

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITINGS, RESILIENCY
AND DISPOSITIONS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC
SITINGS, RESILIENCY AND DISPOSITIONS

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March 18, 2026
Start: 10:05 a.m.
Recess: 10:26 a.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - 8TH FLOOR - HEARING
ROOM 3

B E F O R E: Christopher Marte, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Alexa Avilés
Shanel Thomas-Henry

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:
Frank Morano

A P P E A R A N C E S

Andrea Bender, Vice President of External Affairs at
the New York City School Construction Authority

Joseph Jean-Baptiste, Senior Management Specialist
at the New York City School Construction Authority

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning. This is a
3 mic check for the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public
4 Sitings, Resiliency, and Dispositions. Today is March
5 18, 2026. We are in Hearing Room 3, and this is being
6 recorded by Mike Kane.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, ladies
8 and gentlemen. Welcome to the New York City Council
9 hearing for the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public
10 Sitings, Resiliency, and Dispositions.

11 At this time, I'd like to remind everyone
12 to please silence all cell phones and devices, and at
13 no point may you approach the dais.

14 Chair, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON MARTE: [GAVEL] Good morning.
16 Welcome to the meeting of the Subcommittee on
17 Landmarks, Public Sitings, Resiliency, and
18 Dispositions. I'm Council Member Christopher Marte,
19 and I am Chair of the Subcommittee. I'm joined today
20 by my Colleagues, Council Member Morano.

21 Before we begin today's agenda, I would
like to remind everyone that this meeting is being
held in a hybrid format.

For members of the public who wish to
testify remotely, we ask that you first register

2 online, and you may do so now by visiting
3 www.council.nyc.gov/landuse to sign up and then sign
4 into the Zoom and remain signed on until you have
5 testified.

6 For anyone with us today in person and
7 wish to testify, if you have not already done so,
8 please see one of the Sergeants-at-Arms to fill out a
9 speaker's card, and we will call your name at the
10 appropriate time.

11 For anyone wishing to submit written
12 testimony on the items being heard today, we ask that
13 you please send it via email to
14 landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov, including the LU
15 number and/or project name in the subject line of
16 your email. Video and audio testimonies would not be
17 accepted.

18 I remind members of the public that this
19 is a governmental proceeding and that decorum shall
20 be observed at all times. As such, members of the
21 public shall remain silent unless and until called to
testify.

The witness table is reserved for people
who wish to testify. No video recording or
photography is allowed from the witness table.

2 Further, members of the public may not present audio
3 or video recording as testimony, but may submit
4 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant for
5 inclusion in the hearing record.

6 On today's agenda, we have one hearing. I
7 now open a public hearing for a Preconsidered LU for
8 an application by the New York City School
9 Construction Authority for the site selection for a
10 new approximately 754-seat primary and intermediate
11 school facility located at the corner of Abington
12 Avenue and East Reading Avenue and is bounded by East
13 Perkiomen Avenue to the north, East Reading Avenue to
14 the south, Abington Avenue to the east, and Armstrong
15 Avenue to the west in the Great Kills neighborhood in
16 Staten Island in Council Member Morano's District.

17 Before we hear from today's applicant, I
18 want to give the opportunity to have the local
19 Council Member Morano say a statement.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you, Chair,
21 and thank you for doing this hearing, and thank you
in general for your passion for building schools and
for education in the city in general. I also want to
thank the School Construction Authority for their
work on this proposal and this project and getting to

2 see firsthand the amount of work and the willingness
3 for feedback that they consider on a proposal like
4 this has caused me to develop a whole new
5 appreciation and respect for the School Construction
6 Authority.

7 Now, when a project like this comes
8 before us, the question is not whether change is
9 coming to a neighborhood. The question is what kind
10 of change we're choosing. And over the past several
11 months I've made it a priority to visit every public
12 school in my District. I've walked the hallways,
13 spoken with principals, teachers, and parents, and
14 seen firsthand the challenges that they're dealing
15 with. And what I saw consistently in my District was
16 overcrowding, classrooms stretched to capacity,
17 spaces being used in ways that they were never
18 intended to be used. And that's before fully
19 accounting for the new class size mandate, which is
20 going to require even more spaces in the years ahead.
21 So, my thinking on this project and on this location
has evolved because when you see it up close, when
you hear it directly from the people on the front
lines, it becomes very clear that we need more school
seats in Staten Island. And this proposal would bring

