

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PLANNING, DISPOSITIONS & CONCESSIONS

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November 13, 2008

Start: 11:25am

Recess: 11:30am

HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E: DANIEL R. GARODNICK  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Sara M. Gonzalez  
Inez E. Dickens

2 CHAIRPERSON GARODNICK: Thank you  
3 very much. Good morning everybody and welcome to  
4 the Subcommittee on Planning, Dispositions and  
5 Concessions, a subcommittee of the Land Use  
6 Committee of the New York City Council. My name  
7 is Dan Garodnick, and I have the honor of chairing  
8 the Subcommittee on Planning. We take up today  
9 Land Use number 779 to 784, effecting Willets  
10 Point, in Queens. We're joined today by a number  
11 of members of the Land Use Committee, all of whom  
12 will be recognized at the full Land Use in a  
13 moment, but I did want to recognize the members of  
14 my subcommittee who are here, Council Member Sara  
15 Gonzalez and Council Member Inez Dickens. We  
16 thank them for their presence. And today we are  
17 voting on a plan to allow the redevelopment of 62  
18 acres of prime real estate that is at this moment  
19 in such a state of distress that you would hardly  
20 recognize the area as part of the City of New  
21 York. Willets Point lacks basic infrastructure  
22 such as a sewer system and has not even had the  
23 most basic maintenance of its streets and  
24 sidewalks. Visitors to Willets Point observe sink  
25 holes the size of entire intersections. On

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2 October 17th, this Subcommittee had the privilege  
3 of hearing about seven hours of testimony from  
4 area residents, business owners, labor  
5 representatives, elected officials and others  
6 about the historic inattention to this area, the  
7 absence of basic infrastructure and of course  
8 environmental harms, environmental harms that  
9 continue to do damage to the Jamaica Bay and the  
10 Flushing River. Soil tests have found there high  
11 concentrations of petroleum based contaminants as  
12 well as lead and mercury. The cancer causing  
13 toxins that are present in the groundwater pose a  
14 serious public health risk that is likely only to  
15 grow more acute if the existing land uses in the  
16 area go unchanged. Indeed, the environmental  
17 conditions at Willets Point are so significant  
18 that their remediation by the ultimate developer  
19 of this site alone is an enormous benefit of the  
20 redevelopment. And with this vote today we have  
21 an opportunity to take Willets Point in a new  
22 direction. But we need to note that this area is  
23 also home to a number of private businesses and  
24 property owners, and the City as the applicant  
25 here needs to come to agreement with them in order

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2 to secure control of the land. Today, through  
3 extensive negotiations with property owners, which  
4 included long-term commitments for relocation, the  
5 City has made significant progress towards that  
6 goal. This is critical, because nobody wants to  
7 see the City rely on eminent domain. Small  
8 businesses who have endured the area without basic  
9 services deserve no less today. Members of this  
10 Committee as well as Council Member Hiram  
11 Monserrate, who represents the area, raised  
12 additional concerns that the City's plan to create  
13 a mixed-use community with office space, retail, a  
14 hotel, open space and housing, meet the needs of  
15 area residents. The agreement announced yesterday  
16 does just that. A redeveloped Willets Point will  
17 included an 850-seat public school and 35% of the  
18 housing on site will be permanently affordable for  
19 families earning anywhere from 30 to 60% of the  
20 area median income. It will create 5,300  
21 permanent and 18,000 construction jobs, and this  
22 is the first project in the City with the mandated  
23 labor standards built in from the outset. The  
24 job-retaining program at LaGuardia College will  
25 assist the needs of-- I'm sorry, retraining

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2 program at LaGuardia College will assist the needs  
3 of local workers. The potential for this area as  
4 a point for economic revitalization is enormous.

5 It sits right next door to the New City Field, it  
6 has the 7 train, the Long Island Rail Road and  
7 highways right at its side. It is minutes away  
8 from LaGuardia airport. In short, it is a  
9 critical hub for New York City, one that creates  
10 an opportunity to add billions in economic  
11 stimulus. And the environmental cleanup is to be  
12 done at the expense of the private developer.

