



A Coalition of Civic, Greening, Recreation and Economic Development Groups

STATE and federal legislation committee

New Yorkers for Parks Testimony

in OPPOSITION TO THE ALIENATION OF PARKLAND - HOME RULE MESSAGE 50

May 30, 2003

Introduction

Good morning. My name is Allison Farina and I am the Director of Government and Community Affairs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P), a citywide advocacy organization working to protect and promote New York's 28,700 acres of parkland.

I am here today to oppose the taking of more than 40 acres of beautiful parkland in Van Cortlandt Park for use as a water filtration plant. By earmarking this park as a "preferred site" for the proposed \$1.6 billion construction project without first satisfying due process, denies the people of the Bronx and all New Yorkers their right to open green space, which is essential for neighborhoods to thrive.

More importantly, setting such precedent is unacceptable and irresponsible.

This disregard for public open space is an alarming trend in all five boroughs from midtown Manhattan to Brooklyn Heights¹. For instance, Robert Moses

¹ (Canarsie Park, Walt Whitman Park, Old Mill Creek Park, Robert Moses Playground, Soundview and FDR Boardwalk & Beach, Fort Totten Park)

Playground in Council Member Moskowitz's districts is slated to be destroyed so that the United Nations can erect a new building. If you ignore the need for a comprehensive and comparative assessment of the three potential sites for this plant: in Westchester; on the Harlem River and in Van Cortlandt Park, then what's to stop illegal parkland confiscation at other locations, such as Robert Moses Playground?

No one can question the need to preserve parkland in New York City. It is a rare commodity.

Parks -- clean the air -- break the heat -- and breathe life -- into our neighborhoods. They are not a luxury, but an essential city service that needs to be defended by YOU: our elected officials.

New Yorkers for Parks, along with our coalition of civic, greening, recreation and economic development groups, is fighting to prevent Van Cortlandt Park from being used as a site for a water filtration plant. We firmly believe that parkland must always be a location of last resort -- not the first preference because it is the cheapest.

Furthermore, the city has had two years to find an alternative site for this filtration plant. In the 1990's when the plan was first introduced, NY4P's predecessor organization, the Parks Council joined Friends of Van Cortlandt Park in suing the city. We won the suit in February 2001, when the New York State Court of Appeals ruled that the city could not lawfully build the plant on parkland without the approval of the State Legislature. Now, the city claims -- in an unsubstantiated power-point presentation -- that the Van Cortlandt Park site

is the cheapest, safest, and most practical of all available locations – but such assumption is not good enough.

Before the City Council votes on Home Rule Message 50, we demand that a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement be completed for the Van Cortlandt site and a well-documented, thorough public comparison of all three sites occur. The city must follow all legal procedural safeguards before taking one foot of parkland – to do otherwise sets a dangerous precedent.