2 more than 750 new seats to our borough and help
3 relieve pressure on nearby schools like PS-32, PS-42,
4 PS-53, IS-24. Just as importantly, it would provide
5 families with a modern state-of-the-art educational
6 facility that can serve this community for
7 generations. But I also think it's important to speak
8 honestly about the broader context that we're
9 operating in. In today's City of Yes environment,
10 vacant land like this is not going to remain vacant.
11 If this site isn't used for a school, it's going to
12 be used for something else. Under current zoning, it
13 could support a significant amount of residential
14 development. And in other parts of the city, we're
15 seeing proposals for uses like this become battery
16 energy storage facilities in close proximities to
17 homes. So, while some may wish this land could remain
18 untouched, the realistic alternative is likely
19 something far more intensive and far more detrimental
20 to a neighborhood than a school. So, at the same
21 time, I want to acknowledge the residents who live on
and around East Reading Avenue. I've met with them,
I've listened to them, I've watched as several of
them have stormed out of my office as I explained
that I was going to be supporting this proposal. And

2 I've heard their concerns about traffic, about
3 parking, and their concerns about safety, and those
4 are real and they deserve to be addressed. This vote
5 today is about site selection. It's not the final
6 word on design. The design phase is where many of
7 these issues will be worked out, and I strongly
8 encourage the School Construction Authority to
9 continue engaging with the community in a meaningful
10 way as those plans are developed, because I can tell
11 you in my conversations with people that live here,
12 it's not simply a not in my backyard or not in my
13 front yard situation. These are folks with legitimate
14 concerns about parking, about traffic, about
15 flooding, about ice. And I hope that once this
16 project is designed, some of those concerns are
17 addressed. If we take the time to get the details
18 right, this school can become something the
19 neighborhood embraces rather than something that it
20 feels imposed upon it. Because schools, when done
21 right, aren't disruptions, they're anchors. They're
places where communities come together and where the
next generation is shaped. And yes, if we do this
right, the biggest concern on East Reading Avenue one
day might just be finding a parking spot for a school

2 play or a graduation ceremony, and that's a problem
3 most neighborhoods would be proud to have, especially
4 in this environment. For all those reasons, I support
5 moving forward with this project, and I look forward
6 to working with SCA and the community to make sure
it's done the right way. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MARTE: Well said.

8 Appearing today from SCA on this proposal
9 is Joseph Jean-Baptiste and Andrea Bender.

10 Those wishing to testify remotely must
11 register online by visiting Council website at
council.nyc.gov/landuse.

12 Panelists, please ensure your microphones
13 are on.

14 Counsel, would you please administer the
affirmation?

15 Panelists, would you please raise your
16 right hand and state your name for the record?

17 ANDREA BENDER: Andrea Bender.

18 JOSEPH JEAN-BAPTISTE: Joseph
Jean-Baptiste.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell
20 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth

2 in your testimony before this Subcommittee and in
3 answer to all Council Member questions?

4 ANDREA BENDER: Yes.

5 JOSEPH JEAN-BAPTISTE: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON MARTE: Thank you, panelists.

7 You may begin.

8 ANDREA BENDER: Good morning, Chair Marte
9 and Council Member Morano. My name is Andrea Bender.
10 I am Vice President of External Affairs at the New
11 York City School Construction Authority. I am joined
12 by Joseph Jean-Baptiste, our Senior Management
13 Specialist at the SCA. We are pleased to present
14 --actually, I'm sorry, next slide, please.

15 We are pleased to present a proposed new
16 approximately 754-seat PS/IS at East Reading Avenue
17 between Armstrong Avenue and Abingdon Avenues in the
18 Great Kills neighborhood of Staten Island. This
19 proposed project, as we all know, is in Council
20 Member Frank Morano's District, and we thank him
21 wholeheartedly for his partnership and support on
this project. Next slide, please.

Pursuant to Section 1731 of the New York
State Public Authorities Law, the New York City
School Construction Authority has undertaken the site

2 selection process for a new approximately 754-seat
3 primary intermediate school facility located at
4 Abingdon Avenue between East Perkiomen Avenue and
5 East Reading Avenue Block 5474, Lots 12 through 29 in
6 the Borough of Staten Island. The site is
7 approximately 96,000 square feet, 2.2 acres, and is
8 located within Staten Island Community Board Number 3
9 and Community Education Council District Number 31.
10 The purpose of the proposed project is to provide
11 additional long-term capacity to relieve overcrowding
12 in School District 31. The five-year capital plan for
13 Fiscal Years 2025 to 2029 allocates capital funding
14 to address existing overcrowding and forecasted
15 changes in student enrollment and to support New York
16 City Public Schools' policies regarding class size
17 reduction. During the 2023-2024 school year,
18 Community Education Council 31's elementary schools
19 collectively operated at 112 percent of their
20 targeted capacity, as Council Member Murano clearly
21 noticed on his school tours. Next slide, please.

