



NYC Industrial Development Agency Hearing: Yankee Stadium

New Yorkers for Parks Testimony

January 15, 2009

Good morning. I am Sheelah Feinberg, Director of Government and Community Relations at New Yorkers for Parks, the only independent watchdog for all the city's parks, beaches, and playgrounds. For 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks has worked to ensure greener, safer, cleaner parks for all New Yorkers.

New Yorkers for Parks has serious concerns about the new Yankees Stadium and the most recent call for additional municipal bonds to complete construction. The new stadium has already drastically changed the park landscape in the community park. The plan asked the community to take "one" for the team, with out consultation or adequate transparency of the political process. Furthermore, the plan drastically decreases and fragments the South Bronx's number of parks, trees and recreational spaces, and the request for additional funding does not include a remedy for environmental, safety, and public health issues.

The construction has had negative impacts on the community. The temporary park facilities are inadequate, a smaller running track than before is unacceptable. Even strong proponents of the new Yankees stadium, such as Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion, Jr. insists that "while I understand the reasons for various delays in the park schedules that have occurred, but at this time the needs of local residents must take priority" in the remaining stages of construction.

PARKLAND ALIENATION/PUBLIC PROCESS

In eight days, back in 2006, the City council and State Legislature gave away 22 acres of park land to the Yankees for the new stadium. Residents were not informed of this

parkland alienation nor invited to attend public hearings, and were thus unable to give meaningful input before it was approved. The lack of a transparent process and the absence of community participation are disheartening at best, and illustrative of the overall “behind closed doors” approach to developing the new stadium.

MITIGATION

As part of the mitigation efforts, the community was offered 27.05 acres of replacement parkland. However, these acres do not replace the value, usefulness or convenience of existing parkland. The interim parks that were promised to the community have yet to be completed and the substitutes will be disjointedly scattered throughout the South Bronx making them severely inaccessible to many residents. Adding insult to injury, many of the old parks will be replaced with parking lots.

The loss of nearly 400 mature trees combined with the additional parking spaces created by the plan intensifies poor air quality and environmental issues. The surrounding community suffers from some of the highest rates of asthma. And while the plan has called for the planting of 29,000 new trees to compensate for this environmental impact, the FEIS clearly stated that it will be impossible to replant “an equivalent basal area in the affected project area” and will plant replacement trees “as nearby as possible”.

FINANCING

While parkland was literally being removed from under their feet, the community also saw the Yankees ask for additional funding even as they offered conflicting mitigation and parks financing numbers. Differing price tags were given to the city and federal government for these 22 acres of ball fields, handball, basketball and tennis courts, as well as a soccer field and running track.

Now, as reported by the media, the Yankees are asking for an additional \$370 million in new taxpayer-backed financing for the final stages of construction. This is in addition to \$942 million in previous financing, and \$660 million from the city to replace parkland and improve transportation.

For all the dollars being spent to improve the inside the stadium there is little proof that any of it will go beyond its gates. New Yorkers for Parks does not support these additional municipal bonds when there are no details to ensure how the funds will eventually benefit the community or restore their parkland. The previously mentioned concerns need to be addressed and resolved with these new tax-exempt bonds if they are approved.

After all, if the Yankees can find the resources to dig up Big Papi's shirt to remove a "curse", maybe they can dig up enough resources to make sure they don't curse the community.

Thank you.