



Bronx Council for Environmental Quality



Post Office Box 265, The Bronx, New York 10464-0265

January 5, 2006

Honorable Amanda Burden, Chairperson
and Members of the NYC Planning Commission
22 Reade Street, Suite 2E
New York, N.Y. 10007

Dear Chairperson Burden and Members of the NYC Planning Commission:

BCEQ (www.bceq.org), founded in 1971, is a local non-for profit organization made up of volunteers, dedicated to working in the Bronx for "an aesthetic and unpolluted environment, with a natural and historic heritage." Our members do not support the taking of public parkland for private profit. The earlier Bronx precedent of taking parkland (in Van Cortlandt Park) for the "public benefit" of clean water, while specious, was (in concept) for some greater good. We should note that the Bronx residents employment have not materialized as only one quarter of the current workers at the Croton Filter Plant site live in the Bronx (based on the NYC DEP statistics) – much less than what was promised. Moreover, that decision was based on the premise (which may turn out to be false) that the parkland would be returned to the people.

The present case is not at all the same. Taking public parkland away in a densely populated, low income area, with little or no promise of recompense, borders on environmental racism on the part of the public officers making this decision. It does not matter that the benefit is for the fifty or sixty thousand fans per event attending Yankee Stadium; for that is no competition when measured against a million or so Bronxites that can not view the game on public television, or the hundreds of thousands of children who, each and every day find that they have no place to play, no trees to shelter, and no clean air to breathe.

If the Yankees weren't making decisions based solely on their bottom line, then they might have some empathy with a community numbed by years of having

no effective voice in the fate of their own neighborhood. They would be part of the neighborhood, instead of just carpetbaggers. BCEQ Members think there is a reasonable alternative to steam-rolling over the interests of those most affected. As environmentalists we believe in the three R's – reduce, reuse and recycle. It's been done before, and should be done again, e.g. renovate the old stadium on that hallowed ground.

It is bad public policy to ignore other alternatives – especially when there are a plenty of brownfields that have been abandoned in this very same neighborhood. Those brownfields are in need of remediation, would clean the air, and would be a better use of land. Look at NYC Planning Commission statistics to see that the amount of parkland per person in this area is deminimus as compared to the rest of the City and even other parts of the Bronx. Why do you think the asthma rates are so high in this area of highly traffic highways and low-to-dwindling parkland (i.e., trees)? Clearly, one negative impact of park loss is the increased temperature and the reduced shade resulting from the removal of trees and/or green space.

To many of us who grew up in the Bronx, Yankee Stadium is special. But so are the surrounding green open spaces, i.e. Franz Sigel, Joyce Kilmer, Mullaly and Macombs Dam Parks. We were free to explore all these places, and take advantage of their recreational and educational opportunities. Without open space experiences, our children will not be able to appreciate baseball, its history and the lessons it can teach us.

It may seem unnecessary to expound upon the value of parkland, but this is much easier when you have it than when you don't. According to the most recent publication of the *New Yorkers for Parks*, the Bronx has the lowest, in other words, the best overall residents-per-acre-of-parkland ratio of all the boroughs; the City ratio is 278; the Bronx is 191. This is because Teddy Roosevelt had the foresight to plan for the whole borough and City of New York. This kind foresight would *not* have left this neighborhood without an open vista to the Nature that makes the rest of the Borough a magnet for families and communities. Yet, statistics here tell the sad story.¹

¹ Acreage CD 17 (CD for the Stadium and Macombs, Joyce and Franz Sigel) 214.83.
Acreage CD 16 (just north of Yankee Stadium and the CD which Mullaly is in) 67.59
Acreage of parks surrounding Yankee Stadium:

Mullaly 21.29	Joyce Kilmer 7.05	Macombs Dam 32.76
Franz Sigel 17.58	Jerome Hill 0.95	Arcilla PG 1.55
Summit Park 0.06		

The percentage of parkland² in the two City Council Districts neighboring Yankee Stadium, added together, are substantially less than the citywide total of 14%. This means³ that each person in Council Districts 16 and 17 have a square of green space six feet wide and three to ten feet long, respectively. By of comparison, if the Yankees played the Red Sox within the square of the base-path, each player would have more than 400 square feet, or about *ten times* as much parkland as their community neighbors.⁴ We all know they need space to play baseball. It just needs to be recognized that all of us need space to lead our lives as fully as we can.

The only urban land that is literally cool-space in summer is green-space, where shade over soil and plant life may be the only comfortable oasis on a summer evening. In winter, the only place the neighbors of the Yankees can literally see snowbirds is right in the spare slivers and patches of surrounding parkland. And while the Yankees may not consider it in their planning process, unlike stadiums, and parking facilities, the parks do not contribute to the combined sewers that discharge pathogens into the Harlem River, one of the only waterways accessible to the local community.

Please respond to these comments, and vote against this proposal.

Sincerely,

I.C. Levenberg-Engel
BCEQ President 2006

² The percentage of parkland in the 16th and 17th Council Districts is 5% and 7%, respectively.

³ Moreover, in the 17th CD, the acres of parkland per 1000 residents are 1.43, and the number of kids per park is 1,298. In the adjacent 16th CD, the acres of parkland per 1000 residents are 0.42, and the number of kids per park is 1,815.

⁴ Acreage for Yankee Stadium 22.74, and the Yankee parking lot 2.03.