

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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May 6, 2009
Start: 10:55am
Recess: 11:50am

HELD AT: Committee Room
 City Hall

B E F O R E: JAMES F. GENNARO
 Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Peter F. Vallone, Jr.
Thomas White, Jr.
Mathieu Eugene
Elizabeth Crowley
Domenic M. Recchia, Jr.
G. Oliver Koppell
Bill de Blasio
Erik Ulrich

CHAIRPERSON GENNARO: Are we on?

Are we live? We're good? Good morning. I'm Councilman Jim Gennaro, Chairman of the Committee on Environmental Protection. Whoops. Okay. Take two. Good morning. Can I go now? I can go now? Good morning, I'm Councilman Jim Gennaro, Chair of the Committee on Environmental Protection. And, today, we're holding a vote on Intro 506-A, a bill to develop a comprehensive wetlands protection policy. Grateful to be joined by members of the Committee, Council Member Vallone, Council Member White, Council Member Eugene, Council Member Crowley, Council Member Recchia.

And, as I was saying, New York City once contained 224,000 acres of freshwater wetlands. This variable ecosystem was able to hold back erosion, prevent flooding by retaining storm waters. It could filter and decompose pollutants and would have been able to slow global warming, or the effects of global warming, by converting carbon dioxide into oxygen at a great rate. In the past 200 years, most of this land has been filled for construction, developed or dredged. Only 2,000 acres of the freshwater

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2 wetlands, less than 1% of what we once had, remain
3 in the City today. And, many species that once
4 called these wetlands home have been lost forever.

5 Coastal wetlands in New York
6 historically covered approximately-- these are a
7 different kind of wetlands. We talked about
8 freshwater wetlands. Now, we're talking about
9 coastal wetlands in New York once covered about
10 100,000 acres. About 75% of those wetlands,
11 coastal wetlands, in New York City, including
12 salt, tidal, marshes, have also been lost. The
13 loss of these wetlands has resulted in the loss of
14 the species that once lived there. But, the loss
15 of the species diversity pales in comparison to
16 the loss of ecosystem diversity, which is the loss
17 of variation in the collection of assemblages,
18 communities and habitats within a region. With
19 habitat loss, all the species that use that
20 habitat are lost.

21 Development presents a significant
22 threat to the remaining wetlands. But, an even
23 greater threat is posed by sea level rise.

24 According to the US EPA, the National
25 Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration and

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2 the United States Geological Survey, there is--
3 well, those agencies indicate that the global sea
4 level is rising. And, there's evidence that the
5 rate is getting faster. Increasing atmospheric
6 concentration, greenhouse gases, primarily from
7 human contributions, are warming the atmosphere
8 and oceans. According to the EPA, sea level rise
9 will result in the certain loss of at least some
10 of New York City's wetlands.

11 Wetlands protection in New York
12 City is accomplished primarily through the use of
13 three laws; the Freshwater Wetlands Act, the Tidal
14 Wetlands Act and the Coastal Erosion Hazard Areas
15 Act; three State laws. However, these laws have
16 not prevented significant loss of wetlands in New
17 York City and do not speak to sea level rise,
18 which is why we have to act. We have to act now.
19 We have to do this, do this good bill.

20 Without a bold and innovative
21 process needed to balance the burdens placed on
22 coastal areas by development with the obvious
23 economic benefits of preserving our wetlands over
24 time and into the future, New York City will lose
25 more of its remaining wetlands. Intro 506-A calls

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2 for the development of a realistic and visionary
3 plan that acknowledges all the threats to human
4 health and the environment from current and future
5 wetlands loss and proposes informed careful
6 responses. What this bill would do, it would
7 require the inventory, so to speak, making a
8 positive identification of the remaining wetlands
9 in New York City by satellite or aerial kinds of
10 photography and a survey and then, mandate the
11 development of a comprehensive wetlands protection
12 strategy.

13 I'm grateful to the members who are
14 sponsors of this bill. Very grateful, also, to
15 the staff for doing the good negotiations to make
16 sure that we could get a very strong and
17 comprehensive bill. I'd like to thank Jeff
18 Haberman, was critical in these discussions,
19 Counsel Committee Samara Swanston, Siobhan Watson
20 and all the sponsors of this bill.

21 If anyone has any comments, we can
22 take them now. Otherwise, I'll be happy to
23 proceed with the [pause].

24 Okay. What we'll do is before we
25 vote on 506-A, we have to vote-- do you have the--

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2 okay. This is a preconsidered Reso. It's a
3 resolution finding that the enactment of proposed
4 Intro 506-A does not have a significant adverse
5 impact on the environment and is completely
6 consistent with the State Environmental Quality
7 Review Act. It's necessary that we pass this
8 Resolution first before we proceed to Intro 506.

9 And, we're also joined by Council
10 Member Koppell. Grateful to have Council Member
11 Koppell here. And, as I indicated, first, we'll
12 call the vote on the preconsidered Reso that finds
13 that 506-A does not have a adverse environmental
14 impact. And then, we'll proceed to the vote on
15 506-A. So now, we're voting on the Reso. And, I
16 ask the clerk to call the roll.

17 WILLIAM MARTIN: William Martin,
18 Committee Clerk, roll call on the Committee of
19 Environmental Protection, preconsidered
20 Resolution. Council Member Gennaro.

21 CHAIRPERSON GENNERO: Yes.

22 WILLIAM MARTIN: Koppell.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Yes.

24 WILLIAM MARTIN: Recchia.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I'd like

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2 to put on the record, I'd like my name to be added
3 to this bill. But, I vote yes.

