening. It's
15 crazy. It's unbelievable. This is a terrible
16 project. Terrible proposal, that is. I want it to
17 change. I agree with Council Member Barron, 50/50 is
18 not good enough for me. We need to have equal
19 opportunity for all of our children to access any
20 park, any public space in New York City. And unless
21 we have equal access, then it is wrong, and we need
22 some changes.

23 So, please, anyone who has the
24 opportunity to vote, vote this down. Let's go back,
25 relook at this project, relook at this proposal,

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2 because it is not fair and I'm not going to sit down
3 quietly and let people just stomp all over public
4 space, because it's preposterous.

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

6 Council Member Viverito. Just a minute, she has a
7 statement.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: Yes, I
9 just wanted to thank the three panelists since they
10 are East Harlem residents, my constituents, and
11 they've been very strong advocates. And I really, in
12 particular also want to thank the CEC for taking
13 this on, and really, you know, advocating on behalf
14 of the parents.

15 I think when you came out with your
16 resolution awhile ago, I was very pleased to see
17 that it had been proactive. You know, that despite
18 the fact that you had not been consulted on this
19 issue, that you had decided that it was incumbent
20 upon you and the responsibility of the CEC to speak
21 on behalf of all public school children.

22 So, I really want to thank Ms. Taylor
23 Simmons for that. And Mat, he was on the community
24 board, as well as Marina, and everyone else that has
25 been working so hard on this issue. Thank you.

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2 MR. WASHINGTON: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

4 Our next panel is Stuart Johnson,
5 Robert Hoffman, Arlene Virga. Are all those people
6 here?

7 Robert Hoffman had to leave.

8 Arlene Virga?

9 MS. VIRGA: I'm here.

10 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Stuart Johnson,
11 is he here? No.

12 Jay Nanda. And the father that had to
13 leave, if you give a statement to the
14 Sergeant-At-Arms, we're going to have to -- we have
15 15 more people ready to testify and it's 20 after,
16 so we're going to have to use the two-minute clock
17 because the honor system was not working.

18 Let's get one more person. Julio
19 Munoz. And Ms. Virga, you can start. Okay, thank
20 you.

21 MS. VIRGA: Good morning. My name is
22 Arlene Virga, and I represent the Yorkville Youth
23 Athletic Association, a 4,000 not-player,
24 not-for-profit program and park user.

25 Our program has public, private and

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2 parochial school participants.

3 I am well aware and have been well
4 informed of the Randall's Island Project that was
5 nurtured by the Randall's Island Sports Foundation
6 and the private schools.

7 While I am not in support of
8 privatization of our parks, this is not an example
9 of privatization.

10 I am in favor of going forward with
11 this project for several reasons. I am in favor of
12 the project and its funding because without the
13 funding the fields cannot be built or maintained.
14 Without the funding in the fields, the fields will
15 remain few, and the private schools who are
16 grandfathered on the existing fields will continue
17 their fields anyway, and no additional fields will
18 be available for the public schools or for
19 not-for-profits like Yorkville.

20 The private schools already have the
21 fields, and this project will not increase or
22 decrease the field usage.

23 You may then say get rid of the
24 grandfather clause. No way. The grandfather clause
25 is 100 percent necessary for current park users, for

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2 without this, no planning by any program will be
3 possible, and the fields would simply sit there with
4 no organizer, like myself, willing to make plans for
5 their use.

6 I am also in favor of this project
7 because it is embarrassing to play ball versus our
8 Long Island neighbors who balk at coming to our home
9 fields. Our fields are a disgrace, they lack
10 toilets, which is frankly disgusting, and this in
11 the capital of the world. It makes one wonder.

12 The public should welcome this
13 project and recognize that the Randall's Island
14 Sports Foundation is a group of fair-minded
15 individuals, individuals like Aimee Boden, Jonathan
16 Greengrass, Scott McAuliffe and Sabrina Ellentuck
17 who want to see a beautiful sports facility built
18 for all athletes regardless of their race, color,
19 creed or size of their bank accounts.

20 In fact, they have worked tirelessly
21 to aid our more underserved citizens through their
22 many programs.

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Can you wrap up,
24 please?

25 MS. VIRGA: I particularly want to

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2 thank Scott McAuliffe, he is always fair in the
3 distribution of field time. He always answers his
4 phone, and he does that more than anyone to ensure
5 all programs are treated fairly. I trust him, and I
6 trust that more fields will mean more for everyone.

7 I do have one more paragraph.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: If you can give
9 it to the Sergeant, we can make copies and have it
10 for the record.

11 MS. VIRGA: Okay.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

13 (The remainder of Ms. Virga's written
14 testimony is read into the record.)

15

16 Written Testimony of Ms. Virga

17

18 The Public should welcome this
19 project and recognize that the RISF is a group of
20 fair minded individuals. Individuals like Aimee
21 Boden, Jonathan Greengrass, Scott McAuliffe and
22 Sabrina Ellentuck who want to see a beautiful sports
23 facility built for all athletes regardless of their
24 race, color, greed or size of their bank accounts.
25 In fact they have worked tirelessly to aid our more

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2 underserved citizens through their many programs.

3 I particularly want to mention Scott
4 McAuliffe here. He is always fair in his
5 distribution of fieldtime, he always answers his
6 phone and he does more than anyone to ensure all
7 program are treated fairly. I trust him and I trust
8 that more fields will mean more for everyone.

9 Instead of trying to stop this
10 project, I propose that our public schools spend
11 some of the monies that have been recently allocated
12 by Governor Spitzer, to physical education programs
13 and teams for our public schools to ensure that all
14 our schools can have their children using the public
15 spaces at Randall's Island that will become
16 available because of this project. Those
17 organizations that are prepared will benefit from
18 more and better fields, not simply the private
19 schools.

20 (End of written testimony.)

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Next.

22 MR. NANDA: Good morning.

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Good morning.

24 MR. NANDA: I submitted the testimony,
25 I think I'll just go off the top of my head, as you

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2 suggested. Because what is in my testimony has been
3 said over and over.

