

The Main Street WIRE

Roosevelt Island's Community Newspaper • in association with Website NYC10044

EXTRA
Breaking News

Shouts of "Where's RIOC?"

RIOC Session on Mini-School Conversions Is a Bust as Residents Walk Out in Protest

Developer Will Stay With Plan

"Luxury residences represent the highest and best use in a residential community, and they would increase the overall value of the existing housing."

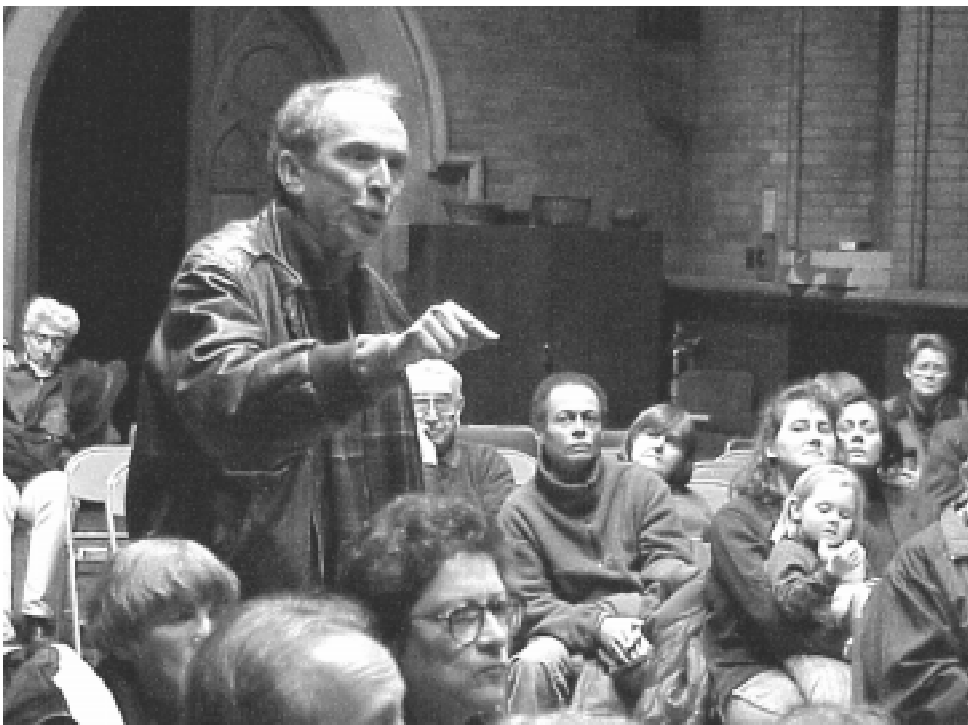
After Monday night's meeting, in which she was unable to make a planned presentation on her plans, developer Diane Wilson spoke with *The WIRE*. She claims her plans will have a strong positive effect in the community, at little cost in residents' views.

"I don't know the politics here," she said. "I'm disappointed that I wasn't able to give factual information regarding the proposed conversion. I don't know why events unfolded the way they did."

Wilson said that she has not yet reached the limit of her willingness to pursue this project. RIOC has her bond of \$50,000 or more, and she says she has invested over half a million dollars in the plan, for engineering studies and architectural work.

Under the plan, each of three mini-schools — at Rivercross, Island House, and Westview — would be turned into five or six private residences. Each mini-school would get a partial second-floor addition for master bedrooms, resulting in units of 2500 to 3500 square feet.

Wilson says the impact would be minimal, and mostly positive. She says that skylights now on the Island House mini-school, for example, extend four feet, seven inches above the roof, and block the views of Island House residents. "The second-floor ceiling would go about eleven feet above the roof line," Wilson says, and



Richard Donovan angrily protested the absence of any RIOC staff at Monday night's meeting.

they would be positioned to avoid disruption of sight lines.

"In Rivercross, of the 400 units I would have some impact on a few units, one way or the other. Right now they have trees and the garden [blocking views]. There are already existing obstructions

of foliage."

Morse Diesel representative Vincent Arcuri, who joined Wilson for a conversation with *The WIRE*, said of the Island House impact, "These second floor additions are less obtrusive than the existing skylights, and in some cases open up better

view corridors. They only affect the sight lines in four locations."

Asked about hostility arising from Roosevelt Island's charter as a community of affordable housing, Arcuri said, "What's been missing here is the high end. The sixteen [residences proposed] will not overpower the income mix here." Wilson agreed: "From what I read of the master plan, this Island was supposed to be mixed-income, not just exclusively for moderate or low or luxury. It was supposed to mimic the same demographics [as the rest of the City], a blend of all classes."