So, here we have an aerial view of the
site. As you can see, it's bounded by Abingdon and
Armstrong, the easement for the unbuilt East

2 Perkiomen and East Reading Avenues. Next slide,
3 please.

4 The notice of filing of the site plan was
5 published in AM New York and The City Record on May
6 8th, 2025, at which time CEC 31, Staten Island
7 Community Board 3, and the City Planning Commission
8 were notified of the proposed site plan. Community
9 Board 3 held a public hearing on May 14th, 2025, and
10 the Community Education Council held a public hearing
11 on June 9th, 2025. All public comments received on
12 the site were considered as part of the site plan.
13 Next slide, please.

14 So, here we have some photos of the
15 current conditions on the site, view of the project
16 site facing northwest from the intersection of East
17 Reading and Abingdon, a view of the project site and
18 the unpaved portion of the easement for East
19 Perkiomen facing east along the paved portion, sort
20 of the backside of the site. Next slide, please.

21 Some more photos of the site in its
current condition, view facing north along Abingdon.
The project site including the portion separated from
the street with a guardrail is visible on the right,
and then the opposite picture is the view facing east

2 along East Reading Avenue, one- and two-family homes
3 across the street, and the project site is visible to
4 the left. Next slide, please.

5 One last view of the project area, the
6 view facing northwest along East Reading Avenue,
7 showing the border between the project site and the
8 adjacent homes on Block 5474. Next slide, please.

9 The SCA affirms the site plan pursuant to
10 Section 1731 of the New York Public Authorities Law.
11 In accordance with Section 1732 of the Public
12 Authorities Law, the SCA submitted the proposed site
13 plan to the Mayor and City Council by letter dated
14 February 23rd, 2026. Should SCA receive approval to
15 acquire the property, a new PS/IS will be constructed
16 and is anticipated to open in 2031. The proposed
17 school will include approximately 31 classrooms for
18 pre-K through 8th grade, two special education
19 classrooms, 10 District 75 classrooms, a speech
20 resource room, a reading resource room, a music room,
21 an art room, kitchen-cafeteria, library, gymnasium,
guidance and medical suites, as well as general
administrative and support spaces. The site plan also
includes two at-grade play yards totaling
approximately 23,700 square feet. Next slide, please.

2 We look forward to the Subcommittee's
3 favorable consideration of the proposed plan and
4 would be happy to answer any questions that you might
5 have. Thank you so much.

6 CHAIRPERSON MARTE: Thank you.

7 Council Member Morano, do you have any
8 questions?

9 COUNCILMEMBER MORANO: Sure. I'll ask a
10 couple brief ones.

11 Thank you again for all your work on
12 this, and thank you for being so willing to address
13 all of my substantial number of questions throughout
14 this process. One question that did come up from a
15 couple of neighborhood residents, and I'll ask on
16 their behalf, is a lot of them I think have come to
17 understand that a school is a positive thing for a
18 community and certainly better than a lot of the
19 other alternatives. But some people raised, well,
20 does it have to be such a large school, does it have
21 to be 760 students and 98 faculty members? And
they're concerned with the traffic and parking
implications of that. Can you talk about how that
size was developed and if there's any realistic
prospect for making it a smaller school?

2 ANDREA BENDER: Sure. So, based on the
3 size of the property and the need in the surrounding
4 community we like to, where we can, maximize our
5 development to meet the needs of the school district
6 in question. It is important to note that we did
7 analyze in our SEQR analysis the impacts on traffic,
8 parking, and other community, resources and, along
9 with the mitigations that our SEQR analysis
10 identified for some signalization on some area
11 streets, there was no impact found to traffic flow in
12 the neighborhood and there appears to be, based on my
13 own experience and based on the SEQR findings,
14 substantial parking able to accommodate the traffic
15 generated by students and staff driving to the site.
16 The impact on parking was very minimal and only
17 reduced the available parking spaces by approximately
18 6 percent, still leaving a very significant number of
19 spaces available. So, I understand the community's
20 concerns very much. This is a common concern that we
21 get across the city. One of the things that often
takes a minute is once the school opens and traffic
patterns sort of stabilize, the impact tends to be
much less than people anticipate just based on their
own experience or their own anecdotal information,

2 but our SEQR analysis does show that there would be
3 no impact to traffic and no impact to parking. And
4 our goal here is really to maximize the development
5 that's needed to meet the needs of the school
6 district.

