

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PLANNING, DISPOSITIONS AND
CONCESSIONS

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May 2, 2016
Start: 1:14 p.m.
Recess: 1:33 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room,
16th Fl.

B E F O R E:
INEZ E. DICKENS
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Darlene Mealy
Ydanis A. Rodriguez
Andrew Cohen
Mark Treyger
James G. Van Bramer

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Jose Lopez
Deputy Director
Parklands and Real Estate Unit
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation

John Hatfield
Executive Director
Socrates Sculpture Park

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2 CONCESSIONS

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[gavel]

3 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Good afternoon, I'm
4 Council Member Inez E. Dickens, Chair of the
5 Subcommittee on Planning, Dispositions and
6 Concessions. Welcome everyone to today's hearing.

7 I want to thank and acknowledge my
8 Sergeant of Arms Allen Hsu, my Land Use Director Raju
9 Mann, Deputy Director Amy Levitan, and of course, my
10 phenomenal Attorney, Dylan Casey.

11 We are joined -- I'm sorry -- [background
12 comments] and Julie Lubin, and I apologize, Julie.

13 We are joined today by Council Members
14 Andy Cohen and Council Member Mark Treyger. We have
15 one item on our calendar today, so let's get to it.

16 Land Use Item 0358, Socrates Sculpture
17 Park, an application submitted by the Department of
18 Parks and Recreation for an amendment to the City Map
19 involving the establishment of Socrates Sculpture
20 Park, including authorization for any acquisition or
21 disposition of real property located in Council
22 Member Van Bramer's district in Queens. Council
23 Member Van Bramer has joined us this afternoon;
24 Council Member, would you like to speak on this?

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: I would very
3 much; thank you very much, Madame Chair for the
4 opportunity to make a guest appearance at your very
5 important hearing today to speak very quickly on this
6 application.

7 Socrates Sculpture Park is an incredibly
8 important institution, not only for my district and
9 all of Queens, but in fact, the City of New York and
10 for the last 30 years or so it has been presenting
11 world-class, world-class art, sculpture, exhibits;
12 educational programs on a tiny but very important
13 patch of land in Long Island City, and John Hatfield
14 and Katie Denny Horowitz are here and they're gonna
15 speak a little bit more to this. But what this
16 essentially is going to do is create a unified and
17 complete Socrates Sculpture Park and ensure its
18 continued viability as a city park by making some
19 very slight but important changes to the map of the
20 City of New York and also making sure that we acquire
21 in perpetuity a small portion of the park which is
22 currently privately owned, but we need that space
23 very much so that the park can grow and have a
24 permanent administrative and educational presence,
25 with a future building that we would like to see and

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2 will see built there, so this is gonna be great for
3 Socrates Sculpture Park but even better for the
4 people of Queens and the City of New York and I just
5 wanted to come by to urge all of you on the committee
6 to approve it and then to come to Socrates Sculpture
7 Park if you haven't already been, 'cause it is an
8 amazing, amazing place to both see the waterfront and
9 to look at incredible, incredible works of art that
10 John and Katie make sure are available for everybody,
11 and we thank the Parks Department for their work in
12 this very important action as well; they're
13 incredibly important partners in this endeavor and
14 again, Socrates has been around for 30 or so years;
15 we wanna make sure it's around for the next 300 years
16 as a City of New York institution. So with that,
17 thank you very much, Madame Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Thank you so much,
19 Council Member; I assume that you're a very strong
20 supporter of this, having listened to that statement
21 and I'd like to see if any of my colleagues have a
22 question for the council member in whose district
23 this is located; a very comprehensive statement
24 asking for support and an affirmative vote.

25 Now is this a public park or is this..

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: It is a
3 public park with, as I mentioned, a few parcels that
4 are currently privately owned and some that are
5 mismapped, shall we say, so we are making some
6 technical corrections to the map of the City of New
7 York and also taking back that portion of the park
8 which is currently privately owned.

9 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: The privately
10 owned, Council Member; is that going... does that have
11 to be purchased and if so, is it at market rate or
12 should I ask...

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: It is not
14 being purchased, but there is a transfer of some
15 usable development rights and we believe that that is
16 a good deal for the City of New York, but I'm sure
17 the applicants can expand a little bit further on the
18 nature of the transfer.

19 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Thank you so much,
20 Council Member. I'm now gonna call up, please, Jose
21 Lopez, Department of Parks and Recreation and is this
22 Dijon Hatfield?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: John
24 Hatfield.

25 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: John...

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: John. It
3 looks like Dijon, but it's just John...

4 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: It's just... well I
5 apologize... [crosstalk]

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: he's not that
7 fabulous to be Dijon.

8 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: I apologize...
9 [crosstalk]

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Yeah,
11 [background comments].

12 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: I apologize... from
13 the Socrates Sculpture Park. When you seat, please
14 identify... turn on your mics and identify yourselves
15 and where you're from, please.

