

Next issue:
Apr. 6-7

The Main Street WIRE

Roosevelt Island's Community Newspaper

in association with Website NYC10044



Website NYC10044 www.nyc10044.com
St. Patrick's Day (plus 1) on Roosevelt Island found Sgt. David Nisthaus of the NYPD Emerald Society Pipes & Drums leading a procession up Main Street, followed by an assortment of residents that included Jim Whalen, founder of the Roosevelt Island St. Patrick's Day Parade. Whalen explained that the Island event was scheduled for Sunday, March 18, instead of March 17, in order to avoid competition that might have drawn throngs away from Manhattan's parade. "It might have upset the Cardinal," Whalen said.

Rent Determination Plays Out For Westview and Island House

News Analysis by Robert Laux-Bachand

The State has made its decision on rent increases for Island House and Westview, and tenants of the 761 apartments will be given 30-day notices of new rates that will most likely take effect on May 1.

The decision – whatever it is – may come as a letdown to members of the Westview Task Force, who never succeeded in getting the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) to engage them directly on the main issues they tried to present during rent negotiations.

The Task Force was headed by an engineer, Opher Pail, and it approached the rent determination process as it would a construction project: A professional inspection of the building was the basis; the accountants' financial data was the framework; and an extensive array of evidence on the cost of roof repairs and other work, assembled over several months, was supposed to be the firewall against a rent increase.

At stake, potentially, is millions of dollars. The Roosevelt Island Housing Management Corporation estimated that Westview would be in the red some \$1.4 million at this time next year unless its current rent of \$300 per room was raised substantially. The Task Force, on the other hand, said that Westview would have a surplus of \$934,100. (Similar extremes were presented during the course of Island House's "BRD" – bureaucratese for Budget Rent Determination – with the company and the State more than \$1.3

million apart in their deficit estimates.)

Westview's strategy started to unravel on February 8, when a DHCR official cut short the testimony of Pail's team of experts at the apartment complex's rent conference. When Pail protested, the task force was given more time to make its case, and its members assumed they would get a chance to meet with DHCR's "technical staff."

As the weeks went by, letters and phone calls were exchanged with Ken Miller, the agency's site representative for Roosevelt Island, and meetings were set up and then postponed by DHCR staff architect Arthur Kahane. What Westview really wanted, more than anything else, was some documentation for the housing company's request for more than \$1.3 million for its re-

See BRD, page 10

RIOC Stuns Housing Companies, Billing a Public Safety Hike of 27%

by Robert Laux-Bachand

The latest jolt to Roosevelt Islanders' pocketbooks came in the form of a March 1 bill from RIOC to the companies that manage the Island's housing, seeking a 27 percent increase in payments for Public Safety services. For most Islanders, the increase amounts to more than \$100 per apartment per year.

But perhaps the invoice could better be described as an attempted jolt.

Some of the managers who received the invoice, which took them by surprise, say they do not intend to pay the increase unless they receive an adequate explanation from the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation. And several members of the RIOC Board, who also said they were caught off-guard by news of the increase, suggested that they would bring up the subject at their next Board meeting on March 29 – the date, coincidentally, of the first session of a high-level RIOC-housing management committee that has been given a broad mandate to consider all issues related to public safety.

Michael J. LeConte, Chief Financial Officer of Jerome Belson Associates, the parent company of the Roosevelt Island Housing Management Corporation (RIHM), sounded the alarm in a March 9 letter to the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), saying he was "shocked" by the increases for Westview, Island House and Eastwood.

The increase for those three buildings, \$186,461, arrived just as RIHM was wrapping up negotiations with DHCR for the rent increase it will be allowed to levy on tenants for the next two years. LeConte responded with a letter asking that DHCR "increase all budgets accordingly." That would add up to almost \$875,000 for all three apartment buildings in 2001.

But it appears he was too late to change the State's final figures.

Otis Jones, DHCR Deputy Commissioner of Housing Operations, said this week that Belson's request had not been granted in the rent orders being prepared for Island House and Westview (the State's rent determination conference for Eastwood is scheduled for May 1).

In his March 9 letter, LeConte said: "We absolutely disagree with the increases implemented by

RIOC and will be requesting all documentation with personnel and job function breakdowns to support the increase in security charges." Other top officials with the company have assured tenant representatives that they intend to resist the higher fees, which, if enacted, would have the effect of cutting down on the money available for other expenses at Island House and Westview.

See RIOC, page 7

Grannis After Ryan Over Island's Capital Shortage

Assemblymember Pete Grannis is after RIOC again. Once again, it's over the Island's capital needs and how they will be met without funding from the State budget.

Grannis says that important maintenance work is going undone, pointing out that RIOC is contractually obligated to care for the Island's non-residential structures.

"RIOC appears to be doing little more than crossing its corporate fingers and hoping for a windfall from afar to meet its financial obligations," Grannis writes in his March 15 letter. "What you and the agency should be doing is leaving no stone unturned, including seeking State assistance, to mitigate future costs and avoid future problems by not allowing the work needed today to go unattended."

Grannis lists a series of projects he considers critical:

- \$6.2 million required for seawall work, listed in a still-secret Army Corps of Engineers report. About the report, Grannis writes, "It is my understanding that you have resisted accepting the final report presented to you by the Corps," and asks why, adding "Has RIOC taken any action

See Grannis, page 6

Briefly...

A hijacking of a mail truck was foiled Wednesday by Island postal workers and officers from Public Safety. The truck was empty, waiting for a load, when a man described as having "an Irish accent," who had been loitering in the area, took on four postal workers, grabbed the vehicle's keys, and sped off the Island. He was soon captured, after smashing into a forklift, a tree, and a lamp post. He was taken to Elmhurst Hospital to be treated for injuries incurred in the crash. Postal inspectors are investigating, but no list of charges was immediately available. Assaulting a postal worker on duty is a Federal offense.

Roosevelt Island's **Running Partners** Team is looking for a volunteer running coach to work with existing staff. Frank Cherry, who can be reached at 486-2377, describes it as a service opportunity for a runner available some or all of MWF 1:30-3:00. (Related stories, page 10.)

Doryne Isley – Housing's Woman Unquestionably in Charge

by Anusha Shrivastava

Make no mistake about who is in command at this office: a mug on Doryne Isley's desk reads, "She Who Must Be Obeyed."

The General Manager of Roosevelt Island Housing Management, Isley, 54, is a woman so charged with energy and a sense of mission that one can almost feel it like a physical force in her office. Dressed in a red tennis skirt, she comes to her office straight after a game, ready to meet "whatever comes through the door." Residents come with problems when they cannot understand regulations, seniors come with mail they find incomprehensible and some parents come with unruly teenagers to seek advice. "Some days I feel like a social worker rather than a housing manager," she says.

A Housing Manager is what Isley says she is best cut out to be. She bought her first brownstone in Harlem at the age of nineteen. After a decade-and-a-half of buying, selling and managing property in Harlem, she decided to take her interest in real estate in a different direction. She went back to school and studied Facilities Management at Iona College in New Rochelle.

In the mid-'80's, she bought two Century 21 franchises in Mount Vernon and New Rochelle. When she decided she had had enough of the seven-day work week, Isley took up the post of Commissioner of the Mount Vernon Housing Authority. "I began supervising the day-to-day operations of the public housing units of that city," says Isley. As Commissioner in Mount Vernon, Isley claims she has successfully privatized all public housing in the city of Mount Vernon.

Her real-estate background and experience in Mount Vernon was crucial to her being appointed by the representatives of the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal as General Manager of Roosevelt Island Housing Management in 1995. "They were familiar with my accomplishments and ability to run a site," says Isley.

On the Island, Isley oversees 1,761 units of housing in Eastwood, Island House and Westview.

With her staff of 115, Isley is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the buildings and their maintenance, and with ensuring that all rules and regulations of the State of New

See Isley, page 9



At the Island's Halloween Parade in 2000, Doryne Isley was armed with her two-way radio and her usual smile.

Inside:

A four-page special section on Ed Logue's Roosevelt Island, drawn from a recent panel discussion at the Municipal Art Society...

A story on the Island's Toastmasters Club...

A report on the exciting end of the Youth Program's basketball season...

And much more.

RIRA On Track

The RIRA Common Council was at its best last week. Its members found the formula for the deliberations of an elected representative body and executed it almost brilliantly. The matter at issue was a resolution, brought by Planning Committee Chair Larry Parnes, proposing to offer the Residents Association's conditional support for the Octagon Apartments plan put forward by Becker and Becker.

Parnes had circulated the resolution in advance, and there had been some preliminary discussion, via e-mail, among some Council members. As a result, most arrived at the meeting well-prepared to discuss the issues. That meant the listening was better than ever, because the points being made were intelligent and the statements were to the point.

It's a complex matter. Because the proposed apartment wings are outside the scope of the Island's General Development Plan (GDP), there's the delicate matter of whether to call for, or demand – perhaps even to litigate to require – a change in the GDP. The GDP is part of the Lease between City and State, and exactly who in City government is currently empowered to assent to proposed changes could become an issue.

Since many Councilors think the Octagon project is a good idea, even if only because it will rescue the derelict Octagon landmark, it seems unlikely the Council will vote to oppose the plan. But there are a few worrisome aspects – wings which, if built too high, could overwhelm the remaining historic structure; an apartment mix skewed away from families; parking arrangements inconsistent with the rest of the Island's dwelling units. Finally, there's the issue of the GDP and how it should be amended to provide for apartments at the Octagon site.

Many members of the Common Council favor working with Becker and Becker, perhaps *around RIOC* if that proves necessary, to get what's best for the Island. Others are loathe to endorse a plan that could set precedents on amending the GDP, which is the Island's only zoning, and which will surely be relied upon to keep Southpoint parkland from becoming an overly-commercialized mistake.

Parnes' preparation, a strong hand at the gavel by RIRA President Matthew Katz, and the knowledgeable participation of elected, thoughtful members of the Council made the discussion a perfect example of the strength of democracy. And, incidentally, quite a contrast to the *unelected* RIOC Board of Directors, which has lately taken to conducting more and more of its important discussions in a secret executive session.

It's just one more indication that the time has come for true representative government on Roosevelt Island.

What Are They Thinking? Or Are They?

What kind of management springs a 27% price hike for its services without some advance notice to those who will have to pay the bill? (See lead story, page 1.)

What kind of management ignores an ongoing DHCR rent determination process into which owners might want to factor such a 27% increase?

Answer: The kind of management we have at RIOC.

DL



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Letters

To the Editor:

After visiting our Island merchants and getting depressed over the conditions of their stores, I wrote a letter to *The WIRE*. Lots of friends and neighbors told me how wonderful it was. I am still waiting to see results at our shops. The fish/vegetable market looks much cleaner. To date there is no change at the rest of our stores.

In order to prevent depression, I decided to leave the island by Tram.

What do I notice at the Tram?

The cabins are in need of a good cleaning. The windows at the end of the cabins, especially those under the gratings, are dirty. No one has removed the gratings in a long time and washed the windows, inside and out.

The cabin ceilings are filthy. Some white paint would help. We can see every greasy handprint that has worked in the cabin this year.

The blue walls need a scrubbing and/or paint job.

The upholstery is torn on the benches. I am sure we can afford a few yards of vinyl fabric.

The “pits” where the cabins pull in at the Manhattan station are filthy, need a sweeping and hosing down.

The elevator floor has not been washed in months. The entire elevator is dirty.

Only one turnstile works in Manhattan. Yes, I know they no longer

To the Editor:

Cabbies have never been too happy about having to go to Roosevelt Island and drive back to Manhattan empty. Especially with Main Street being a dead-end street where you can't make U-turns. Can't say I blame them.

But now, how far does a taxi driver have to drive – 20 mph, with a stop sign every 50 yards – before he can turn around and head back north to the bridge?

That is very embarrassing. I can only empathize when I hear a driver curse because I'm going to Main Street, and no reasonable tip will adequately compensate him for the wasted time and mileage.

Is anyone giving any thought to providing a place where cars are allowed to turn back without having to go all the way to the Tram?

Claude Lestelle

make turnstiles that do not take the MetroCard. Hint hint – it is time for the MetroCard.

The entire Manhattan station needs a renovation. We do not even have a sign indicating that this is the Roosevelt Island Tramway Station any more. It left with the staircase.

Aside from the massive renovation needed at the Manhattan station, the other suggestions will cost virtually no money and can easily be done during the nightly down time.

