

Committee On Parks and Recreation

Date	6/19/08
Start Time	
Finish Time	



City of New York Parks & Recreation

**New York City Council
Committee on Parks & Recreation**

**Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir:
A discussion on the restoration and enhancement of a community resource**

June 19, 2008

**Testimony by
Adrian Benepe, Commissioner**

INTRODUCTION

A little over one year ago, on Earth Day 2007, Mayor Bloomberg presented a long-term plan for a greener, greater New York. PlaNYC laid out 127 initiatives designed to address the challenges of a city whose population will grow by one million people by 2030; among those initiatives are providing significant improvements to eight regional parks. Today we are here to talk about one of the regional parks selected for improvement – Highland Park and the Ridgewood Reservoir.

REGIONAL PARKS

PlaNYC provides an opportunity for the city to re-envision eight regional parks sites across the city. With at least one new regional park in every borough, the Department plans to enhance these existing green spaces and turn them into destinations for the 21st Century; admired by residents and visitors from across the city. We have been working with community organizations and individual residents to create designs that respond to and address community priorities and needs and that also provide more recreational opportunities to keep New Yorkers healthy and active. As you know, we are confronting rising levels of obesity and related diseases, including diabetes and heart disease. Well designed and maintained parks are a foundation for recreational activities and fitness that are crucial to healthful lives.

Today we are here to talk about one of the eight regional parks - the Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoirs in Brooklyn and Queens - but I would like to first give you an overview of our planning and design approaches for the regional parks.

In all of our PlaNYC work, we take in consideration the following:

- **Ecological assets**
 - Extensive research is done to identify the area's ecological assets and to outline a plan to preserve and restore valuable natural features by conducting an environmental inventory and assessment.

- **Community input**
 - The design of every park starts and ends through a planning effort with the surrounding communities, community boards and elected officials.
- **Accessibility and Recreation**
 - Opening up the park to additional users and upgrading recreation opportunities is a primary objective of our open space initiatives.
- **Stormwater Best Management Practices**
 - Using innovative and sustainable materials and methods is a priority.

HIGHLAND PARK AND RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIRS CONTEXT AND LOCATION

What kind of park is Highland Park and the Ridgewood Reservoir and how do those considerations impact their design potential?

Highland Park is in a unique location that borders both Queens and Brooklyn and serves diverse communities on both sides of the border. The park is bordered on the south and west by the original Highland Park. The nearest residential communities, including Cypress Hills and East New York, are largely low-density residential communities. To the East of Highland Park is Salem Field Cemetery, to the North is the Jackie Robinson parkway and two cemeteries farther north. Cypress Avenue connects the park to the Queens neighborhood of Ridgewood, which also consists of one- and two-family homes and small multi-family dwellings. The developed portion of Highland Park located in the southern area of the park contains several ballfields, two playgrounds, three comfort stations, tennis courts, basketball courts, a spray shower, a woodland grove (reported to have been designed by Frederick Law Olmsted) and a picnic area. Highland Park is also home to the first Children's Garden in New York, a feature that is still active today. All of the amenities of Highland Park are heavily used and enjoyed by residents of Brooklyn and Queens.

The reservoir dates back to the early 1850s, when the growing populations of Brooklyn and Queens required more water and private companies began to purchase land to drill wells and divert streams to create a water supply network for Brooklyn. In 1858, the city of Brooklyn built the Ridgewood Reservoir that held almost 154 million gallons daily. In 1891, Brooklyn purchased the surrounding lands around the reservoir for park purposes, and in 1905 New York City connected Brooklyn to the Catskill aqueduct. By 1915, a music stand, shelter house, rustic bridge, football and baseball fields, 28 tennis courts, a flower garden, and the Children's farm gardens existed in the adjoining Highland Park and by the mid-1960s, Brooklyn became less dependent on their own water system. The system became obsolete and two basins of the reservoir were decommissioned and drained in 1989. In 2004, the Department of Environmental Protection transferred responsibility for the reservoirs to the Parks Department.

CURRENT CONDITIONS OF THE RESERVOIR

The 50-acre site of the Ridgewood Reservoir consists of three reservoir basins, pump houses and a caretaker cottage. When the basins were drained, nature took over. The clay lining, however, continued to hold rain water, leaving a large body of open water in the central basin, and wet areas in the other two outer basins. Gradually, the basins became overgrown and partially filled with silt and trees, invasive plant species and other vegetation are particularly dense in basin 1. Basin 3 is partially filled with water and the pump houses and caretaker cottage are in disrepair with damaged roofs, cracked brickwork and windows missing and boarded up. The entire site is enclosed with chain link fencing that is frequently cut by vandals who use the basins for illicit purposes, the pathway lighting is vandalized and inoperable, and the perimeter staircases are in disrepair.

When we look at open space to determine appropriate land-use and management, existing conditions are relevant. But existing conditions are a snap-shot, a moment in time. We need to examine site history to see how conditions developed and the rate and trajectory of change to predict how fast the site is changing and divine what future conditions will be.

The Ridgewood Reservoir site is a unique, highly contrived site. Some of my favorite New York City natural areas are highly contrived including:

- The sandy dredge-derived landscape around Jamaica Bay where various public works, including the construction of the Belt Parkway, and JFK and Floyd Bennett airfields inadvertently resulted in high quality maritime grassland and shrubland; and among others
- Pelham Bay Park's Orchard Beach Meadow, among the highest concentrations of rare plants in NY State, created when topsoil was scraped away to contribute fill for the construction in the late 1930s of the Orchard Beach parking lot.

But, on the other hand, most of the city's most highly contrived natural areas are also its most ecologically constrained. A very narrow range of invasive, non-native plants dominate landscapes that bear cultures deepest hand prints.

Ridgewood Reservoir exhibits both extremes.

Basin 1

Most plant communities in Basin 1 are dominated by native trees, shrubs, and herbs. Many of the dominant plant species are adapted to seasonally or permanently wet conditions. When NRG visited the site with Dr. Andrew Greller, Queens College Emeritus Professor of Botany, in the late 1980s, the site was mostly an open wet meadow with diffuse tree saplings. Professor Greller remarked that the site appeared as if it would one day turn in to the largest, finest red-maple swamp in western Long Island. Today it could be characterized as a complex mosaic of vegetation communities, many of which are wetlands, containing substantial areas of coastal hardwood swamp dominated by a mix of red maple, sweet gum, and pin oak trees. Professor Greller was correct. He had intuited that ecological processes in Basin 1 had a positive trajectory that would result in greater stability and habitat quality. These are raveling processes. What Dr. Greller did not see 20 years ago was that by the 1990s birds would disperse to the site the seeds of invasive exotic shrubs and vines. Overall, the conditions in Basin 1 are very good, and raveling processes are still in play. However, the invasive species are rapidly gaining and absent intervention by natural resource managers will in the near-term overtake much of the area and

cause a steep decline in native species diversity and habitat quality. Invasive exotic species promote unraveling processes.

Basin 2

The most conspicuous feature of Basin 2 is its large expanse of open water ringed by a wide border of common reed, *Phragmites australis*. Basin 2 appears much as it did 20 years ago, with perhaps now a larger area of Phragmites. Phragmites is an exotic invasive wetland grass that provides some water quality and habitat values that tends to overwhelm native wetland plant communities that many consider possessing more diverse habitat values.

Basin 3

The southern portion of Basin 3 exhibits a mosaic of vegetation communities very similar to Basin 1. Wetland plants are dominant, but trees appear to be generally more sparsely distributed. This western-most basin exhibits a split personality. The northern portion – roughly half – is composed almost entirely of invasive exotic trees forming a canopy over invasive exotic shrubs and herb. This appears to be the driest part of any of the basins and is unambiguously not a wetland. The largest part of this area is dominated by a scant two species: 1) invasive exotic black locust in the canopy; and invasive exotic mugwort as ground cover. This part of the basin exhibits the ecological nadir of the reservoir complex. The ecological trajectory here is a flat-line; as far as forest quality goes it is abysmal and there is no reason to expect it to get better in any sense of a human time-scale.

The Parks Department recognizes the ecological importance of the area despite concerns about the danger of invasive species. These ecological assets will be a critical design consideration and as Parks continues in the planning phase with the community, we will preserve and protect a vast amount of diverse flora and fauna species in and around the reservoir. However, I would like to emphasize that doing nothing at the reservoir is not the best way to manage the site.

It is a fallacy that nature takes care of itself. Even huge wilderness area in undeveloped regions such as Yellowstone and Everglades National Parks – each larger than one million acres – require management to reduce the ill effects of invasive exotic species. As Mike mentioned earlier, the clay-lined basins are not ideal for many of our native trees and plants to take root. Invasive species can push out whatever native growth has established itself there, and ultimately overwhelm more valuable and sustainable natural features.

The Parks Department has a long history of working to preserve and improve natural areas, starting in 1984 with the establishment of the Natural Resources Group by Commissioner Henry Stern. The Department manages over 9,000 acres of natural areas – woodlands, wetlands, meadows – and we have restored hundreds of acres of natural areas to improve their value, wildlife habitat and opportunities for environmental education. We have 73 miles of hiking trails and 16 nature centers, and over 100 park rangers offer environmental education in our thousands of acres of outdoor classrooms. We partner with national and local environmental and conservation organizations, including the Audubon Society at the national, state and local levels. In working with Audubon, we converted the boathouse in Prospect Park into the nation's first urban Audubon center.

There is also a long history of healthy co-existence of natural areas and recreational facilities. Examples include the Great Lawn and Turtle Pond and the Ramble in Central Park, both teeming with wildlife; Central Park's North Meadow and natural woodlands; Prospect Park's Long Meadow and adjacent Woodland Ravine; and playing fields of Alley Pond and the adjacent woodlands and trails; Pelham Bay Park picnic grounds and sports fields and the natural trails of Hunter and Twin Island.

PLANNING STATUS AND PROCESS

Before PlaNYC came into existence, there was already a lot of programming in Highland Park, and money allocated for capital improvement projects. The funding started with \$250,000 from the City Council and an additional \$250,000 from the Borough President in Fiscal Year 2004. Then, Council Member Dilan allocated \$2,200,000 in Fiscal Year 2006 for a total of \$2,700,000. With this money, work is underway to convert old clay tennis courts into a multi-use field. We will also be repairing an existing spray shower as part of the contract. This project is currently about 10 percent complete, with construction scheduled to finish in January of 2009.

Using requirements contract money, we are replacing the mesh backstops, painting the frames and replacing the baseball hoods on ballfields 3 and 4, and in August we will be upgrading the picnic area and installing four volleyball courts.

Our Highland Park Administrator Debbie Kuha has organized a number of community events and festivals, including a Garden Hoe down at the Children's garden, a Strawberry festival, puppet shows, dancing under the stars, live theatre performance by the Puerto Rican Traveling theatre, Russian American Kids circus, Junior Gardening program, and a fall festival. We have assigned a full time supervisor, crew chief and staff to the park and designated Highland Park as a district operation separate from District 5 Queens.

With all the activity and improvements taking place in Highland Park, I should note that Highland Park is a large park, and the reservoir is only a portion of it. Therefore it is important to understand how any work in the reservoir area will compliment the areas outside of it. As part of the design process, we will look at the park as a whole to determine what areas our project can strengthen, and what areas we can draw inspiration from. We will set the priority for work in the park based on the two listening sessions, five tours with elected officials and community representatives, (including groups such as Community Boards 5 in Queens and Brooklyn, ballfield permit holders, the Save the Ridgewood Reservoir coalition, Brooklyn clergy and others) and six meetings with elected officials. We also take into account the opportunities and constraints that the park provides and in the end, this great new park will only be viewed as a success if it serves the needs of the local and regional community groups, neighbors and stakeholders in the area.

Ideas we have heard so far include:

- **Educational opportunities:** Provide interpretive maps to highlight the importance of ecosystems and wildlife areas, and convert one or more of the currently degrading structures for an Urban Park Ranger station;

- **Nature Center:** Consider a small Nature Center near Basin 2, with bathroom facilities for public use at the active recreation areas. Adaptive reuse of the pump houses and a museum about the history of the Brooklyn Reservoir system has also been proposed.
- **Active and Passive Recreation:** Repair and add bikeways and walking paths, enhance and add new athletic facilities including but not limited to cricket, soccer, volleyball, track, skateboarding, and basketball

NEXT STEPS IN DESIGN PROCESS

We anticipate full registration of the design contract by the end of June 2008. Once registered, the consultant will immediately start preparing an in-depth site analysis. While he has done valuable work to date that has informed our discussions, he has been limited by his contract status. Based on this site analysis we will start developing conceptual plans which will be the basis for discussion with the various community groups, elected officials and the community boards. We realize that this is an important project to the local community and look forward to working with them closely. We anticipate a phased construction of work on the Park, contingent upon the design. Our goal is to start the first phase in fall 2009 with a completion date in spring 2011

CONCLUSION

As always, it is a pleasure to be able to present to the Council the opportunities available at Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir. The work of restoring natural areas and creating community involvement in caring for and protection of natural habitats is paramount to the success of this park and the region. In addition, the work we'll be doing to enhance active recreational opportunities for the Brooklyn communities of Cypress Hills and East New York to the south, will be transformational for the children of those neighborhoods. They will be able to exercise, interact and learn about nature and their community in ways not available before.

With the Council's continued support, we look forward to seeing a truly transformational project become a reality.

FOR THE RECORD



**OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK CITY
COMPTROLLER**

TESTIMONY BY

WILLIAM C. THOMPSON, Jr.

NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER

**Before the
New York City Council's Parks & Recreation Committee**

Should the Ridgewood Reservoir Be Preserved as a Wetland?

Council Chambers - City Hall

June 19th, 2008

10 AM

Testimony of William C. Thompson, Jr.

Chairman Foster and honorable members of the New York City Council, my name is William C. Thompson, Jr., and I am the Comptroller of the City of New York. I want to thank you for holding this hearing and giving me an opportunity to address what I believe is a critically important issue: Saving the Ridgewood Reservoir.

Before I discuss why it is essential that we preserve the Ridgewood Reservoir—in all its natural glory—allow me first to provide a brief history of how the reservoir came to be in New York City.

As some of you may know, the Ridgewood Reservoir was originally constructed in 1858 to provide drinking water to Brooklyn. It remained in regular service until 1959, when demand for water began to outstrip the reservoir's supply. It was then used for about 30 years as a backup water supply for parts of Brooklyn and Queens until it was finally taken out of service in 1989. Since then, the reservoir has been virtually untouched by human development.

But during the years the reservoir lay dormant, something wonderful happened: It became a bona fide wildlife preserve, right in the heart of New York City. As the 50 acres reverted to wetlands, meadows, and forests, tens of thousands of plants and trees took root and flourished. Turtles, fish, frogs, and millions of insects moved in. Songbirds nested in the glades, transforming the area into a migratory rest stop. Indeed, according to the National Audubon Society, 137 species of birds use the reservoir, including eight rare species.

In short, the Ridgewood Reservoir soon became a place as close to unspoiled nature as you're likely to find within city limits—an accidental wilderness, tucked alongside the Jackie Robinson Parkway.

Many people are astounded to learn that there is this teeming wildlife preserve in New York City. I certainly was when I visited the reservoir earlier this year; I was simply blown away by the area's natural beauty, its biodiversity, and its stunning elevation changes.

But as you know, the New York City Parks Department is currently considering a \$46 million "renovation" project that would raze one of the reservoir's three basins—including more than 20 acres of the entire reservoir—and convert it into athletic fields and facilities.

This plan would be disastrous, for a number of reasons.

What is perhaps most misguided about the plan is the fact that Highland Park—right next to Ridgewood Reservoir—already *has* plenty of ball fields. Most of these fields, and many areas of Highland Park itself, are in deplorable condition.

Money spent destroying and rebuilding the reservoir could be so much better spent improving the existing fields in Highland Park, or fixing any number of problems

currently plaguing the park. Broken lamp posts, dilapidated pathways, and stone bridges are all in desperate need of repair. As it stands now, Highland Park could be one of the city's most beautiful and utilized parks, but it's so run down people hardly ever use it.

The plan also flies in the face of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's widely hailed environmental blueprint, which bemoans the loss of the city's natural areas.

The Parks Department's own scientific consultants have warned against disturbing the reservoir, an area they call "highly significant for the biodiversity of New York City and the region." The area was also found to improve air quality, reduce storm water runoff and erosion, and temper the local climate.

The parks commissioner has said the city needs the athletic fields to combat childhood obesity. This is an important objective, but isn't walking and hiking in a natural reserve a viable form of exercise?