"Was it appropriate for you to represent RIOC tonight?" *The WIRE* asked Arcuri. "As I understand the charge given at the last Board meeting," Arcuri responded, "it was my duty to conduct this public information session tonight whereby the proposed developer could present her proposal and respond to any questions or comments from the com-

See **Wilson**, page 2

"Developers Hung Out to Dry"

"This is like the Mayor calling and Town Hall Meeting and not bothering to show up," said James Kaufman after Monday night's aborted community meeting. Kaufman, an attorney and active Republican, has grown increasingly disillusioned with the management performance of Republican Governor George Pataki's appointee, RIOC President Dr. Jerome Blue.

Kaufman later viewed the situation from a lawyer's viewpoint: "It strikes me that once again a developer has been hung out to dry by Jerry Blue. This has been evident in every proposed development to date. A builder is enticed by promises that RIOC cannot deliver on — 'approvals are in place,' or 'variances to the General Development Plan are not needed,' or 'the Board has approved the development,' or 'it's on the agenda for the next Board meeting' — all of which were detrimentally relied on by the builder to spend more money 'past the point of no return,' to keep pouring good money after bad."

Kaufman's use of the phrase, "detrimentally relied on," is a lawyer's way of saying the developers involved may have grounds for legal action against RIOC to recover their costs, having counted on RIOC's representations about progress.

"If there is a purveyor of fraud and deceit," Kaufman continued, "it is almost obvious that the blame resides with RIOC, not the developer."

Spontaneous Boycott Over Blue's Absence

by Dick Lutz

RIOC's Community Forum on mini-school conversion disintegrated into open rebellion Monday night.

The meeting, called to inform the community about — and get community reaction to — the plan to add a second floor to the mini-schools and convert them into luxury condominium apartments, was chaotic from the start.

As Morse Diesel representative Vincent Arcuri attempted to call the meeting to order just after 6:30 p.m., there were immediate shouts, "Where's Blue?" This was a reference to Dr. Jerome Blue, President of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation [RIOC], who had been ordered to hold a community information meeting on the mini-schools plan by Joseph Lynch, Commissioner of the State's Division of Housing and Community Renewal.

"Where's RIOC?" some shouted. Arcuri tried, more than once, to explain:

"Morse Diesel has been hired to oversee this process as Owner's Representative. I work for Morse Diesel. I am chairing this meeting." In response, there were shouts: "No, you're not. Where is RIOC?"

Few attending were willing to accept Arcuri as a stand-in for RIOC or Blue. "Get out, get out!" cried Richard Donovan. "This is not the meeting I gave up my time for. RIOC called this meeting. RIOC should be here!"

As the meeting became more chaotic, Residents Association President Patrick Stewart took the microphone in an attempt to restore order. "Dr. Blue is not holding this meeting," he said. "He's not here. Let us count our blessings." The attempt at levity brought laughs from only a few. Stewart continued, "Yet they [the RIOC Board of Directors] will try to vote on this on March 11. We owe it to ourselves to learn what we can about this project." A few moments later, Rivercross resident Roy Eaton made a similar plea.

But few of the 130 residents attending were sympathetic. Even the Residents Association First Vice President, Joan Christianson, rejected Stewart's suggestion. "If we stay here, they can say they've had their community meeting. What we should all do now is leave, so that there is no meeting." Several people picked up a chant: "Everybody leave! Everybody leave!"

Most did.

A few stayed, but not for a formal meeting. They looked See **Protest**, page 2



6:35 — 140 present as Vincent Arcuri started the meeting.



6:45 — As anger mounted, residents started heading for the doors.



6:55 — A few remained, chatting or viewing drawings at the front of the room.



Before, After The Island House mini-school profile would change as shown under Developer Diane Wilson's condo plan.

United, We Stand



What More To Say?

There's little more that an editorial can say about Monday night's "Community Forum" staged by RIOC at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Announced for an inconvenient time, on an inconvenient day for many, the session was a blatant insult to the community by Dr. Jerome Blue, President of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation. For that matter, it was a blatant insult to his boss, Commissioner Joseph Lynch, who heads DHCR as a member of the Governor's cabinet.

Others said it Monday night with more force, and more eloquence, than can be mustered here on a tight deadline: They asked, "Where's Blue?" and walked out.

That says it all.

This community has long since had more of Jerry Blue and his misbegotten management methods than any community should have to bear. It is time, after long last, for him to leave his debacle behind and seek sustenance in other quarters.

And For the Island?

For the Island, it is time for some measure of local autonomy, including the opportunity to elect the Board of Directors that oversees the public benefit corporation that runs the Island, and to hire the professional community management any great community needs and deserves.