To the Editor:

My apartment overlooks Main Street and I spend a fair amount of time listening to music and looking out at the street. I have a view of the bus stop at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd. I see many residents stop and stare to see if a minibus is coming, trying to decide whether to walk to the subway or Tram, or wait for the bus.

Except for rush hours, the minibus always leaves Motorgate at five minutes past the quarter hour. To catch a bus, be at either of the two bus stops at five minutes past the quarter hour, and the wait will be only a minute or two.

Jerry Lieber

To the Editor:

A super and very special “Congratulations!” to Vicki Feinmel and the committee who organized the FunRaiser Dance earlier this month. It was a fabulous party and only great things were overheard about it. Thanks to all of you for keeping an “Eye On The Isle” and doing something that brings our community together. Looking forward to the next event.

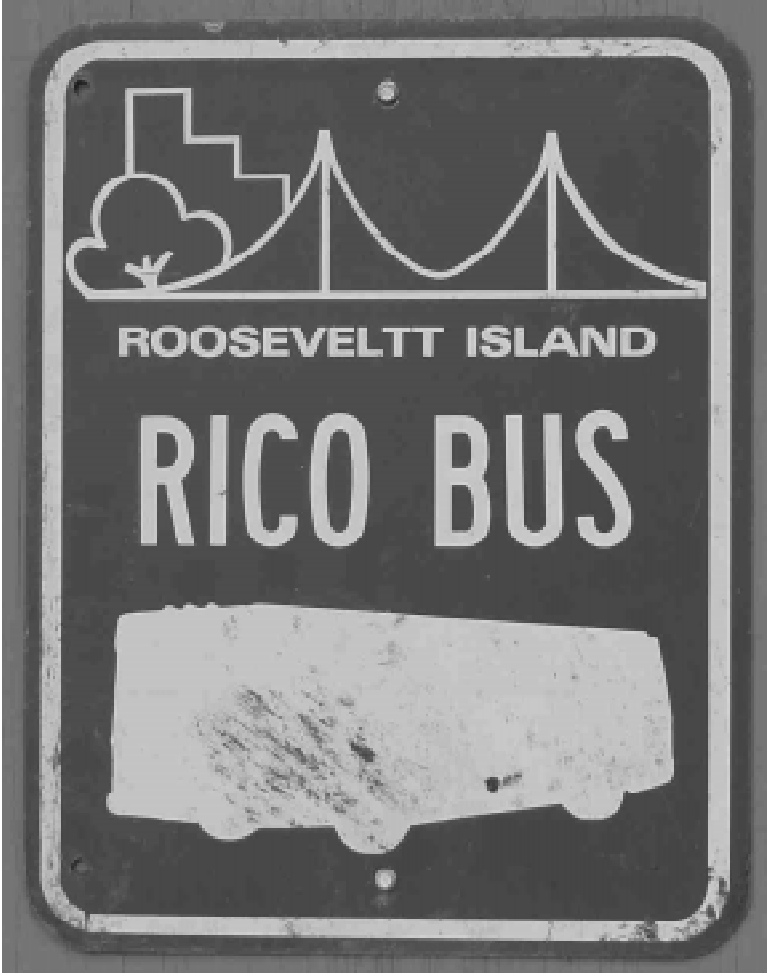
Harry Small

It is time our Tram manager, Sean Kirby, paid a little attention to the condition of the Tram. Why aren't you overseeing this, Mr. Ryan?

Judith Berdy

Photoeditorial

Quality Control by the geniuses at RIOC



Unretouched photo of sign at subway

Letters Policy: *The WIRE* welcomes letters to the Editor, to the community, and to/from officials, and will consider publication on a *Name Withheld* basis, but the writer's name, address, and phone number must be provided. Letters subject to acceptance. **Preferred means of submission:** PC-standard 3.5-inch floppy disk left at 531 Main Street for *The WIRE*, or by e-mail to nyc10044@rcn.com (ASCII text preferred or use any wordprocessing software, but no MSWord files with macros). **Alternatives:** Typed, double-spaced copy left at 531 Main Street or faxed to (212) 755-2540. Clearly handwritten letters will be considered. **All letters subject to editing for length and clarity.**

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appears this issue on
Website NYC10044
with supplemental materials on many *WIRE* reports
www.nyc10044.com

Letters deadline for April 7 issue: April 1
Letters received after deadline will be considered on a space-available basis

COMING UP

Compiled by *WIRE* staff – Fax information to 755-2540
e-mail MainStreetWIRE@rcn.com
or click on the e-mail link at www.nyc10044.com

Continuing through April 14, 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. (except Thursdays and Sundays), **Exhibition – Housing New York: Ed Logue and His Architects**, presented by the Architectural League and the Municipal Art Society, at MAS, 457 Madison Avenue (between 50th/51st). Residential projects of the Urban Development Corporation, including Roosevelt Island. Information: **935-3960**.

Sat., Mar. 24, 3:00 p.m., Memorial Service for C. Mark Bethel (rescheduled), Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Sun., Mar. 25, 1:00 p.m., Walking Tour of Roosevelt Island – Revisiting the Master Plan, conducted by Judith Berdy, President of the Roosevelt Island Historical Society, for the Municipal Art Society. \$15. Reservations required; call **935-3960**. (Meet at the Manhattan-side Tramway station at 12:45 p.m.)

Sun., Mar. 25, rescheduled, No Place Like Home, historical script by the late Rev. Oliver Chapin. See April 22 listing.

Mon., Mar. 26, 7:45 p.m., Maple Tree Group meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd; planning for elected representative government and professional management for Roosevelt Island.

Tue., Mar. 27, 6:00 p.m., Roosevelt Island History on the Web, at the Library (a program of the Roosevelt Island Historical Society).

Wed., Mar. 28, 9:30-12:30, Career Day at PS/IS 217. Volunteers sought to tell students about their work lives. Call **980-0294**, ext. 2422.

Thur., Mar. 29, 9:30 a.m., RIOC Board of Directors meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd, **rescheduled from March 8**. (Executive session normally starts at 9:30, followed by public session, starting 10:30 or 11:00.)

Fri., Mar. 30, 7:00 p.m., Adult Friday Concert Series, PS 217 auditorium, program to be announced.

Sun., Apr. 1, 3:00 p.m., 17th Annual CYO Fashion Show, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Wed., Apr. 4, 8:00 p.m., RIRA Common Council meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Sat., April 7, next issue of *The Main Street WIRE*. **Deadlines:** Advertising in the paper, Fri., Mar. 30; decision on stuffers for *The Bag*, Mon., Apr. 2; materials due Thur., Apr. 5. **Future issues:** Apr. 21; May 5, 19; June 2, 30; Aug. 4, then every two weeks starting early in September. **Phone/fax** for news, **826-9055/755-2540**; phone/fax for advertising inquiries, **751-8214/755-2540**; to list your organization's Island events here (no charge), fax information to **755-2540**, or e-mail MainStreetWIRE@rcn.com.

Sun., Apr. 8, 4:00 p.m., Dedication of Memorial Plaque and Good Shepherd banner in honor of the late **Rev. Oliver T. Chapin**, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Thur., Apr. 12, 6:00 p.m., RIOC Board of Directors meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Wed., Apr. 18, 8:00 p.m., Community Board 8 Roosevelt Island Meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Apr. 20-22, Main Street Teen Theatre, Museum, a play by Tina Howe; performance times to be announced.

Sun., Apr. 22, 7:30 p.m., No Place Like Home, historical script by the late Rev. Oliver Chapin, Chapel of the Good Shepherd. An oral and slide history of the Island, presented as a benefit for the Organ Fund of Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Donation \$5.00.

Apr. 27-30, Main Street Teen Theatre, Pippin, a musical version with original music by Bob McDowell; performance times to be announced.

Wed., May 2, 8:00 p.m., RIRA Common Council meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Thur., May 10, 9:30 a.m., RIOC Board of Directors meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd. (Executive session normally starts at 9:30, followed by open meeting, starting 10:30 or 11:00.)

May 18-20, Main Street Children's Theatre, Hollywood Musicals, a dance program; performance times to be announced

Wed., June 6, 8:00 p.m., RIRA Common Council meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Thur., June 14, 6:00 p.m., RIOC Board of Directors meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

Thur., July 12, 9:30 a.m., RIOC Board of Directors meeting, Chapel of the Good Shepherd. (Executive session normally starts at 9:30, followed by open meeting, starting 10:30 or 11:00.)

There is no charge to list Island events here. E-mail information to mainstreetwire@rcn.com, fax to 755-2540, or leave copy at desk at 531 Main Street, addressed to *The WIRE*.

The RIRA Column

"Spring is here, spring is here. Life is skittles and life is beer." Yes, the *vernal equinox* is history, as is the interminable winter of 2001. There are buds on the trees and we have every reason to believe that leaves and blooms will follow. Can cut-offs and suntan lotion be far behind?

There is much in this issue of *The WIRE* about the Municipal Art Society panel discussion of Roosevelt Island, which took place on March 7. There were two surprises for me in that regard: First, I was invited the day before to be a panelist representing our community, and I was happy to oblige. Second, and perhaps not such a surprise, RIOC was invited to seat a panelist representing the State and declined. It was a highly interesting evening, with the best and most pointed questions and comments coming from an audience composed largely of Roosevelt Islanders. If there was any consensus among the panelists, it was that the sociological experiment called Roosevelt Island was a huge success, but that the financial commitment of New York State to complete this planned community has been an abject failure. New York City Planning Commissioner, Alexander Garvin, was a panelist, and expressed his ongoing interest in the Island. His belief that Blackwell House is in pristine condition and that Main Street is essentially vehicle-free suggested that his information is not up-to-date, and I have written him with the hope that he, and through him New York City, will continue to monitor this City-owned Island.

Your RIRA Common Council met on March 14 and began a discussion on the efficacy and appropriateness of the proposed Becker & Becker Associates' development of Octagon Park. BBA has presented their ideas to the community through Town Meetings and through the RIRA Common Council, and, with some provisos, has been received favorably. The RIOC Board has given initial approval to this project, which includes a restoration of the Octagon landmark, the construction of two wings of fair market housing, an "ecological park" and the refurbishment of our picnic area.

The debate was brought by the Planning Committee, which proposed a resolution supporting the "concept" of the BBA project subject to appropriate amending of the General Development Plan (which designates Octagon Park as "open space"), and an adjustment of the apartment breakdown to include more two- and three-bedroom, family-oriented apartments with a percentage of affordable units that is consistent with the GDP. Also, the resolution calls for residential wings lower than eight stories (perhaps six, as in the original proposal) so as not to aesthetically overwhelm the unique Octagon structure. The resolution also requires the developer to abandon plans for additional parking areas and to seek Common Council review and comment before soliciting final RIOC approval. Those against suggested revising the resolution to oppose support of the project for the same reasons cited.

As you know, Becker & Becker is not obliged to get our approval for their project, although they have stated their unwillingness to build anything of which the community disapproves. However, their understanding of the parameters under which they must operate comes from RIOC, and all their negotiations

regarding legalities, approvals, size, aesthetics, ground rents, community give-backs, etc. only take place with RIOC. As this community's voice, RIRA has an obligation to present its views inasmuch as it is possible to define them. Here's how the debate breaks down.

Those who urge passage of the resolution argue as follows:

- Octagon has been derelict for scores of years, and recent fires have made the landmark more unlikely to receive financial support from government or non-profits. Something is better than nothing.

- RIRA has been identified with opposition to development, and this is an opportunity to be positive and supportive of an attractive plan.

- BBA will restore the Octagon landmark for public use and will satisfy the GDP requirement for an ecological park on the site.

- The resolution's demand for amendment of the GDP through appropriate City agencies will protect the rest of Roosevelt Island from unwanted and inappropriate development.

Those urging modification of RIRA approval argue:

- The GDP calls for residential construction only in Northtown and Southtown, and requires affordable housing to be part of the equation. It defines Octagon Park as an Open Space Area of 15 acres south of Coler Hospital and north of the Northtown Area. An Open Space Area is defined to "be developed to serve residents of the City as a whole, as well as residents of the Island," and doesn't include residential construction of any kind.

- The GDP reflects a cohesive plan which should not be modified piecemeal and whose amendment for one project may be cited as precedent for subsequent projects such as Southpoint. It is the only protection against rampant, ill-considered overdevelopment.

- The defunct Board of Estimate amended the GDP last in 1990. Until the turf war for control of City land use between the Mayor and the City Council is resolved, we should not subject our future development to their tender mercies, especially those of this Mayor.