4 WILLIAM MARTIN: Vallone.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yes.

6 WILLIAM MARTIN: White.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WHITE: Yes.

8 WILLIAM MARTIN: Eugene.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Yes. I
10 would like also to put my name as a co-sponsor to
11 this bill, also.

12 WILLIAM MARTIN: Crowley.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Yes.

14 WILLIAM MARTIN: By a vote of seven
15 in the affirmative, zero in the negative, no
16 abstentions, the preconsidered Resolution is
17 adopted.

18 CHAIRPERSON GENNERO: And now, what
19 we'll do for the preconsidered Reso, we'll hold
20 the record open on that until the other, for a
21 half hour or whatever the period of time is, to
22 give other members a chance to vote on that.

23 And now, we'll proceed to Intro
24 506-A, which is the actual bill. People can feel
25 very good about this piece of legislation.

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2 Everyone talks about wetlands and like the need to
3 protect them. And, you know, notwithstanding the
4 fact that there are federal protections. There
5 are state protections. There are still regulatory
6 gaps that, you know, do allow the wetlands to be
7 developed without proper consideration, without
8 proper control; something that we have to stop.
9 And, I'm very, very happy with the way this bill
10 turned out. So, you can all feel good about it
11 and your children and grandchildren will thank
12 you.

13 And so, with that said, I ask the
14 clerk to call the roll and I urge a yes vote on
15 this bill.

16 WILLIAM MARTIN: Gennaro.

17 CHAIRPERSON GENNERO: Yes.

18 WILLIAM MARTIN: Koppell.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Aye.

20 WILLIAM MARTIN: Recchia.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Again, add
22 my name to the bill and vote yes.

23 WILLIAM MARTIN: Vallone.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Please add
25 my name to both bills. And, I vote yes.

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2 WILLIAM MARTIN: White.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER WHITE: Yes.

4 WILLIAM MARTIN: Eugene.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Yes.

6 Please, again, add my name to both bill, please.

7 WILLIAM MARTIN: Crowley.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Yes. And,
9 can you also add my name to the bill. Thank you.

10 WILLIAM MARTIN: By a vote of seven
11 in the affirmative, zero in the negative, no
12 abstentions, both items are adopted. Council
13 Members, please sign the Committee reports. Thank
14 you.

15 CHAIRPERSON GENNERO: Thank you.

16 I'd like to thank the members, thank the staff,
17 thank the people that are here, thanks everyone
18 who helped out with this bill. I neglected, in my
19 comments, shame on me, to recognize the good work
20 of the Mayor's office on this bill. We worked
21 very closely with the Bloomberg Administration on
22 the development of this bill. We got a lot of
23 good things in this bill. And, we're grateful to
24 the Administration for negotiating with us in good
25 faith so that the bill was really left intact.

2 And, I just want to recognize that and thank the
3 Administration for that. It's been great to
4 partner with them on many environmental
5 initiatives; many more things yet to do. But,
6 today is a very, very good day.

7 And, with that, I think everyone
8 and we'll leave--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL:

10 Mr. Chairman?

11 CHAIRPERSON GENNERO: --the record
12 open for other members who wish to come and place
13 their vote. And, I recognize Council Member
14 Koppell.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: I just
16 want to observe that it's been almost 30 years
17 since I was the sponsor of the Freshwater Wetlands
18 Act in Albany, which I worked very hard to pass.
19 And, this is a good addition, coming 30 years
20 later.

21 CHAIRPERSON GENNERO: Right.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Maybe it
23 would have been good to come a little sooner.
24 But--

25 CHAIRPERSON GENNERO: Right.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: --it's
3 good that we're still working on these matters.

4 CHAIRPERSON GENNERO: And, why
5 don't we all pledge that 30 years from today,
6 we're going to pass another really great bill
7 also. And, all the things that we'll do between
8 now and 30 years from now, we should all live so
9 long and be healthy. Okay. Thank you. Thank
10 you, Council Member Koppell. And, thank you for
11 your great work 30 years ago. Thank you for your
12 great work today. And, we'll leave the record
13 open so the record'll be open so the other members
14 can come and cast their votes. Thank you all very
15 much.

16 [END OF TAPE 1003]

17 [START OF TAPE 1004]

18 WILLIAM MARTIN: Roll call
19 Committee on Environmental Protection,
20 preconsidered Resolution, Council Member de
21 Blasio.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER de BLASIO: I vote
23 aye.

24 WILLIAM MARTIN: Vote on
25 preconsidered Resolution is now eight in the

2 affirmation, zero in the negative and no
3 abstentions. Introduction 506-A, Council Member
4 de Blasio.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER de BLASIO: I vote
6 aye.

7 WILLIAM MARTIN: Vote now stands at
8 eight in the affirmative, zero in the negative and
9 no abstentions. Thank you.

10 [END OF TAPE 1004]

11 [START OF TAPE 1005]

12 WILLIAM MARTIN: Roll call
13 Committee on Environmental Protection,
14 preconsidered Resolution, Council Member Ulrich.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Aye on the
16 Reso.

17 WILLIAM MARTIN: Reso now stands at
18 nine in the affirmation, zero in the negative and
19 no abstentions. Introduction 506-A, Council
20 Member Ulrich.

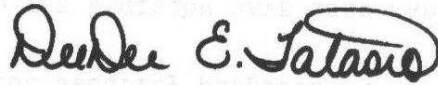
21 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Aye.

22 WILLIAM MARTIN: Final vote on
23 Introduction 506-A is now nine in the affirmative,
24 zero in the negative and no abstentions. Thank
25 you.

C E R T I F I C A T E

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

Signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "DeeDee E. Tataseo". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Date

May 22, 2009