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July 3, 2014

Ms. Elisabeth Draper
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Planning Bureau
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12238 RobertoClemente.Plan@parks.ny.gov

Dear Ms. Draper:

We write to you on behalf of the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality (BCEQ) to formally express BCEQ's general support for the proposed boathouse and associated dock and ramp in the draft plan for the revitalization of Roberto Clemente State Park (RCSP).

Since 1971, BCEQ has sought to establish — as an Inherent Human Right — a sound, forward-looking environmental policy regarding an aesthetic, unpolluted, environment protecting a natural and historic heritage. Since 2001 we focused on Harlem River issues with our elected officials to develop connections to and along the Harlem River -- including a continuous pedestrian/bicycle waterfront greenway, and to create on-water access and activities in an effort to improve water quality. We are actively working on two projects the popup wetland WCS-NOAA project at Pier 5 and the NYS Brownfields Opportunity Area Project - Step 2, both on the Harlem River.

Many groups have used RCSP for rowing and canoeing. In particular, a rowing program has been provided by the Empire State Rowing Association (ESRA) to the community through a temporary facility at RCSP every year for nearly three decades, making rowing one of the longest-running activities at the park. Human-powered rowing is an environmentally-friendly activity, a lifetime sport and a form of recreational that has deep roots in New York City. The sport of rowing in the United States was actually born in NYC in the early 1800s, when the watermen that shuttled people and goods in wooden rowing boats between anchored vessels in NY harbor and the shore -- they were the taxis of their day -- competed for customers. This naturally led to competition, and the sport of rowing was born. At the turn of the century, NYC had dozens of boathouses lining its shorelines, and hundreds of thousands of spectators lined the banks of the Harlem River to cheer on competitors in rowing regattas.

Today, most major U.S. cities have public rowing facilities, including Boston, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Dallas, Chicago, etc. However, despite much progress in opening up waterfront access to NYC residents, there is still not a single permanent rowing facility open to the general public in NYC. While rowing has persisted as an environmentally-friendly form of recreation in New York City despite the lack of permanent public facilities, long term NYS and NYC City Planning documents over the years have consistently included proposed boathouses. BCEQ strongly believes it is time to finally make a New York City public boathouse a reality by including a boathouse and associated dock and ramp in the final plans for the revitalization of Roberto Clemente State Park.

Kindly respond with your comments to harlemriver@bceq.org.

Sincerely,

Karen Argenti
Karen Argenti
Co-Chairs, Water Committee, BCEQ

Dart Westphal
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Co-Chairs, Water Committee, BCEQ