- We don't need 360 units of fair market housing built for another research institution built on our parkland. We don't want our picnic area enshaded by either an eight or six story apartment house. If we are patient, there are opportunities for restoring the Octagon which this RIOC hasn't the foresight to seek out, but which a RIOC headed by a professional community manager supervised by a RIOC Board of Directors elected from the community would pursue.

What do you think? Our discussion was tabled until April so that more representative language could be crafted. Take this opportunity to talk to your building representatives, to Larry Parnes, chair of the Planning Committee, and to your Island-wide representatives including me. There is much informed concern on both sides of the issue. Your take on the question can only illuminate and enhance what we vote on and how we vote. Let us know your thoughts.



Matthew Katz
Residents Association President

Senior Center

Monday
12:45, Arts & Crafts (RIDA)

Tuesday

10:00, Jazzercise
1:00, Games (RISA)

Wednesday

9:15, Stay Well (stretch)
10:00, English as 2nd Lang.
7:00, Glee Club Choral Group

Thursday

10:00, Tai Chi
10:30, Creative Arts
6:30, Dance Class

Friday

9:00, Citizenship
10:00, English as 2nd Lang.

Home-delivered meals
are available:
Call 744-5022, ext. 1203

Special Events

Mon., Mar. 26, 10:30-11:30,
Wordprocessing (last class)

Mon., Apr. 2, 12:30, Video and
Discussion: Memories
of the 21st Century

Wed., Apr. 4 and 18, 12:15,
Calligraphy Class

Thur., Apr. 5, 11:00,
Shopping bus to Stop&Shop
(tentative)

Mon., Apr. 16, 12:30, Lecture:
Reduced-Fare MetroCard
by Mail (postponed from
March 9)

Fri., Apr. 20, 12:30, Volunteer
Recognition/Birthday Party

Wed., Apr. 25, 12:30, EPIC
Lecture (new guidelines)



After last weekend's St. Patrick's Parade, all these young marchers gathered around Piper David Nisthaus.

This summer, the fun's in the forest.

Come to camp, learn to ski!
To what???

**Yes,
Ski!!**



You'll love our forest full of fun-filled activities!
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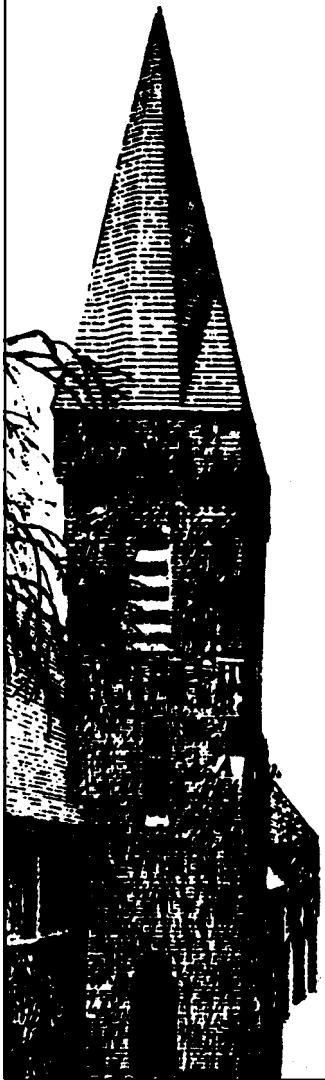
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Grannis from page 1
regarding the eventual funding needed for this project?”

- Blackwell House. “You were hoping to receive funding... from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. What is the status of this request? If this agency does not fund the project, what are your alternative funding plans?”
- Chapel of the Good Shepherd. Pointing to 1995 estimates of \$1.5 million in an engineering report, Grannis writes, “RIOC has not, to my knowledge, ever sought to raise a penny for this critical project either through the State or outside sources.”

Grannis goes on, “...it would appear that you and the [RIOC] board are under the impression that some-

how sufficient money can be found through private and non-governmental sources. The problem with this approach is that if you are wrong, these facilities will continue to deteriorate.”

Subsidies for neither the Island’s capital needs nor its operating expenses have not been in the State budget for several years, and while the Governor has not spoken publicly on the issue, he is known to feel the Island is, or should be, self-sufficient.

By deadline, Ryan had not received the letter from Grannis. A copy was supplied by *The WIRE*, but Ryan said he didn’t feel he could comment before receiving the letter from Grannis.

The full text of the Grannis letter is reprinted below.

March 15, 2001

Mr. Robert H. Ryan
President and Chief Operating Officer
Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation
591 Main Street
Roosevelt Island, NY 10044
Re: RIOC’s Capital Budget
Dear Mr. Ryan:

I am writing to inquire about RIOC’s progress in securing funding for capital projects on Roosevelt Island, including repairs to the seawall, Blackwell House and the Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

This issue is of paramount concern to me and the Island’s residents since, as you well know, you did not request nor did Governor Pataki provide, any financial support for RIOC’s activities in his proposed state budget for FY 2001-02. Compounding my concern are your comments regarding the current Southtown development in Dennis Hevesi’s column in *The New York Times* on Sunday January 14, 2001 (*An Island With a History of Change Awaits Its Latest Transformation*): “The feeling of this administration of RIOC is that the developer knows best and government should take a back seat.”

While this statement was offered in relation to the Southtown project, it appears to me that it’s a harbinger of the general belief by management and at least some of RIOC’s board members that the private sector and free market forces have all the answers and that government assistance is not needed for meeting any of the Island’s capital needs. The status of funding for the three capital projects listed above points up my concern with this approach.

According to the draft report released by the Army Corps of Engineers in February 2000, the approximate cost for the work needed on the seawall is \$6.2 million. It is my understanding that you have resisted accepting the final report presented to you by the Corps. What are your reasons for this? Are you questioning the Corps’ cost projections, the scope of the identified work or the phasing of its implementation? If any of these, please provide me with details. Recognizing that work of some magnitude is needed to ensure that the seawall will continue to protect the integrity of the Island’s landmass, has RIOC taken any action regarding the eventual funding needed for this project?

With regard to the repairs needed in Blackwell House, you told me in our meeting last October that you were hoping to receive funding for this project via a grant from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. What is the status of this request? If this agency does not fund the project, what are your alternative funding plans?

RIOC’s approach to the third project, the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, is one that I find particularly distressing. Armed with an engineering report from 1995 that estimated the cost of the work to be at least \$1.5 million, RIOC has not, to my knowledge, ever sought to raise a penny for this critical project either through the State or outside sources. The only funding for addressing the Chapel’s deteriorating conditions has come from the special appropriations now totaling \$250,000 that I have secured in the past few State budgets for the New York Landmarks Conservancy to undertake this repair and restoration work. Obviously more than this is needed. Where do you propose to find it?

Based on your comments in the Hevesi article and elsewhere and your actions to date regarding at least these three high profile projects, it would appear that you and the board are under the impression that somehow sufficient money can be found through private and non-governmental sources. The problem with this approach is that if you are wrong, these facilities will continue to deteriorate.

Based on the City’s lease with the State and the Island’s General Development Plan, it is clearly the responsibility of New York State to maintain the Island’s non-residential structures and general infrastructure. Not only does this not appear to be happening, but RIOC appears to be doing little more than crossing its corporate fingers and hoping for a windfall from afar to meet its financial obligations. What you and the agency should be doing is leaving no stone unturned, including seeking State assistance, to mitigate future costs and avoid future problems by not allowing the work needed today to go unattended.

I look forward to your prompt response to the questions posed herein and would appreciate your providing me with a list of all the capital needs you have identified on the Island. Please call me or Tony Morenzi if you have any questions regarding issues raised in this letter.

Alexander B. Grannis
Member of Assembly

copies:
RIOC Board of Directors
Joseph B. Lynch, NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal
Hon. Carolyn Maloney
Hon. Olga Mendez
Hon. Gifford Miller
Matthew Katz, RIRA

Book Club Celebrating Its 20th Year

by Mickey Karpeles Bauer

The Roosevelt Island Book Club is celebrating its 20th anniversary this month. While some residents don’t know there is such a group, its members eagerly look forward to each monthly meeting.

Original members Meredith Gandy, Carole Kleinknecht, Ann O’Grady and Barbie Swanson held the first meeting in March, 1981, at Ann O’Grady’s home. The book on that occasion was *Daniel Martin* by John Fowles.

The initial discussion set up a few rules. The frequency (once a month), the day (Thursday), the time (9:30 to 12 noon). The reason for the time was that the women all had young school-age children. They were free for these few hours to do things that were important to them – to read and to socialize. As time went by, new members joined, others moved off the Island, the children went to school full day and some

The club originally used paperbacks because they were cheaper than hard cover, but now that the Island Library is part of the New York Public Library system, reserving and borrowing books has become much easier and less expensive. Members are grateful for the inter-branch system for reserving books.

Most book clubs have leaders who guide the members through the book and ask appropriate questions. The Island club chose not to do that. Its discussions are free-flowing and everyone participates. Sometimes there are heated differences of opinion, or members laugh about humorous descriptions, or are horrified at violent happenings, or sniff at sad endings. They never hesitate to tell the person who recommended the book what they think about it, good or bad.

In recent years the new members have included older women whose children were grown and out of the house. The difference in the age spread made for a



Current members At their session Thursday morning were (seated) Naomi Pomerantz, Lorraine Lasker, Carole Kleinknecht, Susanna Lenzi, Meredith Gandy, and (on the floor), Linda Grady-Troia, Mickey Karpeles Bauer, Joan Pape. Over the years, meeting monthly, the group has read and discussed some 220 books. (The list accompanies this report on *Website NYC10044* www.nyc10044.com.)

members went into the work world. Over the years, there have been 29 members.

The host for the month makes breakfast for the group because it is held so early in the day. There are no rules about the menu – some serve juice, bagels and cheese, and coffee or tea; some serve quiches; others cook food mentioned in the book being discussed. Regional food has been a popular choice, whether the locale of the book is the South, the West, or around the world.

There has never been an effort to out-do one another in preparing breakfast. However, Susanna Lenzi has always cooked, served and decorated fascinating tables when it was her turn to host the meeting. When the book was *The Endurance*, by Caroline Alexander, about Sir Ernest Shackleton’s expedition to Antarctica, she represented the ice pack with clear glassware, clear plates, white plastic cutlery, white linen table cloth and napkins, and several groups of tiny penguins scattered across the center of the table.

The books that are selected for discussion are wide-ranging – novels, the classics, plays, poetry, biographies and short stories. The authors are from around the world.

broader discussion, and everyone learns from one another’s age perspective.

July and August are treated differently from the rest of the year. They represent a more relaxing time. One month is for vacation and the alternate month for something light or amusing to read; for refreshments, there might be a pot-luck breakfast on the Rivercross lawn.

This month’s book is *A Clearing in the Distance* by Witold Rybczynski, an informative biography of Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect who lived from 1822 to 1903 and designed Central Park (1858-1876). He also designed several college campuses and the U.S. Capitol grounds (1875).

Present members of the Book Club are Libby Duffy, Lorraine Lasker, Meredith Gandy, Susanna Lenzi, Linda Grady-Troia, Joan Pape, Mickey Karpeles Bauer, Naomi Pomerantz, and Carole Kleinknecht, its industrious recorder and historian.

Membership in the club is not open (there’s an open book discussion group at the Library), but a list of titles and authors discussed over the group’s 20 years is available by calling **593-7259**.



Progress on Central Nurses Residence

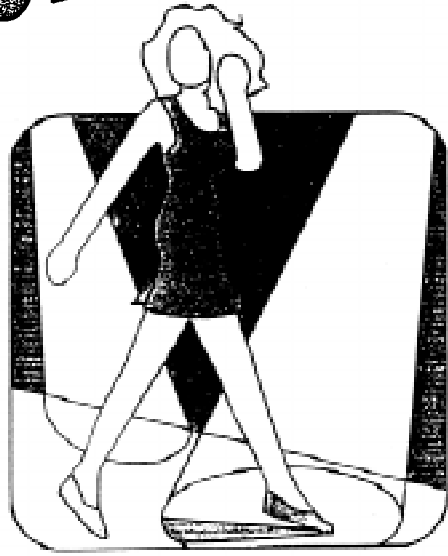
A demolition worker lowered a tool to a co-worker Tuesday during the brick-by-brick demolition of the building, preparing the way for Southtown. Built in 1936, the CNR had about 600 single rooms housing nursing school students from the Central School of Nursing, which operated out of Goldwater Hospital, and Metropolitan Hospital School of Nursing. Nursing staff also used the building. The building was closed in 1975, and has been abandoned and unused since that date. When Southtown is complete, Main Street will be extended through the present site of the building to the Tramway station.