In fact, for children who are less interested in sports, or nature-lovers of any age, the reservoir's natural walking and hiking areas are the *perfect compliment* to the nearby sports fields. That is why the reservoir's trails should be upgraded with benches and rest areas, as well as markers pointing out unique flora and fauna.

The Parks Department should also open areas of the reservoir for guided nature walks, a great educational tool. For many New York City children, the reservoir is the only way to experience the natural world.

Make no mistake: I am in no way anti-development. In fact, during my tenure as New York City Comptroller, I have been a champion for *responsible* development in all five boroughs.

But this is different. This is one of New York City's last natural reserves, and it should not be destroyed to make room for ball fields that already exist right next door.

TESTIMONY OF QUEENS BOROUGH PRESIDENT HELEN MARSHALL
BEFORE NY CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION
– June 19th, 2008

GOOD MORNING MEMBERS OF THE NEW YORK CITY
COUNCIL, PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE
CHAIR FOSTER, COMMISSIONER ADRIAN BENEPE
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND
RECREATION, AND OTHER DISTINGUISHED GUESTS.
BEFORE I BEGIN, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE CITY
COUNCIL FOR HOLDING THIS OVERSIGHT HEARING
AND AFFORDING US THE OPPORTUNITY TO VOICE
OUR CONCERNS REGARDING THE RIDGEWOOD
RESERVOIR AND HIGHLAND PARK.

LET ME FIRST BEGIN BY SAYING THAT I OPPOSE THE
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION'S PLANS
TO CONVERT THE HISTORIC LANDMARK INTO
BALLFIELDS. RATHER, I AM A STRONG ADVOCATE TO
PRESERVE THE UNIQUE AND IMPORTANT
ECOSYSTEMS THAT HAVE DEVELOPED IN
RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR. RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR

AND HIGHLAND PARK TOTAL APPROXIMATELY 142.5 ACRES OF WOODLANDS, LAKES, WETLANDS, AND PICNIC AREAS AND IS LOCATED ON THE BROOKLYN/QUEENS BORDER WITHIN HIGHLAND PARK. THE RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR IS AN IMPORTANT AREA FOR RESIDENT, MIGRATORY AND NESTING BIRDS AND CAN SERVE AS A PLACE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY, BIRD WATCHING OR SIMPLE JUST A PLACE TO ENJOY THE WONDERFUL FRUITS THAT MOTHER NATURE HAS TO OFFER. IN ADDITION, THE EXISTING TOPOGRAPHY OF HIGHLAND PARK IS NOT ONLY PERMISSABLE TO SCENIC AND SERENE WALKS, BUT IF RECONFIGURED AND PROPERLY MAINTAINED, THIS AREA COULD SERVE FOR THE SITE OF MANY DIFFERENT SPORTING EVENTS, AND HELP DISCOUNT THE NEED TO BUILD ADDITIONAL SPORTS FACILITIES. UNFORTUNATELY, RIDEGWOOD RESERVOIR HOLDS THE DISTINCTION OF BEING ONE OF THE EIGHT “UNDERDEVELOPED DESTINATION PARKS” TO BE COMPLETED UNDER

MAYOR BLOOMBERG'S PLAN. TO THAT END, I SUPPORT AND RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING:

(1) CREATION OF AN ECOLOGY RESEARCH CENTER AND MUSEUM WHICH WOULD BE AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS; (2) PRESERVING ALL HISTORIC NATURAL AREAS AND ENSURING THAT THEY RECEIVE THE SAME TREATMENT AS HISTORICAL LANDMARKS;

(3) INSTALLATION OF SECURITY LIGHTING, NEW FENCING, REHABILITATION OF WALKWAYS AND RAILING, AND THE CREATION OF A SECURITY SYSTEM TO PROTECT THE RESERVOIR FROM UNAUTHORIZED ENTRY; AND (4) ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ONGOING MAINTENANCE PROGRAM FOR EXISTING SPORTS FACILITIES LOCATED ON JAMAICA AVENUE IN LOWER HIGHLAND PARK AS WELL AS THE FOUR BASEBALL FIELDS LOCATED IN UPPER HIGHLAND PARK.

IN CLOSING, I KNOW I HAVE SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY BOARDS AS WELL VARIOUS CIVIC AND SPORTS RELATED GROUPS AND THE PARKS SERVICES COMMITTEE WHEN I ASK THAT WE WORK TOGETHER WITH THE MAYOR'S OFFICE, THE CITY COUNCIL AND THE DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION TO SAVE THE RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR AND RESTORE HIGHLAND PARK. THROUGH A JOINTLY COLLABORATIVE AND COOPERATIVE EFFORT, I FEEL WE CAN MAXIMIZE THE FULL POTENTIAL OF THIS STORIED PIECE OF LAND. THANK YOU ONCE AGAIN FOR ALLOWING ME TESTIFY ON THIS IMPORTANT ISSUE.



**City Council Oversight Hearing: Ridgewood Reservoir
Parks Committee**

**New Yorkers for Parks Testimony
June 19, 2008**

Good morning. I am Sheelah Feinberg, Director of Government and Community Relations at New Yorkers for Parks, the only independent watchdog for all the city's parks, beaches, and playgrounds. For 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks has worked to ensure greener, safer, cleaner parks for all New Yorkers.

New York City's natural areas, including wetlands, forests, and salt marshes, are vital to the health of our city. Natural areas improve air and water quality by filtering pollutants and capturing stormwater, and they provide habitat for countless plants and animals. Through these capacities, they help to fulfill many of the stated goals of PlaNYC, the Mayor's long term sustainability initiative.

We are here today in support of the preservation of Ridgewood Reservoir, a natural area on the Brooklyn-Queens border that is home to divergent species of trees, plants, birds and other wildlife. The forest borders Council Districts 37 and 30, an area with limited natural resources.

The potential destruction of up to 20 acres of forest at Ridgewood Reservoir seems to be in direct opposition to the admirable goals set forth by the Mayor in PlaNYC including: planting one million trees, enhancing storm water management and greening the cityscape to improve water and air quality. In addition, as we have heard in *The New York Times* and elsewhere, there seems to be significant community opposition to the destruction of the forest.

After reading in a November issue of the *Daily News* that the Parks Department was considering replacing 20 acres of forest with artificial turf fields, New Yorkers for Parks shared our concern with Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe. We were glad to hear that if the Parks Department decides to replace the forest with active recreation, "we plan to use natural turf fields." However, we believe that preservation of the entire reservoir should be the first priority.

While we understand that a balance between passive and active recreation facilities must be found, we believe that by enhancing the multiple recreational opportunities in adjacent Highland Park, the community will be well served. We trust that the department and our elected officials will seriously consider community input as plans for the park are finalized.

Thank you.



NEW YORK CITY AUDUBON

Testimony of New York City Audubon
City Council of the City of New York
June 19, 2008

RE: The former Ridgewood Reservoir Property -- now part of Highland Park

I am Dr. Susan Elbin, Director of Conservation for New York City Audubon. Founded nearly thirty years ago, NYC Audubon is a grassroots conservation organization dedicated to protecting wild birds and their habitat within the city, improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers.

I had the privilege of visiting the former Ridgewood Reservoir earlier this week, and I would like to thank Parks Commissioner Benepe and Borough Commissioner Lewandowski for inviting me to see some of the unique natural areas inside the basins, and to applaud their recent efforts to protect this unique property from vandalism.

Descending into the basin feels like climbing back into an earlier age, free from the noise of the Jackie Robinson Parkway, into an oasis of nature -- all the more remarkable because this forest has regenerated without any assistance from people. It is clear on first glance at the unique habitats that have developed here that the primary value of this property is as a natural area.

As a natural area, this park provides breeding territory for nearly 40 bird species, such as American Redstart, Yellow Warbler, and Red-winged Blackbirds. American Woodcock, a ground nesting bird, is a unique and unforgettable species whose presence is testimony to the site's lack of disturbance. In addition, the site provides important stopover habitat for migrating birds. A recent study showed migrating birds feeding in a natural area in a New York City park regained depleted body fat significantly faster than birds in non-urban parks, though the mechanism is still not understood.

NYC Audubon understands that it is the job of the Parks Department to balance the needs of recreation and conservation in this and every park in the city, and we continue to encourage the parks department to consider alternate sites outside of the reservoir complex to build needed ball fields. In addition NYC Audubon is currently conducting a comprehensive breeding bird census of Central Park, and we will analyze recent and historic data to explore the impact of ball fields and other greenswards on nesting birds and we'll provide that analysis to the Parks Department to aid them in their planning.

Most of the basin is comprised of wetland habitats, not surprising because of the impermeable clay liner of the reservoir, and is unsuitable for development. Only one small section, a section dominated by Black Locust and Mugwort -- species that are not native to New York -- holds any possibility of development as ball fields.

On behalf of New York City Audubon's nearly 10,000 members, I strongly urge that funds be allocated to turn the former Ridgewood Reservoir into a destination for environmental education and a unique nature sanctuary, that ball fields should be placed in the basin only as a last resort, and if so placed should be designed and maintained in a sustainable way. The Ridgewood Reservoir is a unique treasure, worthy of special protection.



RIVERKEEPER

Testimony Presented by: Andrew A. Rafter, Legal Intern
Project Supervisor: Craig Michaels, Investigator
Riverkeeper, Inc.

Re: Oversight – Should the Ridgewood Reservoir be Preserved as a Wetland?
Hearing Before the Council of the City of New York
Parks and Recreation Committee
June 19, 2008

Riverkeeper is a non-profit environmental organization that works to protect the Hudson River and the New York City drinking water supply. We are also part of the SWIM coalition (Storm Water Infrastructure Matters), a broad coalition of environmental groups working to promote better stormwater management throughout the City. In addition, we work closely with the growing number of environmental and civic groups around New York City studying the environmental and public health impacts of development projects.

According to the New York City Parks and Recreation Department's estimates, the area that comprises present-day New York City historically included over 224,000 acres of freshwater wetlands. These unique ecosystems provide countless environmental benefits to the surrounding communities by functioning as buffers that control erosion, prevent flooding, filter pollutants, and provide critical plant and wildlife habitat. These ecosystems will continue to become increasingly valuable in terms of offsetting the likely effects of global warming. Of this initially vast area, only 2,000 acres remain today. This documented environmental loss underscores the need to protect the few wetland habitats that remain.

Ridgewood Reservoir is located within Highland Park. It was originally built in 1856 on a natural basin. It provided water to Brooklyn until 1959 and was then used as a backup water supply until it was decommissioned in 1989. Today, the 50 acres that comprise the Ridgewood Reservoir have become an urban forest and freshwater wetland. This is a unique natural resource that is now an important habitat that provides many benefits to wildlife and the natural environment of New York City. As such, Riverkeeper opposes any plans to significantly alter these valuable wetland areas.

Stormwater Impacts

More than 27 billion gallons of raw sewage and polluted stormwater discharge out of 460 combined sewer overflows (CSOs) into New York Harbor each year. Although water quality in the Harbor has improved significantly over the last few decades, most of the waterfront and its beaches are still unsafe for recreation after it rains. New York City's outmoded sewer system

combines sewage from buildings with dirty stormwater from streets. As little as one-tenth of an inch of rain can overload the system, causing raw sewage to overflow into the harbor and waterways.

PlaNYC 2030 established an inter-agency Task Force that is currently examining how and where best management practices (BMPs) can be implemented to reduce stormwater impacts throughout the City. BMPs are economically sound alternatives that can reduce the volume of stormwater entering the system. Examples of BMPs include: street trees, greenstreets (smaller vegetated areas on streets); green roofs to capture and/or detain run-off from buildings; tree pits designed to retain water for absorption by trees; and the use of porous pavement in area parking lots. Any excess stormwater that is not captured by source controls then enters the sewage system for eventual treatment.

The policies of sustainability and green infrastructure espoused in PlaNYC are also embodied in Local Law 5 a sustainable stormwater management bill recently enacted. While support for similar bills and policies continues to gain momentum, and while the BMP Task Force continues to make progress, the Department of Parks and Recreation continues to propose sacrificing passive recreational opportunities. Clearly, there is a disconnect here between policy and implementation.

In its current form, Ridgewood Reservoir absorbs stormwater that would otherwise enter the city's already overburdened sewage treatment system at the Newtown Creek Water Pollution Control Plant. Any increase in the amount of impervious surfaces at Ridgewood Reservoir would result in an increase in stormwater and consequently an increase in the CSOs that already pose a serious burden on the city's waterways, dumping 2.7 billion gallons of raw, untreated sewage into Newtown Creek alone. Any areas of Highland Park not within the Newtown Creek sewershed presumably drain into Jamaica Bay. Given the city's commitment to sustainable stormwater management and the protection of these specific watersheds, the proposed filling of Ridgewood Reservoir plainly contradicts the city's state policy goals.

Flooding

Given the predictions from scientists around the globe that the frequency and severity of storms will increase as temperatures continue to rise, and given that the five boroughs of New York City continue to see increased development and an ever-increasing population, flooding in New York City is not a problem that is about to go away. In order to properly deal with this problem, the Parks Department will need to work with all city agencies to take a fresh look at how the city manages stormwater. Ultimately, city agencies will need to implement an approach that controls stormwater at the source, not at the end of the pipe.

In order to abate future flooding problems, the Parks Department needs to concentrate on directing as much rainwater as possible away from overflowing sewer systems, where it quickly overloads the lines and triggers not only flooding in the streets and homes of area residents, but leads to raw sewage overflows into our creeks and rivers.

City leaders owe it to residents to start thinking differently about stormwater. Indeed, a report issued by the MTA on August 8, 2007 recommends a broad systematic approach in order to

avoid future flooding problems, which specifically includes source control methods such as greenstreets and green roofs. *See* MTA Report at 25. The report notes that many of these changes will “require a change in the institutional culture to include a range of professions and stakeholders involved in the planning and decision process.” *Id.* Moreover, the report urges that costs and benefits be analyzed in “not only monetary terms, but also in terms of environmental and community sustainability.” *Id.*

Urban Heat Island Effect

According to a report issued by New Yorkers for Parks, summer temperatures in New York City are approximately 7 degrees warmer than surrounding areas. This phenomenon, known as the urban heat island effect, is created by the combination of a vast amount of impervious surfaces (asphalt, concrete, etc.) and the dramatically small amount of trees and green spaces that can absorb the summer heat. By installing recreational fields in place of woodland habitat, green space, and wetlands, the urban heat island effect areas exacerbated in the communities surrounding Highland Park.

Habitat Preservation

Since being decommissioned in 1989, Ridgewood Reservoir has been reclaimed by nature and become an important habitat for many bird and plant species. Currently there are as many as 137 species of birds that have been identified in the reservoir many of which are migratory birds traveling along the Atlantic flyway. According to some sources there may be at least 20 breeding species at the site. Of these species, several are considered threatened (Pied-Billed Grebe) or endangered (short-eared owl) and others are considered declining or rare on the Audubon Society’s Watch-list. In addition to providing habitat for many species of birds, the Reservoir also provides habitat for many species of plant, some which are also potentially subject to legal protection under the endangered species act.

As the City itself acknowledged in PlaNYC 2030, green spaces such as Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir provide many benefits to the surrounding communities. The trees and plant life at the reservoir improve air quality, absorb ultraviolet rays, provide for the bio-retention of stormwater and reduce the Urban Heat Island Effect, as noted above. While the Parks Department tends to focus on active recreation as a means to combat childhood obesity and other health risks, this focus overlooks the numerous benefits of passive recreation such as birding, hiking, and other uses offered by the site in its current condition. Apart from removing toxic chemicals from the air, ground and water, the improvement in the air quality that results from having such a concentration of photosynthetic plants also helps to combat asthma and other respiratory ailments.

If the city wishes to encourage active recreation, rehabilitation of the existing structures at the adjacent Highland Park should be its first priority.

The importance of this habitat is not diminished simply because some of the trees and plants are not indigenous to New York City. The Parks Department has implied that the City’s plan will effect a portion of the reservoir that is of lesser concern because it is being overrun by invasive species and is a lower quality habitat as a result. While invasive species are a legitimate concern, particularly in wetlands areas, the appropriate response to the threat of invasive species is a well-

thought out and ecologically sound plan of forest management – not a wholesale destruction of verdant space that is already so rare in the city.

Inconsistency with PlaNYC

The proposal to clear and develop over 20 acres of green space is in direct conflict with many of the Bloomberg Administration's stated goals under PlaNYC 2030. As part of the mayor's plan for a more sustainable New York City, the administration has committed itself to various goals, including the so-called One Million Trees program. The goal of this plan is to plant one million new trees in the city by the year 2017. While the planting of one million trees is a laudable goal, priority should be given to preserving trees that are already in place.

