



City of New York Parks & Recreation

New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation

Oversight – Status of Yankee Stadium Replacement Parks

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Testimony by
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INTRODUCTION

Mayor Bloomberg's vision for a revitalized South Bronx, called the 'South Bronx Initiative,' is a multi-agency effort developed in coordinated with local city, state and federal elected officials, along with the support of local community groups. The Yankee Stadium Redevelopment Program, a major element of the South Bronx Initiative, includes over \$2 billion of public and private dollars for new infrastructure, retail, professional sports and entertainment, mass transit, parks, athletic facilities and greening. Even in the midst of a massive redevelopment project the community played host to the recent Papal visit and will again be on the national stage with the All Star Game next month. We are here today to discuss the open space component of the redevelopment plan, specifically the new parks, facilities and greening initiatives undertaken as part of the broader redevelopment program.

New York City is currently in the largest period of park expansion since Robert Moses and the WPA projects of the 1930s. In the Bronx, new and renovated parks are transforming communities and improving the quality of life. More than \$178 million has been invested since 2002 in Bronx park improvements including new waterfront parks, greenways, and recreational facilities. Over the next few years, the City will spend roughly over \$400 million to develop nearly 150 different park projects in the Bronx, including those connected to the Yankee Stadium Redevelopment Program.

PUBLIC REDEVELOPMENT AND CITY PARKS PROJECTS

The City is investing \$281 million to build new parks, improve local sport fields, upgrade roadways, utilities and related infrastructure, and improve public transit through its contribution to the new MTA Metro-North Station. Parks is building new recreational facilities that will include new grass ballfields where the stadium once stood, an all-weather soccer and football field surrounded by a 400-meter competition quality track, basketball courts, handball courts, a new tennis center, a skate park and a waterfront park that will provide the first meaningful public access to the Harlem River since highways and rail lines were built along the river's edge. The park program alone is budgeted at \$174 million, allowing us to plan and build great new parks and facilities that will serve the surrounding community for decades to come. As with all park

projects, the public, particularly those who use the parks on a regular basis are involved in creating the designs for the new parks, as are members of Community Board 4 and local elected officials. In addition, we attend both the Parks Committee and full board meetings of Community Board Four each month to make presentations, provide updates and answer questions. We also host a monthly coordinating meeting for government agencies and elected officials, issue a quarterly newsletter and maintain a website to provide current information on the progress of the park replacement plan.

NEW RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The recreation facilities displaced by the new stadium were confined to two parks: sixteen tennis and eight handball courts in Mullaly Park; and, two little league ballfields, a 400 meter running track and soccer field, one softball field, one little league field, two basketball courts and twenty-four handball courts in Macombs Dam Park.

The replacement park sites are comprised of both existing parkland that is being redeveloped, and newly mapped parkland. In the new Macombs Dam Park, atop Garage A, we will build four basketball courts, eight handball courts, a 400 meter running track, an all-weather soccer/football field, an adult fitness area and a comfort station. The latter will also provide needed storage space for maintenance equipment and supplies, as well as support space for local Parks Department staff. Replacing what was once a marginal road, Ruppert Plaza, will become an important public plaza and gateway to Heritage Field. This location, the site of the original stadium, will have one grass softball field, one grass little league field and a tournament quality grass baseball field oriented to mirror the historic Yankee ballfield.

River Avenue Park will see new benches, spray shower, play & fitness equipment, as well as a skate park. Along the Bronx Terminal Market waterfront, a new park will contain tennis courts, a parks district office, tennis concession and café in Building “J”, an ice rink, a beach, barbeque and picnic area, as well as an outdoor classroom. This new waterfront park will be connected to its surrounding community across a new pedestrian bridge from Ruppert Plaza that will be wider, and better lit than the old bridge. Most importantly, it will be open year-round and connect to a brand new metro North Station.

BUDGET

I know this committee and members of the public are particularly interested in the costs of this project and the schedule for building the new parks. As mentioned earlier in the testimony the construction budget for the park component of the project is \$174 million, substantially higher than the first cost projections, but a concrete demonstration of the City’s commitment to fully rebuild the parks and facilities displaced by the new stadium. For the total project, which includes non-parks related infrastructure improvements, the budget was originally \$160 million. Since then, \$121 million of funding has been added to Parks Capital budget to address the following needs: \$57 million in additional funds for park development work; \$9 million for infrastructure work, \$16 million added for project and program management, design and administration and \$39 million for the MTA Metro North Station and pedestrian bridge. There are three reasons for the cost increases. First, the scope of the project has grown substantially

since it was first announced; second, site conditions and environmental remediation have been significantly more challenging than first anticipated; and third, the super-heated construction market continues to push costs higher and higher.