CYO

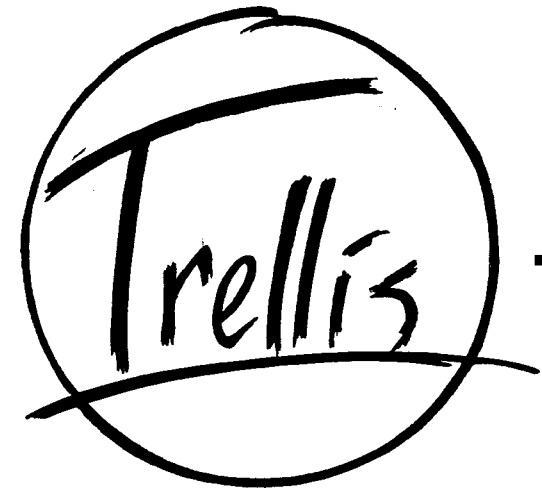
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RIOC from page 1

Mitchell Hammer, manager of the Rivercross co-op, said that he, too, was billed for a 27 percent increase.

"We received an invoice, period," he said. "We never got a cover letter, an explanation, a reason or a rationale." To pay a bill demanding "thousands of dollars more than usual" without raising questions would not be good business, he said, noting that he had received "no written explanation or backup."

Hammer said RIOC did give him an informal answer — "that costs had gone up and that they contractually are able to do this." But nearly three weeks after getting the invoice, he is still waiting for documentation.

The Rivercross manager declined to break out the co-op's dollar figures, citing the need to consult with his co-op board, but it is obvious from the RIOC financial statement that Rivercross pays the same amount for Public Safety as does Island House, its fraternal twin in terms of the Island's construction history. Because of the differing number of apartments, however, the proportional cost of Public Safety services is different: approximately \$544 per year for Rivercross residents under the new scheme; \$513 per apartment for Island House.

Officials at RIOC — some describing the pace of business at their office in recent days and nights as "hectic" and even "chaotic" — did not respond directly to questions regarding Public Safety finances. And Public Safety Director James Fry, who is more typically responsive to press inquiries than his colleagues on the west side of Main Street, also deflected questions on this issue, saying merely, "I make my needs known to RIOC, and RIOC does what it does."

But RIOC's audited financial statement for 2000 does provide at least a warning of a financial squeeze, and might have served as a tip-off of impending cost increases if the accountants on the other side of the fence had taken it at face value.

The statement for the year ended March 31, 2000, shows that the Public Safety Department, which has about 40 employees, spent \$1,746,611, an increase of \$300,000 from 1999. Payroll accounted for more than 94 percent of PSD's total expenditures in 2000, making the average compensation more than \$41,000. Meanwhile, the contributions of Belson and Rivercross were not changed in the two-year period, but the RIOC operating revenue specifically allocated to Public Safety from Manhattan Park's \$2.9 million year 2000 ground-rent payment to RIOC actually declined by about \$8,000.

According to the auditors, McGladrey & Pullen LLP, "reimbursements from four housing companies and Manhattan Park for not less than 50 percent of the cost of maintaining a public safety department are included in housing company

reimbursements" for the Island's police services. Thus, in the 2000 budget, the housing company reimbursement (from Rivercross and the three Belson buildings) is roughly half of Public Safety's expenses. And Manhattan Park chipped in \$165,298, bringing total Public Safety revenue to more than \$1 million.

But Manhattan Park's contribution is not limited to this amount. The massive infusion of ground rent from the 1,107-unit complex, which is increasing \$100,000 per year through 2007, serves to cover the deficit for Public Safety, the Tramway, and many other Island expenses.

It's impossible, without any guidance from RIOC personnel, to determine whether the Public Safety bill represents a cost-driven expense (for a new municipal union contract, for example), or is a reallocation of contributions, or is, in fact, an anomaly — a one-time monthly bump.

On one level, at least — simple arithmetic — it appears that the bill is merely an attempt to balance the books, since the increase closely matches the department's increased deficit compared with its revenue for 2000. On the other hand, if it does indicate higher Public Safety costs, it appears that the department's spending for 2001 will be \$2,159,916, an increase of more than \$400,000. And, as several officials pointed out, that amount does not include major State-donated budget items such as patrol vehicles and the cost of office rent.

But nobody is talking about the actual budget for 2001, and as RIOC's silence deepens, critics of the Public Safety Department can be counted on to question the cost-benefit understanding that underlies the concept of an independent Roosevelt Island security force, which is already under fire at Eastwood for its deployment practices regarding inside vs. outside policing.

Ron Schuppert, a Rivercross board member and former law enforcement officer who has long followed Public Safety issues, said that Public Safety has many good people who are capable of doing a very good job under proper supervision. But he contends that RIOC may have made a mistake in its latest billing maneuver by pressing the issue of the very existence of Public Safety.

"The alternative is getting rid of Public Safety and requesting the NYPD down here to patrol the streets and, if the buildings want added security, they can hire security firms like every other building in the city," he said.

Basic questions of this type motivated the RIOC directors to create a Public Safety Advisory Committee on January 25, "to consider all issues related to public safety." The committee will be chaired by RIOC board member Dr. Joan Dawson, who is the Project Director of the NYU Center for Urban Education's Equity Assistance Center.

Resident members of the RIOC board will serve on the committee, along with the RIOC President and Public Safety

Director, and representatives of the Island's housing management companies — some of the same people who have had to deal with the latest cost increase.

Board member Leo Kayser, Gov. George Pataki's chief representative on the RIOC board, said that the committee "should examine the role of the Public Safety Department now and in the future, should the Island be integrated back into the City of New York," while ensuring that "there is no reduction in the services provided to the community," according to the January 25 RIOC board minutes.

Another RIOC board member, David Kraut, who will be called upon to take part in the new committee as an Island resident, was asked to comment on the question of whether residents should view the Public Safety increases as a matter of RIOC's due diligence, or whether it could be taken as a sign of financial deterioration. Here is Kraut's response:

"As I have stated repeatedly, in public and in *The WIRE*, this RIOC administration and its predecessor are under firm instructions from Governor Pataki to 'operate, develop and manage' Roosevelt Island without any financial assistance from the State of New York. The Cuomo administration helped us out to the tune of \$6 million per year in capital expenditures, and more than \$1 million per year in operating expenditures. That money is simply no longer available to us. These are the conditions under which the current RIOC board and administration are operating.

"All recent actions and decisions, from the Octagon project to the Motorgate rate increase, can be interpreted in light of this situation, so one might possibly assume that the Public Safety increases are also of this kind, although no one has explained this to me specifically. So I am personally troubled that the State has put us in this position, but I am confident that the RIOC administration is doing the best it can under the circumstances."

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Toastmasters Helps Its Members Master Public Speaking

by Francine Lange

When Arlene Stock was scheduled to make a presentation to clients at the company she owns several years ago, she panicked. She had presented many times in the past, but they were sit-down meetings, where she was at the same level as her audience. The thought of standing in front of a group, which the upcoming meeting required, terrified her. “I was just beside myself with nerves,” she said.

Stock’s fear didn’t fit her background. After all, she had played before audiences since five years of age, as a musician during recitals. No problem. The fear came, she recalls, when she faced her audience with herself and her voice, nothing else. “I wasn’t speaking through an instrument – it was me.”

Realizing that part of her business’s success rested on how well she represented it and wanting to overcome her fear, she turned to a friend, Al Weinstein, for advice. A verbatim reporter at the United Nations and active in organizations on the Island, Weinstein spoke easily and eloquently. “He was a great public speaker,” said Stock.

Weinstein directed her to the Roosevelt Island chapter of Toastmasters International, a club that helps members improve their speaking and listening skills. Established in 1924, Toastmasters has chapters all over the world, with more than 80 located across New York’s five boroughs. Members gain and strengthen skills by giving timed speeches, both prepared and impromptu, and evaluating other speakers’ efforts.

Topics can be plucked from current events or personal passions. In the prepared talks, speakers focus on and build upon designated public-speaking skills that include tone of voice and persuasion, and use of icebreakers, props and visual aids. During a recent meeting, for example, Delia Leon de Cameo, who is from Mexico, spoke persuasively about that country’s president, Vincente Fox. Jim Tendean-Luce used props – a photo album and a notebook of information



Francine Lange
Delia Leon de Cameo steps away from the lectern to draw closer to her audience as she speaks about Mexico’s president, Vincente Fox.

– to enhance his description of the overseas orphanages his organization, Orphans International, is planning to build.

In the impromptu speeches, a “Table Topics host” calls on randomly-selected members to respond to questions about a certain subject within a short timeframe. “Toastmasters teaches you to think on your feet,” said member Malcolm Cohen.

Soon after she joined, Stock gave her first speech, an ice-breaker. “It was as hard as anything I’ve ever done in my life.” But she got through it, and the next speech, and the one after that. The following year she entered an area-wide Toastmaster competition and won the top prize for an impromptu speech. “That gave me confidence,” she said. Her transformation to poised presenter has helped her welcome rather than dread speaking challenges. “I don’t have a problem anymore,” she says. “If I do, I know how to deal with it.”

Members agree that the supportive, nonjudgmental atmosphere at the meetings goes a long way toward encouraging peoples’ efforts. Bernie Silverman, who has been with the Island chapter from its 1978 beginning, said the club has delivered other benefits. People have met and become friends, some even falling in love and marrying. He said he believes that better communications can make better people. Not only can people learn to speak, they can learn to be better parents, spouses and friends. “What’s so great about it is you’re surrounded by your peers, by people who basically love you,” he said.

Luca Gatto, the club’s current president, feels that because members are also part of the community – neighbors – the club has a more congenial flavor than corporation-sponsored clubs. Doris Chernik, another long-time member, agrees. She adds that the three-day seminars on public speaking that some companies offer for their employees can’t compare with a club that allows members to practice their speaking

on a regular basis. “They’re very good,” she said, “but then they leave you.”

Gatto, who is from Sicily, said that the Island club had another feature – its international representation, with as many as 12 countries represented among the club’s 22 active members. Countries include Algeria, Angola, Canada, East Africa, Holland, Mexico and Switzerland. Gatto says that, besides nurturing his passion for public speaking, he joined the club for additional reasons: to meet people on the Island and to improve his language skills. “At the time, my English was not as good as it is now,” he says.

In addition to the speaking, the timing of the speeches as well as evaluating speakers are important components in the club. Stock says that some situations require time limits, and the timed speeches help members stay within those limits. “It’s very unprofessional not to honor other peoples’ time,” she said. After speeches, designated evaluators comment on presenters’ skills, and offer suggestions for improvement. Evaluators (who are also timed) must listen carefully to what people are saying so they can provide fair and helpful feedback.

Chernik has witnessed members’ development over the years. “You grow from it,” she says.

The Island club meets every second and fourth Mondays. Membership dues are \$100 a year. “For what the club delivers, it’s a very good value,” says Gatto. Anyone who is at least 18 years old and interested in joining or in finding out more about the club may call him at **583-0842** or send him an e-mail at lgatto@nyc.rr.com. Toastmasters International



Francine Lange
Club members listen to another member speak. From left are François Campeau (looking at notepad), Jim Tendean-Luce, Doris Chernik and Luca Gatto.

also has a website, www.toastmasters.org. The Island chapter’s site will be up and running soon, at www.geocities.com/toastmasters10044/index.htm.

Island’s Tennis Season Is Due to Start in April

The 2001 tennis season is scheduled to get under way April 1 on the six outdoor hard courts adjacent to Octagon Park. At deadline, however, RIOC had not announced a fee structure for court use. The courts are open to permit holders year-round.

In addition, the Roosevelt Island Tennis Association (RITA) offers programs ranging from purely social to fairly competitive, and welcomes tennis players of all abilities.

To use the courts, players must get an annual permit from the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), using an application packet that was scheduled to be available in April during business hours at the RIOC office, 591 Main Street, or 24 hours a day at Public Safety, 552 Main Street. If past custom is followed, applications can be mailed, allowing about a week for processing, or permits can be obtained on a while-you-wait basis at the RIOC office 5:00-8:00 any Wednesday evening in April. (Applicants are advised to check with RIOC, at **832-4540**, to make sure materials are available.) A recent photo is required.