4 My name is Jay Nanda, and I'm Founder
5 and Executive Director of Urban Dove, a non-profit
6 organization that serves youth. We don't currently
7 use the fields at Randall's Island, so we're not
8 really here advocating for our organization, but
9 more for children in general. I think it's very
10 interesting that the contract has a five-year review
11 period, and that the trust, that the Randall's
12 Island Sports Foundation and the City are willing to
13 renegotiate after five years, which implicitly means
14 --

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: To review.

16 MR. NANDA: To review after five
17 years, which implicitly means that if the demand
18 increases, that the moment will be there to put
19 public dollars into this park.

20 I think that there is a very easy way
21 to test whether there is a public demand, before the
22 contract ever gets signed. And I have suggested to
23 Borough President, and Melissa, you have I have
24 spoken about this, and other folks, you could put
25 this contract on hold for a year, and if you

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2 provided transportation, which everybody agrees,
3 this is a fact, even the Randall's Island Sports
4 Foundation agrees, transportation is the key.

5 If you were to provide transportation
6 in the form of public buses, and Frederick Douglas
7 Academy, who I know very well and respect everything
8 they do, clearly it's a start that they got buses to
9 get there. If you were to provide buses, see what
10 the demand in public schools would be.

11 We work with 18 public high schools
12 that don't have their own gyms, and we have a
13 creative public/private partnership that rents the
14 gyms and donates them to the schools.

15 You could provide public/private
16 partnership to create a transportation mechanism for
17 a year, even 18 months to two years. And see how
18 many public schools, and I have gotten e-mails and
19 calls from dozens of coaches and athletic directors
20 saying they would absolutely have teams. See what
21 the demands on those fields would be.

22 Bring them out to the fields. You
23 have to take back some of the fields from the
24 private schools, but wait two years, before you lay
25 down the bricks, see where the people will walk. And

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2 I think if you did that, and in the end you saw that
3 the demand was not there, then maybe this contract
4 makes more sense.

5 But to sign it first and then look
6 for a demand is just doing it backwards. Let's find
7 out what the demand is, provide public
8 transportation, create mechanisms so that public
9 schools know transportation exists, help them get
10 teams going and if you did that, I think you would
11 see that not only is 66 percent way too much, but if
12 you really let public demand go, the private schools
13 wouldn't have any fields, because there are so many
14 public schools that would use this in a second. And
15 I think it's just backwards to sign a contract and
16 then review it. Let's review it and then sign a
17 contract.

18 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

19 MR. NANDA: Thank you.

20 MR. MUNOZ: Hello. My name is Julio
21 Munoz. I'm here to represent the Bald Eagle
22 Association. I'm from Bronx County. I've been a
23 Chairman. I've been on a planning board for ten
24 years. I was the Chairman of it twice. I was also
25 the Commissioner for a little league in the Bronx.

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2 And, so, we've used the field prior this project
3 being announced.

4 I've got to tell you, from personal
5 experience, that this project should not go forward.
6 What you see here is the cream of the Parks
7 Department, but when you have to deal with the
8 permit system, and the individuals and the district
9 offices, most of them know that this happened, and
10 that we have access to those fields, if any? And if
11 they do, from personal experience, again, I've got
12 to tell you, from personal experience, it's very
13 difficult to get a permit.

14 Our little leagues, we had a permit,
15 the Star Light in the Bronx, we had a permit, and
16 they came in, the Parks Department said we're going
17 to renovate this literal plot of land for you and
18 we're going to give you a brand new ball field.

19 Well, they found out after they
20 started the construction that it was a toxic field,
21 and that our kids was playing all along in one of
22 our fields and it was toxic.

23 And, so, we tried to get a permit to
24 work or play elsewhere. It was very difficult. We
25 didn't and our league went under, defunded. And, so,

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2 I gotta tell you, personal, someone who works with
3 kids in baseball, the Parks Department has
4 traditionally been, the upper level has been
5 traditionally a racist, organization. Since the
6 Giuliani Administration, it has not changed. It
7 looks like it won't change, and there are no
8 mandates to make those changes.

9 So, I've got to tell you that that's
10 the problem that, besides this project, is going to
11 be what the City Council has to deal with.

12 Thank you very much.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

14 Our next panel, and can you get Ms.
15 Virga's testimony so you can make a copy so that we
16 can have that last paragraph for the record, please.

17 He's coming this way to get it from
18 you.

19 (Testimony read into the record at
20 the end of Ms. Virga's testimony.)

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: The next panel is
22 Elizabeth Cook Levy, Geoffrey Croft, Harry Bibbins.

23 MR. JERESKI: Harry is not here. He
24 couldn't make it. Bit I could speak, but not for
25 him, for myself.

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2 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Who are you?

3 MR. JURESKI: Robert Jureski. A

4 graduate from --

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Wait, Robert.

6 Don't start talking yet.

7 Robert, yes, you're here. I've got

8 you, Robert.

9 For everybody that has written

10 testimony, if you hand it in and talk, that will

11 work. Thank you.

12 MR. CROFT: Hi. Good afternoon,

13 everyone.

14 "Unable to meet its awesome

15 responsibilities, New York City's Department of

16 Parks is moving towards turning over large chunks of

17 its domain to private groups and corporations." That

18 was written in 1980, October 15th, from the New York

19 Times. Good morning. My name is Jeffrey Croft. I'm

20 President of New York City Park Advocates.

21 Under the current proposal, in

22 exchange for desperately needed funding, 20 private

23 schools would be allowed to buy access to park land

24 during peak hours, to what are supposed to be public

25 fields.

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2 Make no mistake, this is an equity
3 issue, pure and simple. As proposed, New York City's
4 underserved residents would continue to be punished
5 because their schools, their communities, do not
6 have the resources that are needed to take advantage
7 of the facilities on Randall's Island, a vital
8 resource so close, yet so far away.

9 While much of the dialogue has
10 centered around the lack of physical education, that
11 is only the tip of the iceberg. Private schools have
12 the infrastructure, the coaches, the athletic
13 directors, the supplies and the transportation to
14 make use of these fields.

15 Most public schools and parochial
16 schools do not. Providing physical education in
17 after school programs is a major selling point for
18 sending children to private schools. Physical
19 education is a major part of the curriculum. Many
20 charge extra for these programs.