The scope has expanded in ways that provide more and better facilities and services to the public. Building “J”, the handsome old powerhouse structure that sits on the Harlem River, has been added to the Waterfront Park to provide a headquarters for our Community Board 4 Operations staff, space to host a tennis concession and other public uses. Pier 4 was added to the park plan creating more waterfront access and the demolition of the decrepit “Victory” building was not part of the original plan for the site. The pedestrian bridge that provided access to and from the parking lots on game days only was only intended to be renovated and made ADA compliant. It will now be three times as wide and open around-the-clock to connect the community to the new Metro North station, retail outlets and the Waterfront Park. Heritage Field has grown by $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre from what was originally envisioned. The initial plan called for two temporary ballfields along the waterfront while construction of the new Waterfront Park was underway. Though well meant, the idea proved impractical for a number of reasons. Rather than abandon it, the City decided to provide two new permanent ballfields, at PS 29 and the West Bronx Recreation Center, at a cost substantially higher than the temporary fields.

The earliest construction cost projections were made using industry standards for materials and commodities and comparable costs for similar projects. However, site conditions, environmental mitigation and the unique nature of some of these properties have resulted in higher estimates than were originally projected. The Waterfront Park site had 10 underground oil tanks rather than the four shown on the survey resulting in significantly higher mitigation costs. The seawall and subsurface require significant new infrastructure to support the park program. Building J needed a full environmental remediation. The first demolition estimates for the stadium were based on industry standards, but the stadium is anything but a typical structure and its proximity to two major subway lines makes the project even more complex. And even the two new permanent ballfields had unanticipated site and environmental issues that raised the total cost of construction.

With international demand for petroleum-based projects and basic construction commodities at an all time and local demand for construction services pushing supply limits, construction costs continue to outpace even the most liberal estimates. Overall cost escalation of 1.5% per month is now common in public and private construction across the city- a rate of increase that like the price at the pump, was hard to imagine just a short time ago. And while we constantly update our estimating methods, each new publicly-bid project seems to raise the bar higher in terms of construction costs.

SCHEDULE

I am happy to report that we are delivering on our commitment to provide new parks and facilities for residents of this community. The interim track and field has been open for over a year now and will remain open until a track and field on top of Garage A is available for public use. Though final version of the rooftop park will be constructed in two phases, public use will be preserved throughout the process. The PS 29 ballfield opened in April and the field at the West Bronx Recreation Center will open in a matter of weeks. Improvements to the northern

portion of Mullaly Park are complete and construction has begun on the southern portion of the park. The pool and skate park will operate as normal during construction. Work will begin on the two new River Avenue parks in August and will be completed next spring. So far over 3,000 of the 8,000 new trees committed to replace those lost to construction have been planted on streets of the Bronx. Heritage Field and the new Rupert Place, the centerpiece of the park replacement plan, can't begin construction until the existing stadium is removed next year. It is still expected to open in the fall of 2011. The Waterfront Park is in construction and we expect it to be available for public use a year from now, in line with the original schedule. The renovation of Building "J" will take longer, probably until the end of 2009, but again that was not part of the original scope for the project. Garage "A", which will support the rooftop park, began construction in 2007, a year later than originally anticipated, but the recreational facilities that were ultimately displaced by construction remained open to the public during the delay and they should not be out-of service any longer than originally anticipated. The rooftop on Garage "A" is expected to be completed by 2010.

You may hear today various calculations of acreage associated with this project. We want to assure you that the project we are building today replaces all of the park space being taken up by the new stadium and its parking garages. Most importantly, we want to assure you that all of the recreation facilities that were displaced- all of the sport fields and play areas- have been accounted for and are being replaced in ongoing consultation with the community. The clearest evidence of this is visible from an image of the Preferred Alternative as it appeared in the Yankee Stadium FEIS. It is the image the community saw through various public meetings. It is the image the Planning Commission and Council had before at the time of their final votes.

We invite you to inspect this image closely. You will find that every element of the plan that was approved remains in our project today. Every recreational element and every parcel of parkland remains as in the project without exception. In fact, the only changes you will find to the project we are building today are the addition of the PS29 and West Bronx Recreation sites and that the locations of some recreational elements within the plan have changed.

CONCLUSION

In closing, this is an unprecedented time for both park and private sector development in the Bronx. The benefits of the Yankee Redevelopment Project are significant, including new parkland and state-of-the-art recreational facilities by top designers working closely local residents and user groups. No great urban development project comes without temporary disruptions to normal routines. We appreciate the patience and support Bronx residents and local officials, have shown in dealing with the issues and inconveniences associated with the rebuilding of Yankee Stadium and the construction of new parks in the community.