RITA, a not-for-profit community tennis association, organizes a number of tennis events throughout the season. At \$20, membership provides access to a series of clinics, group lessons, tournaments, Saturday round-robin doubles play, holiday picnics, and other events. Members can also play on the famous “ladder,” now in its 21st year. Under the ladder system, players challenge others just above or just below them on the ladder ranking, and move up or down according to reported wins and losses. Past seasons have culminated in a ladder championship series.

Applications for RITA membership will be provided in the application packet for RIOC’s tennis permit, but RITA membership is not required to obtain a RIOC permit to use the courts. For questions about RITA membership or tennis on Roosevelt Island, call Michael Kolba at **980-3811**, or e-mail either Jan.buennen@db.com or mkolba@aol.com.

Fees for court use last year were \$90 for a resident individual, \$55 for seniors 62 and over, \$40 for juniors 16 or younger, \$160 for a family of two adults, \$200 for a family of three or more adults and/or children in the same household, and \$5 for Island guests.

Fees for off-Islanders ranged from \$10 for a guest to \$300 for a family membership covering three or more adults and/or children, with individual permits priced at \$150.

Isley from page 1

York and Department of Housing and Urban Development are complied with in terms of new applications and current residents. “Doryne is totally devoted to bringing the best possible services to her residents,” says Marilyn Engstler, the Director of Community Affairs, who works closely with Isley. “She addresses every issue and complaint brought to her attention.”

Another associate, Facilities Manager Thelma McIntosh, says she and Isley are like Thelma and Louise in that they approach problems from different angles. “When we approach quality-of-life issues, we tackle them very differently, but Doryne keeps the lines of communication open. If I take something up on its technical aspect, she polishes the public relations aspect. Doryne has the ability to take a grain of salt and make it into a mountain. She is innovative, extremely organized and very detailed,” McIntosh says.

Soon after she started working on the Island, Doryne initiated Roosevelt Island Day, modeled on a similar program in Mount Vernon. Isley thought it would be a good idea if everyone banded together to spruce up the Island and was surprised at the enthusiasm shown by residents. She then brought in the Jazzmobile, which visits every year in July. “We wanted to have one event every month in the summer to entertain the Islanders,” says Isley.

Among other projects initiated by her are the Youth Memorial Fountain, featuring a little garden and a small fountain with plaques bearing names of Island youth who passed away before their time.

The desire to get to know the residents of the buildings she manages has led Doryne to hold floor meetings in Island House and Westview recently. Eastwood meetings are scheduled for April. “Normally I don’t get to meet the population I serve unless they have a problem. I see them at their worst, when we have thoroughly dissatisfied them in some way, shape, form or fashion.”

Her petite frame all set to take on new challenges, Doryne asserts that she is a motivator who prefers to have things done her way. “I am not bull-headed about it and I would be the first to say that it doesn’t work, so I think I am fair. When it comes to my staff, I have been in this business for a lot longer than many are old.”



At the Seniors Fashion Show in November, Isley received a thank-you gift from grateful seniors, presented by the event’s co-host, Deputy Director of Public Safety Rene Bryant.

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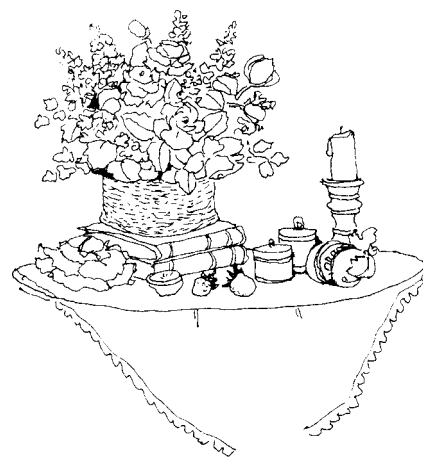
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Four in Running Partners Program Complete 5K Race

Early Sunday morning, March 4, as the city prepared for the blizzard-that-failed-to-show, Riad Vetter, Philip Santos, Emilio Estevez, and Nicole Neal were seen huddled on a breezy street corner at 168th St on the West Side pinning on race numbers, tying computer timing chips to their shoelaces, and stretching their limbs in preparation for the start of Coogan’s Salsa Blues & Shamrocks 5 km race, sponsored by the New York Road Runners Club.

These middle-schoolers are members of the 20-strong Running Partners Team on Roosevelt Island, and they were about to participate in their first-ever road race, up Ft. Washington Avenue to the Cloisters and back.

The results couldn’t have been better: Riad finished in 28:07 with Philip just two seconds behind, earning them third and fourth places among the 33 students from other Running Partners Teams around the City. (See www.nyrrc.org for complete results.)

All Team participants received free registration, T-shirts, and food and drink, just as if they were regular members of the New York Road Runners Club. Even better, our runners were paired up with Race Buddies, adult volunteers who ran with and coached them throughout the race.

The race schedule for the remainder of the Spring includes three Road Races in Central Park and 6 Track Meets at venues around the City. First up is the Running Partners Friendly Invitational, a track meet to be held in Central Park on Friday, April 6 at 4:30 p.m.

Parents of middle-schoolers may contact Ms. Kaye Kerr at the school for more information on how their children can become a part of this program.

BRD from page 1

placement reserve account over two years – an amount equal to about 10 percent of the complex’s current total rent.

“I think we could have gotten some points across better face to face, but the facts are pretty much what they are – this is a gross overfunding of the reserve fund,” said Leon Lowder, a Westview resident and accountant who worked on the Task Force.

But earlier this month, Miller lowered the boom, telling the task force it had to abide by a March 12 deadline to submit its final comments. “This does not change our position or cooperation for any meeting scheduled with DHCR’s technical staff,” Miller told Pail in a letter.

The Westview team, which thought it had until the end of the month, accused Elliot Ashrey, the DHCR Assistant Director, of breaking the promise he made at the rent hearing. But the Task Force quickly put together its final documents and delivered them to the DHCR office in downtown Manhattan, protesting, however, that “We were not given the opportunity to address the core issues.”

One week later, the orders were ready. Otis Jones, Deputy Commissioner, said the division followed its standard procedure in determining rents for Mitchell-Lama middle-income housing: After taking into account the information presented by the company, tenants, and its own accounting staff, and reviewing comments from the hearings, a DHCR management committee met “to make sure it’s all done according to statute, and to come up with a final number.”

The decision is submitted to Commissioner Joseph Lynch for his approval, and Jones signs the final order. The agency does not disclose its decision until tenants are notified.

Jones said the agency had factored the rising cost of energy into its calculations, but did not accept the company’s last-minute request for a budget addition based on the rising cost of Public Safety services on Roosevelt Island. As for the Westview complaint that its engineers were stymied at the hearing, Jones – who was not present at the February 8 conference – noted that DHCR officials “try to officiate the meeting in an orderly fashion. If we feel they’re trying to filibuster, we try to prevent that.”

The State’s role in Mitchell-Lama proceedings is to protect the interests of the tenants, but Jones’ comments reinforced the impression of some first-time participants in the process, especially those representing Westview, that the tenants and DHCR were proceeding along parallel tracks – if not operating in parallel universes.

Even the simple contention, for example, that “Our current rents are probably the highest in the NYS Mitchell-Lama program,” as Pail stated in his final letter, is a matter of some nuance. Jones said that, yes, Westview and Island House pay the highest rents of State, or Urban Development Corporation-funded Mitchell-Lama projects, but that doesn’t necessarily mean the Roosevelt Islanders are paying the highest Mitchell-Lama rents. There are dozens of other such middle-income properties, many in Manhattan, that come under the City’s jurisdiction.

Jones said the capital costs associated with a reserve account are budgeted according to a ten-year physical condition survey. But the accountants and engineers who worked for Westview looked at that survey, done in 1994, and found it irrelevant. They wanted something that apparently does not exist: detailed, up-to-date State or housing company information on repairs and improvements.

As Lowder commented: “Basically, if you’re asking for that much you have to justify it. But then you see this hilarious documentation. I think your waiter could give you a better projection of expenses.” He was alluding to the company’s estimate for a major facade repair project, costing perhaps \$300,000, that he said was “scribbled down on one piece of paper.”

In retrospect, the Westview group, which tried to tackle all the facts and figures head-on, may have collided with a process that operates according to a less-literal set of rules. Jeff Resnick, the accountant for both the Island House and Westview task forces, alluded to the “rituals” of the Budget Rent Determination in a meeting with the Island House Task Force before the February conferences, suggesting that the outcome would be determined more by the skills of the bazaar than by those of accountancy. And Ashrey himself reminded the tenants on February 8 that DHCR had to be attuned to market conditions, not just revenue-expense analysis, in adjusting rents.

Audrey Berman, President of the Island House Task Force, has said she has grown more accustomed to this process through several rounds of rent negotiations. Island House’s focus has been to seek greater financial accountability in the housing company’s use of outside contractors, and to insist on “more competent human resources in the building” – goals she said the group has been achieving largely through its direct dealings with management. She also said the tenants themselves were instrumental in securing help with energy conservation.

But Island House, too, is chafing at what it considers to be a lack of relevant data. Berman noted that the tenants’ financial expert, Tim Johns, had submitted a letter to the DHCR complaining that it was proceeding with a rent increase for the next two years without having obtained audited figures for 2000. “How do you figure a rent increase when you haven’t audited the books?” Berman asked. Johns himself, like Resnick, used the term “ritualistic” when referring to the overall process.

When the orders come out from the DHCR, residents of both apartment buildings will be able to judge for themselves how effective they have been in defending the Island’s middle-income rents. But for some tenants who decided to take the plunge and get involved in this year’s proceedings, the stress of dealing with the State and housing company’s bureaucracy is already taking its toll.

Lowder, for example, who has lived on Roosevelt Island for less than two years, is thinking of bailing out, partly because of the uncertainty of the rent. After spending countless hours of his free time camped out in real estate offices, struggling to find documents and crunching numbers of uncertain origin, he said that the idea of trying to qualify for a co-op mortgage for some other part of town is starting to look mighty appealing.

SPORTSWIRE



Wayne Neal and Marcus Harrison contest the jump ball to start the overtime period in the March 9 match between the Mavericks and Da Kingz.

Vicki Feinmel



The Champion Mavericks (left to right): James Williams, Rakeem Cummings, Marcus Harrison, Robert Tavares, Cyriel Dikourme, Kendrick Gibson, Jonathan Tavares, Charles McCoy, and Coach Steve Marcus.

Vicki Feinmel

BASKETBALL There were no upsets this year in the Roosevelt Island Youth Program’s Basketball Championship Tournament as the Mavericks in the Senior Division and the NY Heat in the Junior Division, the first-place teams in the regular season, continued their success and captured the championship in games played on March 9 and 10.

In the **Senior Division** championship game, the Mavericks defeated Da Kingz in overtime 97-92 in a game that was truly worthy of any “Final Four” tournament. In what will be remembered as one of the finest basketball games ever played in an Island Youth Program tournament, two evenly-matched teams played an exciting game marked by great individual efforts from Charles McCoy (56 points) and Kendrick Gibson (19 points) of the Mavericks and Alex Sheppard (41 points) and Wayne Neal (31 points) of Da Kingz, as well as solid team play by both teams. The game opened with Da Kingz grabbing an early 14-3 lead behind 8 points by Alex Sheppard and 6 points by Wayne Neal; however, Kendrick Gibson and Charles McCoy each hit two three-point baskets in a run by the Mavericks that tied the score at 26-all midway through the first half. For the rest of the first half, neither team led by more than 4 points and Da Kingz had the halftime lead 48-46. For the first ten minutes of the second half, the teams kept trading the lead with no team ahead by more than three points. Then the Mavericks, behind by two three-point baskets by Jonathan Tavares and two rebound baskets by Marcus Harrison, opened a seven-point lead. However, during the last five minutes of the second half, Da Kingz wrested the lead back as Mark Comrie, Herman Kouadio and Jay Colon each hit big shots for Da Kingz. As the game reached the final seconds, Da Kingz had the lead by three points and the Mavericks had the ball; and in the defining moment of the game, Kendrick Gibson hit a three-point shot from the corner to tie the game at 88-88 and send it into overtime. In the overtime, the shots would no longer fall for Da Kingz, and they were outscored by the Mavericks 9-4.

Members of the champion Mavericks were Alhassan Camara, Rakeem Cummings, Cyriel Dikourme, Kendrick Gibson, Marcus Harrison, Charles McCoy, Jonathan Tavares, Robert Tavares, and James Williams, and the team was coached by Steve Marcus.