13 This is a plan from which the public will surely  
14 benefit. The action before us today, Related Land  
15 Use number 779 to 784 in Queens Community Board 7,  
16 are proposed amendments to the zoning resolution  
17 establishing a special district in Community Board  
18 District 7; an amendment to the zoning map,  
19 establishing a special Willets Point district; the  
20 proposed designation of the Willets Point Urban  
21 Renewal Area; the proposed urban renewal plan for  
22 that area; the disposition of city-owned property  
23 within that renewal area; and the proposed  
24 amendment to the City map to eliminate and close  
25 streets within that area. I should note that

2 there is also an agreement to be executed today  
3 that will allow the Borough Board of Queens to  
4 review the business terms of the ultimate  
5 disposition of the land here once established  
6 under Section 384 B 4 of the City Charter. But  
7 what we are voting on now are the items that I  
8 mentioned a moment ago, and an opportunity to seed  
9 economic growth, and in doing so to reclaim an  
10 area that has long-suffered from neglect, an area  
11 that today is causing great environmental harm, an  
12 area that if done correctly will directly benefit  
13 the affected community and the City at large. And  
14 so I am going to turn the microphone now to the  
15 Chair of-- I'm sorry. I'm holding up.

16 [Pause]

17 CHAIRPERSON GARODNICK: Thank you.  
18 And with that we are going to ask the Counsel to  
19 call the roll on the Subcommittee and the Chair  
20 recommends an Aye vote on Land Use 779 to 784, the  
21 only items that we are taking up in this  
22 subcommittee today. And with that, I ask the  
23 Counsel to call the role.

24 COUNSEL: Chair Garodnick?

25 CHAIRPERSON GARODNICK: I vote Aye.

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COUNSEL: Council Member Gonzalez?

COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Aye.

COUNSEL: Council Member Dickens.

COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Chair,  
permission to explain my vote?

CHAIRPERSON GARODNICK: Yes, go  
ahead.

COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: All right.  
I want to commend my colleague Council Member  
Hiram Monserrate for his strong fight for his  
community. He will see to it that there's a task  
force set up that will oversee the enforcement of  
MWBE. The affordable housing component has more  
than 60% for 40% AMI or lower. That's significant  
in a time when we don't have, quote, affordable  
housing. I've been concerned about small minority  
businesses and their survival, but I trust in my  
colleague's continued fight to ensure that small  
businesses will survive through this. Displaced  
autoworkers will have available to them training  
in the green technology of the auto industry and  
hotel hospitality training will also be available.  
This will help to ensure that those workers that  
possibly could be displaced will have the

1  
2 additional training available to them in green  
3 technology that this world is coming to, and for  
4 hotel hospitality. The Environmental Impact  
5 Statement shows significant need for remediation  
6 due to the high levels of toxic waste to the land,  
7 which impacts not only the people who work there  
8 but the people who live there and in the  
9 surrounding neighborhoods. The remediation,  
10 through an agreement, will be paid for by the  
11 developer and not by the City of New York, during  
12 these hard and difficult economic times. I  
13 understand the difficulty in these rezonings, and  
14 I commend Hiram Monserrate for the hard and  
15 diligent work he has done, because I for one know  
16 what it is to have to take a hard stand on a very  
17 difficult situation when you are concerned about  
18 the community that you love and fight for, and you  
19 do so hoping that you're doing it for the  
20 betterment of the entire community and not for  
21 grandstanding for the media. Thank you, and I  
22 vote Aye.

23 COUNSEL: But a vote of three in  
24 the affirmative, none in the negative, no  
25 abstentions, all items are approved and referred



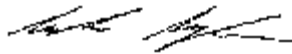
1  
2 to the full Land Use Committee.

3 CHAIRPERSON GARODNICK: Thank you  
4 very much. And before we adjourn I just wanted to  
5 recognize, since I didn't do it adequately in my  
6 opening, the work of Council Member Monserrate  
7 here, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor Leiber, who made  
8 this a very high priority, Speaker Quinn and of  
9 course Chair of Land Use, Melinda Katz. This was  
10 an enormous amount of work and I congratulate all  
11 of them. And with that and the vote having been  
12 established at three in the affirmative, zero in  
13 the negative, this Subcommittee on Planning is  
14 hereby adjourned.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Erika Swyler certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date February 9, 2009