21 Providing adequate budgets for the
22 provision of these programs will be the only way to
23 allow these under-resourced schools and communities
24 to take advantage of these fields.

25 The enormous discrepancy between the

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2 resources available to the City's private schools
3 and those reported to New York City's public and
4 parochial schools must be brought into this dialogue
5 if we are to have any hope of achieving a solution.

6 You can give all the fields to those
7 under-served resource groups and communities, but it
8 would not make a difference if they do not have the
9 budgets that are needed to provide physical
10 education, after school and recreation programs.

11 Until a plan is drawn up that
12 addresses these dramatic inequities, nothing should
13 be allowed to go forward.

14 It is reprehensible that the City
15 would try to move forward without first studying the
16 needs of its City's disadvantaged. Additionally,
17 State alienation legislation must be gotten.

18 In closing, allowing anyone to buy
19 access to public park land in exchange for
20 desperately needed funding is not the answer, no one
21 should be allowed access to what are supposed to be
22 public facilities. Instead, the Mayor, the City
23 Council, must begin to accept responsibility and
24 allocate sufficient public funds, to construct and
25 maintain public park facilities that meet the needs

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2 of all citizens.

3 MS. COOKE LEVY: Thank you for holding
4 this public hearing and having a public discussion
5 about these issues, Council Member Foster and
6 Council Member Viverito.

7 I'm Elizabeth Cooke Levy. I am a
8 trustee of New Yorkers for Parks. This is a Citywide
9 organization, many of you know it. We have almost a
10 100-year history of working to create, maintain and
11 protect public parks, and the views that I'm
12 expressing represent the vast majority of the Board
13 members of our organization.

14 I'd like to emphasize that although
15 this hearing was wonderfully detailed and thorough,
16 that I think there has been a lot of conversation
17 about issues that are distractions.

18 This is not about what percentage of
19 the fields and what percentage of the time, what
20 schools use the fields. I honestly think it's about
21 how we decide to fund parks.

22 And I also would hate to see this
23 become a debate or a competition where somehow the
24 private schools are set up in competition with the
25 public schools.

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2 We need a policy where all people who
3 want to live and be in New York are accommodated,
4 and that there is a master plan where everyone can
5 be accommodated.

6 We're not opposed to grandfathering
7 in on a year-to-year basis the private schools to
8 use the fields in Randall's Island, if that's the
9 best place for them, and fields in other parts of
10 the City are best for other schools. I don't know if
11 public schools should all be accommodated somewhere
12 else. I don't know if they have to be bused to
13 Randall's Island. The point, though, is that right
14 now the Parks Department has control and flexibility
15 year-to-year over the permitting system. They're
16 able to look at all applicants. They're able to look
17 at needs, and they're able to make decisions and we
18 are all able to hold them accountable for a
19 distribution of park, public assets based on need.

20 How we pay for it should not be
21 privatized. If this goes forward, our concern is
22 that the ability to pay would kick off prime time.
23 We don't have any other model like it, certainly not
24 20-year locks.

25 We have private events for one night

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2 in our cultural institutions, but it's at times when
3 those institutions are otherwise closed, and not
4 open to the public. In addition, I know I'm a little
5 over my time, let me applaud the Randall's Island
6 leadership and the private schools. We just think
7 they've lost their way.

8 Yes, private funding of events. If
9 you want to have a wedding at, you know, Wave Hill,
10 it's done when the place is closed. They charge as
11 much money as they can, and that money helps pay for
12 their public programs to public schools. Our
13 libraries, our cultural institutions, all have
14 events that charge. But it is in the end either
15 earned income or philanthropy. We'd like to see
16 private dollars and philanthropy, either way, that
17 this plan is implemented as presented. Thank you.

18 Oh, I should have introduced --

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, I should
20 have. I'm sorry. This is Sheila Feinberg, the new
21 Allison Farina of New Yorkers for Parks. Like
22 Governmental Affairs person, Director of Operations,
23 how about that?

24 MR. JERESKI: Good afternoon. My name
25 is Robert Jereski. I'm a graduate of one of the

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2 private schools, as well, St. Bernard's, that would
3 benefit, according to some readings, would benefit
4 from this access, privileged access to these ball
5 fields.

6 Many schools, many public schools in
7 New York City offered do not have adequate
8 facilities. A large number use areas other than a
9 gym. Roughly half the schools have serious equipment
10 shortage. I'm here today to oppose this deal, I'm
11 opposed at which the manner in which it was arrived
12 at, one year of secret negotiations, and the
13 substance of it, which would be to grant privileged
14 access to schools that can pay.

15 I agree with Letitia James in the
16 need to take a step back and look at a needs
17 assessment of all the public schools in this City,
18 and to devise a plan to provide access and to meet
19 those needs.

20 The Parks Commissioner said that he
21 thought the demand was being met in public schools,
22 but he doesn't know. He said he doesn't have any
23 figures on what the needs are. So, we should really
24 take him at his word, that he does not know what the
25 needs are. And that he would spend a year in secret

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2 negotiations to meet the needs of private schools,
3 while he does not know that what the needs of public
4 school students are is outrageous. It's outrageous
5 and it's really something that this Committee should
6 put in front of your agenda and look at the Parks
7 Department and see who is it serving by its
8 practices and policies.

9 I submitted a Civil Rights complaint
10 to the Attorney General the day after Martin Luther
11 King day, and the gravamen of that complaint was
12 that the City Parks Department is deploying
13 resources to meet the needs of mostly white -- I
14 went to St. Bernard's, I know many people at other
15 private schools, those are mostly white education
16 institutions, and to the exclusion of mostly
17 Hispanic and Black public school students from
18 contiguous communities.

19 That is a complaint that I hope this
20 Committee will urge the Attorney General to deploy
21 some resources to expanding to look at a Citywide
22 analysis of what needs of public access are being
23 met by the Parks Department's policies and
24 practices, who is excluded, who is on the inside,
25 who is on the outside.

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2 Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very
4 much.

5 Our next panel, Richard Barr, L.
6 Haimson, Emily Horowitz. And if you have statements,
7 you can just give it to the Sergeant.