Community Opposition

Aside from the obvious detriments to the environment, there is also considerable opposition to the development of Ridgewood Reservoir from within the communities that will purportedly benefit from the Mayor's plan. The community boards of both adjacent neighborhoods adopted a resolution to preserve the Reservoir in its current state and to oppose the development of the site. Instead, they propose that the site be maintained in its current state and that an educational center and museum be built onsite. This sentiment is expressed in the resolutions passed by both Community Board 5 in Queens and Community Board 5 in Brooklyn.

Riverkeeper supports and encourages the development of such education programs that capitalize on the unique opportunities that such a natural setting provide to students who live in a predominantly urban environment and thus do not normally have the opportunity to experience such habitats on a regular basis. It would be a shame if such a resource were to be destroyed so that the city can build ball fields that could easily be built somewhere else where such natural resources are not present. If the Parks Department is serious about working with the communities in determining future uses of the reservoir, these resolutions must not be ignored.

Parks Department Resources and Feasibility

Highland Park is directly adjacent to the proposed site and is poorly maintained. If resources were devoted to necessary carrying out necessary maintenance and upgrades, would likely provide the active recreation facilities that are proposed for Ridgewood Reservoir. The dirt patches in the outfield of the baseball fields and the poor condition of the tennis courts are direct testament to the Parks Department's inability to properly maintain the already existing recreational facilities.

The department has currently allocated \$50 million dollars to develop this site. That money could be better spent upgrading the many city parks that are not properly maintained, including Highland Park. This location is an obvious candidate for increased maintenance and upgrade. We propose that before the city bulldozes an important natural habitat, it focus its efforts on rehabilitating poorly maintained parkland that might otherwise satisfy the needs of the surrounding communities.

Similar projects involving the filling in of wetlands to create ball fields have failed and should caution the parks department against undertaking such projects. One such example is that of Strack Pond in Queens. The pond was converted into ball fields in 1966 but the fields were

constantly flooded and were eventually turned back into wetlands in 2004. This raises questions as to whether it is even feasible to construct ball fields in this location, and if so would they be subject to similar chronic flooding. The city made the mistake once. Such a costly mistake should not be repeated at Ridgewood Reservoir.

Environmental Review

From an overall environmental perspective, any proposed changes to the Ridgewood Reservoir should be subject to scrutiny under either the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and the City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) process.

There are potential legal obstacles to converting the basins into ball fields. There are state and federal laws protecting endangered species. Since there is evidence of endangered plants and animals now using the reservoir as habitat, any proposed action will need to adequately assess and protect the quality of that habitat in order to comply fully with applicable laws. The reservoir may also qualify for protection under either state or federal laws protecting freshwater wetlands. If such classification is granted, these laws will limit the permissible activities on-site and will require permits from the appropriate state or federal agencies before any activity is allowed.

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Riverkeeper is a non-profit environmental organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Hudson River Estuary, New York City's upstate drinking water reservoirs, and the rights of all New Yorkers to clean communities and a clean environment. Since 1965, we have brought hundreds of environmental lawbreakers to justice, forcing more than \$1 billion in fines and remediation projects.

Contacts:

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Andrew A. Rafter, Legal Intern, Riverkeeper, 914-478-4501, arafter@riverkeeper.org*

Resources:

Sustainable Raindrops: http://riverkeeper.org/special/Sustainable_Raindrops_FINAL_2007-03-15.pdf

PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/planyc2030/html/home/home.shtml>

SWIM Coalition: <http://www.swimmablenyc.org>

*Report on Flora of Ridgewood Reservoir by Uli Lorimer:
<http://www.ilandart.org/danceprojects.cfm?id=4&subPage=3&rID=2>*

Save Ridgewood Reservoir: <http://ridgewoodreservoir.blogspot.com/>

MTA August 8, 2007 Storm Report: http://mta.info/mta/pdf/storm_report_2007.pdf

EAST BROOKLYN CONGREGATIONS
440 WATKINS STREET – BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11212
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EAST BROOKLYN CONGREGATIONS LEADERS CALL FOR PROMPT & ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE REPAIR AND DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHLAND PARK -- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – JUNE 19, 2008

More than 100 leaders of East Brooklyn Congregations (EBC) will gather at 9:45 AM on Thursday, June 19, in front of City Hall to call for repairs and expansion to Highland Park – the sprawling 140 acre area located along the Jackie Robinson Parkway on the border of Brooklyn and Queens. Later, several EBC leaders and EBC allies will testify at a hearing in City Hall.

“We need a park as maintained and as improved as City Hall Park, or Central Park, or Prospect Park,” said EBC leader and co-founder, the Reverend David Benke. “And that will require significant city or private sector investment right now, not dithering and delay from the Office of Management and Budget.”

Highland Park serves the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Bushwick, Cypress Hills, East New York, and Ridgewood in Queens. Despite the fact that the park is currently under funded and poorly maintained, it is still heavily used. “Our parishioners and their neighbors fill this park because it is the only such space our neighbors have access to,” said Bishop David Benke, Pastor of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Cypress Hills near the church. East Brooklyn Congregations has 31 different member churches, schools, and neighborhood associations throughout Brooklyn, including 12 with significant membership living near the park.

“This is the only place most people in Bushwick can use for most outdoor sports and the only space for a picnic with your family,” said Fr. Mariano Cisco, the Pastor of St Joseph Patron Roman Catholic Church in Bushwick, and EBC Strategy Team Member. “The park’s facilities, especially the path’s handball and basketball courts need to be repaired, and there is a desperate need for more fields, courts, picnic and other areas as well.”

“We applaud the Parks Department for coming up with a plan to develop more needed facilities,” said Juan Romero a Saint Joseph Patron Parishioner and EBC Leader, “However, this must be done in a way that addresses the legitimate concerns raised by some environmentalists about protecting wildlife in the park’s Ridgewood Reservoir, where the expansion has been planned.”

Most importantly an improvement, and or expansion, must be done as soon as possible. “The park is in dire need of more facilities and improvements to existing facilities,” said Larry Rickert, a Saint Peter’s parishioner and EBC Leader. “The most important thing is for this to happen in the current administration.”

For further information, contact Bishop David Benke at 914- 497-9676

Rob Jett
568 5th Street
Brooklyn, NY 11215

The Council of the City of New York, Committee on Parks and Recreation public hearing,
Oversight - Should the Ridgewood Reservoir be Preserved as Wetland?

Good morning. Thank you Councilwoman Foster and committee members for this opportunity to testify before this hearing regarding the future of the Ridgewood Reservoir.

My name is Rob Jett and I am a member of the organization Highland Park Ridgewood Reservoir Alliance

When the Brooklyn Water-Waters Company was designing the reservoir system in the mid-19th century they choose as its location the highest point along the Brooklyn and Queens counties. Today, it is the reservoir's position on that hilltop that contributes to its role in helping to solve several key environmental issues facing city decision makers. Three of those topics are:

- The health of Jamaica Bay's Wetlands
- Reducing Newtown Creek Combined Sewage Overflow
- Mitigating New York City's "Urban Heat Island"

Within the last 20 years environmental biologists began raising red flags over the apparent decline of the critical Jamaica Bay Wetlands eco-systems. Councilman James Gennaro led a series of hearings which resulted in the passing of Local Law 71.

The law required the New York City Department of Environmental Protection to create a watershed protection plan for the watershed/sewershed of Jamaica Bay, and would create a Jamaica Bay watershed protection plan advisory committee.

According to maps created by the Jamaica Bay Wetlands Task Force, the Ridgewood Reservoir falls within the boundaries of the Jamaica Bay Watershed. The three basins contain a freshwater lake, bog and forest which act, essentially, as a giant sponge, attenuating storm water surges and filtering water that eventually ends up in the bay. Removing any of the existing habitats and replacing it with artificial recreational surfaces would effectively destroy that mechanism

The Ridgewood Reservoir complex also affects Newtown Creek. Which brings me to my second point.

Environment Organization "Riverkeeper" states, "More than 27 billion gallons of raw sewage and polluted stormwater discharge out of 460 combined sewage overflows ("CSOs") into New York Harbor each year." Studies have determined that the most efficient and cost effective method to ease this problem is through storm water source control. The city already has a 50-acre storm surge suppression system in place called "The Ridgewood Reservoir." Removing the forests and wetlands at the reservoir would only worsen the problems at Newtown Creek.

My third, and final point, is regard "Urban Heat Island Effect." According to NASA, the urban heat island effect "causes air temperatures in New York City and other major cities to be warmer than in neighboring suburbs and rural areas." Unusually high temperatures reduce air quality by increasing ozone, which affects everyone's health. It also increases the risk of major heat waves and blackouts. Planting more trees and other vegetation reduces the temperature. Satellite images from NASA's study show that the Ridgewood Reservoir and its surrounding areas are some of the coolest locations within the city's five boroughs. Once again, removing the forest and wetlands would be counterintuitive to what the mayor is trying to accomplish.

"Trees for Public Health Neighborhoods" has identified East New York as having fewer than average street trees and higher than average rates of asthma among young people. Planting additional trees in these neighborhoods will reduce the pollutants that trigger respiratory disorders, and contribute to healthier living standards. A map created by the Department of Parks & Recreation show that the Ridgewood Reservoir falls within the boundaries of that neighborhood.

I applaud Mayor Bloomberg for leading the way in environmental and sustainable urban agendas. Unfortunately, if the Department of Parks & Recreation is allowed to proceed with their development of the Ridgewood Reservoir, it would negate many of the mayor's conservation oriented ideas. It is for that reason that I respectfully request that this committee ask Mayor Bloomberg to revisit his PlanNYC 2030's decision for the Ridgewood Reservoir.

TESTIMONY OF THOMAS C. DOWD
BEFORE THE PARK'S COMMITTEE OF
THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

June 19, 2008

INTRODUCTION:

My name is Thomas Dowd. I live at 59-13 Summerfield St. Ridgewood NY 11385. I am a member of the Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic Association, St. Matthias Church, The Ridgewood Democratic Club the Parks Committee of Community Board 5 (Queens) and the Highland Park/Ridgewood Reservoir Alliance. I am Chairman of a Boy Scout Troop and President of the Earth Society Foundation. I hold an MPIA degree in Public and International Affairs. I am a fourth generation resident of Ridgewood.

The Ridgewood Reservoir is 148 years old and an environmental jewel on the Border of Queens and Brooklyn. Others will testify about its environmental importance. I am here to speak about long term substandard public administration by many agencies of the city government that must be corrected as soon as possible. Agencies that need help include the Parks Dept., Police Dept., Transportation Dept, elected officials in both Boroughs and the Executive Branch of city government. The bright spot in all of this is the cooperative work done by both community boards in Brooklyn and Queens. Agencies that need to be more active related to the preservation of the 52 acres of the Reservoir and redevelopment of the rest of Highland Park are the New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation, the Dept. of Education, Landmark Preservation Board and the NYC Tourism Board. We are hoping that the following will occur:

1. The Parks Dept should be urged to cease cutting trees recently planted in Highland Park as the federal Youth Corps program. Responsible individuals should be reprimanded.
2. Parks should publish a set of goals that preserves all three basins of the Ridgewood Reservoir as natural habitat-- forever. The City Council should mandate such a goal statement and specify no development within the 3 basins. Such a resolution has been passed by two community boards. The Parks Committee of the City Council needs to adopt the goals statement published by both Community Boards 5 of Queens and Community Board 5 of Brooklyn.
3. The City Council needs to find a way to improve coordination among Borough officials in Queens and Brooklyn so that the capital and maintenance budgets can be developed and used to benefit both Boroughs.
4. The Executive Branch should register the contract designating the Reservoir as one of 7 new destination parks. The contract should include the creation of an environmental preserve and a

museum dedicated to the history and importance of water. This should improve transparency of the planning process.

5. The NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation should be asked by the City Council to oversee all activity in the basins in order to preserve endangered species and to stop the progress of plans to put artificial turf ball fields in this environmentally sensitive area. The City Council should play a role in asking the state for such oversight of the Reservoir area. This should include the publication of environmental studies already completed.
6. The Police Dept. executive level should review a joint plan by the 75th and 104th precincts that stops Precinct borders from inhibiting police activity. The plan should include a long term plan for video monitoring the Reservoir rim. The City Council should see such a plan within 90 days.
7. The Landmark Preservation Committee needs to prevent the breaching of the walls of the 148 year old reservoir and supervise the restoration of the Old Stone Bridge in Highland Park. These structures need to be designated as historically important.
8. The Transportation Dept. needs to be asked to evaluate the safety issues related to crossing Vernon Blvd., for people using the rim of the Reservoir for exercise. They need to be given 90 days to repair the lights along the rim of the Reservoir. This repair should be done in such a way as to prevent future vandalism but also allow the area to be monitored via video. If the lights were designed so they could be dimmed, the study of nature and astronomy would be aided for the 15,000 students in the immediate area.
9. The Tourism Board should report to the City Council the potential of this highest point in Queens. The Education Dept. needs to evaluate the potential for helping over 15,000 students study environment, water conservation, nature and photovoltaic installation.
10. The Ethics Committee of the City Council should be asked to look at the issue of using ball field permits as a means of influence peddling.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION RELATED TO THE TEN REQUESTS.

1. A maintenance crew, unfamiliar with the park, was recently allowed to cut weeds in an area covered by young trees planted last year by a federal Youth Corps program. Last summer the young people planted several hundred trees now lost because of careless maintenance. This action flies in the face of the million tree initiative.
2. Against the advice of the community, letters and meetings by elected officials, NY Times editorials and the protests of many organizations, the Parks Dept. still maintains the plan to build ball fields 40 feet below street grade level in basin 3. A similar plan was carried out in Forest Park several years ago until the Park's Commissioner realized that a natural pond is better than a wet ball field. Basin 3 has held water for over 100 years. In addition, the extreme heat generated by a ball field so far below grade will cause problems for people and wildlife. Recent studies have been critical of the use of the artificial turf being proposed. These new fields are being proposed by Parks at a time when the current fields in Highland Park are not maintained and underutilized.

3. The Reservoir and Highland Park are 85% in Queens and 15% in Brooklyn. This is the administrative nightmare that has hurt the park for a long time. This quirk of political geography has allowed the park to slip through the cracks of oversight, funds and planning. The Maintenance and Capital budgets are split between the two Boroughs and two community boards. Without close coordination and joint goal setting, the park has suffered monumental neglect in infrastructure. Indeed, the beautiful reforestation of the basins was due to a 40 year neglect of the Reservoir. The community is concerned that toxic dumping in an adjacent cemetery has seeped into the Reservoir. Last year's programming for Highland Park took only a small post card, while the programs for Forest Park took several pages.
4. After years of neglect, the city turned the reservoir over to the Parks Dept. four years ago. The area was to become one of 7 destination parks. While all six other city contracts for the 7 parks Development project have been registered, the Reservoir has not been registered. Registering the contract will make the Park's Dept plan more transparent. The only published picture, shown by the Park's Dept at St. Peter's church, clearly shows the existence of ball fields that would endanger the environment. At community sessions, Parks insisted community leaders place ball fields in the reservoir basins. The community resisted. Park's has also stated its goal of breaching the wall of the reservoir to improve access. This would hurt the environment. Four endangered species exist in the basins now. Other means, such as an elevator could bring in emergency crews.
5. Parks has shown a level of poor judgment in the administration of the Reservoir. It allowed the water level to be lowered to fight West Nile disease. The result was to increase the danger of West Nile by created a still water source. Park's is ignoring the million trees initiative by cutting down the Youth Corps trees and planning to cut basin trees for ball fields. The current ball fields and walk ways in Highland Park are not well maintained. The current thinking about destination parks relates to individual health initiatives such as biking and walking, not baseball fields. The state and federal governments have a broader view of the importance of the Atlantic flyway, endangered plants and the watershed than does the city department. The state agency needs to assume oversight of the development of the Ridgewood Reservoir site, not the local Parks Department.
6. Assemblyman Towns calls the police administration of security in Highland Park, "an invisible force field". If the bad guy comes from the Cypress Avenue area, the 75th will not respond. If the ATV comes into the park via Brooklyn, the 104 will not respond. Illegal Paint Ball, ATV riding, muggings and other crimes have been caused by this border mentality. Eliminating this crime problem is the single most important event for the development of the Ridgewood and Cypress Hills Neighborhoods.
7. The best way to preserve the hand built 40 foot thick stone walls of the reservoir and the Old Stone Bridge is to designate them as important historical structures. Even the pump house and other buildings on the property should be examined for historical importance to the city's history. The plan to breach the wall could cause a collapse of at least one wall and damage the environment of creatures now protected by the glacial stones from the area, used to build these two structures. Inside the basins is a mini Jurassic park. Let's not disturb it.