In the **Junior Division** championship game, the NY Heat completed a magical, undefeated season by knocking off the Terminators 60-53. For most of the first half, it looked as though this was going to be the day that the NY Heat lost, as the Terminators controlled the play in the first half and led 23-19 at halftime. However, the NY Heat coaches woke up their team at halftime and the NY Heat began the second half with greater defensive intensity, which led to an increased number of Terminator turnovers and some easy fast-break baskets. By midway through the second half, the NY Heat had opened a 43-31 lead, the largest of the game. The Terminators, however, refused to quit and fought back to cut the deficit to 43-40, but that was as close as they got in the second half. Down the stretch, Tyrell Anderson, showing great agility for a big man, finished off two fast breaks on assists from Sika Franco to seal the win. Paul Brown was the leading scorer for the NY Heat with 22 points, while Sika Franco (16 points) and Fode Bah (6 points) were the big men off the boards, and Fabian Williams (6 points) ran the offense from the point guard position. For the Terminators, Lamar Burrows and Deshawn Pearson, the leading scorers for the Terminators during the regular season, each finished with 14 points, while Keith Summers (14 points) and Pedro Valerio (12 points) were dominating under the boards.

The players on the undefeated NY Heat were Dax Armenakis, Remy Armenakis, Alpha Bah, Eric Miranda, Tyrell Anderson, Fode Bah, Paul Brown, Sika Franco, and Fabian Williams, and the team was coached by Jim Armenakis and Sterling Thomas.

BASEBALL Opening day is April 7.



Da Kingz (left to right): Wayne Neal, Mark Comrie, Mike Formanek, Coach Frank James, Jay Colon, Carlos Nevarez, Herman Kouadio, Alex Sheppard.

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Nine in Running Partners Complete Four Mile Race

The four-mile “middle loop” in Central Park was dry and fast on St. Patrick’s Day as nine members of Roosevelt Island’s Running Partners Team competed in the Spring Fling, a regularly-scheduled race of the New York Road Runners Club.

Once again the pace was set by Riad Vetter (13) and Philip Santos (11) who streaked across the finish line ahead of their Race Buddy who struggled to keep up! They finished fourth and fifth in the Running Partner Team group for males. They were followed by Bianca Long (13) who put in a very strong showing in her first four-mile race to take a fifth place in the female category. Close behind were Emilio Estevez (11) and Jared Jones (11) who finished within ten seconds of one another. Then came Stephanie Negron (11), our smallest big runner, who showed fierce determination in pounding out the four miles. Making a strong fashion statement and good racing spirit was Tiffany Raspberry, also in her first race. Nicole Neal (13) was shepherded to the finish line by Kaye Kerr, and Sean Suarez fought off aching quads, but never stopped until his computer chip clocked his time and he had the green race T-shirt in his hands. Complete results can be found at www.nyrrc.org.

Four-mile patches were awarded at Monday’s practice to Riad, Philip, Jared, Stephanie, and Sean for completing the four miles without walking once.

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Ed Logue’s Roosevelt Island – Success and Failure

Richard Kahan



Program host **Richard Kahan**, former head of the State Urban Development Corporation (UDC), is President of the Urban Assembly, an international not-for-profit organization dedicated to making cities more livable by fostering growth that is socially responsible, ecologically sustainable, politically participatory, and economically productive. He is a winner of the Thomas Jefferson Award from the American Institute of Architects.

It’s About Values

No person has ever or will ever affect my career or my values or what I’ve done in this world more than Ed Logue did. And the reason for that is that he taught all of those of us who were privileged to work with him that urban development was about lots more than bricks and mortar. It’s about values. There is nothing neutral about urban development, about zoning, about designing projects. Everything is weighted with values, and Ed had a very strong, distinct set of values which he conveyed with tremendous power and enthusiasm. One of them, for example, is affirmative action. If he saw me introducing an all-white male panel, there would be hell to pay. But that’s nobody’s fault.

Roosevelt Island played a very important role in that set of values. Ed thought it mattered tremendously what the project was designed like, what the open spaces were like, what the public environment was like. He brought a new standard and a new way of thinking about large-scale development. If you think back to those days, the paradigm then was Coop City, Lefrak City, Trump Village... Nobody had thought to infuse public development with that kind of quality and architectural distinction.

There were other values. The affirmative action – I made light of it, but there was no question that Ed brought the issue of affirmative action to the forefront in a way nobody ever else had in government, that I knew of, and set a standard for a long period of time. Economic equity, economic integration, racial integration – no UDC project moved to the drawing board without that being the program. The architectural program came second.

The Great Experiment

Now, Roosevelt Island is particularly important in this context because it was one of the, if not *the*, centerpiece of his work, and it was a huge social and economic experiment. It’s fair to say that as an economic experiment it failed. It failed because, for a variety of reasons, it was unable to pay its own way to carry the debt service on its infrastructure, and in that sense it wasn’t replicable. Was it worth trying? Absolutely. Was it successful socially? In my opinion, absolutely. This was a time when the middle class was leaving New York in droves. Ed believed that, if you provide a safe environment with high-quality design, wonderful open spaces and good, small schools, people of all income groups would, in fact, stay in New York City. Now, if today, we were to say, “Let’s provide safe neighborhoods, good small schools, and wonderfully designed neighborhoods,” I think we would all agree that people will stay in those kinds of neighborhoods.

I went to Roosevelt Island a few springs ago – I haven’t been there very much in the last 15 years – and people were just beginning to plant their gardens. And... everybody has little plots and they lean over the fences and talk to each other, and I saw black people, and white people, and Caribbean people, leaning over and arguing about whose tulip bulbs were going to be better this year. Then I walked across the street and I saw a soccer game with probably ten different ethnic origins on the field, and I thought to myself, “How many places in New York, which is a phenomenally racially-segregated city, can one see those kinds of everyday experiences working?” And that’s the wonder of Roosevelt Island.

I guess that’s what this discussion will be about, that that spirit and that philosophy carry on in whatever is done in the future on Roosevelt Island. There are certainly those who are arguing that that’s not about to be the case, and those who argue that it is, but I will tell you that Ed’s power reaches beyond the grave, what he was, at least what his attitude was not so long ago when he wrote a letter to Brendan Sexton, who was then President of the Municipal Art Society:

Dear Brendan,
Once the Municipal Art Society was in love with Roosevelt Island. I hope you or some committee can re-activate your interest. Roosevelt Island is under some real threat.

My very best wishes.
Ed Logue

On March 7, The Municipal Art Society (MAS) held a panel discussion on Roosevelt Island and Ed Logue, who was responsible for the Island’s creation as a residential community. The text of this special section is drawn from remarks of the participants at that event. The unabridged text of the discussion is available on *Website NYC10044* www.nyc10044.com. An exhibit on the accomplishments of the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) under Logue, sponsored by MAS and the Architectural League, continues at MAS, 457 Madison Avenue (between 50th and 51st Streets), until April 14 (11:00-5:00 daily except Thursdays and Sundays).

Thomas Mellins



Moderator **Thomas Mellins** is an architectural historian, co-author of three books on New York City, including *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars*; *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial*; and *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism*. In addition to being widely published, he has worked on numerous architectural exhibitions and has lectured in this country and abroad on art and architecture.

Historical Perspective

In 1966, during an age of great government activism, Mayor John Lindsay announced that government would directly plan for the future of what had previously been known as Welfare Island. In 1968 he appointed a 22-member Welfare Island Planning and Development Committee, chaired by Benno Schmidt. The following year the committee released a 141-page report which soon served as the basis for a master plan by Philip Johnson and John Burgee... That master plan was first shown to the public as a Metropolitan



Museum of Art exhibition entitled “The Island Nobody Knows.” The project was subsequently fleshed out by a team of architects hired by the UDC. A first phase of development was begun in 1971. Work on that phase was substantially complete by 1974 and the first tenants moved in the next year. Since that time there has been further development on the Island, and amendments have been made to the Master Plan. As we have seen and heard tonight, there are apparently several proposals on the board that may radically change the Island.

The Island, which in the 1970’s was known as “the new town in town” was without question the UDC’s most-publicized project, and it encapsulated a broad swath of the organization’s lofty ambitions. First and foremost, the UDC plans for the Island sought to marry together first-rate architecture and urban planning with high social ideals, particularly the realization of a paradigmatic, mixed-income community.

Questions for the Future

In light of dramatic shifts in the nation’s political and economic climate, I am asking the panelists tonight to address how relevant and how sustainable is Ed Logue’s vision today, and [ask], “Where do we go from here?” [and] “Is Ed Logue’s vision sustainable – how relevant is it?” I would ask you, “What’s your wish list for the Island – what would you say are the priorities there?”

Alexander Garvin



Alexander Garvin is currently a commissioner on the New York City Planning Commission, and is also the Director of Planning for NYC2012, New York City’s bid for the 2012 Olympics. Mr. Garvin is the author of the award-winning *The American City: What Works, What Doesn’t*, and a principal author of *Urban Parks and Open Space*. In October 1995, he coordinated “Roosevelt Island in Future Focus,” a day-long workshop on the future of Roosevelt Island.

I always had strong feelings about Ed Logue. He’s that kind of person. He’s the kind of person who made things happen. There are very few people in government whose whole psyche is about getting things to happen. But if you’re trying to get things to happen, you have successes and failures, and my view is that Ed Logue always had successes and failures.

Successes

There are clearly things that Ed Logue tried to do at Roosevelt Island that were successful: Income mix, access for the disabled, a remarkable accessibility... Trouble was, the subway opened 13 years late, so there had to be a Tram, and I still remember working at the Planning Commission and saying, “A Tram? We should invest \$2.4 million to build a Tram so that they can market apartments?”

It is a largely automobile-free Island. But not 100% automobile-free. It never could be. Nevertheless, as an experiment in a less automobile-intensive environment, it was a success.

I would say its major success was in demonstrating that you could provide public services outside the City of New York and its bureaucracy very successfully. Of course, it took more than a million dollars annually from the State of New York in subsidies because the Island was never finished, and that’s very significant. Had the Island been finished, I believe you could have covered the cost of a lot of these services. Maybe not the debt service on the infrastructure... but I think it would have been possible. The trouble was that housing was not marketable without subsidies later on.

Failures

I’d like to talk a little bit about the failures, of which I think there are many. The first is, they didn’t implement the original plan. Philip Johnson planned a town center on top of the subway.

The original plan that Johnson prepared, which had the town center... [at the subway station]. Nobody imagined the Tram at that point, and what he had [at the subway station] was in fact an air-conditioned shopping mall... You came out in the middle of an air-conditioned shopping mall. I don’t really care whether you took the architectural form that he proposed or

not, but I do believe that if you’re going to have viable retail it’s... going to be based at the subway. That’s one of the reasons I think one should be thinking in terms of the next stage, using the fact that there’s a Tram and it was never

Website NYC10044 www.nyc10044.com



thought it was going to be there forever.

The Island developed and you can’t start from scratch anymore.

Without 5,000 units of housing there you do not have enough to support anything. But more than that, there’s no other reason to be on the Island except to live there. This is a residential enclave. It is not part of New York. And to that degree I think it is a problem, because it cannot be replicated and it had no spillover into the rest of the communities of New York.

In order to be successful you need a critical mass. When it opened in 1975-76 they had 2,100 units; they now have 3,200 units. That’s not enough to support active retail. It never was, never could be. And 5,000 would work, if there were not two towns, a Southtown and a Northtown. Once you’ve got a Southtown and a Northtown you do not have enough customers in any one of the two of them to support the kind of life it would have been over the subway, and it would have made sense, had the original plan been implemented.

I believe that creating a plan – and Johnson is as responsible for this as the later planners were – with five parks misses the point. You want all of the density in one critical mass that could support a pedestrian environment. You can’t do that; it’s too spread out, there’s too much open space in the way of parks in between.

The minischools did not work. We now have a single school there. I don’t know, if Ed Logue had been around to continue the experiment, whether they would have or would not have worked.

Not Part of NYC

But my main problem with Roosevelt Island is that it’s not part of New York. It is an Island that the people who live there know very well but the rest of New York goes to very rarely. Had there been a source of employment there, a... some other reason to be there besides living there, I think you might have had a very different kind of environment. Had the plan actually been executed with a high-density core at the subway, I think things would have been very different.

