

Land Use Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses Hearing August 11, 2015

Copies to:

Chair Member: Koo; Subcommittee Members: Palma, Arroyo, Mendez, Levin, Barron & Kallos

My Name is Peter Gambardella, I am an Assistant Principal, Head Football Coach and a proud graduate of Curtis High School and I would like to speak in support of the Annex at Curtis High School.

When it was determined that Curtis High School would finally get the much needed annex where the current Temporary Classrooms were located, there was much excitement and joy. Having graduated from Curtis High School in the early 90's and working there for the last 18 years, I've witnessed the growth and desire for students to attend Curtis High School. The building currently sits at over 140% capacity and has to function on 3 different time schedules to accommodate the students. These 3 different time schedules create conflicts for students, staff, parents and community members. As the North Shore continues to grow, this will only more overcrowding. This Addition that will link a century of history to the present will accommodate the current population and provide much needed space for the demand on the Island's oldest public high school.

The new addition was specifically designed to fit into the current structure of our Castle on the Hill. The design of this new addition, replicates the current landmarked building so that it will fit into the community and not be an eyesore.

The new addition will also finally make the entire building handicapped accessible. The current building does not provide an opportunity for a handicapped student to reach the gymnasiums, library, or even meet the college advisors.

The new addition will provide much needed space to accommodate our growing population and provide us with modern classrooms. Four walls that will benefit the children of the north shore for years to come is more important than a single wall that does not benefit anyone.

Peter Gambardella

Asst. Principal Curtis High School

Land Use Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses Hearing April 11, 2015

Copies to:

Chair Member: Koo; Subcommittee Members: Palma, Arroyo, Mendez, Levin, Barron & Kallos

My name is Eric Ritzer and I am the Curtis High School Athletic Director and Assistant Principal for Physical Education and NJROTC. I would like to speak in support of the application to construct a new annex to our school on the site presently occupied by four temporary trailers.

Curtis is well known as a school that produces student-athletes who excel in both sport and academics. We take our athletic program extremely seriously because we know that it is very often a young person's interest in sports that serves as the foundation for their success in school. That's why we are so excited about this project.

When the new annex is completed, it will be the first time in the 110 year history of our school that we will have a competition-ready facility for our indoor sports programs. The school currently has two gyms; both were built in 1964 and are adjacent to the site proposed for the annex. The boy's gym is at street level on St. Mark's Place, and the girl's gym is directly above that. There is very little room in either gym for seating which means that spectators must sit hazardously close to the action. There is even less room for storage of sports equipment such as wrestling mats and volleyball nets stands, so these are often on the gym floor during games and practice. Locker rooms and training rooms are in very poor condition as well.

This new construction will give us a sports facility with new lockers, new fitness center, room for storage and more adequate and safer seating for spectators. In addition, the plan calls for space conversions to accommodate dance, wrestling, gymnastics, drama and other sports and performing arts programs. But this isn't just about playing games in a nice new athletic facility. It's about using the love of sports so that our young people become engaged with their education; have supervised, wholesome after school activities and come to learn the life lessons that team sports and competition offer. By building this annex, we will not be increasing our student population but we will be increasing the percentage who are positively engaged in supervised activities inside the building every afternoon instead of being out on the streets, without direction or adult mediation of any kind. I would think that would be a goal any community could support.

Thank you.

Eric Ritzer

Land Use Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses Hearing April 11, 2015

Copies to:

Chair Member: Koo; Subcommittee Members: Palma, Arroyo, Mendez, Levin, Barron & Kallos

My name is Aurelia Curtis. I am the 12th principal of Curtis High School, having retired effective June 30th, 2015 after 31 years of service. The Department of Education has not found a successor who is willing to change their name to match the school, so here I am! I would like to speak in support of the application to construct an annex to our school on St. Mark's Place, replacing temporary classroom units (TCUs) and providing much needed instructional space.

Curtis High School was the first secondary school built on Staten Island after the consolidation of the New York City Public Schools in 1898. Architect C.B.J. Snyder designed the school to allow for expansion in response to the growing North Shore population. As such, the first two expansions of the original building that opened in February 1904 were constructed from plans that he had the forethought to make available. Since that time, the school's population has continued to increase and the five buildings that comprise the campus of Curtis High School can no longer effectively provide the safe learning environment that our students need and deserve.

When I came to Curtis in 1984 as a Teacher of Mathematics and Computer Science, the enrollment was a little over 1,600 students and all students were on one time schedule. Since then the school's enrollment has grown to as much as 3,000 students (a utilization rate of 179% in 2005) due in large part to the offering of excellent instructional programs and the North Shore's fast-paced population growth. While the current utilization rate of 143% is an improvement over the days when Curtis was extremely overcrowded, you have heard the adverse conditions that currently exist. We are constantly trying to fit 10 pounds of candy in a 9 pound bag!