8. Every single light pole on the rim of the reservoir has been broken by vandals and muggers. This is an insurance nightmare for the city. Repairing the lights should be undertaken before the entire park is redesigned and redeveloped. On a recent tour of the reservoir, elected officials had to climb over steel traffic barriers to get to the rim of the reservoir. There is inadequate control of pedestrian traffic on the Brooklyn side of the park. There may be the need of some sort of pedestrian bridge, traffic lights and some rerouting of public busses near the park.
9. Alley Pond Environmental Center and the hawks near Central Park are important tourist attractions. Every city in Canada has an observation tower at its highest point. The Ridgewood Reservoir is one of the highest points in Queens. From one side, you can see the Atlantic Ocean. From another side you can clearly see the skyline of Manhattan. Just over the fence there are 138 varieties of nesting birds and other wildlife. On the rim there are two buildings that could house interactive environmental education. On the rim, day and night vision glasses could give an incredible look into the natural life of the planet. If the people on the tourist ships docked in Brooklyn do not want to see the Ridgewood wonders of New York, there are 15,000 children in schools within 10 blocks of the Reservoir. They need to understand the importance of nature, this history of water, and the interdependence of people and wildlife among these children. Highland Park is perfect for biking, skating and walking. A city wide bike path already exists. The potential for tourism and environmental education are without limits.
10. It has been alleged that the issuance of ball park permits has been abused. This issue needs to be reviewed by the City Council Ethics committee.



Community Board No. 5

Borough of Queens
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Vincent Arcuri, Jr.
Chairperson

May 20, 2008

Gary Giordano
District Manager

Resolution Re: The Ridgewood Reservoir and Highland Park

After careful consideration and discussion with various civic and sports related leaders, the Parks Services Committee presents the following Resolution regarding the Ridgewood Reservoir, and Highland Park:

Whereas, it is resolved that Community Board 5, Queens supports the following position with respect to the Ridgewood Reservoir:

- That CB5Q supports and is committed to preserving all historic natural areas and that these historic settings receive the same treatment as historical landmarks. The loss of any natural areas negatively impacts the quality of life for all communities bordering these green spaces. Therefore, we support any and all efforts to preserve all eco-systems within all three chambers of the Ridgewood Reservoir;
- That CB5Q supports and recommends the creation of an ecology research center and museum at the Ridgewood Reservoir which would be available to students in the surrounding communities;
- That CB5Q supports and recommends installation of security lighting, new fencing, rehabilitation of walkways and railings, and the creation of a security system to protect the Ridgewood Reservoir from unauthorized entry into the three separate basins;
- That CB5Q supports and recommends that an ongoing maintenance program be established for the existing sports facilities that are located on Jamaica Avenue in Lower Highland Park, as well as the four baseball fields that are located in Upper Highland Park; and
- That CB5Q asks that the Mayor, the City Council, and the Borough Presidents of Brooklyn and Queens work together to allocate capital budget funding annually for overdue improvements to the ball fields, pathways, drainage system, open field areas and other deteriorated parts of Highland Park.

The foregoing is a copy of a Resolution of the Parks Services Committee of Community Board 5, Queens adopted unanimously by Board members during the regularly scheduled monthly Board Meeting held on May 14th, 2008, by a vote of 26 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions, and 0 not voting.

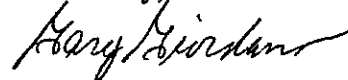
May 23, 2008

Hon. Adrian Benepe, Commissioner
N.Y. City Dept. of Parks & Recreation

Re: CB5Q Recommendation for the
Ridgewood Reservoir & for
Highland Park

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with the Parks Department, elected officials, and Community Board 5, Brooklyn in a very cooperative fashion, so that these wonderful opportunities become realities. Many thanks.

Sincerely,



Gary Giordano
District Manager

CC: Hon. Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of the City of New York
Hon. Helen Marshall, Borough President of Queens
Hon. Serphin Maltese, NY State Senator
Hon. Catherine Nolan, NY State Assemblywoman
Hon. Diana Reyna, NY City Council Representative
Hon. Erik Martin Dilan, NY City Council Representative
Dorothy Lewandowski, Queens Borough Commissioner-Parks Dept.
Walter Campbell, District Manager-CB5, Brooklyn
V: Arcuri, S. Fiedler, P. Kerzner, M. Hetzer, & B. Dooley-CB5Q

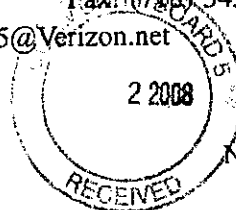
The
Borough
of
Brooklyn



COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 5

The City of New York
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May 29, 2008



NATHAN BRADLEY
Chairman

MARTY MARKOWITZ
Borough President

WALTER CAMPBELL
District Manager

Resolution Re: The Ridgewood Reservoir and Highland Park

At Brooklyn Community Board #5 General meeting, held on May 28, 2008, the Board voted to approve the following resolution:

Whereas, it is resolved that Brooklyn Community Board #5, supports the following position with respect to the Ridgewood Reservoir (3 basins) in Highland Park.

The Resolution Reads:

That Brooklyn CB#5 supports and is committed to preserving all historic natural areas and that these historic setting receive the same treatment as historical landmarks. The loss of any natural areas negatively impacts the quality of life for all communities bordering these green spaces. Therefore, we support any and all efforts to preserve all eco-systems within all three chambers of the Reservoir:

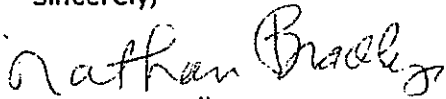
That Brooklyn CB#5 supports and recommends the creation of an ecology research center and museum at the Ridgewood Reservoir which would be available to students in the surrounding communities;

That Brooklyn CB#5 supports and recommends installation of security lighting, new fencing, rehabilitation of walkways and railings, and the creation of a security system to protect the Ridgewood Reservoir from unauthorized entry into the three separate basins;

That Brooklyn CB#5 supports and recommends that an ongoing maintenance program be established for the existing sports facilities that are located on Jamaica Avenue in Lower Highland Park, as well as the four baseball fields that are located in upper Highland and;

That Brooklyn CB#5 asks that the Mayor, the City Council, and the Borough President of Brooklyn and Queens work together to allocate capital budget funding annually for overdue improvements to the ball field, pathways, drainage system, open field areas and other deteriorated parts of Highland Park.

Sincerely,



Nathan, Bradley
Chairman
Community Board #5

CC: Hon. Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of the City of New York
Hon. Marty Markowitz, Brooklyn Borough President
Hon. Nydia M. Velazquez, Congresswoman
Hon. Edolphus "Ed" Towns, Congressman
Hon. John Sampson, Senator
Hon. Martin Malave-Dilan, Senator
Hon. Williams F. Boyland, Jr. Assemblyman
Hon. Erik Martin-Dilan, Councilman
Hon. Charles Barron, Councilman
Hon. Darryl C. Towns, Assemblyman
Community Board #5 Queens

The question at hand is “Should Ridgewood Reservoir be saved as Wetlands?” My answer is yes because both the Federal EPA and NY State DEC list Ridgewood Reservoir as wetlands and it should be saved as an environmental/educational center.

It seems very clear to me that because the DOPR has \$50 million in its budget for Ridgewood Reservoir it wants to spend that money whether or not it is prudent to do so. It is strange to me that this plan which would destroy thousands of trees comes as part of PLANYC 2030 whose stated goal is to plant 1 million new trees. Any development of Ridgewood Reservoir would be a bad idea for several reasons:

1. Development will be Detrimental to ecosystem of the reservoir basins. Commissioner Benepe stated in a recent letter in the NY Times that basin #3 is full of invasive trees and vines that threaten the ecosystem in the basin (a gross overstatement of reality). Therefore, he wants to replace them with parking lots and artificial turf ball fields. Ball fields that are not needed. The two fields in upper Highland Park are now underutilized and in need of maintenance. What is more of a threat to the ecosystem invasive species which can be controlled with proper management or bulldozers mowing down thousands of trees?
2. Development will be Detrimental to Jamaica Bay. The Reservoir is in Jamaica Bay’s watershed and whenever there is heavy rain the water will run into storm sewers and overflow the water treatment plant on Jamaica Bay. The bay has enough other problems without extra overflow. Leave the Reservoir as is and the water will collect in the basins and filter down through the aquifer as nature intended.
3. Contrary to Mayor Bloomberg’s plan to plant 1 million trees. If the stated goal is to plant 1 million trees why cut down 5 to 10 thousand existing trees? It just doesn’t make sense.
4. Fiscally irresponsible. To me the major reason the DOPR wants to spend \$50 million is because it was budgeted when the economy was better and if it is not spent it goes away. In the meantime we have had an economic downturn and money is being cut from the overall budget in areas such as education. To me let’s look at what is more important. Can the money be better used elsewhere?

To those who have never seen the reservoir picture three huge above ground swimming pools with rocks as retaining walls and dirt piled against the wall from the outside to hold it in place. These retaining walls are made of irregular sized rocks that were culled during the excavation of the site. Therefore, if you breach the retaining wall you will never be able to fix it. Once the retaining walls are breached we are past the point of no return. I bring this up because I see a parallel between Ridgewood Reservoir and PFC Strack Pond.

When I was a young boy I would frequently visit Forest Park with my family. One of the places we would go was a natural kettle pond just south of Forest Park Dr and just west

of Woodhaven Blvd. across from the carousel. People would sail toy boats and children could catch sunfish in the pond. It was a lovely spot. Then in 1966 someone got the bright idea to drain the pond and build ball fields in its place. This was done with great fanfare. What a great mistake. The plan was not well conceived. Who would have thought that water would collect in a kettle hole? How unique! Of course over the years there were always problems with the ball fields. Any time it rained they became unusable for extended periods of time. The kettle hole is a natural basin for water. The straw that broke the camel's back came I believe in 2000 when then Parks Commissioner Stern came to the ball fields to take part in the opening ceremonies of Woodhaven/Richmond Hill Little League. It had rained the previous evening and the fields were covered with water and approximately a dozen mallard ducks. Commissioner Stern's comment was "This is for the birds" and a decision was made to restore the ball fields back to its natural state of a pond. At a ceremony celebrating the restoration of the pond and the renaming to PFC Strack Memorial Pond Parks Commissioner Benepe made the following statements in a press release dated 5/19/2004. "Once a soggy and often unusable ball field, this site is now a beautiful pond, teeming with life." "By continuing to restore our city's wetlands we make the city a healthier and greener place for all New Yorkers. The over one half a million dollar restoration of PFC Laurence Strack Pond gives nature lovers a great new spot to see butterflies, Red Tail Hawks and Great Blue Herons."

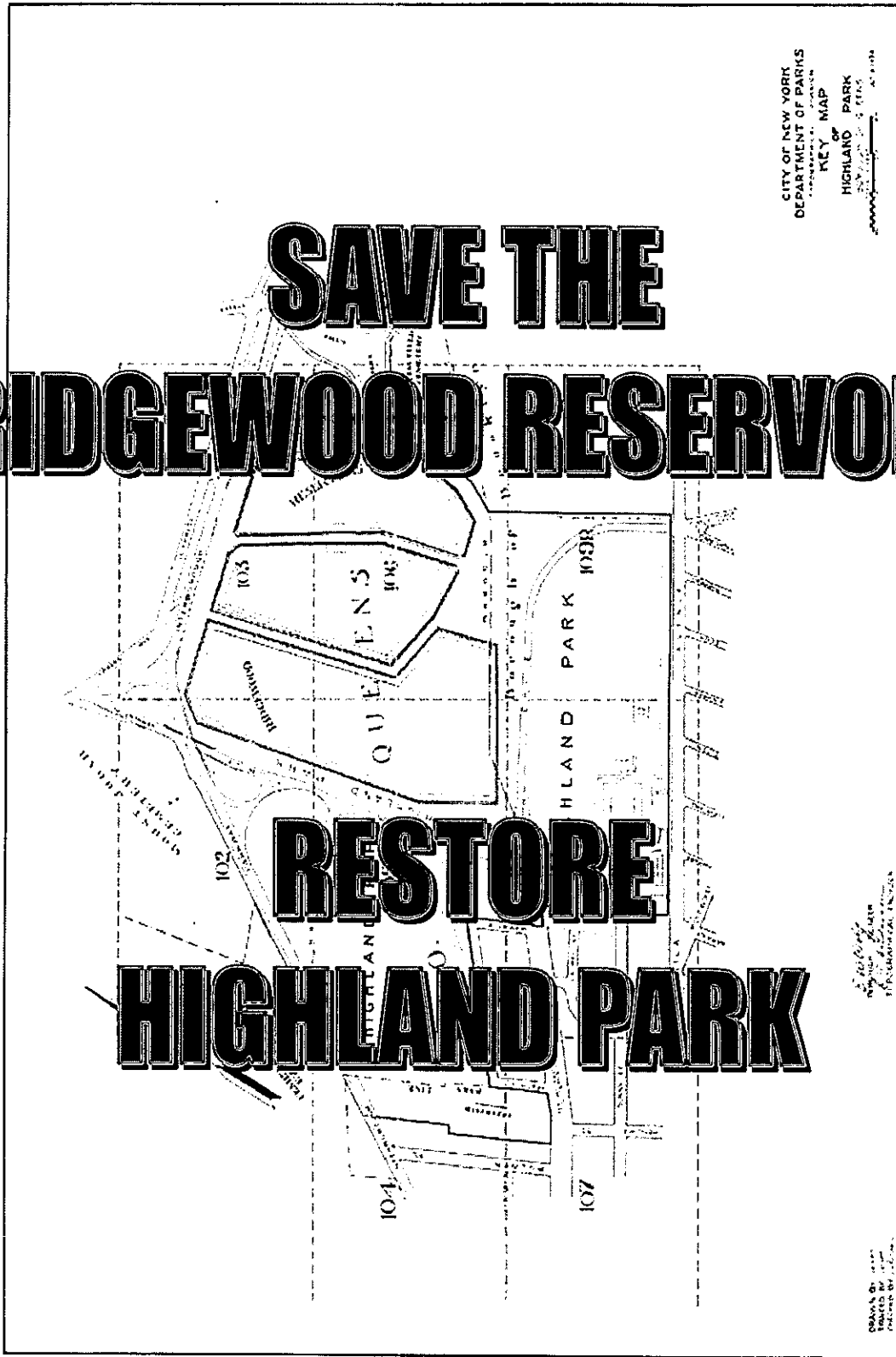
Can you see what a great mistake it would be to destroy the integrity of the retaining walls of any of the basins? Let's not make the same mistake that was made with PFC Strack Pond. The basins of Ridgewood Reservoir were designed to hold water and are wet. Why undo what Mother Nature has done over the past forty years? We have a great opportunity to make the reservoir into a first class environmental/educational center. The Reservoir needs management not development, again management not development.

Thank You,

Ludwig H. Widerka

SAVE THE RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR

RESTORE HIGHLAND PARK



CITY OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS
RECREATION
KEY MAP
OF
HIGHLAND PARK

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DESIGNED BY
DRAWN BY
CHECKED BY
APPROVED BY

Highland Park / Ridgewood Reservoir Alliance

Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir combined total approximately 142.5 acres of woodlands, lakes, wetlands, picnic areas, active and passive sports areas. Over the years much of Highland Park has fallen into disrepair and currently it is in such poor condition that it is being used to only a very small fraction of its potential. If restored and properly maintained, Highland Park-Ridgewood Reservoir could be a jewel. The existing topography of Highland Park is quite interesting and, along with the potential for many lovely walks, this area could also serve for the site of many different active sports, picnics and a variety of local events. A slightly reconfigured and properly maintained Highland Park would obviate the perceived need to build additional active sports facilities within the Ridgewood Reservoir basins. The Ridgewood Reservoir could become one of the best nature preserves ever created in an urban center and would serve as a place for environmental study, bird watching or just quietly enjoying nature.