16 JOSE LOPEZ: Testing. Good afternoon
17 Chair Council Member and Council Members; my name is
18 Jose Lopez; I'm the Deputy Director of the Parklands
19 and Real Estate Unit of the Parks Department and I'm
20 very glad and happy to present to you an application
21 today by the Department of Parks and Recreation that
22 has been long in the making to establish this park
23 formally on the City Map.

24 Before you today you have an amendment to
25 the City Map tying [sic] both, the establishment of

2 Socrates Sculpture Park, the elimination of two city-
3 owned **[inaudible]** streets and the establishment of
4 public place in the Long Island City neighborhood of
5 Queens community **[inaudible]**. The prior [sic] site
6 -- and by the way, you have the same aerial included;
7 I will circulate it to so you can follow, but the
8 prior site is located along the East River waterfront
9 and is bound by Vernon Boulevard to the east and the
10 Costco retail commercial development to the south and
11 the East River to the west; there's some vacant
12 commercial waterfront that is situated to the north
13 of the site. Additionally, the prior site is
14 bisected by a privately owned construction yard site
15 that divides the northern and south portion of the
16 park, so there's a vacant site that you see there in
17 the middle.

18 The prior site includes approximately
19 over 276,000 sq. ft., includes Block 501, Lots 1, 16,
20 31, 60, 101, 112 and Block 499, Lot 51, which is
21 located to the north.

22 The prior site is currently zoned R5 and
23 R6; the area within an approximate 600-foot radius of
24 the prior site includes predominantly land uses that
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2 include some light manufacturing and some grandfather
3 commercial uses.

4 DPR has supported the establishment of
5 Socrates Sculpture Park since the mid 1980s; the park
6 was conceived by a local artist who worked with
7 community members to clear the abandoned and illegal
8 dumping on the site, and you have before and after
9 shots of the park in your briefing there, so you can
10 see how it looked before and how it looks currently.

11 The intent was to create an outdoor
12 working and civic space for artists and to provide
13 waterfront open space for the community and the city
14 at large.

15 In 1986, DCAS granted a five-year lease
16 for the use of the park to a local artist; in 1993
17 DCAS transferred management of the site to DPR.
18 Consecutively, in 1998 and in 2003, the main portion
19 of the park was assigned from DCAS to the Parks
20 Department, which is that larger area that you see in
21 the middle.

22 So the proposed amendment to the City Map
23 before you today will establish the entirety of
24 Socrates Sculpture Park on the City Map, which will
25 comprise of 6.35 acres.

2 Additionally, the application also
3 includes the elimination of two portions of city-
4 owned street **[inaudible]**, so basically those areas
5 are the ones that you see on the aerial map
6 highlighted in blue, which includes the Broadway
7 extension from Vernon Boulevard, all the way to the
8 East River and then also the street end of 31st
9 Avenue.

10 In connection with this mapping
11 application, the City has entered into an agreement
12 to acquire the privately owned Lot 31 in exchange for
13 the development rights attributable to the mapped
14 public place located in the southern half of the
15 Broadway extension. So basically, Lot 31 is the one
16 that you see in the entrance -- I'm pointing to the
17 **[inaudible]** of the presentation so everyone is clear
18 on it. And Lot 31 will also serve for Socrates
19 Sculpture Park Organization to develop an education
20 and administrative building on it.

21 I would also like to mention that as part
22 of the ULURP review process the Community Board, the
23 Borough President and the City Planning Commission
24 have issued a favorable approval to this application.
25 So I'd just like to put to the site. So this is Lot

2 31, this area here and then the application

3 **[inaudible]** extension that is from Vernon Boulevard

4 over to the East River and **[inaudible]** the northern

5 half **[inaudible]** public place, and then **[inaudible]**

6 area, in this area **[inaudible]** Lot 31 **[inaudible]** and

7 then this area also will be the **[inaudible]**.

8 Now I would like to take questions or
9 comments.

10 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Now I have one
11 question before I ask my colleagues and that's about
12 the development rights attributable to the public
13 place located on the southern half; would you show me
14 on the map please the southern half of the Broadway
15 extension?

16 JOSE LOPEZ: Sure. **[inaudible]**

17 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Alright, well thank
18 you so much. Before we go on to our next -- do any
19 of my colleagues have any questions? We've been
20 joined by the way by Council Member Darlene Mealy and
21 by Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez. Are there any
22 questions from my colleagues? John or Dijon.

23 [laughter]

24 JOHN HATFIELD: My name is John Hatfield
25 and I am the Executive Director of Socrates Sculpture

2 Park and I want to thank the committee for taking up
3 this ULURP action and considering it. This has been
4 a decade-long conversation and process to secure the
5 future of the park and the Parks Department has been
6 an incredible partner in this endeavor, with great
7 perseverance. And I'd also like to thank Council
8 Member Van Bramer, who's been an enormous advocate
9 for the park ever since he took office and continues
10 to be so. So we are so grateful to be here.