A temporary solution was installed in 2003 when previously-used classroom trailers were lifted onto the space that was the school's tennis courts. Several time during inclement weather, I was forced to make the decision to close the TCUs, choosing safety over instruction. During other emergencies, the remote location of the TCUs meant that students in those classrooms were always at higher risk than students in the connected buildings. The TCUs offered a distraction for students who sometimes chose an alternate route off the campus instead of returning to their classes. TCUs

installed in 2003 cannot continue to be a viable solution for the instructional and safety needs of our students. We are pleased that the Department of Education (DOE) and School Construction Authority (SCA) gave heed to our 11-year appeal to provide a permanent building in the space that the TCUs now occupy.

My assistant principals and I have worked very closely with the SCA in the design phase of the project to ensure that it paid attention to the details that are certain to impact its success. Among the salient concerns we raised were, providing instructional spaces that support existing and future programs, preserving the architectural integrity of the gothic-style campus, respecting the environmental implications of new construction and continuing to be a good neighbor. The SCA's design team made room at the table for the school's input and the result is a three-story annex that is intended to provide a 300-student increase in the seat availability at Curtis, reducing overcapacity to 130%, a much more manageable number! The new construction may affect 15 trees on the St. Mark's Place side of our campus; the landscaping plan proposes planting of well over 15 trees on the campus and other designated areas. We have been assured that particular care and attention will be taken to preserve as many trees as possible. With respect to the wall, I believe it was always in the plan that portions of the stone wall would be removed as the campus expanded. Photos of the building before the 1922 expansion show longer wall enclosures. C.B.J. Snyder knew in 1898 that the Castle on the Hill would be a beacon for education citywide and planned for his masterpiece to expand. I am confident that he would be pleased with the architectural and environmental integrity of this latest proposed expansion, as we are with the prospect of a new state-of-the-art building to ensure that the instructional needs of the students of Curtis High School are met in a safe learning environment.

Thank you for allowing me to add my voice to the conversation as you make a decision that will shape the future of some of New York City's most deserving students.

Aurelia L. Curtis
11 Tompkins Circle
Staten Island, NY 10301



Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner

April 02, 2015

Mr. Tom Nielsen
NYCSCA
30-30 Thomson Ave.
Queens, NY 11101

Re: NYCSCA
Curtis High School
105 Hamilton Ave., Staten Island, NY 10301
15PR01191
LLW#089515

Dear Mr. Nielsen:

Thank you for requesting the comments of the Division for Historic Preservation of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). We have reviewed the provided documents in accordance with the New York State Historic Preservation Act of 1980 (Section 14.09 of the New York Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law). These comments are those of the Division for Historic Preservation and relate only to Historic/Cultural resources. They do not include potential environmental impacts to New York State Parkland that may be involved in or near your project. Such impacts must be considered as part of the environmental review of the project pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (New York Environmental Conservation Law Article 8) and its implementing regulations (6 NYCRR Part 617).

We note that Curtis High School is eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. This submission proposes to add a new structure where four temporary classroom units are currently located along St. Mark's Place. We have no concerns with the proposed location or appearance of the proposed new construction. It is compatible with the historic buildings and of an appropriate scale, massing and fenestration. Thank you for the attention to detail.

As part of the project, we understand that a portion of the existing rubble stone wall along St. Mark's Place must be removed; part of it permanently and part temporarily during construction. The temporarily removed section will be rebuilt to match the original appearance when the project is complete. Additionally the remainder of the existing stone wall on school property will be repaired and repointed. We have no archeological concerns.

Division for Historic Preservation

P O Box 189 Waterford, New York 12188-0189 • (518) 237-8643 • www.nysparks.com

Based upon our review, it is OPRHP's opinion that the proposed new construction planned for Curtis High School will have No Adverse Impact upon historic resources. If there are substantive changes or unexpected conditions, consultation with our office should resume.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at (518) 268-2181.

Sincerely,



Beth A. Cumming
Senior Historic Site Restoration Coordinator
e-mail: beth.cumming@parks.ny.gov

via e-mail only

TESTIMONY OF THEO DORIAN, PRESIDENT, ST. GEORGE CIVIC ASSOCIATION

My name is Theo Dorian. I am the longtime president of the St. George Civic Association, a respected group of renters and owners of homes and businesses in the area surrounding Curtis High School, whose expansion you are considering. At a crowded meeting, our association, including educators and numerous parents who educated their children at Curtis, voted unanimously to oppose this deeply misguided project.

This plan was in substantially completed form before ever having been presented to our community, and we are now left scrambling to persuade you that of all the schools in Staten Island that could be expanded this way, this is the last one you should even consider. Curtis is currently one of the most overcrowded schools in the City and by far the most crowded in the borough. At 150% capacity, it is the only academic high school situated in the only neighborhood of Staten Island with a largely minority population, while highly in-demand schools such as New Dorp High and Petrides, a prized school in more affluent white areas, remains well below capacity.