Organizations which support our Alliance

Alley Pond Environmental Center

Brooklyn Bird Club

Center for Law and Social Justice

Drosera

Earth Society Foundation

Highlanders East New York United Front

Juniper Park Civic Association

Liberty Park Homeowners Association

Linnaean Society of New York

Making the Road by Walking

National Lawyers Guild – Environmental Justice Committee

Natural Resources Protective Association

New York Environmental Law and Justice Project

Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces

Queens County Bird Club

Ridgewood Democratic Club

Urban Environmental Youth Corp

We Act for Environmental Justice

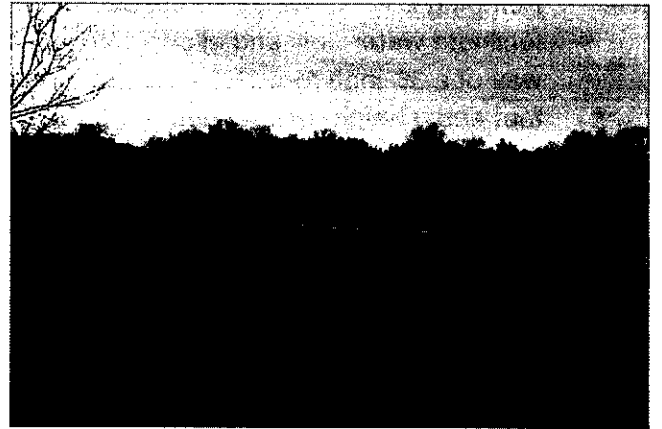
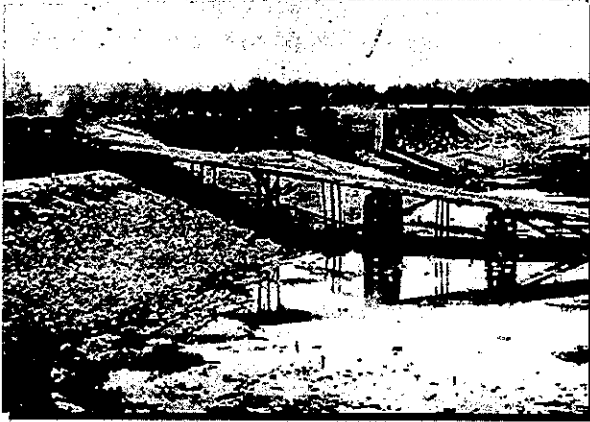
WildMetro

HISTORY OF HIGHLAND PARK INCLUDING THE RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR 1800 - 2007

The growing population in Brooklyn caused a need for more water. In 1852 private companies like the Nassau Water Co. began to purchase land in Queens to drill wells and divert streams to create a water supply network for Brooklyn.

The city of Brooklyn bought out Nassau Water in 1857 and built the Ridgewood Reservoir the following year. The Reservoir held an average 154 million gallons daily, a 10 day supply for the city of Brooklyn.

In 1891, the City of Brooklyn purchased the land surrounding the Ridgewood Reservoir for park purposes under jurisdiction of the Highland Park Society.



The formation of Greater New York City brought water from the Catskill aqueduct to Brooklyn in 1905.

By 1915, a music stand, shelter house, rustic bridge, football and baseball fields, 28 tennis courts, a flower garden, and the Children's farm gardens existed in Highland Park.

The city of Brooklyn became less dependent on its own water system and it was only used in emergencies, the last of which took place in the 1965-66 drought. By 1977, the system was obsolete.

The outer two basins of the Ridgewood Reservoir were drained in 1989. Since then, a flourishing young forest has taken root in the open space of Highland Park.

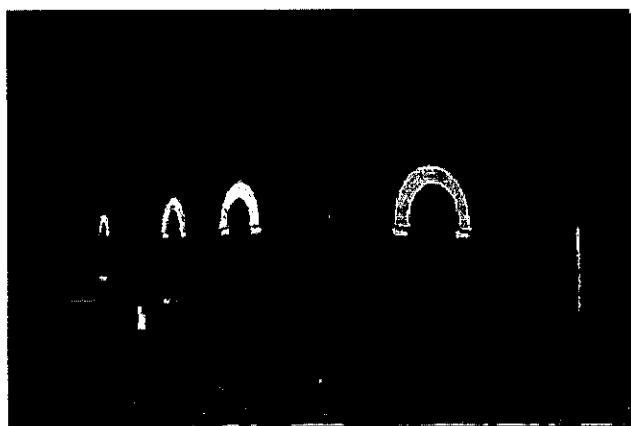
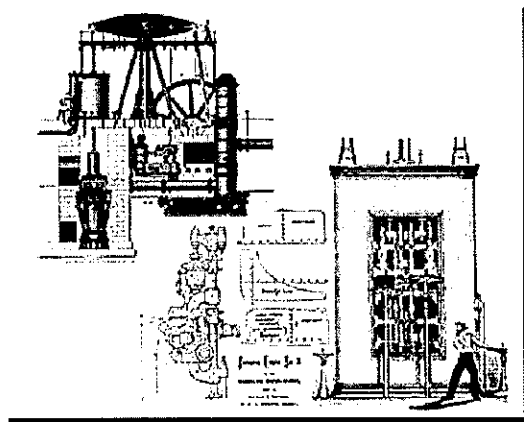
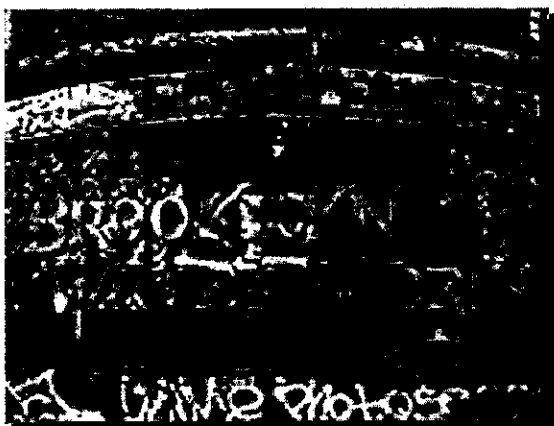


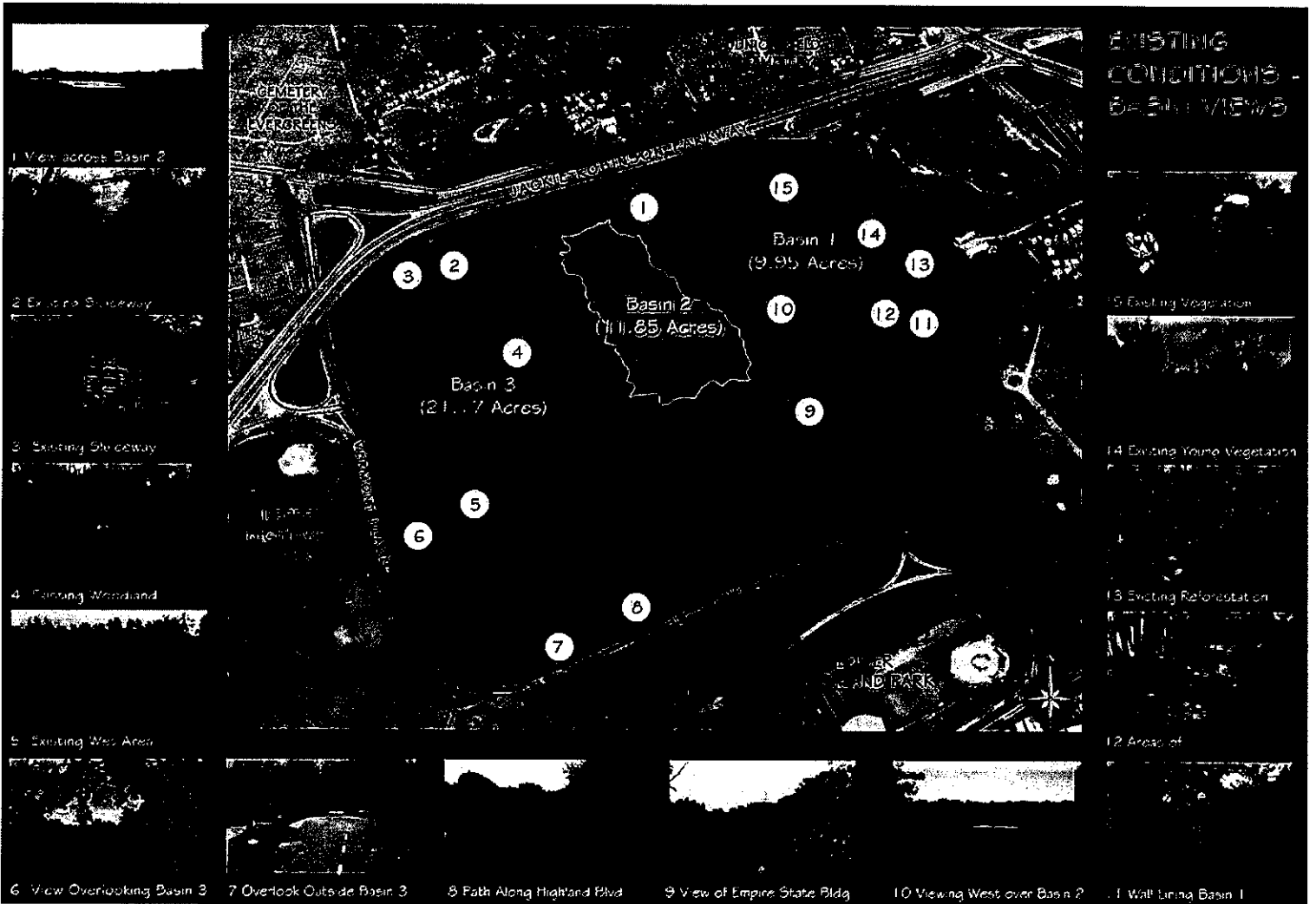
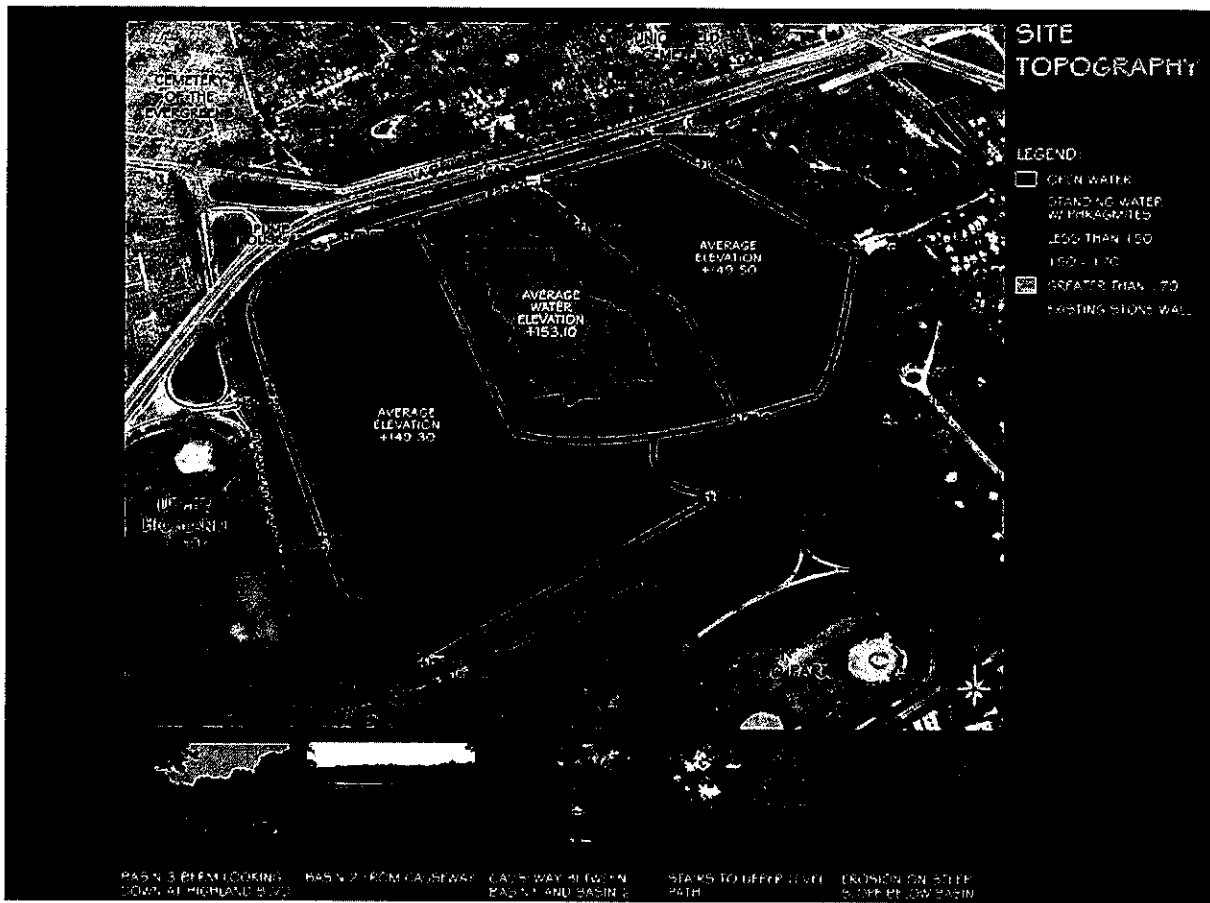
RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR PUMPING STATION

The City of Brooklyn owned powerful steam engines to pump water from connected streams, lakes, and ponds in central Long Island to an elevation of about 170 feet to the Ridgewood Reservoirs. Two engines were built when the waterworks opened and the third, Brooklyn Pumping Engine, No. 3, was built about 10 years later to surpass the performance and efficiency of the first two.

Pumping Engine No. 3 had the additives of an auxiliary barrel and annular water space to facilitate water flow and allow more valve opening. The engine delivered to the reservoir by way of a 36-inch force tube a constant and even flowing stream of water a distance of 3,450 feet and a height of 166 feet.

Highland Park is a place where the public could witness the industry and achievements of man in the waterworks while enjoying the beauty of nature in an outstanding park setting. The potential remains create an opportunity to learn from and enjoy the history of science and nature.





HIGHLAND PARK CIRCULATION



LEGEND:

- PARK SITE
- BUILDINGS
- REGIONAL CONNECTOR
- ARTERIAL ACCESS
- BICYCLE GREENWAY
- PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION
- PEDESTRIAN ACCESS TO UPPER PATH
- OSR BUS LINE
- EXISTING PARKING LOT

KEY:

- 1 REGIONAL ACCESS FROM JACKIE ROBINSON PARKWAY
- 2 MAJOR ARTERIAL ROADS
- 3 MINOR ARTERIAL ROADS
- 4 PEDESTRIAN ACCESS TO UPPER PATH VIA STEPS
- 5 PEDESTRIAN ACCESS TO UPPER PATH VIA RAMP
- 6 STEEP SLOPE / STAIRS