8 Thank you. You can get started.

9 MR. BARR: Okay. Thanks for taking my
10 testimony. I am Richard Barr. I am Vice President of
11 the Community School District 3, Presidents Council
12 on the West Side of Manhattan. And I wanted to say
13 that in the 1930s, in the depths of the great
14 depression, Mayor LaGuardia and Parks Commissioner
15 Moses built parks and playgrounds and playing fields
16 all over the City.

17 They had a partner who was the
18 federal government and the new deal of Franklin
19 Roosevelt, we don't have that partner. What we do
20 have is a surplus of \$4 billion that seems to be
21 only growing, and the notion that the City could not
22 afford over these next years to put that two-point
23 something million dollars into the maintenance and
24 not have to rely on these private funds is
25 preposterous.

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2 And the notion that the City could
3 not afford to develop additional yellow bus routes
4 to bring the public school students to the Randall's
5 Island if they wanted to use it is preposterous.

6 So, what I'm saying is, private
7 school students, public school students, their
8 parents all pay taxes. They should all be entitled
9 to access to these fields. But not in a preferential
10 way. Let everybody, let every school that wants to
11 use a field at a certain time submit a request. My
12 daughter is in eight grade, I know that the
13 Department of Education has to sit through 100,000
14 eighth graders, applications for high school for
15 next year and that the student, the school, what the
16 school has said, they can somehow with their
17 computer match all that. So, the number of schools
18 in the South Bronx, Astoria, East Harlem, which
19 would be most of them, public schools, and the
20 number of private schools that would be submitting
21 requests for these fields, and then allocating based
22 upon, you know, first come, first served, or some
23 fair way every year without anything being
24 grandfathered in is certainly not beyond the City's
25 capability and I think that's how it should be done.

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2 Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

4 MS. HAIMSON: Hi. My name is Leonie
5 Haimson, I'm the Executive Director of Class Size
6 Matters, a Citywide organization devoted
7 specifically towards reducing class size.

8 This is not directly related, but so
9 many of my members, and I personally were so
10 outraged when we heard about this deal, we
11 immediately reached out to parents in the
12 communities that should be served by these fields,
13 none of whom knew anything about the proposal.

14 We sent a detailed letter to the
15 Mayor outlining many of our major objections. I'm
16 going to summarize at least some of them here. It is
17 included in attachment to my written testimony. I
18 want to make a couple of points and comment on what
19 Adrian Benepe said.

20 We reached out to the City Planning
21 Department to ask them about the question of whether
22 this was a major concession or not, because we found
23 doing research that the area of the fields under
24 question are almost 100 times as large as their
25 definition of a major concession. They said the

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2 Parks Department had never asked them this question,
3 and they were not able to rule on it and I should
4 call the Parks Department to find this out. I called
5 them up. I did not get any response.

6 As you have heard from the parents in
7 the community, there is a huge need for these
8 fields, and yet they were never reached out to them.
9 And the question of the permitting process is really
10 a red herring, because, again, this is up to the
11 yearly discretion of the City. And, moreover, there
12 is no reason that the private school should be given
13 access to most of the new fields as well as the
14 existing fields, even under the current practices.

15 The proposed payments by the private
16 schools of \$2.6 million per year amount to only 33
17 million at present value, not the 50 million that
18 the people have stated.

19 The City passed -- the cost for this
20 is going to be between 70 and 80 million dollars.
21 The City passed \$76 million in last year's capital
22 budget to pay for these fields already. The work is
23 going forward, the RFPs have gone out. They're on
24 the EDC website, the return date is at the beginning
25 of next month, and so I think we don't need this

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2 money. We don't want this money. This is an unfair
3 deal.

4 And there are some other points my
5 testimony makes, including troubling conflicts of
6 interest between the foundation and the Parks
7 Department pointed out by two audits by the State
8 Comptroller's Office that said separate your
9 governance and finances from each other. They have
10 refused to do that, and the new news, that some of
11 this money is going to be put back in the foundation
12 and not go to either the City or the field, makes
13 these questions even more troubling.

14 So, thank you for -- again, the City
15 does have a surplus. We're going to get a lot more
16 money from the Governor. A lot of these schools
17 can't afford, in the future, buses, equipment,
18 staffing. The limited factor in the future is only
19 going to be the land, because no one can make more
20 land in this City. So, to lock at 1.1 million school
21 children, public school children for the next 20
22 years, is not only a huge public policy mistake, it
23 is an injustice of the highest order.

24 Thank you for the opportunity to
25 speak to you today.

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2 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

3 MS. HOROWITZ: Hi. I am Emily
4 Horowitz. I am a public school parent in District 6
5 and I am also here as a member of the Community
6 Education Council in District 6.

7 I would love to tell you that our
8 Community Education Council passed a resolution
9 opposing this deal, but I can't because we didn't
10 learn anything about this. We learned about this
11 from Leonie Haimson, who is a parent advocate, and
12 from Juan Gonzalez's column, and unfortunately, we
13 haven't had a meeting since I learned about it.

14 I don't think it's fair to pass this
15 without consulting the 32 community education
16 councils, or all of the public schools. I learned
17 today that they actually went out to 20 private
18 schools. I'd love it if they'd come to the school
19 where my children attend and talk to our school. I
20 mean, there are parents in our school who are grant
21 writers, who are active, who would love to fight for
22 a chance to get at those fields. Yet, they were not
23 approached. It was not because the private schools
24 were so organized, in fighting for their own
25 interest they were approached, so I don't see why we

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2 should agree to a deal when the public schools were
3 not approached, nor the community education councils
4 of the City. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very
6 much.

7 Constance Lesold, Joel Kupferman,
8 Fred -- is there a Fred with an A? Is there anyone
9 named Fred? Because I can't say your last name.
10 Fred? No Fred. Joel Kupferman left. Constance
11 Lesold. Constance?

12 Okay, Stuart Johnson just got back.
13 And Bob McCullough. If you have written testimony,
14 give it to the Sergeant behind you. Oh, I didn't see
15 you. I'm sorry.

16 And we've got to stick to two
17 minutes. We've got to be out of here in like four
18 minutes.

19 You can start. Move down one. And
20 then start. Thank you.

21 MR. McCULLOUGH: Good afternoon. My
22 name is Bob McCullough. I am the President and the
23 Executive Director of the National Association of
24 Each One Teach One. And I have also had the
25 privilege to serve on Community Board 11 for almost

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2 30 years. My most recent position is as the Chair of
3 the Parks Committee in East Harlem.

4 I've been working at Randall's Island
5 Sports Foundation for over 15 years. And I'm
6 convinced that we always have the best interest of
7 my community, our kids, and of course, the park.

8 The private schools have had the
9 permits for the ball fields for over ten years. And
10 according to the New York City Department of Parks
11 Policy, they're entitled to continue to receive a
12 permit, however, we appreciate the Foundation's
13 continued efforts to listen to the needs and the
14 concerns of the local community. In fact, I look
15 forward to Randall's Island Sports Foundation
16 implementing the meaning of the recommendations, our
17 local community board has forwarded to them.

18 The other thing I would like to say,
19 that the construction of the new sports field
20 project will benefit all New Yorkers, not just my
21 community. It specifically benefits Community Board
22 11 residents because it's within our boundaries. The
23 current number of sports fields on Randall's Island
24 does not meet the overwhelming demand of the playing
25 time. The quality of the new fields will be

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2 excellent, is just what our kids need. And it's
3 really what they should have in order to play on.

4 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Mr. McCullough,
5 I'm going to need you to wrap up, please.

6 MR. McCULLOUGH: Yes, Ma'am.

7 The project will provide over 60 new
8 fields and 48 hours of additional playing time. This
9 project would not exist without the private funding.
10 Randall's Island Sports Foundation is working very
11 closely with the Department of Education and the
12 Public School Athletic League, which is a PSAL, to
13 utilize these fields.

14 While we do not give up a limited
15 number of after school hours for that private
16 funding, what we get back is 48,000 additional hours
17 of park use, and substantially improved public parks
18 for the community.

19 I just would like to add that in the
20 future I have asked that Randall's Island have
21 installed lights. Not only will the public schools
22 --

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Mr. McCullough,
24 if it is written, we can make copies. I don't mean
25 to cut you off, but we have another hearing coming

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2 in. I'm sorry.

3 MR. McCULLOUGH: No, that's okay.

4 That's okay. I just appreciate the fact that I'm
5 able to present, you know, our side of it, certainly
6 to the community.

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And we can make
8 copies for the portion that you didn't read.

9 MR. McCULLOUGH: Thank you very much.

10 MR. JOHNSON: Thank you. My name is
11 Stuart Johnson, heard of St. Bernard's School. And
12 thank you for inviting me to speak this morning at
13 the hearing.

14 St. Bernard's has not been part of
15 the independent school that has received permits for
16 the Randall's Island fields. Up to now we played
17 there as a visiting team, but we have decided to
18 join the consortium of independent schools that is
19 helping to fund, or hopes to fund the expansion and
20 improvement of the fields that exist there now.

21 I think the reason we decided to do
22 this is that we thought this would be not just an
23 advantage for us but for a lot of children in the
24 City of New York. Obviously, it's an expensive
25 business for any non-profit organization such as

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2 ours to consider an investment in another charity,
3 another non-profit organization, but along with the
4 19 or 20 other schools with which we cooperate, we
5 thought that this project really was a valuable one.

6 Rather than, I just want to make the
7 point that we don't see it as exclusive use that
8 there are some 48,000 more hours going to be
9 available for all people to play, and I think maybe
10 45,000 of those, especially all on weekends, are not
11 ones to which we would be making requests.

12 I would further say that from what I
13 know, the Randall's Island Foundation approached a
14 number of people to put some help in financing this
15 project. They were not successful except in getting
16 the independent schools to show interest in this.
17 You know, in a way I think we are proud to have done
18 so, and I'm sorry others weren't.

19 I do understand also that there is a
20 community access task force that is being proposed
21 to make sure that there is increased use of these
22 fields by all sorts of children from many different
23 communities.

24 I think it's a great idea and I'm
25 sure the other schools would support that too. Thank

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2 you.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: Just
4 because we are wrapping up, just one question. I
5 have heard from various people that, well, they're
6 grandfather cloused in anyway, so they would have
7 had use of these fields; so my question is, if
8 that's the case and that's the argument that is
9 going to be presented, then why the need for this?
10 Why the need for a contract, if, in fact, they would
11 already be grandfather cloused in and have the use
12 of the fields the way they've been using them now.

13 So, that's why, if that argument is
14 what's being given to us as a community, then you
15 have to understand why we would question if that in
16 fact, if there's not more in this contract, you
17 know, that is shortchanging us as a community.

18 That's an issue which I would like to
19 have some sort of an explanation, and I will talk to
20 the foundation after we finish.

21 And just lastly, that there has been,
22 there has been a lot of -- due to the community
23 pressure, there has been a lot of modifications for
24 the better of the community that have gone in place.
25 I believe very clearly that we need to have a

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2 collaborative process. I look forward to continuing
3 the dialogue, and to exert the pressure to the
4 foundation and in speaking with the Administration
5 as well to continue to work on behalf of our
6 community.

7 With that, I want to thank everyone
8 that was here today, and I want to thank my
9 colleague Foster, Council Member Foster, for
10 allowing this hearing to happen, and I look forward
11 to working alongside all of you as we continue on
12 this road.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Before we end,
14 thank you very much, gentlemen, for the record we
15 have Vince Coleman, who has submitted testimony,
16 Howard Stern, Transportation Alternatives, William
17 Thompson, the Comptroller, and Manhattan Youth
18 Baseball. I just want to remind people that this
19 process, in terms of approving this proposal, does
20 not come through the City Council, and this is the
21 time you need to exercise your right in terms of
22 3-1-1 that the Mayor is always pushing and make sure
23 they know what your concerns are going forward, not
24 only with this deal, but with the potential that
25 this deal represents in terms of the privatization

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2 of public space for private use.

3 So, thank you very much. And if
4 anybody didn't get a chance to speak, please make
5 sure you submit your testimony.

6 Thank you.

7 (The following written testimony was
8 read into the record, exactly as written.)