I wish to get on with the job of finishing it. But I would say it’s very important to understand this is 2001 and not 1968. The United States is a different place. The needs of the people who are there are different from [the original plan].

You need a governance there in which the people who live there have something to say about its future.

I also would like to have not just citizen involvement, but I really believe that you’ve got to bring [in] people who know about planned communities... We have been building them. There are hundreds of them in construction all over the country, some of them good, some of them bad, some of them very famous, some of them not; there’s a body of experience out there and I think that bringing together some of these people, and some interesting architects, with the residents, would help us to proceed in the spirit of Ed Logue. [But] I don’t think that we should slavishly follow the plan that’s there now.

Leadership

Public partnerships, public agencies, only work when the people running them have whatever it [takes] to make things happen. Ed Logue had that. What we are missing at the moment is the leadership in public agencies as a whole that will break through the logjam. I believe that, if enough pressure comes to bear, that will happen on Roosevelt Island, but you need an individual, whether that’s someone from the community, someone who is elected, someone who is appointed by the Governor to run RIOC, it really doesn’t matter. But you need that individual or else it will continue to spin.

Perhaps if we could subsidize the creation of the FDR Memorial... The completion of the Island, I think, has to be an ongoing thing, and in the year 2050 there should be another meeting like this that questions what was done during the last 50 years to make the place better, because I don’t think we should stop just because 5,000 units happened or we got the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele on top of the subway. I think there are a lot of things that could be. Some of them we haven’t thought of yet, and I hope the Island grows and changes many times more...

Deterioration

I think that the Main Street looks like deteriorated East Berlin. I think the concrete columns are totally out of place, don’t belong there, the plastic windbreaks, the generic store signs, all of these things represent design failures. And I believe that they were inherent from the very beginning. That’s one of the reasons that I said I think we have to engage the community that knows about all of this already, from the very beginning in the replanning of it.

A pre-residential Roosevelt Island In this photo from about 1970, the north portion of pre-development Roosevelt Island as seen from the air. The pillars just south of the Welfare Island Bridge support the ramp that now descends to Island level. Coler Hospital can be seen at the north end with other buildings that have since been demolished. The Octagon tower can be picked out just south of Coler. The light-colored tower visible just left of and behind the bridge tower is a Fire Department training tower.

Photo courtesy Empire State Development Corporation via the Municipal Art Society

Paul Byard



Paul Byard is a principal in the New York-based architecture firm of Platt Byard Dovell and the Director of the Historic Preservation Program at the Columbia University School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. As the Associate Counsel to the New York State Urban Development Corporation from 1969 to 1974, he was a key participant in the development of Roosevelt Island with Ed Logue.

What struck me, as a question to ask, is whether this is all history in which, therefore, there are some lessons we could draw from it, or whether it was still a set of live possibilities; and whether we could talk about it as a sense of what we ought to be doing, or whether we ought to think of it as an interesting time when people actually tried to do something. But of course we all learned after that you couldn’t do anything, so forget it, and go on living the way we do now.

National Failures

I think the failures of Roosevelt Island are definitely national failures, not failures of the scheme. And I note in Alex’s comment on things like density, if you look at the map that was part of the lease, of course the density was right where Alex said it was. So the point is not what was going to be built but what actually got built.

There were no inherent failures. [The failures] had to do with things like energy policies. We were paid, I think it was, \$2000 a unit [to] put in electric heat. That was because Ravenswood had nothing to do in the winter. It would provide lots of nice electric heat and we could save a bundle of money off the actual mortgage costs, which were the problem.

I’m very glad Alex says that if you had the full 5,000 units it would have worked. It certainly looked as if it was going to work, and that would have included the debt service on the infrastructure. There were a lot of things you had to do. Yes, you had to keep on having the subsidies, but at that time we expected to have subsidies. It never occurred to us that the United States would entirely give up trying to do anything for the poor. That was something that I dearly, dearly remember Ed saying from his service in Calcutta. Of course we all laughed together in 1969 and 1970 at the idea of people sleeping in the street. That happened in Calcutta. It would never happen in New York. Well, of course, it did

happen with a bang in New York when we decided – when the nation decided – that we really wouldn’t take care of the poor and the indigent and the people who couldn’t take care of themselves.

So the 5,000 units would have come with the proper subsidy that we all expected. [But] when Nixon ended the subsidy program, of course, we all went out of business, and that was the beginning of the end for Roosevelt Island and for everybody else.

I think it’s important to remember that Roosevelt Island was the product not just of a single interest in doing good, doing the public good on a very complicated and high level of the notion of the public good. We thought we were going to deliver something and we certainly did try.

Whatever happens surely has to reflect the needs of the larger politic of the time. Daily life is different now and it’s important to remember what it is. Architecture’s got to be important...

Minischools

The school was made a nuisance for really good reason. It was supposed to be a horrible thing to administer, and the point was that, if you had a thing that was difficult enough and you built it difficult, you would make people have to run the school differently.

The Lease and GDP

[The relationship between the City and State under which the State is developing Roosevelt Island is] basically a leasehold, and if you do something wrong you’ve violated the lease. Then the question is, what happens? The other side’s got to enforce it. It’s an ordinary private set of relationships between two governmental agencies, with a subsidiary to help out with it. You don’t go straight to jail. Somebody has to want to have it come out one way or the other. Well, what the General Development Plan was *supposed* to do, and the choice of the word [“general”] was very careful, was not... there was a thing that was regarded as the master plan, but this thing was called the General Development Plan, as a way to give a kind of very general set of directions that would endure, and it’s interesting to see that they seem to have, somewhat. The object of the exercise was to get an envelope and a shape and commitments to parks and commitments to open space. But the remedies are remedies of a private transaction between two governments.

Today’s Plans

The envelope I’ve seen at least of what’s been proposed seems quotidian for architecture today. I hope we can do a little better, because we certainly wanted to, and I think we did produce some interesting stuff along the way.

Tramway

[We] bought [the Tramway] on a letter to von Roll. It’s the world’s most inefficient Tramway because it lifts you up at both ends. It was not very expensive, and it was not necessarily supposed to last, because after all the subway was supposed to come. But it came in a box, essentially, from Switzerland.



Matthew Katz



Matthew Katz is President of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA). Prior to being elected to this position in December 2000, he served as a member of the RIRA Common Council beginning in 1997, and has served on several of the Association's committees, including Housing and Government Relations, and as Treasurer of the Legal Action Fund. He has been a Roosevelt Island resident since 1989.

In the [exhibit] brochure which some of you may have seen, there’s a quote that says, “Logue’s solutions were often the best in terms of architecture and planning and people’s real lives,” and that struck a note with me. I think that’s true. I think Mr. Logue and his group at UDC built a construct, a Roosevelt Island.

Community

But I would also point out that he did not build a community and, were he here today, I think he would agree with that. The idea that this would be a community was a risk, and 25 years ago people took that risk and they built the community. They built playing fields, and they built an Historical Society to take note of the 250 years of history out on that Island. They built Garden Clubs, moving tons of topsoil themselves... They built a library from scratch, now part of the New York City Public Library. They built a Theatre and Dance Alliance...

This was done by people who moved out there, who took chances, and made this what it is today. From the sociological point of view, you must say that it’s a success.

I think if there’s anything that brought people out there, that made it worthwhile to take these chances, it was the physical conditions that they found there. It was the parkland and open space that makes Roosevelt Island a unique community in the middle of New York. If you were dropped down there blindfolded you would say you were in some small town in upstate New York or in some village in the middle of the country, not in the middle of the Big Apple. It is a unique environment.

I grew up in Brooklyn, I’ve lived in Queens, I lived for 14 years on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. If I knew my neighbors, it was to inquire about the weather in the elevator. It’s impossible to walk down Main Street, our one street on Roosevelt Island, without getting into a half-a-dozen arguments and discussions with people about the issues of the

day. This is not the kind of interaction in a community you expect to find in the middle of New York City. This is another thing that makes the Island unique. But what brought so many of us out there are the parks and the tennis courts and the swimming pools and the playing fields, fields that were built by the sweat equity of the people who live there, and this, I think, is very important.

RIOC

Ideas come to the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, they are considered, perhaps for years at a time; they are either implemented or they are dropped. Case in point: the minischools. People have been looking for a use for [the minischools] ever since they were abandoned. For the past two years, RIOC has been considering the plan of one developer. For two years now, this plan has been in front of RIOC. For two years the Island has said that they oppose the idea virtually unanimously. A blue-ribbon commission of Island residents [the Capital Planning and Development Committee] was put together to advise RIOC on this particular plan. They voted unanimously against it... and yet the RIOC Board voted for it unanimously.

Now, just recently, within the last month, after two years of looking into this, this idea has been dropped, and now the process must start again from scratch with a new RFP. There’s no opportunity to look at the Island as a whole, and I think this is a terrible detriment to the inspiration of Ed Logue.

Local Democracy

[The exhibit brochure says] “Because of Logue’s work, New York and other cities could continue to regard themselves as engines of democracy.” If there’s anything that Roosevelt Island is failing in right now, it is democracy. It may have been that at the beginning of the community and, certainly when RIOC was developed in 1984, the idea of a community that was controlled by some entity seemed to make sense, since this was a brand-new community. RIOC, after all, is a public-benefit corporation, and should be working in the public’s benefit.

This community, though, has been on Roosevelt Island for 25 years now. We have no local government. It is a level of government that has simply been denied us. We have Federal government, we have State government... end of story. The State determines who sits on the RIOC Board, who is the President of RIOC. The Island community has no impact on the operation of the Island or the development of the Island. When do we get enfranchised? ... These are basic, fundamental questions of American democracy that need to be resolved on Roosevelt Island.

There is a group on Roosevelt Island [the Maple Tree Group] that has been working for three years now to revise the 1984 legislation to provide for an elected Board which would then be empowered to hire a trained, professional, experienced community manager to run Roosevelt Island. We think this is an idea whose time has come. We think the current RIOC is not doing an adequate job for Roosevelt Island.

Government’s Role

Just one last thing. The brochure says, “One of the keys to Ed Logue’s success is that he had great patrons, Nelson Rockefeller chief amongst them, who stuck with him. With the right Governor, the right Mayor, and a few others, it could happen again.” God willing.

In 1996, George Pataki became the Governor of the State of New York. One of the first things he did was eliminate both the operating and capital subsidies to Roosevelt Island. We were told, “You are self-sufficient. Go forth and multiply.” For the past five years, Roosevelt Island has been barely making do on its operating costs by cutting back on a great deal of maintenance and repair work on the Island. As for any kind of capital improvements, there is no money. There is no capital fund. You might see, should you look at the financial statements of the Island, as we have very carefully, an item of \$3.4 million in the capital fund. That entire fund will be going to pay for the infrastructure of Mr. Wine’s Southtown project, because in the crackerjack negotiations for this project, RIOC has agreed to pay half the infrastructure costs of the project. So there is no money for anything else. We have a seawall. We don’t know where the money to repair that or extend it will ever come from.

The Lease and GDP

The General Development Plan is a 30-year-old document, but I think its fundamental proviso for affordable housing for families in a small-town context in the middle of New York City is as valid today as it was 30 years ago. My own wish list would be for sufficient population on Roosevelt Island to sustain our merchants, to make our Tram a viable operation. Our Tram, some of you

may know, is the only commuter aerial Tramway in the United States. It is not subsidized by any government, as most public transportation is in the United States, and it is the only public transportation in the New York region that’s not on the MetroCard – another one of the ways that Roosevelt Island has fallen through the cracks.

My wish list would include maintaining the open spaces and parklands that were provided for within the General Development Plan. The General Development was written by architects, not lawyers. You can *read* it. It gives guidelines about how to develop the Island, it is part of the Master Lease that exists between the City and the State of New York, it has the force of law. What the mechanism is for amending this document now needs to be tested. Perhaps in some of its details it could be spruced up a little bit, but this is the only thing that exists between Roosevelt Islanders and inappropriate development that is not in keeping with the quality of life of Roosevelt Island or with the proportionality of Roosevelt Island. It’s the only thing approaching zoning that we have, and when this goes, so goes Roosevelt Island as a planned community.

Something Unique

It’s a strange mindset on Roosevelt Island. Yes, of course we’re part of New York City. Most of the population goes to work there, goes to school there, shops there, entertains itself there. But Roosevelt Island is something unique, something other than New York City. On a summer’s day, when you’ve worked a day in New York and you get off the Tram on Roosevelt Island, immediately you realize that it’s ten degrees cooler than anything you’ve experienced during the day, and the air doesn’t smell of car exhaust, it smells of honeysuckle. You immediately know you’re someplace other than New York City.