View of Pedestrian Access to Upper Path



View of Upper Path Adjacent to Jackie Robinson Parkway



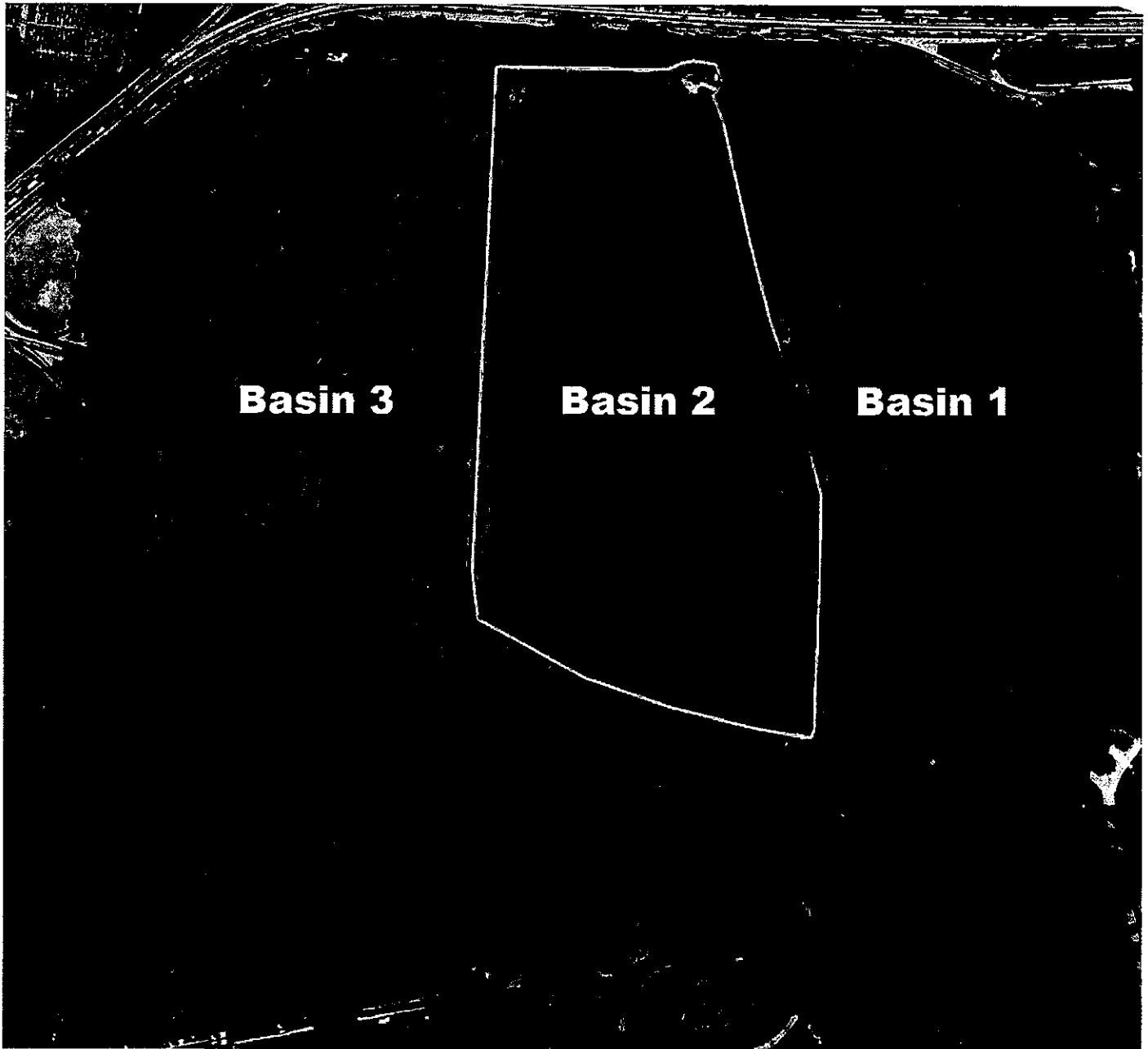
View of Jackie Robinson Parkway Entrance



View of Minor Arterial Road

Prepared by Highland Park / Ridgewood Reservoir Alliance

Ridgewood Reservoir & Urban Forest Fact Sheet



**A Brief Summary of the Environmental and Community Importance of
Ridgewood Reservoir and its surrounding habitats**

Existing Conditions, Site Ecology:

- **Diverse ecologies: fresh water wetlands, mesic and wet forest, successional open fields**¹
Three-quarters of the acreage is wetlands or ecotonal habitat
- **Bog-like open areas and forest fringes are unique within New York City**
- **Large fresh water wetlands are uncommon in our region and critical habitat for native birds, mammals and amphibians**¹
- **A stopover for migratory songbirds and seasonal shorebirds, it is also home to a variety of migratory & non-migratory breeding species**¹
To date 137 species have been observed. Species list includes:

Common Name	Conservation Status
Short-Eared Owl	Endangered ^P
Pied-Billed Grebe	Threatened ^C
Osprey	Special Concern ^C
Sharp-Shinned Hawk	Special Concern ^C
Cooper's Hawk	Special Concern ^C
Red-Shouldered Hawk	Special Concern ^C
Common Nighthawk	Special Concern ^C

- **Eight species of birds on National Audubon Society's "Watchlist 2007" have been observed at the reservoir**
- **The site is developing a mature canopy forest with some strong native plant presence**¹
Species list includes:

Common Name	Conservation Status
Late-Flowering Boneset	Endangered ^C
Fringed Boneset	Threatened ^C
Globe-Fruited Ludwigia	Threatened ^P

- **The site's pond and wetlands are key storm water filters**¹

Urban forests:

- **Improve air quality**
Trees can improve air quality by lowering air temperatures. Trees further their cleansing work by absorbing gaseous pollutants into their leaves and trapping and filtering particulates on and through their leaves, stems, and twigs.²
- **Reduce storm water runoff and erosion**
Canopy catches precipitation before it reaches the ground, allowing some of it to gently drip and the rest to evaporate. This interception lessens the force of storms and reduces runoff and erosion. Decaying leaves form an organic layer on the ground that allows water to percolate into the soil, which also reduces runoff and soil erosion.²
- **Temper local climate**
Trees modify local climate, chiefly by lowering air temperature and increasing humidity; they can also influence wind speed and reduce glare. Inner cities are commonly known as "heat islands" because the buildings and pavement absorb solar energy and radiate it back. Trees provide shade that can reduce the heat-island effect, lessening the amount of air conditioning needed. Evaporation of water from trees also has a cooling effect, especially in hot climates or seasons.²
- **Are good for the economy**
Shaded thoroughfares are not only more physically comfortable but also psychologically more attractive. The value of houses on lots with trees is usually higher than those of comparable houses on lots without trees. Recreation areas such as parks, greenways, and river corridors that are well stocked with trees tend to keep recreation seekers "at home" rather than driving many miles to find suitable places to play. Here again, less fuel is used and less pollution created.²
- **Create habitat for plants and animals**
Trees and associated plants provide shelter and food for a variety of birds and small animals. The presence of trees creates an environment that allows the growth of plants that otherwise would not be there, enhancing the diversity. The monetary value of such diversity is incalculable, but it is well known that residents of and visitors to a community appreciate and enjoy it. Simply put, the presence of trees creates an environment that is much more pleasant for living, working, and playing.²
- **Improve health**
The health benefits of cleaner air and water are self-evident. Green environments reduce stress in people. Trees and their associated vegetation have a relaxing effect on humans. Studies show that patients with a window view of greenery recover faster and suffer fewer complications and medications than those without such views. Children with Attention Deficit Disorder were found to have better behavior in green environments. The presence of trees and other vegetation seems to have a soothing effect that tempers excessive behavior.²
- **Promote community**
A stronger sense of community, an empowerment of inner city residents to improve neighborhood conditions, and the promotion of environmental responsibility and ethics can be attributed to involvement in urban forestry efforts. Active involvement in tree planting programs enhances a community's sense of social identity, self-esteem, and ownership; it teaches residents that they can work together to choose and control the condition of their environment. Planting programs also project a visible sign of change and provide the impetus for other community renewal and action programs. Several studies show that participation in tree-planting programs influences individuals' perceptions of their community. Conversely, a loss of trees within a community can have significant psychological effect on residents.²

(1 - source: NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, Ridgewood Reservoir Listening Session 6/19/2007)
(2 - source: USDA Forest Service, Urban and Community Forestry Center)

Desired Outcomes for Ridgewood Reservoir and Highland Park

Prepared by the Highland Park / Ridgewood Reservoir Alliance

Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir combined total approximately 142.5 acres of woodlands, lakes, wetlands, picnic areas, active and passive sports areas. Over the years much of Highland Park has fallen into disrepair and currently it is in such poor condition that it is being used to only a very small fraction of its potential. If restored and properly maintained, Highland Park-Ridgewood Reservoir could be a jewel. The existing topography of Highland Park is quite interesting and, along with the potential for many lovely walks, this area could also serve for the site of many different active sports, picnics and a variety of local events. A slightly reconfigured and properly maintained Highland Park would obviate the perceived need to build additional active sports facilities within the Ridgewood Reservoir basins. The Ridgewood Reservoir could become one of the best nature preserves ever created in an urban center and would serve as a place for environmental study, bird watching or just quietly enjoying nature.

Desired Outcomes for Ridgewood Reservoir

1. To preserve and enhance the ecosystems within all three basins. No part of the basin walls should be breached.

Existing Conditions, Site Ecology:

- Diverse ecologies: fresh water wetlands, mesic and wet forest, successional open fields
- Three-quarters of the acreage is wetlands or ecotonal habitat.
- Bog-like open areas and forest fringes are unique within New York City.
- Large fresh water wetlands are uncommon in our region and critical habitat for native birds, mammals and amphibians.

- A stopover for migratory songbirds and seasonal shorebirds, it is also home to a variety of non-migratory and breeding birds.. To date 136 species of birds have been recorded in observing for less than a year. The species list includes 7 birds with a conservation status in New York State of Endangered, Threatened or Special Concern. An additional 7 species of birds were observed that are on the 2007 Audubon WatchList. All seven birds were listed in the yellow category, which designates species that are either declining or rare. These typically are species of national conservation concern.
- The site is developing a mature canopy forest with some strong native plant presence.
- Plant species include 3 plants with a Conservation Status of either Endangered or Threatened in New York State.
- The site's pond and wetlands are key storm water filters
- Ridgewood Reservoir is the highest point in the Jamaica Bay watershed. The reservoir and its environmentally significant attributes should be incorporated into the ongoing planning for the Jamaica Bay Watershed Plan.
- Ridgewood Reservoir is the highest point in the Newtown Creek sewershed.

2. To create an Environmental Learning & Research Center for the use of area schools, colleges and for the general public.

This center, supported by the natural areas surrounding it will provide:

- Elementary through high school students with opportunities to study science, biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, math, geography and local history. This would be a chance for hands-on learning in a natural habitat. Indeed it could be used as a resource for all disciplines including language arts and the arts.
- Youth groups such as boy and girl scouts with an environment where they can learn various outdoor skills and engage in nature study.
- Colleges and universities with an area to conduct study and research in many disciplines.
- The general public with a place where they can expand their knowledge and appreciation of the natural environment.
- A place for the education and training of people entering new environmental fields.

3. To develop a long term management plan to remove and mitigate damaging invasive plant life and to improve wild life habitat.

- In basins number 1 and 3 to remove the invasive plants and to replace them with native plants that would provide a habitat with suitable under story for birds and other wild life.
- To remove the invasive phragmites in basin #2 and to create habitat to attract resident, migratory and nesting waterfowl.

4. To create a museum/learning center that demonstrates the historical and technological significance of Ridgewood Reservoir and the entire city water system. This could be housed in, or might incorporate, the existing gatehouse.

- To create an educational program and interpretive signage that highlights the necessity of water for all living things.
- To create interpretive signage that highlights the history of the Ridgewood Reservoir and surrounding area.

5. To encourage active recreation at the reservoir.

- To design the perimeter pathway around the reservoir with adequate room for walkers, runners, and dog walkers.
- Create several small work-out stations along the perimeter pathway.
- Bicyclists should be provided with a safe bike path directly adjacent to Vermont Place and Highland Blvd. to replace the path that is now in use along the elevated perimeter walkway. The elevated perimeter walkway is not wide enough to safely accommodate walkers, joggers and bicyclists. Bicyclists should have a safe place to lock up their bikes while visiting the upper level pathways around the reservoir basins.

6. To restore all lampposts, fences, stairways, railings and walkways at the reservoir.

- To recreate and restore the original, wrought iron perimeter fence.
- To create a security system that protects the basins from vandalism and unauthorized entry into the basins.

7. To provide seating, viewing areas and necessary amenities for passive recreation.

- To remove much of the invasive vegetation on the elevated walkways between basins #1 and #2 and between #2 and #3 and to design seating and viewing areas around the middle basin.
- To provide amenities such as restrooms, water fountains, signage, bike racks and trash cans.

8. To create two over-the-road walkways.

- One over Vermont Place from the upper Highland Park parking lot that allows for easier and safer access to the reservoir
- One over Highland Blvd. to connect Lower Highland Park with Ridgewood Reservoir and again to allow for easier and safer access.

9. To coordinate and integrate all facilities at Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir.

10. To ensure the coordinated, well-funded administration and maintenance of the entire area.

Desired Outcomes for Highland Park

1. Repair and/or modify existing sports facilities.

- Do appropriate repairs to the two baseball fields in the SW corner of Highland Park.
- Build/repair the 4-5 volleyball courts near the parking lot on Vermont Place. The asphalt should be removed and new courts built.
- There are currently enough basketball courts in the park but they need to be oriented North-South instead of East-West to avoid problems with the sun.
- The area along Jamaica Avenue that used to be used as tennis courts is currently being used for soccer.
- A proper field should be built that could accommodate soccer and football. The space is ample long enough at 140 yards but research should be done on how to add approximately 20 yards to the width of the area which is now measures approximately 50 yards. (Possibly area could be added on the south side or some yardage could be added to the south and some to the northern sideline).

2. Create a usable place for concerts and other performances in the upper park

- The octagonal pavilion facing the old English Garden is in total disrepair and sits very close to the Jackie Robinson Parkway, which creates a lot of background noise.
- Employ experts to investigate the possibility of creating appropriate (and visually integrated) sound barriers that could make this space usable for performances. The pavilion would then have to be rebuilt and the landscape restored.
- If it is determined that even with sound barriers this would not be an appropriate place for concerts then the pavilion and the area in front of it should be redesigned and this area could be turned into an area for youth soccer or recreational soccer (with width is about 40 yards). Another possibility is to turn this area into a type of "Great Meadow" similar to Central Park but smaller.
- If the area of the pavilion is found not to be usable for concerts another place should be found.
- Again, employ an expert who could lead to the proper place. Perhaps the area that is sometimes called the overlook that looks over the ravine that the stone bridge crosses? What kind of acoustics would this provide? Let's get a few volunteer musicians to get out there and play in order to hear. It might make an excellent "concert hall".

3. Repair/restore the stone bridge.

- We understand that DOT funds have been acquired and plans are under consideration to improve the stone bridge.

4. With the aid of original plans, reconstruct all of the walking paths and stairways in the park.

- All of the walking paths in the park are in deplorable condition and should be restored.
- Repair all of the stairways have been removed and/or covered.
- Original landscape created in the park should be restored.

5. To create a comprehensive plan to protect the soil, trees, shrubs and ground cover in the park.

- Improve drainage and reduce erosion
- Undertake tree pruning and soil enhancement especially for specimen trees.
- Repair existing damage with appropriate methods such as cribbing, etc.
- Replant trees and ground cover where possible.
- Protect all existing trees and foliage when improvements are being done.

6. To provide necessary amenities.

- Restrooms, water fountains, signage, bike racks, trash cans.

HIGHLAND PARK / RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR ALLIANCE

Education & Preservation Project

Advocating preservation, restoration and community involvement in the redesign of Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir

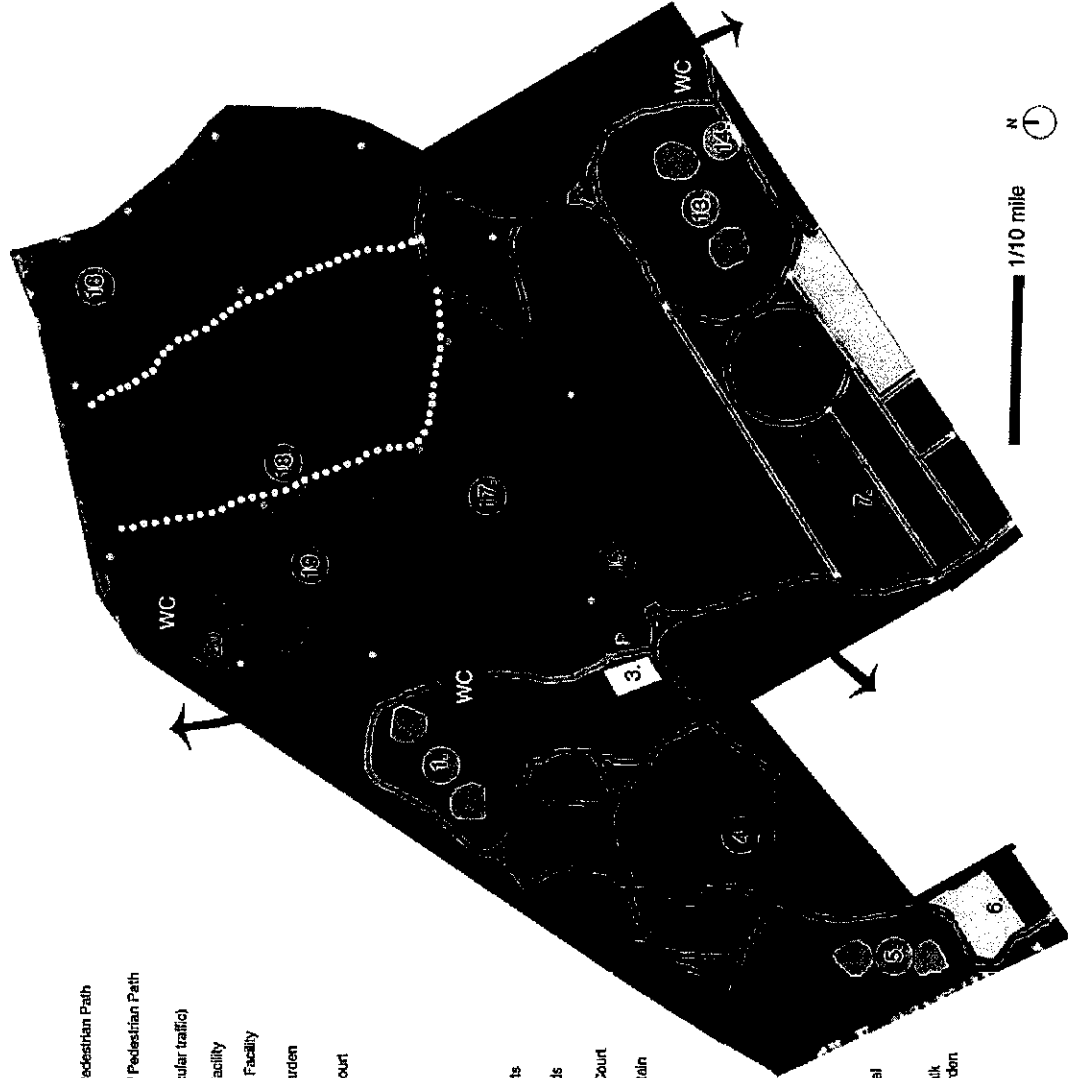
SCHEMATIC PLAN

DATE: 10/15/07 PROJECT NO: 07-001 TO 002 REVISION

KEY ELEMENTS

- The ball fields on the eastern edge of upper Highland Park are to be renovated and maintained to allow for maximum playing access. Proper construction and care will negate the current need for additional fields. Bike / pedestrian paths and vegetation are to be updated and properly maintained.
- This area was once a formal garden, as part of the original Christed design. It should be restored as a destination garden, with specimen tree species, shrubs, perennials and annuals to attract passive recreation and improve the park's aesthetic reputation. Site and pedestrian pathways are to be repaired and improved and existing trees are to be pruned, and maintained.
- The existing volleyball court will be repaired and renovated so that it can be of consistent and reliable use to users.
- A bandshell will be nestled into the wooded slope near the historic and renovated stone bridge. This area is protected from sound from the neighboring roads and will be a gathering place for entertainment of all varieties. Pathways along slope will be repaired and improved and the forest area should be thinned, existing trees pruned and others added to facilitate a picturesque forest experience.
- The ball fields at the west side of Highland Park will be removed and maintained to allow for maximum playing access. Proper construction and care will negate the current need for additional fields. Bike / pedestrian paths and vegetation are to be updated and properly maintained.
- Existing play equipment will remain, improved and expanded over time as needed.
- Existing tennis courts to be maintained as needed.
- Existing soccer fields to receive complete overhaul, including an adequate drainage system and resurfacing (spring 2008)
- Existing basketball courts to be reoriented north-south, to be repaired and resurfaced. Lighting to be reoriented to allow for evening play time.
- Existing spray fountain to remain (renovated spring 2008).
- Existing children's garden to remain and be expanded as feasible.
- Existing soccer / horseshoe courts to remain and be maintained as needed.
- Existing ball fields are to be completely renovated. This area of the park will be a focus of efforts. A retaining wall will be installed to the north side of the current fields to add area for two additional fields.

- (cont.) A parking track will be constructed for added utility access to attract additional users. Bump out facilities are to be built. Surrounding pathways are to be repaired and maintained.
- A landscaped bioswale will replace existing vegetation along south end of fields to absorb runoff and to accommodate drainage across sports field area. This bioswale will feature attractive, wet-tolerant native species and can serve as an educational tool with signage, explaining NYC's water infrastructure and the importance of Highland Park with Ridgewood Reservoir.
- The highest point on the site provides striking views of Brooklyn out to Jamaica Bay. A new installation of signage and telescopes will illustrate and explain the significance of the geography to the siting of the reservoir, as well as note landmarks in the distance. Displays will discuss the Atlantic Flyway and the critical importance of Jamaica Bay and the reservoir to migratory birds.
- An formal accessway to the reservoir level path with proper handcap and bike access will be established at existing entrance areas. Clearing of debris, removal of existing weedy vegetation, planting of decorative vegetation, and signage will all contribute to making the reservoir inviting to all members of the surrounding neighborhoods and residents of New York City beyond. The levee path system will be overhauled, and proper fencing installed to prevent entry to reservoir basins. Signage and displays will be placed at points along the pathways to explain salient historical and ecological information about the site and the city. Aesthetically appropriate lamp-post, motion-sensored, downward-directed lighting fixtures will replace the older, often non-working ones on site to ensure safety and discourage uninvited entry to the basins and other restricted areas at night.
- Within the basins, paintball and other sources of serious disturbance will be stopped. Invasive plants will be removed, replaced and controlled as is possible. Restricted areas will be preserved and improved as a wildlife habitat.
- Wood docked overlook points will be cantilevered from levee paths, to provide extended visual access to life and activity in the basins.
- The most degraded portion of the basins, near the proposed nature center, will be overhauled and native woodland plantings installed. An educational nature path will be constructed for pedestrian access from the adjacent nature center. The planted material will act as a seed source for other areas of the basin.
- The existing sluiceway structures will be turned into a nature center / educational center that will serve as a resource for schools, after-school programs and the general public. The center will have displays explaining more about the infrastructure of New York City's water and sewage systems, the reservoir's and Highland Park's history, the natural history of the area, and the ecology of the basins. The center will also be used as a backdrop for a park, forest, and water education workers. Bathroom and comfort facilities will be added.



LEGEND

- = Existing Walkway
- = Proposed Walkway
- = Existing Bikeway / Pedestrian Path
- = Proposed Bikeway / Pedestrian Path
- = Existing Road (vehicular traffic)
- = Existing Bathroom Facility
- = Proposed Bathroom Facility
- = Proposed Formal Garden
- = Existing Volleyball Court
- = Proposed Bandshell
- = Existing Ball Field
- = Existing Play Area
- = Existing Tennis Courts
- = Existing Soccer Fields
- = Existing Basketball Court
- = Existing Spray Fountain
- = Existing Children's Garden
- = Existing Soccer / Horseshoe Courts
- = Proposed Running Track
- = Proposed Educational and Nature Center
- = Proposed Nature Walk and Native Plant Garden
- = Proposed Overlook
- = Proposed Improved Lighting

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THE SCENES**

May 29, 2008

OP-ED CONTRIBUTORS

A Wilderness, Lost in the City

By **WILLIAM C. THOMPSON Jr. and ROBERT F. KENNEDY Jr.**

MANY people are astounded to learn that there is a teeming wildlife preserve in New York City. Ridgewood Reservoir on the Brooklyn-Queens border is an oasis where an amazing range of plant and animal species thrive in a verdant landscape of steep hills and narrow valleys amid the city's paved sidewalks.

But what's more astounding, the city's Parks Department could wind up destroying it.

Ridgewood is an accidental wilderness, tucked alongside the Jackie Robinson Parkway. Built in 1858 to provide drinking water to Brooklyn, the reservoir was abandoned in 1989.

As the 50 acres reverted to wetlands, meadows and forests, tens of thousands of plants and trees took root and flourished. Turtles, fish, frogs and millions of insects moved in. Songbirds nested in the glades, transforming the area into a migratory rest stop. According to the National Audubon Society, 137 species of birds use the reservoir, including eight rare species. It is a place as close to unspoiled nature as you're likely to find anywhere within city limits.

Yet, the New York City Parks Department is considering a \$50 million "renovation" project that would cover more than 20 acres of the reservoir with athletic fields and facilities.

This plan flies in the face of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's widely hailed environmental blueprint, which bemoans the loss of the city's natural areas. The Parks Department's own scientific consultants have warned against disturbing the reservoir, an area they call "highly significant for the biodiversity of New York City and the region."

The parks commissioner has said the city needs the athletic fields to combat childhood obesity. This is an important objective, but the money that would be used to destroy this extraordinary natural habitat could be better spent improving Highland Park, next to Ridgewood Reservoir. Highland Park has plenty of ball fields to serve its neighborhood, but they are in such deplorable condition that few people use them.

Ridgewood's natural preserve is a great place for people of all ages to walk and hike. Its trails should be upgraded with benches and rest areas as well as markers pointing out unique flora and fauna. The Parks Department should also open areas of the reservoir for guided nature walks, a great educational tool.

Ridgewood Reservoir offers visitors a rare chance to lose themselves in a forest, to hear bird song, to touch wilderness and to sense the divine. The city shouldn't let that slip away.

William C. Thompson Jr. is the comptroller of the City of New York. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is a lawyer for Riverkeeper, an environmental group.

For additional information contact:

Highland Park / Ridgewood Reservoir Alliance

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New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Renovation Plans for Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoirs
June 19, 2008

Good Morning. I appreciate this opportunity to speak at this hearing as a representative for the Bushwick Community and would like to request on behalf of the community's children and student athletes, that you include ball fields in the Reservoir Project at Highland Park. Ball fields are important because they encourage sports, keep students in school, promote health and well-being and deter crime.

My name is Jennifer Jones. I am a Physical Education Teacher for the New York City Public School System and the Varsity Baseball Coach for the Bushwick Campus' Baseball Team. I have been teaching in the Public School system for thirty years and coaching at the Bushwick Campus (formerly known as Bushwick High School) for the past twenty years.

The Bushwick Campus' Varsity Baseball Team usually has between 18 and 30 students on its team. This high school does not have a baseball field like so many of the other New York City Public High Schools have. The Bushwick Campus has been using Field #2 at Highland Park for more than twenty years for their league and non league games only. The team does not have an official baseball field they can practice on.

The students and I, with some assistance from the NYC Parks Department, have worked hard over the years to maintain this field in the best possible playing condition. Our team has to travel to Highland Park on public transportation for every game. We try to get to the park early to prepare the field before the start of the game. The team hardly has time to warm up before the game, due to the time it takes to ready the field for play, before the umpires arrive. People are always waiting for the games to finish, so they can take over the field; many of them don't assist in the maintenance of the field. If the Bushwick Campus had its own field, or there were more baseball fields at Highland Park, both the high school and the community's needs would be better served.

Field #2 at Highland Park is the only field that is suited for baseball. I worked with the Parks Department many years ago to have the field made into a baseball field; even had a pitcher's mound permanently installed. Field #2 is a public field, so I have to apply for a NYC permit every year in

order to have a field the team can play on. I also must compete with the public and other special group events for playing time for the Bushwick Campus' students and team. Everyone who wants to play baseball wants to play on Field #2. This field gets the most use and the most wear and tear. Currently it is need of repair and upgrades.

In the last few years, the Take the Field Foundation, renovated many NYC High School Athletic Fields. Also, the NYC Parks Department, renovated many ball fields in the city parks, for example, the Parade Grounds in Brooklyn and in Queens, Victory Field and Juniper Valley Park. The fields at Highland Park have been overlooked.

When I heard about the Reservoir Project at Highland Park and the amount of acres that would be developed and preserved, I was excited to think that more baseball fields could be developed and that, possibly, the Bushwick Campus could get its own baseball field at Highland Park. I thought that both the naturalists/birdwatchers and the community children could both benefit from this wonderful and much needed project. Hundreds of children and tax paying adults utilize Highland Park's Ball Fields. There are too few ball fields for the amount of usage the park receives. Besides, all the fields in Highland Park are in need of repair and upgrades.

As I understand it, with the amount of money and acreage that is available for the Reservoir Project at Highland Park, it would be a great injustice to all the citizens of the community to exclude ball fields from the project. New ball fields are needed and the current ball fields need repairs. One Baseball Field at Highland Park is not sufficient to accommodate the neighborhood. If it wasn't for my efforts and those of the Bushwick Campus Varsity Baseball Team, Highland Park would not have the only official baseball field that it does have.

Please seriously consider my request and include more ball fields, especially baseball fields in the Reservoir Project. I believe all parties' interests can be accommodated successfully and no one group would be favored over the other. Please don't leave the kids out. Thank you.

Jennifer Jones

Robert E. Doocey
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- Removal of trees and foliage has a damaging effect on the benefits listed above;
- Destruction of the reservoir land for the accommodation of athletic fields is contrary to the specific wishes of all who participated in so-called “listening sessions” (described as one-way by participants);
 - Installation of artificial turf – a carcinogenic danger itself – defeats the soil erosion benefit of the untouched Reservoir land and reduces or eliminates the filtering benefit of the land;
 - Concrete will accomplish the same destruction;
 - This unnecessary and unjustified destruction of this rare jewel will reduce or eliminate the appeal to wildlife to use the land as their habitat;
 - Destructive conversion of this land for use as athletic fields will encourage even further mindless destruction of the remaining habitat by having large numbers of unsupervised and unrestrained “athletes” gradually invading and destroying whatever habitat remains.
- The Parks Department can shift the allocated \$50 million otherwise set for the destruction of the Reservoir to a cleanup. The tires, air conditioners, and all sorts of debris dumped must be removed. Eliminate the growth that chokes good plant life; prune where required;
- Use community expertise to beneficial effect.

HIGHLAND PARK – LONG NEGLECTED – WHY?

- Adjacent to the Ridgewood Reservoir is Highland Park, a portion of which is within Brooklyn, and the other, in Queens – a useless bit of data;
- Highland Park is approximately 185 acres – more than triple the acreage of the Reservoir – and already has long-neglected accommodations for both athletics and everyday recreation;
 - Six ball fields;
 - Twenty-eight tennis courts;
 - Twelve basketball courts;
 - One soccer field;
 - Handball courts;
 - Two playgrounds;
 - One running track;
- Transfer the appropriate portion of the \$50 Million allocated for the destruction of the Ridgewood Reservoir for use in the upgrading, expanding and improvement of these long-neglected athletic accommodations;
- Spend no money – tax or private contributions – on the installation of any artificial turf or concrete;
- Natural grass, trees, foliage, and shrubbery have been available since time began. It is utter arrogance to believe that a government agency can improve on the beauty of these;
- Preserve the Reservoir; maintain Highland Park; this is our tax money.

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**SUBJECT: SHOULD THE RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR BE
PRESERVED AS A WETLAND?**

Testimony to the NY City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Position: Preserve the Reservoir as a Wetland

Friday, June 19, 2008

Ridgewood Reservoir Status Quo:

- Fifty acres of long neglected nature preserve jewel;
- Habitat for approximately 137 species of migratory and non-migratory birds, some of which are endangered, threatened, or of special concern;
- The fresh water basin is home to birds, mammals and amphibians;
- Large portion is wetlands or ecotonal (transition zone between two different plant communities);
- Contains endangered and threatened native plants;
- National Audubon Society "Watch list 2007" bird species – eight, so far – have been observed at the reservoir;
- The Reservoir lands are filters for storm waters.

Ridgewood Reservoir Benefits:

- Trees and foliage improve air quality;
- Variety of trees and foliage reduce storm water runoff and the resulting soil erosion;
- Trees and foliage moderate the local climate
- Trees and foliage, by their natural appeal, improve the local economy and property values nearby;
- Trees and foliage create a home for animals and birds;
- This very rare urban wetland/forest/bird/animal preserve provides a superb educational opportunity for youngsters to appreciate wildlife and understand ecology;
- The location is a quiet, natural setting for year-round enjoyment by people of all ages and interests.

Ridgewood Reservoir Restoration – NOT Destruction:

- Many residents of Brooklyn and Queens would be delighted to help the Parks Department identify the trees, shrubs and greenery that should be preserved and nurtured, as opposed to the greenery that does require removal (such as some vines that choke tree growth). These residents have a variety of expertise including identification of plant life that nurture wildlife;

Written Testimony of
David M. Quintana, Ozone Park, Queens, NY

New York City Council
City Hall, New York, NY 10007

Oversight - Should the Ridgewood Reservoir Be Preserved as a Wetland..?
- Parks & Recreation Committee of New York City Council - June 19, 2008

I am here as a concerned citizens for our communities & as an education advocate on behalf of the Ridgewood Reservoir and Highland Park which is located on the Brooklyn-Queens border. I am a member of the Queens Community Board 10 Parks Committee and the former District 27 representative to the Chancellors Parents Advisory Council (CPAC).

The NYC Department of Parks & Recreation (DOPR) currently has a capital grant for use at the Ridgewood Reservoir in the amount of approximately \$50,000,000.00 (\$50 Million).

I would like to start by presenting a brief history of the Ridgewood Reservoir site. The Reservoir - which was constructed in 1848 to provide drinking water to the city of Brooklyn - was taken out of New York City's water system during the latter half of the 20th century and transferred from Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to the DOPR. It is comprised of three basins, one of which still holds water.

Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir combined total approximately 142.5 acres of woodlands, lakes, wetlands, picnic areas, active and passive sports areas. Over the years much of Highland Park has fallen into a state of disrepair through neglect and lack of maintenance. It is currently in such poor condition that it is presently being used to only a very small fraction of its community potential.

I feel that if the location is restored and properly maintained, Highland

Park-Ridgewood Reservoir could be a jewel of both natural beauty and a state of the art education facility serving our communities youth and students.

The Ridgewood Reservoir while being ignored and left stagnant since being officially closed by DEP in 1989 has seen nature take root to reclaim the land - plant and wildlife have sprung up in each of the three basins. With this reforestation, it has become a verdant gem surrounded by the asphalt and concrete of our City.

The DOPR present plan calls for the destruction of thousands of trees to build new synthetic turf ballfields in this pristine site. This is totally antithetic to the Mayors PlaNYC 2030, which calls for the planting of One Million trees here in NYC.

I believe that the main thrust should be to prevent the Parks & Recreation Department from decimating the existing natural habitat at the Ridgewood Reservoir which I feel is to the detriment of the community and secondly, to force the Parks Dept to rehabilitate the existing ballfields at Highland Park which is in line to the community's wants and needs.

It should be noted that Ridgewood Reservoir lies on the top of the federally protected Jamaica Bay watershed and is within the sewer shed of Newtown Creek - a federal super fund site. Therefore, I feel that to destroy 10-15 acres of this forest and wetlands is money very poorly spent and could have grave consequences upon these federally protected bodies of water .

I feel that the DOPR plan to wantonly destroy any portion of the Reservoir is wrong-headed from an ecological standpoint since there are at least 3 species of endangered or threatened plants within the site. In addition, there are 14 species of birds have been observed at the reservoir that have been classified as threatened, endangered, of special concern or are the Audubon Watch list and are experiencing significant declines.

The DOPR has avoided conducting a thorough Environmental Impact Study (EIS), which I feel is necessary before any construction should be allowed to take place.

I believe that spending money to decimate a natural habitat when there are existing sports facilities in place and in light of the city's current budget situation would be money very foolishly spent by this Administration.

Lastly, staff members of this committee have attended a walking tour of Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir and have gotten a sense of what a beautiful location it is and how if DOPR is allowed to continue their present course that we as a City are surely missing out on a rare chance to enhance our parks system to the benefit of the surrounding communities of Brooklyn and Queens. I know this is often said - but words truly cannot describe the sheer magnificence of this site.

I am grateful to the City Council for conducting this hearing and giving me and others the opportunity to address you with our serious concerns regarding the DOPR and our community.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

David M. Quintana
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Ozone Park, NY 11417
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dquintana1@nyc.rr.com

My name is Yordi Olivo and I am representing more than 828 Baseball and softball players in the community of Cypress Hills and East New York Brooklyn.

Recently, it has come to my attention that \$50 million has been given by the Mayor to the Department of Parks and Recreation for the Ridgewood Reservoir. I strongly feel this money would be well spent by building playgrounds, additional baseball, softball and little league fields and better equipment to maintain existing fields. The community has grown in recent years with more children and adults using the parks daily. More fields for little league baseball and adult softball are urgently needed. In addition, a playground for children to pass the time and play safely would be welcomed. Another thing to consider is the current maintenance of Highland Park. Although the current park crew does a good job at maintaining the fields and park area, it would also serve the park well to provide more resources to better maintain the fields by adding running water to settle the dust, Night lights to fields 5 and 6 and keeping the bathrooms open while the kids are still playing or providing a key. Improving the ground conditions of the clay and grass areas of the baseball fields and possibly adding bleachers and improving the current benches would be money wisely spent. These are my ideas. The community would greatly benefit from these changes and it would be greatly appreciate

Yordi Olivo
583 Ridgewood Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11208

Petition to build new Ball fields in Highland Park.

1	Jose Vichard
2	ANSELMO GUARDA
3	Jose Luis Miller
4	Daniel Rodriguez
5	Fabio de la Cruz
6	Milton Ortiz
7	Edwin Guibon
8	Rafael Rodriguez
9	FERNANDO CASTRO
10	Demetrius Lopez
11	Ben Ball
12	Robinson Batista
13	Christina Nunez
14	Alberto Lopez
15	Francisco Garcia
16	Manuel Castro
17	Enrick Rodriguez
18	Samuel Lopez
19	Manlio Melina
20	Francisco Rios
21	Manuel Rodriguez
22	Bob
23	Ana Garcia
24	Calvin de la Cruz
25	Victor Lopez
26	Dominic Rodriguez
27	Penny Martin GONZALEZ
28	Rosa C. Lopez
29	Bryllio Perilla
30	Mark Lopez
31	MATEHINACARO
32	Jeffrey Lopez
33	Luis Cabrela
34	Edward Luzon
35	Ally Varado
36	TEODORO RODRIGUEZ
37	Luis Rodriguez
38	Freddy MARTINEZ
39	Alexander Lopez
40	Frank Morales

41	Rafael Luciani
42	Jose Lopez
43	Donald Rodriguez
44	Manuel Lopez
45	Bob
46	Roberto Perilla
47	Samuel Lopez
48	Jose Vichard
49	Francisco Garcia
50	Jose Lopez
51	Carlos T. Perilla
52	Samuel Lopez
53	VICTOR CASTILLO
54	Arismundo Rodriguez
55	Bob
56	Felix Lopez
57	Bob
58	Bob
59	Manlio Melina
60	Victor Martinez
61	William Lopez
62	Jon de la Cruz
63	EDWARD ABBEC
64	Jo para
65	Manlio Melina
66	Manlio Melina
67	Manlio Melina
68	MICHAEL FABIAN
69	Manlio Melina
70	Manlio Melina
71	Manlio Melina
72	Manlio Melina
73	Manlio Melina
74	Daniel Rodriguez
75	Manlio Melina
76	Juan Rodriguez
77	Manlio Melina
78	Manlio Melina
79	Francisco Simeon
80	Luis Morales

Petition to build new Ball fields in Highland Park.

1	JOSE ABBEU
2	JUNIOR A BEGES
3	José Quiroz
4	Roberto Rodriguez
5	Andy Rodriguez
6	Polivito Rodriguez
7	SUAK QUIROZ
8	Dean Guzman
9	Jose Reyes
10	Saribaldy CALABRERA
11	JIMMY LOPEZ
12	Jason Melendez
13	Jonathan Wena
14	Nelson Mello
15	Juan Eduardo
16	Fco. R. Lopez
17	Dora Lopez
18	Eduardo
19	Edwin
20	Jose Cabral
21	Enrique
22	Jose
23	Mamun
24	Jose
25	Rodolfo TRONCOSO
26	JUAN SANTOS
27	WANDA CABRERA
28	Roberto Rosario
29	José Dominguez
30	Lizbeth
31	Carla Sergey
32	León Gutierrez
33	Jose
34	Plumón Pidrardo
35	Angel Rodriguez
36	Jose
37	Junior Rojas
38	Samir
39	Jose Brito
40	Aracely Pina

41	William S.
42	Jose Perez
43	Sejín Viera
44	FRANCISCO SANTOS
45	Alex Santana
46	Manuela Castro
47	Julia de Leon
48	Reina de Leon
49	Reymon de Leon
50	Roberto Rodriguez
51	Carlos R. Brown
52	Jose
53	Manuel Quiles
54	Carlos Luciano
55	Hector L. Colon
56	HUGO FERNANDEZ
57	Jose
58	Rafael
59	CARLOS ACEVEDO
60	Santo Garcia
61	Salvador Valera
62	Richard Batista
63	Roman Quira
64	JOSE A. GALIA
65	Jose
66	Jose Ruiz
67	Noel Rodriguez
68	Julio Villora
69	Alex Roto
70	Felix Espinal
71	Felix Bonobon
72	Edwin Melendez
73	Felix Siqueira
74	Reinaldo
75	Carolina Sujan
76	Angela
77	Carlos Vargas
78	Manuel Aliés
79	Dehus Mendy
80	Jose

Comments by Jennifer Monson, Artistic Director of iLAND-interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature and Dance.

Contact: Jennifer@ilandart.org

www.ilandart.org

RE: Oversight Should the Ridgewood Reservoir be preserved as a Wetland?

Thursday, June 19th, 2008 10 am.

To the Council of the City of New York-

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the preservation of the Ridgewood Reservoir as a wetland.

First I would like to give you a brief account of my own history of the area.

I am a choreographer and in 2000 I began a project that literally followed the migrations of birds while offering site-specific dance performances, panel discussions on migration navigation and habit conservation. This project gave me an opportunity to engage with local environmental and arts organizations along the Pacific, Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways. Among other things, this project taught me about the precipitous loss of songbirds across the Americas and of the importance of urban natural areas not only for wildlife but for local populations as well. It introduced me to the idea that nature is everywhere and that the health of the planet relies on people's familiarity with the vital systems that keep our world thriving. Birds are used as ecological indicators of the health of the planet and its interrelated systems.

After I finished this migration project, following the journeys of gray whales, ospreys and ducks and geese, I was ready to stay in one place for a while and watch the seasons transition around me. I first became aware of the Ridgewood Reservoir in 1990 and have visited it regularly ever since. In 2007 I decided to develop a year-long project on the Reservoir based on my creative research with dance and scientists. I received permission from the Parks Department to embark on the project in the fall of 2006.

One of my first ventures into the basins was with Michael Feller of the NRG and Andrew Greller, Professor Emeritus at Queens College. Walking with them opened my eyes to diverse array of plant and animal life thriving in the drained basin of the reservoir. They identified a variety of rare sedges, marveled at the amount of moss that was growing (moss generally doesn't do well in urban areas because it is so sensitive to air pollution) pointed out insects, dragonflies, lizards, turtles, nesting sites. Professor Greller talked about the unique situation of the reservoir as being very similar to the swamp forests of Long Island but oddly misplaced at the top of the terminal romaine where the reservoir is situated. It is a young forest in succession and gives a sense of what Long island's forests must have been like 100 years ago. This moment in time at the reservoir offers a remarkable opportunity to study the regeneration of natural systems in response to human activity and disturbance.

Since that time I have studied the area with members of the Brooklyn Bird club (who have identified something like 175 breeding and migrating bird species that use the reservoir). I have been there with Uli Lorimer, native plant curator at the Brooklyn botanic

garden and with John Waldman, a biology professor who took us into the water with waders to see what kind of aquatic life we could find.

Each one of these specialists was amazed that a site like this exists in the middle of New York City. In my own experience of traveling along the migrations in the US I rarely found such a large area of habitat/wilderness in the middle of a big city. The opportunities that the reservoir presents for research education and passive recreation are what all cities are desperate for. These natural wild areas function within the cities watershed, reduce waste water run off, provide all the benefits that forest areas provide, cooling the air, producing oxygen, a filter for noise, as well as a balm to the spirit of local residents and visitors.

In the words of John Waldman, professor of biology at Queens College

The Ridgewood Basin is a little forgotten gem in the heart of the Brooklyn/Queens complex. Tucked high on a rubble hill left by glaciers, one must work hard to locate an access point just to view it. Once part of a drinking water system that stored water, the pipe that fed it is sealed but the pond persists from ground water. Its clarity is excellent and dragonflies, amphipods, and other invertebrates abound, as do aquatic birds. At least one large turtle also lives here. But fish are a question mark—accessing its open waters to survey it is nearly impossible, given the dense stand of Phragmites rush that completely rings its shallows for one-hundred feet or more. Because of this obstacle, I speculate that no person has waded or paddled its core for decades, making the Ridgewood Basin one of the wildest places in all of New York City.

In my dance project at the Reservoir I did 3 seasonal public events. Audience members from all over NYC came to experience these performances. People were struck with disbelief. They couldn't believe they were in NY City. During our rehearsals we were witness to the wide range of local residents who take advantage of the pleasures of the reservoir on a regular basis, young immigrant families, retirees, teenagers and children.

This area is incredibly rare. It is a rich wetlands area as well as a spectacular example of urban wilderness.

It was once designated Forever Wild by the parks department. I urge the city council to do everything in their power to take a hold of this unique opportunity to create a vital research, education and passive recreational area around the reservoir.

In addition this area fits perfectly into the purview of the Natural Resource Group of the Parks Dept whose mission is to conserve New York City's natural resources for the benefit of ecosystem and public health through acquisition, management, restoration, and advocacy using a scientifically supported and sustainable research.

Managing the reservoir with an eye to ecological sustainability will continue their pioneering research in urban ecology restoration and management.

Additional Notes from the Natural Resource Group Site on the NYC Parks dept web site.

The Forever Wild Program is an initiative of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to protect and preserve the most ecologically valuable lands within the five boroughs.

These vital open spaces are home to thousands of critters, including flying squirrels, bald eagles, and fascinating rare plants. They also give New Yorkers and visitors the chance to walk in the woods, paddle a stream, or observe wildlife with family and friends

Importance of Management and NRG

Located on the Atlantic Flyway, one of the four main bird migration routes in America. Millions of birds as well as bats, butterflies and dragonflies travel the flyway each spring and fall. The reservoir provides these animals with food, shelter. The bike and pedestrian path offers views of this area and glimpses into this natural haven.

Ridgewood Reservoir Natural Area Mapping and Inventory Surveyed June 2005

22 June 2008

Testimony to the Council of the city of New York
Committee on Parks and Recreation

-
Position - yes

-
Should The Ridgewood Reservoir Be Preserved as a Wetland?

Clearly, the only sensible answer to the question is a qualified yes. Presently a very cogent argument to preserve and protect the Ridgewood Reservoir has been presented by the Ridgewood Reservoir/Highland Park Alliance. The presentation includes graphic, printed and video material that succinctly illustrates the need to keep the reservoir a natural habitat. However, I would specifically call your attention to the value of trees not only as they exist in the reservoir but their place in a community. The following paragraph is taken from *Arboriculture & Urban Forestry* 34 (3): May 2008 page 153.

Trees have a very deep and crucial meaning to human beings. The significance of old trees is archetypal; in our dreams they often stand for the wholeness of personality. The tree people love to create special places; places to be in and places to pass through. Trees have the potential to create various kinds of social places. Social and individual well being cannot be achieved except in ways that also promote ecological well being. Ecological well-being, which in a literal sense means the well-being of the house of civilization, refers explicitly to natural and other conditions that support and sustain human life. It is not accurate or appropriate to treat the environment as though it was somehow separate from the social life it supports. An active interdependency characterizes the relationship between social life and the surroundings. References to human and environmental separation cannot be justified on any grounds today, if they might have been justified heuristically in the past.

When you consider the fact that two mature trees provide enough oxygen for a family of four for the entire year the value of trees in sustaining life itself takes on real meaning to a community. Mayor Bloomberg's plan to cut down thousands of mature trees in the Ridgewood Reservoir in order to build several ball fields is ludicrous. Mayor Bloomberg should use the taxpayer's money to procure the abandoned cemetery land adjacent to basin one to construct his ball fields; he should also focus on maintaining the present parkland.

The *Arboriculture & Urban Forestry* article notes a very important consideration that the council should dwell on as it weighs the question of keeping the Ridgewood Reservoir a preserved and protect wetland: 1) work to increase knowledge and collaboration among local people and between people and organizations, including new skills and experiences,

access to resources, and networking; and 2) developing public works projects that directly engage citizens in monitoring, improving, and restoring the places in which they live. A fundamental concept here is that environmental projects, landscapes, and policy imposed on people by outsiders can mean or do little for a community.

If the taxpayer's money is spent prudently and in accordance with the desires of the community – incidentally the community board CBB5 of Brooklyn and CBQ5 of Queens have approved the Ridgewood Reservoir/Highland Park Alliance plan for the development of the reservoir and the surrounding parkland - developing this gift that nature and our forefathers have given the City of New York with a vision that protects the environment will make this park an economic engine that will up-lift the entire area, as well as provide jobs and income to the neighborhood and the City of New York.

NYC Comptroller Bill Thompson personally took the walking tour of the Ridgewood Reservoir at Highland Park, and as a result of his physical and psychological immersion in this beautiful urban habitat he realized the importance of preserving and enhancing what nature has returned to man. As a matter of fact every elected official or their representative -including the Borough Presidents of Brooklyn and Queens - that has taken the educational tours sponsored by the Ridgewood Reservoir/Highland Park Alliance has come to the conclusion that the well thought out and graphically illustrated plan presented by the Alliance is the most sensible and correct way to spend the taxpayers money.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward Kampermann
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