

APPENDIX F
WRITTEN COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT



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Testimony of New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver
to the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation
Regarding the East River Waterfront Esplanade and Piers Project
Draft Environmental Impact Statement
March 5, 2007

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that the LMDC has prepared for the East River Waterfront Esplanade and Piers Project.

As the elected State Assemblyman for the 64th Assembly District, I represent the entire length of this proposed East River Waterfront restoration project, which borders the Financial District, South Street Seaport area, Civic Center, Chinatown and Lower East Side communities. I am pleased that the City is finally turning its attention to this neglected section of the waterfront with a renovation plan that has been largely embraced by residents and community leaders. While I am strongly supportive of this project moving forward, I do have some concerns with the DEIS that need to be addressed in the final Environmental Impact Statement.

The study area for the Waterfront restoration project, from the Battery Maritime Building to the entryway to East River Park travels through Community Boards 1 and 3. I commend the LMDC for creating a DEIS that treats both areas as equal partners in this project and provides a plan that seeks to better our communities in a collaborative manner.

There are many challenges to ensuring that the East River Waterfront renovation is a success. Most obvious, are the challenges related to the physical obstacle course that the FDR Drive creates and the financial resources required to finish the project. Equally as important are the secondary chain of events that are not planned for in the DEIS and will place a tremendous burden on the surrounding communities.

Finding space to replace the bus parking that will be displaced by the renovation needs to be handled head on. Though I am a huge proponent of the greater access to the waterfront created through the removal of bus parking, without careful planning the buses will find their own new spaces in the community.

The DEIS states that a total of 65 to 70 bus parking spaces under the FDR Drive will be lost as a result of the project. That total includes approximately 45 bus spaces located just south of the South Street Seaport near Piers 13 and 14 and about 25 spaces located in the vicinity of the Manhattan Bridge. It is unacceptable that the DEIS fails to address how to mitigate the severe adverse impact the loss of bus parking spaces will create, even though it predicts that the displaced buses would likely seek parking in the adjacent neighborhoods.

The DEIS suggests that this issue instead be “studied” and that we may need to rely on traffic enforcement agents or the bus operators themselves to resolve this problem; this approach does not go far enough. The City must identify replacement parking areas for these buses so that they do not simply end up parking wherever they want in these busy residential and commercial areas negatively impacting both traffic and pedestrian flow and air pollution levels. Commuter and tour buses already are a major problem in the Financial District, South Street Seaport, Chinatown and Lower East Side communities. The City cannot allow an additional 70 buses to simply roam the streets of Lower Manhattan looking for convenient places to park. The recent World Trade Center Environmental Assessment forecast up to 280 additional tour buses per day visiting the new WTC Memorial when it opens in 2009 but also is yet to identify where those buses will be stored. It is absolutely incumbent upon City officials to quickly identify alternative parking areas, in consultation with the local Community Boards, for the hundreds of tour and commuter buses which descend on this area everyday. These mitigation measures should be included in the final Environmental Impact Statement for this project.

The proposed narrowing of southbound South Street to one lane between Montgomery Street and Robert F. Wagner Place must also be mitigated since this section of South Street has heavy traffic volumes as cars frequently exit the FDR Drive at this point to avoid the congestion that slows traffic heading towards the Brooklyn Bridge exit. The DEIS identifies two potential mitigation measures to address this problem. One is the elimination of parking along this southbound stretch of South Street in order to create a second moving lane for traffic. Another possible mitigation measure would be the build-out of the Brooklyn Bridge Ramps Project to improve the ramps from the FDR Drive to the Brooklyn Bridge and thus reduce the number of vehicles which would detour onto this stretch of South Street to access the Bridge. One or both of these measures must be instituted to address the projected traffic congestion along South Street.

Details of important components of this project are not fully discussed in the DEIS and should have been incorporated. They include the New Market Building replacement, the beach on Pier 42 and the Battery Maritime Building Plaza. I strongly urge the City to share the details and identify funds to fully build these projects in the final EIS.

Community participation in the continued planning of the project is also of utmost importance. The proposed pavilions are intended to serve the people who live near them. I strongly recommend that the greater communities be fully consulted regarding the type of uses that go into those spaces.

The same goes for the planning of the piers and other open spaces. Community input is essential to insure that those areas are designed to address local needs of the nearby communities, as well as reflect the neighborhoods’ rich cultural diversity. Furthermore, many of the areas adjacent to this project lack enough open spaces and parks. The renovation of the waterfront provides an excellent opportunity for the creation of open park land and recreational spaces.

As you know, having a recreational facility on Pier 36 is a matter that is very close to my heart. In 1994, I, on behalf of the residents of the Lower East Side, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City that provided for the rehabilitation of Pier 36 and a recreational facility to be built on the pier. Over the last several years, the Pier 35/36 Task Force and Community Board 3's Waterfront Task Force have been developing criteria for such a plan and, most recently, have successfully negotiated with Basketball City to be the company that builds the recreational facility, while maintaining affordability for community residents. Though there was no mention of a recreational facility on Pier 36 in the DEIS, it is my hope that the City will incorporate this soon-to-be-built facility into the design plans for the East River Waterfront.

Another potential site to create community recreation or cultural space would be the New Market Building. The East River Waterfront Plan calls for the demolition of the existing New Market Building and building a new structure of approximately 40,000 square feet. It is my understanding that the City has agreed to set aside space in this building for community use. I would urge the City to work with Community Board 1 in their efforts to obtain community space in the rebuilt New Market Building.

Additionally, the DEIS does not provide a plan to create greater connectivity to the waterfront through public transportation. In the early drafts of the waterfront redevelopment proposal, there was a plan for extending bus routes towards the waterfront. I strongly encourage the City to work with New York City Transit Authority to adjust current bus routes, or create new ones, to make the waterfront more easily accessible.

Finally, I raise the issue of park maintenance and governance. It is my understanding that this matter has not yet been resolved, however it is essential that the City put into place a reliable governance structure to ensure the success of this revitalization project. Such a governance structure must make certain that the project has a sufficient and steady source of income and a dependable maintenance plan in place to assure its on-going success. The governance mechanism should also enable the community to have on-going input into the development and maintenance of the piers and esplanade.

I strongly urge the LMDC and City to carefully consider all recommendations made today and address these issues prior to the issuance of a final EIS for the East River Waterfront Esplanade and Piers project.

Thank you.