It is time, in short, for the legislation drafted by the Maple Tree Group to be moved expeditiously through the New York State Legislature.

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Protest

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at a display of architectural renderings that developer Diane Wilson of Corporate Realty Partners had brought to show the scope of her plan. Some argued with her or with the architectural team from Fifield Piaker & Associates. "You'll never build it," said Milt Marcus as he spoke with an architect. "The community won't allow it. We'll put every possible legal roadblock in your way."

RIRA President Stewart commented later in the evening, "I was really proud of all the people who were there, who have had just about enough of all this, that they said, 'Screw it, and we're walking out.'"

Stewart continued, "RIOC's not being present was unconscionable. To put the onus on Morse Diesel and Diane Wilson was about as bad form as I've ever seen, in business or otherwise. Blue has strung these people along, just as he has the eldercare developers, unfairly, probably without having them informed. He's not just unfaithful to his responsibilities to residents; he's doing the same thing to the developers. They have been led down the primrose path."

"I felt offended and I felt everybody there should be offended," Richard Donovan commented later. "I had prepared a speech on my feelings about the development, and I realized that there was nobody from RIOC except [RIOC Board member David] Kraut, who was unwilling to stand for RIOC."

Kraut himself told *The WIRE* as the meeting broke up, "People's anger was predictable. They expected Blue and found that he and the rest of the administration was not here, and they were furious. I don't know why anybody should be surprised they're angry." Asked how he felt about Blue's absence, Kraut said, "I'll respond with a question: How do you think the meeting would have gone had he been here? I don't know the answer to that."

Kraut was asked if he thinks the project can be salvaged, given the community's anger. "I'm not going to comment on this project right now. I'm going to discuss what happened here tonight with the [DHCR] Commissioner and others and see if we can share a sense of what's possible."

Shirley Margolin, a longtime resident who has served on Community Board 8, told *The WIRE* after Monday night's meeting that appointing Morse Diesel as RIOC's representative in the development process "doesn't relieve Jerry Blue of the responsibility to speak directly with the community and to its concerns. Beyond that, the community really needs to read the General Development Plan, which very clearly indicates for whom apartments will be built on this Island. It was never intended for \$600,000 condominiums."

Margolin said, "Everything on this Island relates to the river. Everything was designed to keep the river special. This [proposal] is really an attempt to sell it off to the highest bidder."

RIRA Vice President Joan Christianson was still angry well after the meeting. "It's illogical that he would be expected to hold a meeting and then not be there. The man from Morse Diesel — who the hell is he? When did he become an arm of RIOC? If Joe Lynch

told Jerry Blue to conduct a Town Meeting, then he should conduct a Town Meeting, and not stay away." Christianson, whose call for people to walk out essentially marked the end of the meeting, added, "When I saw people who rarely come to these meetings getting angry, it was time to put a stop to it."

Speaking of RIOC President Blue, Christianson added, "The depth of this



As the meeting grew more heated, Patrick Stewart asked for calm and recommended residents stay to learn about the proposed project.



Ken McDermotroe was among the vocal protestors at Monday night's meeting, suggesting residents call DHCR Commissioner Joseph Lynch to protest RIOC's handling of the community forum.

man's ignorance astonishes me. How much are we supposed to take? He keeps topping himself." She called for Blue to be fired, and asked residents to call DHCR Commissioner Lynch with that demand.

At press time for this extra edition [5:00 a.m. Tuesday] *The WIRE* was not able to contact RIOC or DHCR



Once the meeting broke up, a few residents remained to ask questions of the architectural team.

for comments, or to learn whether another community forum on the conversion plan will be scheduled.

Wilson

from page 1

munity, to document those questions and comments, and report back to RIOC, to Jerry Blue.

"In my opinion what [the residents] should have done is demand a meeting with Blue to discuss it face-to-face with him. This was the information meeting. So I think they reacted incorrectly... My personal opinion, if I was on your side on the Island, I would have heard [the presentation] and then demanded a meeting with Dr. Blue about it."



Developer Diane Wilson

Wilson commented that deterioration of the mini-schools is already serious. "If not cured soon, it will cost RIOC a lot to fix. Whether I develop the products or not, somebody is going to have to stabilize the buildings."

Wrapping up her talk with *The WIRE*, she said, "My goal is always to create win-win situations and [in this case] that is still my goal."



Owner's Rep Vincent Arcuri

African-American Heritage Celebrated at Senior Center



Let's hear it for the cooks Doing the culinary chores for the Youth Center's Beacon Program pancake breakfast at the end of February were Jeanette Caraballo, Michelle Lamb, Gloria Coleman, and Head Chef Way Remeki. At the African-American Heritage Celebration at the SeniorCenter, GFlenn Williams did the honors at the stove.



