

Harlem River Working Group

February 9, 2012

New York City Industrial Development Agency, Attn: Ms. Frances Tufano,
110 William Street, 5th Floor,
New York, New York 10038

To the Industrial Development Agency of New York City:

The Harlem River Working Group writes to request you to postpone the decision to approve the Fresh Direct project until and unless questions about project and its impact on the Harlem River Waterfront, and the Greenway are settled. In the interest of environmental justice and good government, we suggest that there is no urgency in the approval of this project, and that public participation is critical to a successful project.

The Harlem River Working Group (HRWG) is a coalition of nearly fifty community organizations, city, state and federal agencies, and elected officials focused on the Harlem River -- an area stretching 9.3 miles from the Randall's Island to the Hudson River in Bronx County, New York City. The group's goal is to work toward restoring the Harlem River; reconnecting the waterfront with the people; recreating the water's edge; and reinvigorating in-the-water recreational and commercial activities. Since 2008, we have been working to protect the Harlem River by creating a partnership of stakeholders who live, work or recreate along the river.

The overarching vision for the Bronx waterfront is, like Manhattan, a ribbon of contiguous greenways along waterways to be used for boating, running, walking, fishing, and otherwise recreating.

Over the last four years, the Working Group has been collecting ideas, compiling studies and holding visioning sessions across the five community board districts that encompass the Harlem River Waterfront. One of the areas that is essential to this vision of a Harlem River Greenway and necessary to connect the Bronx East and West from the High Bridge and the Harlem River Greenway to the South Bronx Greenway and to Randall's Island is the area of land that is in question: the Harlem River Yards Project. The lease holder of Harlem River Yards has been in conversation with the City of New York for several years about creating access to a pedestrian bridge under construction that will link the South Bronx Greenway to Randall's Island and Manhattan. The connector addresses a decades-old slight to the communities of Port Morris and Mott Haven- a tiny body of water separates them from Randall's Island but there had never been a safe and legal means to access the open space and green playing fields there until the connector was proposed. Its completion should be part of the overall deal to develop the Harlem River Yards project, but unfortunately this bridge project which is nearing competition has been delayed and may be canceled if the Galesi Group, who has a 95% ownership of the Harlem River Yard Ventures, Inc. lease with the DOT refuses to provide access from the bridge (which the city has already partially built) to 132nd Street.

Furthermore, the Harlem River Yards Project and its partner project, the Oak Point Link, should give the city and state of New York this warning: *Proceed with Caution*. Both projects were envisioned in the 1970's as part of the Full Freight Access Program and the Link and Yards were to reduce "total shipping costs in the region by \$100 Million per year, create more than 5,000 permanent jobs, reduce air pollution by decreasing truck traffic on the region's highways, and help avoid \$500 Million in public road improvements" (Office of State Comptroller Report 95-D-43). However, as anyone along the Harlem River knows the Oak Point Link has become known as the Garbage Train and it has trains on it less than a dozen times a week and Hunts Point continues to ship more than 90% of its produce by truck, while the Bronx Community has had 1.9 Miles of waterfront made inaccessible to it. One need only look to our

newest waterfront park, Mill Pond Park, where while there are numerous inlets and beaches which would make the park perfect for water recreation, NYC Department of Parks and Recreation has been unwilling to permit such actions due to the danger posed by the Oak Point Link, which cuts off the park and community from its waterfront.

In 2011, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) announced efforts on seven pilot locations, one of which is the Bronx & Harlem River Watersheds (New York). Our area was chosen because both "locations had a strong restoration effort underway, spearheaded by local governments and community organizations." Through the UWFP, representatives from community organizations, city, state, and federal agencies convened on the EPA vessel "Clean Waters" and sailed to conduct a "Rapid Assessment" of the Harlem River corridor. Local residents had the opportunity to stand at the rail side by side with experts from agencies such as NOAA, EPA, USFWS, USACE, USGS, USDA FS/NRS and point out long neglected issues that plague the river while also pointing out the hidden opportunities to reclaim the river. All on board agreed to work together and identify projects that have a high feasibility of moving forward and improving the river. But not all have worked together.

We urgently request you postpone this decision making process until you can satisfy public participation requests, decades of decision making policies, and comprehensive waterfront plans concerning the greenway, as well as other matters of health and safety that this project raises. We need a partner stakeholder to join us to make the Bronx a great place in which to live and work.

Sincerely,

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