7 COUNCILMEMBER MORANO: I asked you this
8 privately, but I'll go ahead and ask it publicly for
9 everybody's sake. Will SCA commit to holding at least
10 one public meeting with residents during the design
11 phase so that they can weigh in on traffic, parking,
12 and the layout?

13 ANDREA BENDER: Certainly.

14 COUNCILMEMBER MORANO: In terms of the
15 entrance location, there was one design that was
16 floating around somewhere that a couple people were,
17 you know, emailing me over the last couple days. Has
18 a final decision been made on where the primary
19 entrance will be, and will the community have input
20 on that before it's finalized?

21 ANDREA BENDER: So, when we analyze a site
for a potential school, we are looking to make sure
before we purchase a property, we are looking to make
sure that the program that we would like can actually
fit on that property, and we have to work with DOT

2 and other regulatory agencies to develop some kinds
3 of assumptions to analyze traffic, parking, other
4 impacts. So, we have a conceptual plan that is in our
5 SEQR analysis that shows an entrance for the purposes
6 of study. That is not the basis of design. We have
7 not started design. We do not start design until we
8 close on the property. And so, when we enter into
9 design, the architect team will look at the street
10 grid in the area and they will look at proposed
11 openings that make the most sense for ease of
12 drop-off and pickup for buses, for families. They
13 will certainly look at how that will affect the
14 community. I'm certainly happy to take the
15 community's input on where the proposed entrance
16 location that might work best for them. I'm certainly
17 happy to relay that. What I would say is that for
18 safety and operational reasons, we would want to
19 reserve final decisions on those considerations to
20 the architects.

18 COUNCILMEMBER MORANO: Sure.

19 ANDREA BENDER: Again, absolutely happy to
20 take those considerations from the community back to
21 the design team.

2 COUNCILMEMBER MORANO: You mentioned the
3 SEQR analysis. Can you confirm for the record that
4 the Phase 1 and Phase 2 environmental reviews didn't
5 identify any contamination that would prevent a
6 school from being built safely on the site? I know
7 there was some concerns about soil when people first
8 heard about this project.

9 ANDREA BENDER: Yes. The SEQR analysis
10 identifies that the subject property has not been
11 meaningfully developed since at least the 1920s and
12 consists largely of native soils and historic fill,
13 which is consistent with sites that we see pretty
14 much everywhere in the city.

15 COUNCILMEMBER MORANO: Lastly, can you
16 briefly explain to folks why this site was selected
17 over other potential locations, including publicly
18 owned sites?

19 ANDREA BENDER: Sure. So, at this time in
20 this area, to our knowledge, there are not other
21 sites that are as large and also available for
acquisition at this time. That is why this site was
selected. I am not aware of publicly owned sites in
the immediate vicinity of this site. I'm aware of
some publicly owned sites sort of elsewhere on Staten

2 Island. We love developing on publicly owned sites
3 where we can because it frees us from spending
4 millions of dollars to acquire property. So, if you
5 have publicly owned sites that you'd like us to look
6 at, please let us know. That goes for any Council
7 Member. But that's why this site.

8 COUNCILMEMBER MORANO: Thanks very much.

9 ANDREA BENDER: Yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARTE: I would like to
11 recognize Council Member Thomas-Henry and Council
12 Member Avilés.

13 Do any other council members have any
14 questions?

15 All right. Thank you.

16 This applicant panel is now excused.

17 ANDREA BENDER: Thank you so much.

18 JOSEPH JEAN-BAPTISTE: Appreciate it.

19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON MARTE: Counsel, are there any
21 members of the public who wish to testify on this
item?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No, there are not.

CHAIRPERSON MARTE: Okay.

2 If there are any remote public
3 participants who wish to testify and have not already
4 done so, please press the raise hand button now. And
5 if you're here with us in person, please see one of
6 the Sergeant-at-Arms arms to first fill out a speaker
7 card.

8 All right. There being no other members
9 of the public who wish to testify regarding the
10 public SCA school site, the items are now laid over.
11 Thank you.

12 That concludes today's business, and I'd
13 like to thank the members of the public, my
14 Colleagues, Subcommittee Counsel, Land Use Staff, and
15 the Sergeant-at-Arms for your participation today.
16 This meeting is now adjourned. Thank you. [GAVEL]

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5 C E R T I F I C A T E
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8 World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing
9 transcript is a true and accurate record of the
10 proceedings. We further certify that there is no
11 relation to any of the parties to this action by blood
12 or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome
13 of this matter.



19 Date April 30, 2026
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21