Website NYC10044



Cheyenne Dashiell was one of many kids enjoying last weekend's African-American Heritage Celebration. The event was organized by Housing Management and sponsored by Rivercross, RISA, the PTA, and the Collective Artists' Expo.



Anise Ganbold, Third Grade
on Prizefighter Jack Johnson



Assefash Makonnen, Third Grade
on Jonetta B. Cole



Tebe Makonnen, Second Grade
on Dr. Benjamin Carson



Tyler Cannon, Second Grade
Louis Armstrong composition, on clarinet

These imaginative quilts have been hanging in the lobby of PS/IS 217, and are the joint work of students at various grade levels.



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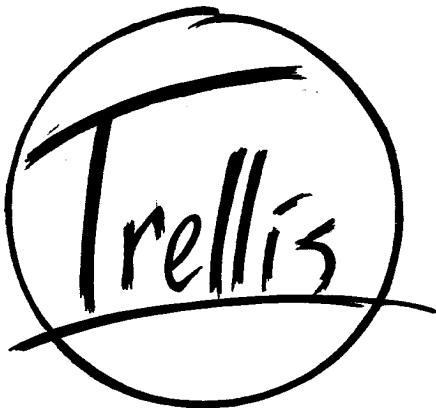
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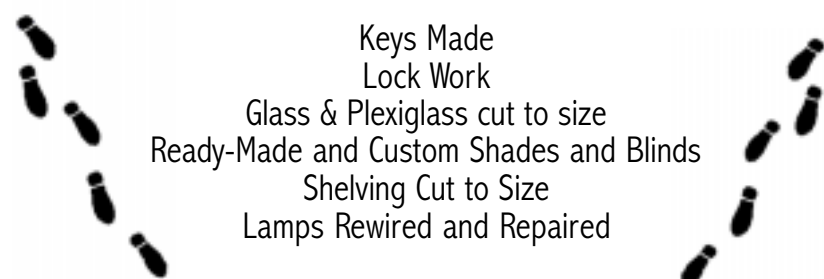
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YOUTH PAGE

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YOUTH CENTER SWIM PROGRAM A ROOSEVELT ISLAND SPLASH!

Peering through water-soaked glasses, Vladimir Moraru, a swim instructor for the Roosevelt Island Youth Center, queries an eight-year-old Mark Spitz wannabe. “How many can you pick up?” Moraru asks, holding up a fistful of colorful submersible weights. The boy signals an ambitious “four” then splashes both feet over his head to direct his stubbornly cork-like body under the water’s surface. The boy’s fear of the water disappears as he focuses on the challenge while Moraru stations himself a reassuring arm’s-length away.

Over 50 children currently participate in the free swimming lessons provided each Saturday at the SportsPark pool. “I love it!” responds Kristle Pizzari, a 5th grader who lives in Eastwood, when asked about her lessons. “This is my second class and I’m learning a lot!” Her younger brother Kenny eagerly reports on his new-found skill. “I learned the flutter kick and the jelly-fish float.” A broad smile brightens his face, “Oh yeah, I can push off and glide too!!”



“Most of our students are at Level I and II” says Will Martinez, Head Swim Instructor for the program. Martinez has taught swimming for nearly 20 years and credits swim-



ming with helping him regain mobility after a serious motorcycle accident. No stranger to children’s behavior, Martinez is an Assistant Truant Officer at Martin Van Buren High School.

Both Martinez and Moraru are Certified Water Safety Instructors, the highest swimming certification awarded by the American Red Cross. Moraru is an accomplished competitor and a former National Swim Champion from Rumania where he earned a Master’s Degree in Physical Education, was a gym instructor, and coached swimming and water polo. Moraru and his family currently live on Roosevelt Island.

Participants in the swim program will achieve Red Cross certification as they pass proficiency testing at various levels. Although the current program is filled to capacity, plans are being considered to offer the program again during the Spring with an expanded enrollment.

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Teen Hoops in Three-Way Tie

Blues defeated Greens this week in a 59-58 squeaker, catapulting them out of the cellar and into a three-way tie for second place in the teen boy’s league.

League leaders, the Yellows, enjoy a comfortable 3-win margin. The Yellow’s strength centers on Ron Artest, a 10th grader and the brother of Daniel Artest, Center Forward for the St. John’s Red Storm.



Play-off games for the teen boys are set for March 18th at 7:15 and 8:30 p.m. The championship will be played at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, March 22nd. All games are played at the PS/IS 217 gym.

Edgar Holley, Recreational Director for the Beacon Program, coordinates the basketball league for 15-17-year-old boys each Monday night. Teams are made up of 8 players with a limited number of openings.

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