11 I just wanted to give a little bit of
12 context for those of you who may or may not be
13 familiar with the park, but it is a national and
14 international model of arts taking over and looking
15 at abandoned sites and culturally programming them
16 and acting as an agent of change and a catalyst of
17 change. I'm invited to speak to various
18 municipalities, from Detroit, Nashville; Oakland,
19 about this successful model of Socrates.

20 What we're here today to propose and do
21 is secure its future; there are some anomalies and
22 interesting things about how the City Map is drawn
23 for this park and one of the most important parts is
24 the acquisition of a private parcel of land that in
25 fact for the 30 years that the park has been in

2 existence has acted and looked and operated like a
3 park within its borders but in fact is in private
4 hands. The park is having its 30th year anniversary,
5 so the timing of this couldn't be better, and the
6 most significant part of mapping the park; it allows
7 to deepen our relationship with the Parks Department
8 in furthering the master planning of the park and to
9 begin to make plans for shoreline restoration; other
10 capital improvements that are much needed.

11 Today the park enjoys about 150,000
12 people; 40,000 of those directly interface and
13 participate in our programs; 10,000 kids are part of
14 our arts education programming and creative
15 experiences; we have an international film festival;
16 large-scale community events, so you know at any time
17 the park may enjoy upwards of 3,000 people for an
18 event or an activity; it's a highly, highly used
19 public park and we're here to secure its future.

20 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Thank you. Now
21 before I open it up for questions; I was looking at
22 this map and there's part of this that I see on here
23 and there where it's going to be... it looks to be in
24 the river.

2 JOSE LOPEZ: Yes, so basically you have
3 the USB headline [sic] and the bulk headline over the
4 years have changed and actually, a lot of this area,
5 if you look at historical maps, there used to be a
6 pier that used to come all the way [inaudible], so
7 that has been filled over the years in this area. So
8 basically, at the end of the area that you see, I
9 mean that... the kinda little [inaudible] area there,
10 that is not under water and then the area at the end
11 of the street, there is an assisting... [inaudible]
12 combined sewer overflow, so the head is actually at
13 the end of the street, so in this area here.

14 [background comments]

15 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Alright. But now
16 I'm really referring to -- I don't know if you can
17 see where I'm referring to here..

18 JOSE LOPEZ: Oh, over here?

19 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Yes. Yes..

20 [crosstalk]

21 JOSE LOPEZ: Yes. So this is an anomaly
22 planned for the water; basically we have a kayak and
23 boat lounge that is currently used by the community
24 in this area [sic] here; this is [inaudible] that is
25 all [inaudible]... [crosstalk]

2 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: So there's boat
3 docking there; did I hear you say?

4 JOSE LOPEZ: Yes. Yes, there's a kayak
5 lounge for boats and kayak.

6 JOHN HATFIELD: Socrates hosts with Long
7 Island City Boathouse a free kayaking program and we
8 utilize that beachfront; it is part of the Parks
9 Department and Socrates and we partner with them in
10 providing that on that parcel of land.

11 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Oh, that's very
12 impressive... [crosstalk]

13 JOHN HATFIELD: In addition to... we do
14 also a coastal classroom on that parcel of land where
15 students can actually access the water and do things
16 like water testing and study the sort of biology of
17 the riverfront.

18 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Oh very good; I
19 like that; you all should've told me that.

20 [laughter] And I'm very impressed with the
21 photographs, because I was looking at the before...

22 JOHN HATFIELD: Yeah.

23 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: and then I had to
24 ask my colleague about all these flowers; was that
25 the same site and he assured me it was, so I'm very

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2 impressed with it. Do any of my colleagues have any
3 questions? Are there any other members of the public
4 that wish to testify on this? Seeing none, I am
5 closing the public hearing on Land Use Item 0358,
6 Socrates Sculpture Park. I am putting the item up
7 for a vote; I note for the record that the
8 application that we are voting on today has the full
9 support of Council Member Van Bramer in whose
10 district it is, as well as the Queens Borough
11 President and the City Planning Commission. I too am
12 asking my colleagues for an affirmative vote. I will
13 now call on my counsel to call the vote on a vote to
14 approve.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Dickens.

16 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: I vote aye.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Mealy.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I vote aye.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member
20 Rodriguez.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Aye.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Cohen.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Aye.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member
25 Treyger.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Aye.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: By a vote of 5 in the
4 affirmative, 0 in the negative and 0 abstentions,
5 Land Use Item 0358 is approved and referred to the
6 Full Land Use Committee.

7 CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: I would like to
8 thank the members of the public, my colleagues,
9 Council Member Van Bramer, the counsel and my Land
10 Use staff for attending today's hearing. This
11 hearing is hereby [gavel] adjourned.

12 [background comments]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date May 17, 2016