So we’re both. We’re part of New York, and yet we’re also Roosevelt Island.

Regarding the question of architecture, in terms of the future we’ve seen some architect’s drawings of some of the plans for the Island. We’ve seen what some of the proposals for our Octagon Park might be. We’ve seen some of the proposals for what Southpoint might be, and what we’ve seen are two 32-story towers comprising a Marriott Hotel, condo and conference center which is so out of proportion with life on Roosevelt Island as to boggle the mind. What we unfortunately have not seen is so much as an artist’s rendering of what Southtown will look like. Over the past two years, we’ve seen a three-dimensional artist’s model of the placement of the buildings but, where the buildings go, what we’ve seen are white styrofoam blocks. Blackwell Field is now completely blocked off prior to the excavation of foundations in the springtime, and yet at this point we have never seen so much as a drawing of what these buildings will look like, what the facades will look like, what the apartments will look like... Will there be balconies, will there be spacious rooms? We just don’t know. We have met with the developers on many occasions at town meetings, through meetings of our Residents Association, but there are some fundamental questions which haven’t been answered, and again I think it comes back to the question of, “Is RIOC doing their job as a public benefit corporation?” And I would bring to your attention that RIOC is not represented here although they were given that opportunity.

Photo by Steve Rosenthal, courtesy Sert, Jackson and Associates



David Wine



David Wine is Vice Chair of The Related Companies, L.P., one of the country's largest real-estate companies specializing in luxury rental apartments, government-assisted housing, retail, commercial and mixed-use properties. He serves as President of Related Residential Development and as Chair of Related Managed Company, L.P. Prior to joining Related in 1978, he was a multi-housing representative to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

I started my career as a multi-family housing representative for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as an urban intern. 1976 was a time of great commitment by government – the beginning of the Section 8 program. A group of urban interns were brought to Roosevelt Island to [see] an example of the new-communities program which had been implemented by HUD.

My next introduction was in the late 80’s, when an RFP was issued for a developer to build Southtown, the portion of Roosevelt Island meant to complete the 5,000 units originally envisioned under the General Development Plan. 1989 was a problematic time in real estate – not much interest was expressed by the development community in a one-phase, 2,000-unit project in which the developers would pay all the infrastructure cost. I don’t think any developers responded to that RFP.

Housing Opportunity

My next introduction was the next RFP in the mid-90’s. As a company, we saw Roosevelt Island as part of the greater housing scheme in New York, as it always was. Roosevelt Island was seen as a housing opportunity for various income groups and we saw the housing prices escalating dramatically beginning in the early 1990’s. We felt Roosevelt Island could serve a need.

We responded to that RFP, [actually a] request for qualifications to enable RIOC to select experienced developers who could work in a quasi-public-private partnership developing a financially feasible plan for construction of Southtown. We were [chosen] in a partnership with the Hudson Companies. Between the two, we have a lot of experience in building all sorts of housing in New York City at multiple price points: high-rise, low-rise, for-sale housing, rental housing...

We embarked upon a series of meetings to really educate ourselves about many of the issues which have been discussed. Many of the issues had to do with the viability of commercial spaces, the viability and usability of whatever open space was going to be displaced by the construction of Southtown, what would come, what quality would it be, how useful would it be, what kind of economic integration would continue... I think we were struck by Ed Logue’s commitment to economic integration; the spirit of that economic integration runs very deep in Roosevelt Island today, and we must address that in our development of Southtown.

Progress

We anticipate starting construction [soon] on the first two buildings, which will be operated and owned by Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital and the Cornell Medical Center as staff housing for both their employees and their families, who I think share a great commitment to what Roosevelt Island is and what Roosevelt Island remains to be for the future.

Seeing the Whole

My hope for Southtown is that it can be a springboard from which a lot of the planning that people have been talking about – for Roosevelt Island as a whole – can take place. Because such a long period transpired during which no development on Roosevelt Island occurred, there’s been a lot of disjointed effort, and I think trying to get to some of the economic stability or economic self-sustaining numbers has spurred a lot of investigation. I hope Southtown can put some of those issues to rest, and guarantee the population density needed to make the Tram even more self-sustaining, to enable additional services to be provided, so that the Island as a whole can enjoy some of the planning the Island needs. It needs to be looked at as a whole, and to be planned, not piecemeal, but with great vision, which is what Ed Logue brought to the table.

The original vision of having a common around the subway is the focal point of what Southtown is. Part of it is the hope to realize the dream of open space and parkland by having a beautiful commons at the subway.

Shifting Economics

Think about [how] the economics have shifted. Think about the amount of money that was invested in building affordable housing on Roosevelt Island when it was originally constructed. What’s happened now is that for something to be built, to achieve economic viability, somebody’s got to pay the bill. If the economics don’t work, someone’s got to pay the bill. So what’s happened right now is New York is a medical center, and the hospitals have selected Roosevelt Island as a community in which to house many of their employees and their families. They’re planning day-care centers and playgrounds, and they are seeing this as a means of joining the existing community. We see that as a good way to bridge a pragmatic fiscal need.

Gifford Miller



Gifford Miller serves as Roosevelt Island’s representative in the New York City Council. He serves on Council committees including Land Use, State and Federal Legislation, Transportation, and the Subcommittee on Permits, Dispositions and Concessions. In addition, he previously headed the Council’s Task Force on Regional Planning. He chairs the Council Select Committee for Charter Reform.

I think there are two purposes to this evening – to look back, and to look forward. I feel very confident that Roosevelt Island is a success, an extraordinary place, a place that is like no other.

A Unique Place

I would really just like to address this “not-part-of-the-City” [argument]. I don’t think that is true. It think it’s a unique part of the City. It’s a small town right in the heart of the biggest city in the world, very much a part of New York to me. It’s a place where people not only know me, their elected representative, but know my mother. That’s a unique experience in the City of New York, but it is most definitely part of the City. I think there is a give and take between the Island and the rest of the City.

I was there just the other day for the [PTA International Dinner], and the different parents brought food, and there was Afghani food, Thai food, Indonesian food... It was amazing, and these were all from people who live on the Island and are a part of the Island’s community.

And the disabled community is an extraordinary success, and also there’s a very large elderly community, particularly a very large community of people over 80 – drastically higher than there is in other parts of the City and the United States.

So it’s a unique place, I think, and it has been extraordinarily successful in bringing people together. And it’s a small town. Everybody loves each other, and everybody hates each other, and they all know each other so well. It’s a unique place in that experience, but ultimately, I think, it’s a place where people pull together.

I think that clearly we need to consider how to go forward in order to continue that give and take. But in terms of the income mix, people of different races, ethnicities, [it has] unique status as an extraordinary place where many people from the United Nations live.

RIOC a Disappointment

What’s disappointing to me is that there has been an abandonment by the leadership of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation of not just the General Development Plan, but also of any attempt to do the [kind of] planning which the Island is such a wonderful example of.

Under this Governor, there has been a total walking away from the notion of the planned community. This is not the responsibility of Mr. Wine’s company. But I’m critical of the whole process by which they selected a developer and then have been negotiating with a developer for six years about what should go on the Island. To me, the effort that was undertaken for the Roosevelt Island “Future in Focus” in late 1995 was exactly the right type of effort that needs to be undertaken again. In 1974, a group of outside people could consider what was the right thing to do on Roosevelt Island because there were no inside people. Now you can’t plan for Roosevelt Island without involving the residents. But you bring the residents, you bring planners, you bring officials, you get them together, and you consider, what is the right thing to do.

Government has walked away from the commitment to housing that was there before, and you can’t pretend that there are still the same kind of dollars that there were before, but we should consider what kind of housing do we want – do we want families or do we want medical school housing, or do we want a mix? We should decide what it is that we want, and put it out to request for proposal on who’s going to build. And you should consider the rest of the open space and all the rest of it.

My frustration [is that it] has been so difficult to get RIOC to move forward with any plans. I’ve been wanting to negotiate with RIOC on the subject of the one-fare MetroCard system. I’m offering them a deal on which they’ll make lots of money, and MetroCard will be effective on the Tram, and they haven’t been able in nine months to get together a meaningful meeting to accept lots of money in order to have the MetroCard placed on the Tram. It’s that kind of total lack of leadership which has overseen an Island, which is an extraordinary piece of real estate, during the strongest real estate market in the history of the world, and yet [there is]

no final agreement on what to build in Southtown. I think that comes squarely back on RIOC’s shoulders.

I haven’t been able to get RIOC to agree to anything... anything, even reasonable things that you can’t believe that they can’t agree to, and the only reason I think there’s hope is that I’m hoping that we’re going to have a new Governor in a year and half, and at the rate at which they’re going, there’s still going to be plenty of things left on the table to be decided.

Local Democracy

There is a raging debate on Roosevelt Island on what the right type of governance is because the governance, in my opinion, has been so poor. To me, the question is not that the governance there now is so unacceptable, and that it can’t work, because it can work, but it’s not going to work unless there’s leadership from the top, and all the way down, that is committed to making the Island into a place consistent with the vision of Mr. Logue and the others who first framed this as a concept.

The Future

I think that the “where we go from here,” is we should sit down as a community, as elected officials, and as a leadership of RIOC, consider what we want to go where, and not just turn it over to whoever is the highest bidder for any particular place, and then make it happen.

RIOC’s abandonment of the whole concept of planning [is unfortunate]. There’s one member of the Board, who is close to the Governor, who wants essentially to just put the Island up for sale to the highest bidder, and let them do whatever they want to do with whatever portions of the land it is. I think that’s ridiculous... [APPLAUSE] These are failures not just of the Pataki administration. There were previous Governors who never did anything about Southpoint. There were many Democrats in a row [who] did nothing to develop the fabulous proposal for the FDR Memorial at the south end of the Island, which should be a jewel. It’s right for an extraordinary space [APPLAUSE], and it’s not been acted on.

So there needs to be more development, and it should be done in a planned way that involves the community in order to reach the best solution for everyone involved. And I hope we can still do that with the space and the time that we have left.

May I say about the Tram... It’s become such an extraordinary part of the Island’s identity, I don’t think anyone can contemplate the Island without the Tram.

Economics

I think it’s pretty well accepted that, if the Island reached its full development point, it could sustain itself in terms of its operating costs. In fact, there hasn’t been a subsidy for four years...

It depends, I suppose, on how you gauge success. Richard [Kahan] said it’s been a failure as an economic matter in the sense that it doesn’t entirely support itself. But what community does entirely support itself? The Upper East Side does not support itself and no one thinks about it in those terms. You have taxes which go to pay for the local services and you have other taxes which go in a broad sense to pay for the capital of the structure, and I [don’t think we can] expect a unique place like Roosevelt Island to be entirely responsible for its seawall. And why should we look at it in that fashion? It’s a part of the City, it should be receiving the services which it needs and it should be supported to the extent that it has infrastructure needs. So I think that [self-sufficiency] as a gauge of success is false.

Lease and GDP

The General Development Plan is an excellent document. It’s brief and it allows for innovation. I re-read it again this morning, and I don’t think that there is a great need to amend it all that largely, but I would be open to amending it. The City... There is argument about how you go about amending it, and whether it has legal force, but to me, there isn’t much question – either the Mayor or the Council has to approve amendments.

Government

I don’t think the Governor is committed to what everybody on this panel has pretty much expressed their commitment to, which is to consider a plan for the Island as a whole and to work to realize that plan. And that’s reflected in those people who work for him [at] RIOC. The Governor’s recent appointments to the Board have been floating ideas of selling off the Island or turning it back to the City. Nothing can happen on the Island without the Governor’s say-so in some form, whether it’s him personally or his appointees.

My concern is that I don’t see the City, State, and Federal government making the type of commitment to affordable housing that you had before, and so it’s how do you work within that context to still realize something that is appropriate for the vision that was originally there.

The problem is that everybody on this panel doesn’t get to make that decision, and [it is] the people who are not on this panel who are making the decision, and who are not doing the plan.

I think the point here is that you have such a contrast between proposals for what to do with this extraordinary space and between planning processes. In the one, you had a master plan from someone who considered that part of the Island should be open space, and relate the name of the Island to the mission of the Island, and in the other, you had an RFP process which said, “How can you make money with this particular plot of land?” And so what you have is an extraordinary contrast between one vision and another, which comes directly out of the type of planning process which was undertaken for that space.