9

10

11 Written Testimony Of:

12 Hector Nazario

13 President

14 Community Education Council for District 4

15 January 31, 2007

16

17 Good morning, my name is Hector
18 Nazario, and I am the president of the Community
19 Education Council in District 4 in East Harlem. The
20 Community Education Council consists of parents from
21 throughout East Harlem, elected to represent the
22 interests of our schools and our children.

23 Right now, our schools desperately
24 need access to more sports fields. We have only
25 eight ball fields that are shared among 58 public

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2 schools.

3 This is why our Council passed the
4 attached resolution on December 13, 2006, against
5 giving 20 private schools the right to monopolize
6 most of the fields on the Island for the next 20
7 years.

8 These fields are on public park land,
9 and the city should not be giving them away to
10 private schools just because they offered to pay for
11 part of the costs of expanding and renovating them.
12 This deal is fundamentally unfair to public
13 schoolchildren in East Harlem and the city as a
14 whole.

15 Our Council asks all our elected
16 officials to imagine how they would feel if they
17 were public school parents, whose children and even
18 grandchildren would be excluded from a public park
19 because a group of private schools had been better
20 able to pay for their access.

21 This contract violates all standards
22 of fairness, inclusiveness and transparency and
23 should immediately be withdrawn.

24 Thank you for your time.

25

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2

3 Written Testimony Of:

4 Henry J. Stern

5 President

6 New York Civic

7 January 31, 2007

8

9 Testimony of Henry J. Stern,
10 president of New York Civic, former Commissioner of
11 Parks and Recreation for the City of New York,
12 former member of the Council of the City of New
13 York, before the City Council Committee on Parks &
14 Recreation.

15 I am here to support the plan for the
16 city to receive assistance from private schools to
17 repair and maintain the ballfields on Randall's
18 Island. Were the city simply to fulfill its
19 obligation to keep ballfields in safe playing
20 condition, the private schools would have use of the
21 fields for the minimal permit fees that are now
22 charged.

23 Instead the schools are undertaking
24 to reimburse the city for a large portion of the
25 capital expense the city is incurring to renovate

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2 the fields. In exchange, all they want is what they
3 already have, the grandfathered right to use the
4 fields, which no one else has applied to use. They
5 want the fields improved, the city dopresidents
6 (sic) not consider their renovation a priority, so
7 the schools will pay for it in the interest of
8 giving their children a safe place to play.

9 The parents of these children are,
10 for the most part, New York City taxpayers who save
11 the city a great deal of money by not sending their
12 children to public schools, although they pay for
13 the right to do so. The argument that they should
14 not be allowed to pay to repair the fields they use,
15 or that doing so is part of some insidious
16 conspiracy to exclude other children from using the
17 fields, is ridiculous.

18 This controversy is a splendid
19 example of the application of political correctness
20 to the relatively nonpolitical area of parks and
21 recreation. Absolutely no one is being injured by
22 this proposal, except that private schools will pay
23 for better and safer conditions to do something they
24 now do for free.

25 To transform this into an issue of

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2 the oppression of the underclass is an illustration
3 of how far people have to go to find issues.
4 Public-private partnerships have done enormous good
5 since Betsy Barlow Rogers helped found the Central
6 Park Conservancy in 1980. Over three hundred million
7 in private funds have been contributed New York City
8 parks by individuals, foundations and corporations.
9 No one has been excluded from using a park as a
10 result of any of these donations.

11 In fact, in many cases they have
12 stimulated the city to appropriate capital funds for
13 park improvements that would not otherwise have been
14 made.

15 The involvement of the private sector
16 in public parks has been one of the great success
17 stories of the last quarter-century. It has been
18 copied all over America by cities using the Central
19 Park Conservancy and the Prospect Park Alliance as
20 models. The Randall's Island Sports Foundation works
21 in that tradition. It should be congratulated rather
22 than criticized for the proposal it has made, which
23 will result in safe, modern and attractive
24 ballfields for everyone who uses Randall's Island
25 for athletic competition.

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2

3

4 Written Testimony Of:

5 CYO/Manhattan Youth Baseball

6 430 East 89th Street, Suite A

7 New York, N.Y. 10128

8

9 As a young man I heard a rock band
10 and their music spoke to me. Over the course of 3
11 years I followed the band as it played small clubs.
12 One day the band hit it big and their next venue was
13 at Madison Square Garden, the music now spoke to
14 tens of thousands.

15 15 years ago I went to a small
16 meeting in the apartment of Karen Cohen the founder
17 of the Randall's Island Sports Foundation. Her
18 message was simple:

19 - Lets take this over used run down
20 park and remodel it with lush playing fields.

21 - Let's reach out to the surrounding
22 communities and create athletic programs for inner
23 city children.

24 As the administrator of a weekend
25 youth athletic program, her message spoke to me.

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2 Over many years I have worked with
3 Karen and watched her message and hard work develop
4 into:

5 - the wonderful Ican stadium.

6 - The Randalls Island Kids after
7 school and summer camp program including.

8 - o A public tennis, golf, soccer,
9 football and track and Field programs,

10 - And, Most importantly, improved
11 conditions of the fields and roads for everyone.

12 Her song has now reached a larger
13 audience. The East Side Independent Schools. These
14 Private Schools already have the permits for 95
15 percent of the fields during the peak afterschool
16 hours under the New York City Department of Parks
17 grandfather guide lines. These Private Schools heard
18 Karen's message; realized their community
19 responsibility to be part of the solution and
20 decided to spearhead the renovation process.

21 - In return the Island's athletic
22 fields will be redesigned to create MORE and BETTER
23 fields for everyone.

24 - Individuals as well as programs
25 like mine that use Randall's Island on the weekends,

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2 during the summer and at night will benefit greatly
3 from the extra fields.

4 - The Randall's Island Kids programs
5 that bring children over from East Harlem will have
6 athletic fields to play on instead of looking for a
7 patch of grass.

8 - Comfort stations and water
9 fountains instead of trees and bring your own water.

10 - Very importantly the field's will
11 have grass instead of concrete hardened dirt that
12 with a flash of rain become shoe sucking mud.

13 It is exciting and wonderful to see
14 the different communities coming together supporting
15 this renovation project. Karen's message is music to
16 all who want something better for all the children
17 of New York City. I urge this committee to please
18 hear the melody and join the chorus.

19

20

21 Written Testimony Of:

22 William C. Thompson, Jr.

23 New York City Comptroller

24

25 Chairman Foster and members of the

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

2 Parks and Recreation Committee, good morning and
3 thank you for the opportunity to present testimony
4 today regarding the use of athletic fields on
5 Randall's Island.

6 First of all, I would like to state
7 that i strongly support the development of
8 additional sports fields on Randall's Island. I also
9 support the policy of exploring public/private
10 partnerships that can provide supplementary funds
11 for capital projects.

12 However, as I have argued in recent
13 months, the plan proposed by the City to designate a
14 percentage of athletic fields on Randall's Island
15 parkland to private schools in New York City is
16 inadequate to address the needs of our children and
17 our neighborhoods.

18 Randall's Island sits between three
19 working class areas - East Harlem in Manhattan, Port
20 Morris in the South Bronx, and Astoria, Queens.
21 These neighborhoods have great needs for
22 recreational space, such as additional soccer,
23 baseball and softball fields, but no easy access to
24 Randall's Island.

25 The fact that public schools and

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2 community groups representing these communities do
3 not currently have the resources to utilize the
4 athletic fields on Randall's Island, as independent
5 private schools historically have been able to do,
6 should not exclude them from the chance to do so in
7 the future.

8 We cannot deny the children of our
9 City this chance to participate in team sports and
10 physical activity simply because they can neither
11 afford the cost of a private academy nor access the
12 physical space where such recreation takes place.

13 As a member of the Franchise
14 Concession Review Committee, which must approve any
15 deal on the use of these athletic fields, I have
16 been following these developments very closely.

17 In recent months I have argued that
18 the length of the agreement ought to be of a shorter
19 duration than the 30-year plan that was originally
20 proposed. I was heartened to see that the current
21 plan has now been reduced to 20 years.

22 I further believed that the
23 percentage of athletic fields originally proposed
24 for use by 20 private schools during prime time
25 after school hours - 80 percent -- was too high. I

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2 was encouraged to see that this figure, too, has now
3 been reduced to two-thirds of such fields.

4 I recognize that there is currently
5 less demand for the fields from public schools and
6 local community groups than there is from
7 independent schools.

8 However, the underutilization of
9 Randall's athletic fields by public schools and CBOs
10 reflects a problem first and foremost of access. Any
11 agreement regarding Randall's Island should
12 therefore include a commitment by the City to
13 address transportation and other access issues.

14 Toward that end I have recommended a
15 new task force representing both the offices of
16 elected leaders and community based organizations.
17 This task force would work with the Administration
18 to devise, implement and monitor a realistic plan
19 for community access.

20 Again, I was heartened to see the
21 City include mention of a task force in its recent
22 hearing notice. But details about the task force
23 have yet to be resolved. For example, we would like
24 to explore expanded bus service and other modes of
25 transportation to the Island.

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2 While mindful of the fact that the
3 Administration controls the votes on the FCRC, and
4 therefore the outcome, we will continue
5 conversations with the Administration until the
6 February 13 vote in order to improve access and
7 availability of Randall's Island facilities to
8 public schools and local community groups.

9 The current and proposed new fields
10 are not merely a setting for competitive sports.
11 They represent in a larger sense a form of
12 opportunity: the opportunity for physical health and
13 fresh air; the opportunity to learn teamwork and
14 cooperation; and, at the most basic level, an
15 opportunity for play.

16 With care and consideration, we may
17 all benefit from the renovation of Randall's Island
18 ball fields and the development of new ones. We can
19 take advantage of public-private partnerships while
20 ensuring that the children of New York City are not
21 placed in the untenable position of having to pay to
22 play.

23 Thank you very much.

24

25

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2 Written Testimony Of:

3 Noah S. Budnick

4 Deputy Director for Advocacy

5 Transportation Alternatives

6

7 Good morning, I am Noah Budnick,
8 deputy director for advocacy of Transportation
9 Alternatives, the City's advocates for safer and
10 increased biking and walking.

11 Before moving forward with further
12 planning for the major reconstruction Randall's
13 Island's parks, the City needs take a serious look
14 at how New Yorkers are going to get there and enjoy
15 this soon-to-be much improved urban oasis floating
16 in the East River. Right now, the lack of equitable
17 transportation service makes Randall's Island
18 inaccessible to people who live just a stones throw
19 away in Harlem, the South Bronx and Astoria.

20 The Parks Department should convene a
21 taskforce with the goal of making Randall's Island
22 more accessible by foot, bike and public transit to
23 more people, especially those who live closest to
24 it. The taskforce should be comprised of:

25 - Transportation, transit and

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2 development agencies;

3 - Local elected officials;

4 - Members of Manhattan Community

5 Board 11;

6 - Members of Bronx Community Board 1;

7 - Members of Queens Community Board

8 1;

9 - Community leaders;

10 - Advocates; and

11 - Developers.

12 This taskforce should study:

13 - How people currently get to

14 Randall's Island and where they come from;

15 - Existing travel demand to access

16 Randall's Island and where that demand originates

17 from;

18 - Specifically, how people who live

19 in nearby neighborhoods in Harlem, the South Bronx

20 and Astoria currently get to Randall's Island and

21 often they visit;

22 - Existing barriers that prevent

23 people in Harlem, the South Bronx and Astoria from

24 visiting Randall's Island more often;

25 - How to make Randall's Island more

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2 accessible from the surrounding neighborhoods; and

3 - How to meet future travel demand to
4 access Randall's Island based on the planned
5 development and where that demand will come from.

6 The study should produce short -,
7 medium- and long-term solutions that will be
8 implemented to make Randall's Island easily
9 accessible to the thousands of people who live
10 within just minutes walks and bike rides away.

11 Solutions to improve bicyclist and
12 pedestrian access to Randall's Island that the study
13 should consider include, but are not limited to:

14 - Building a connection to the
15 planned South Bronx Greenway.

16 - Opening the 103rd Street footbridge
17 year round and making Manhattan-side access to it
18 safe and convenient.

19 - Accelerating rehabilitation of the
20 Queens-span of the Triborough Bridge, assuring the
21 new biking and walking path is ADA accessible and
22 that Queens-side access to the new path is safe and
23 convenient.

24 - Making Manhattan-side and
25 Bronx-side access to the Triborough Bridge safe and

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2 convenient;

3 - Increasing bus local service to
4 Randall's Island from the Bronx, Manhattan and
5 Queens;

6 - Building another crossing to
7 Manhattan (such as the plan developed by CIVITAS)

8 Community leaders from the
9 surrounding neighborhoods lament the current poor
10 access to the island and the barrier it creates
11 between local residents and recreation, relaxation
12 and fresh air there. Simply put: right now, because
13 people cannot get to Randall's Island, they do not
14 use Randall's Island and the parks there.

15 To assure equitable access to parks
16 on the island, biking, walking and transit access
17 from the neighborhoods surrounding Randall's Island
18 must be substantially improved.

19

20

21 Written Testimony Of:

22 Vince Coleman

23 Baseball and Softball Program Director

24 Harlem RBI

25

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

2 January 31, 2007

3

4 Re: Randall's Island Proposal

5

6 Good morning, my name is Vince
7 Coleman, Baseball and Softball Program Director at
8 Harlem RBI, and I am here to testify on behalf of
9 the organization in regard to the Randall's Island
10 Proposal.

11 Briefly, Harlem RBI is a 16 year-old
12 community based youth development program, located
13 on 100th Street in East Harlem. The organization,
14 which was founded in 1991 when we turned an
15 abandoned lot into two little league baseball
16 diamonds, now serves over 650 girls and boys, age
17 7-18, with year-round educational, enrichment and
18 sports programming. The primary goal of the program
19 is to help at-risk youth graduate high school and
20 matriculate to college. Of course, each summer, all
21 of our kids still play on a baseball or softball
22 team, since that is our "hook." Participation at
23 Harlem RBI is free of charge, and virtually all
24 program participants are low-income, minority
25 children from East Harlem, Central Harlem and the

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2 South Bronx.

3 I want to begin by thanking the City
4 Council and the Committee on Parks and Recreation,
5 under the leadership of Chair Helen Foster, as well
6 as East Harlem Council Member Melissa Mark Viverito,
7 for allowing me to testify.

8 Also, please accept apologies from
9 Harlem RBI's Executive Director, Richard Berlin, who
10 was unable to attend this hearing.

11 Speaking well here today presents a
12 real challenge for Harlem RBI, because we consider
13 everyone in the room to be an important friend and
14 ally in our work.

15 From the City Council Members, the
16 Borough President and other elected officials who
17 support and advocate for more and better youth
18 service opportunities,

19 To the Department of Parks and
20 Recreation -- whose visionary Commissioner, Adrian
21 Benepe has been a vital friend and true believer in
22 our work throughout Harlem RBI's existence, and who
23 has in fact provided Harlem RBI with a License to
24 build, maintain, operate and fund its own beautiful
25 Field of Dreams on East 100th Street in East Harlem,

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2 To the Randall's Island Sports
3 Foundation, who has helped provide literally
4 thousands of Harlem RBI girls and boys with a place
5 to play, learn and grow each spring, summer and fall
6 for each of the last 15 years,

7 To New Yorkers for Parks - whose
8 predecessor, The Parks Council, was actually Harlem
9 RBI's fiscal agent when we opened our doors in 1991,

10 - Everyone in this room is friend of
11 Harlem RBI, and we could not do our work without
12 you.

13 And naturally, like any good youth
14 agency, we hate to see our friends fight.

15 ***

16 At the same time, the issues at stake
17 here today -- of access, equity and public trust--
18 are real ones that impact our work and the children
19 and families whom we serve.

20 Against this backdrop, it is
21 important for Harlem RBI to speak to three issues
22 that it sees as vital in this conversation.

23 - First, some of the public
24 characterizations of the Randall's Island Sports
25 Foundation leadership seem unfair. RISF is and

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2 always has been a Public/Private partnership whose
3 mission is to provide the children of New York City
4 with a great place to play. While Harlem RBI has
5 real some concerns about the length and structure of
6 the proposed agreement with the private schools, our
7 long experience with RISF is that they see service
8 to East Harlem and the Bronx as a top priority, but
9 one that - given limited land and resources -
10 requires some tradeoffs. While we think it right
11 that these tradeoffs undergo real public scrutiny,
12 to suggest that RISF is trying to shut out
13 low-income kids does not compute, in Harlem RBI's
14 experience. As stated, the history of thousands of
15 East Harlem children who have played in our program
16 and thus, on the Randall's Island ballfields over
17 the last 15-years, is proof of that.

18 - Second, as eloquently expressed
19 over the last few weeks by Jai Nanda of the Urban
20 Dove, one of the biggest barriers in place -
21 transportation - is not even on Randall's Island.
22 Rather, it is a simple reality that public schools,
23 non-profits and low-income youth often have trouble
24 just getting to Randall's Island. Part of the
25 solution to this controversy, which everyone in the

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2 room (and some people not in room, probably) should
3 be responsible for, is insuring that kids and teams
4 and families can easily get to Randall's Island.

5 Finally, there is the issue of
6 private subsidies for public goods. While good
7 people may disagree about the merits of the
8 public/private approach, this policy "solution" is
9 probably here to stay. And in that case, perhaps we
10 should focus on ensuring as much inclusiveness as
11 possible in the discussion about what the public
12 good entails. In the case of Randall's Island, that
13 would require more seats and the decision makers'
14 table for more and more different voices. It would
15 also require those who come to the table to do so in
16 good faith, with the trust and belief that all of us
17 want what is best for all of our children.

18 (Hearing concluded at 121:59 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATION

STATE OF NEW YORK)
COUNTY OF NEW YORK)

I, CINDY MILLELOT, a Certified Shorthand Reporter, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate transcript of the within proceeding.

I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 31st day of January 2007.

CINDY MILLELOT, CSR.

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, CINDY MILLELOT, a Certified Shorthand Reporter and a Notary Public in and for the State of New York, do hereby certify the aforesaid to be a true and accurate copy of the transcription of the audio tapes of this hearing.

CINDY MILLELOT, CSR.