

**Statement Presented to the NYC Council Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting On
Oversight of the Randall's Island Sports Foundation and the NYC Parks Department
Marina Ortiz, Monday, September 22, 2008**

Good afternoon. My name is Marina Ortiz and I live and work in East Harlem. I also run a website, www.eastharlempreservation.org, that has documented the egregious omissions and utter lack of transparency on the part of the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation and the Randall's Island Sports Foundation as has already been discussed here today.

I am also one of several plaintiffs in a lawsuit that successfully challenged the franchise agreement between the city and 20 private schools for permanent, principal control of ball fields and the island.

Despite this victory, I have had to endure phone calls to my employer by Aimee Boden complaining when I exercised my right to free speech on my own time, and I continue to be threatened with arrest or to have my camera broken simply for covering events on the island.

More importantly, the future of the island remains a veiled in secrecy as the RISF continues to conduct its business in private refusing to allow community input on the development and use of this public parkland. Clearly, we would not be here today if the Randall's Island Sport Foundation truly operated in a transparent and inclusive manner.

I have testified at hearings twice before to help shed some light on the problems local residents face when dealing with the Randall's Island Sports Foundation. Unfortunately, many of my questions have yet to be answered and so I will repeat them for you here today in the hopes that you might direct the RISF to respond to local communities the agency is supposed to serve.

- Why Is the largest parkland reconstruction project in the City's history still a mystery?
- Why wasn't the public given full details on the scope of the "sports fields" construction prior to its implementation?
- How does the amount of public parkland that has actually been allocated to the privately owned tennis center/stadium remain a blur, and why has this project also not gone through the proper channels?
- Why doesn't the RISF provide financial reports on any of its development projects to the general public, or make available financial data on concert/stadium and other event revenue.
- Why won't the RISF allow meaningful local representation on its board, or hire local *managerial* staff?
- Are private schools still seeking guaranteed prime time access to the ball fields? If so, when do they plan to disclose this new and improved "Master Plan?"
- In 2007, the RISF promised to stop holding private parties on the island, and to stop preventing pedestrian access to the island during such private events by raising the pedestrian footbridge and by installing a large police presence at all points. This promise

was in fact reneged and activities have increased. Why does the general public continue to be harassed by private security agencies and denied access during public press conferences and the like, as was the case when the Commissioner ordered me “off the island” while I was photographing a public press conference on public parkland.

- The amount of public parkland being used for these private affairs is also being understated, as they do not take into account the denial of public access to surrounding areas, including all roads and parking lots within the vicinity of such events.
- Why does the RISF still refuse to allow the general public attend its board meetings, yet insists on meeting with boards of local agencies and organizations.
- The Randall’s Island Golf Center provides free transportation to the island every hour, yet it doesn’t even stop in East Harlem. Why hasn’t the RISF considered alternate pick up zones in East Harlem as an incentive for local schools and sports groups to get to Randall’s Island.
- Despite reported risks, why is the Parks Department continuing to install artificial turf in communities with disproportionate levels of asthma and that lack natural grass in its parks?
- When will the RISF explain why they needlessly destroyed thousands of trees, dozens of acres of flora and fauna, and displaced wild life on over 178 acres of public parkland?
- Again, why does this great City allow environmental reviews and ULURP to be so flagrantly bypassed and the scope of such significant work to be misrepresented? Construction crews and most developers don’t get away with such misconduct anymore, so why should the Parks Department?
- And, finally, when will we have genuine community and elected official participation?

The Randall’s Island Sports Foundation has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars obscuring the truth while appeasing a few local residents with free concert tickets and catered meals, yet they continue to operate with little or no public oversight and community input – before rather than after the fact.

Thank you. I look forward to some answers.