Yet, even though it is right in the middle of a neighborhood heavily strained by the traffic and parking problems it presents, the school provides no pickup areas and virtually no parking for its staff, students, and parents. This results in massive daily congestion and safety hazards on what were meant to be peaceful neighborhood streets. The puzzling one-way nature of the main arteries, St. Marks Place and Hamilton Avenues, creates constant problems for drivers and pedestrians, a burden that we have borne under strain without complaint. Now the city proposes some of its biggest development projects ever, including the world's largest observation wheel and a much-needed shopping mall, both designed to draw thousands more to a neighborhood with nowhere near the needed traffic infrastructure to support them. In this context, it is startling and bewildering that it chooses the school it has burdened with many times the overcrowding of other schools, to expand.

The additional building proposed would be constructed on one of the only remaining stretches of St. Marks that enjoys a modicum of peace, which will certainly be shattered and the setting of its homes transformed utterly. As someone who moved a block and a half away, choosing a home that is bound by landmarks law and requires City permission for any changes or alterations near the landmarked school property, I can tell you it is shocking to learn that the City that imposes these very strict regulations is not required to abide by them.

I have neighbors who were forced to change their chosen building materials and designs for their rear stone walls, yet when it comes to respecting the same laws it

has placed on its own property, the City tells us they have no power to enforce its laws if the State chooses not to. And so they have chosen not to, leaving all the homeowners who purchased homes under landmarks law, or who were told that imposing these expensive restrictions on their homes would maintain our area's sense of place, frustrated and bewildered.

Of all the places in our borough to place a new school building annex, this is the worst one that could ever have been picked, and is proposed for the one school that the City itself has chosen to overcrowd. It is deeply disingenuous to portray this expansion as an answer to overcrowded classrooms when it will add a net seven classrooms while devoting over half its volume to a gym and leave Curtis as still the most substantially overcrowded school in Staten Island.

What the north shore needs for its serious problem of school overcrowding is a new high school and middle school. All of our efforts should be focused upon that goal, rather than money thrown at a giant new building that will shatter the sense of place of our historic landmarked neighborhood while doing nearly nothing to address the problem of overcrowding.

While it may be true that the school and the City government are not required to undergo review by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to alter our historic area in a massive way and change the texture of life in our neighborhood it should still voluntarily abide by the same rules that we homeowners are required to undergo. An educational institution charged with teaching respect for our history and architecture, should not tear down its centuries-old defining stone wall and build a massive new building without undergoing any landmarks review because the State says so.

While more affluent, majority-population neighborhood schools remain below capacity, we are told that Curtis requires this building to accommodate the very overpopulation imposed on it by the City. In fact, it does almost nothing to that end by increasing classrooms by seven in a building designed to house a new gym. After you approve the construction of this inappropriate behemoth on landmarked property surrounded by a landmarked historic district, Curtis will remain seriously overcrowded while other Staten Island schools remain overcrowded.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 8/11/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: FREDERICK MALAY

Address: _____

I represent: NYC School Construction Authority

Address: 30-30 Thomson Ave. L.I.C. 11161
N.Y.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 12015-3414 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 8/11/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: AUNELIA L. CURTIS

Address: 10 TOMPKINS Cir.

I represent: CURTIS H.S.

Address: STATEN ISLAND, NY 10301

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Curtis H.S. Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 8/11/2015

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Harwood

Address: 103 St Mark Pl. SI 10301

I represent: myself

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. CURTIS HIGH Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 8/11/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RICHARD HUMPHREY

Address: 115 ST. MARKS PL. STATEN

I represent: HISTORIC HOMEOWNERS ISLAND

Address: ON ST. MARKS PLACE

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Curtis High School Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 8/11/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Theodore A. Dorian

Address: 199 St. Marks Pl. St. NY 10301

I represent: St. George Civic Association

Address: Po Box 987, St. NY 10301

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Curtis High School Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 8.11.15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RAMA CHORPASH

Address: 97 St. Marks Pl. Staten Island NY 10301

I represent: Myself - Historic Homeowner

Address: On St. Marks

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Schools Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 8/11/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KENKULON

Address: "

I represent: School Construction Authority

Address: 30-30 Thomson Ave, LIC

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T 2015-3414 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ERIC RITZER

Address: 24 Fraser Street

I represent: Curtis High School

Address: 105 Hamilton Ave SE, NY, 10301

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T2015-3414 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 8/11/15

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Peter Gambardella

Address: 25 Morrison Ave 10310

I represent: Curtis HS

Address: 105 Hamilton Ave 10301

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T2015-3414 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 8/11/15

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Thomas Hepworth

Address: 77 Portland Pl.

I represent: Curtis HS

Address: STATEN IS. NY 10301

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms