



“Making Park”

**Testimony of Carter Craft, Program Director
before the City Council Select Committee on Waterfronts
Concerning Hudson River Park**

November 13, 2002

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to speak before the Committee. I would like to make three points today.

Hudson River Park is one of New York City’s greatest waterfront achievements of the 20th Century.

When the Port Authority was busy creating a break bulk cargo and distribution facility, who knew that its days as a maritime facility were numbered and its relationship to the water would become largely incidental.

When the State Department of Transportation was struggling with how to rebuild or revamp the West Side Highway who knew that pioneers like Cathy Drew or Jim Wetteroth or Bob Townley or John Krevey would step in and cultivate genuine community resources like the River Project, the Downtown Boathouse, Pier 63 Maritime or Pier 25, also known as the “People’s Pier.” It’s inspiring that these pioneers continue to serve the community, which has grown to meet them and will surely protect them.

Hudson River Park is an imperfect model of waterfront redevelopment.

As an achievement of the last century, the model is already dated. Ever since containerization caused much of the port economy to relocate farther and farther from the urban core, more and more waterfront land has been opened up for public access and redevelopment. For more than the last two decades our city and state have been working to create the means to develop and implement large scale waterfront revitalization plans and projects: the West Side Waterfront Panel, the Queens West Development Corporation, the Hudson River Park Conservancy and Trust, Brooklyn Bridge Park Development Corporation. Our collective experience with all of these efforts should inform how we handle Governors Island, Jamaica Bay, Sunset Park, and Fresh Kills.

Two hundred years ago, when the Commissioners released their plan for the City, a reporter remarked on the lack of squares and open spaces in the plan. “Worry not” replied one of the Commissioners “as the Rivers will be our parks.”

This promise has been unfilled for nearly 200 years, and Hudson River Park is indeed helping to fulfill it. The Hudson River Park is an imperfect model is because it virtually denies our water-dependency as a city and a region. It’s not so much anyone’s fault, as it is the unfortunate manifestation of the fact that generations of New Yorkers have grown up disconnected from the River beside them. As the river’s edge fell into a pattern of abuse and decay the collective vision for what the waterfront should become emerged as something that was 180 degrees from what was there. People rejected, and rightfully so, the misuse of waterfront land. Many people don’t even know what “water-dependency” is.

Still, the unfortunate reality lies in the prevailing public perception that industry and maritime commerce have moved from this area we should make it anything but industrial or maritime.

And in doing so we deny the reality that Hudson River Park is the western edge of two of New York City’s Central Business Districts.

Though the volume and mass of goods that embodied commerce and trade have been reduced by technology to packets of information and wire transfers, the reality continues that the Business Districts need workers who arrive by bus, they generate solid waste that must be handled or removed, they require concrete and gravel and salt to build or rebuild themselves, and they consume energy that must come from somewhere.

In a City that is essentially an archipelago, we must devise and develop ways to make use of the natural benefits that water transport provides, and do so in ways that public access and enjoyment can also be facilitated.

For the last two years the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance has been researching examples of infrastructure projects around the world that accomplish multiple goals. We've found water treatment facilities that function like botanic gardens in China and Washington State. We've found Port facilities in Rotterdam or Oakland that accommodate public access as well as maritime trade; energy facilities in Providence and the San Francisco Bay Area that pay for and maintain adjacent public access; and we've found a waste transfer station in Phoenix that looks like the Gardens of Babylon and also functions as a community center.

The issue of relocating the majority of these uses from Hudson River Park is mandated in State Legislation and we are not advocating to change this legislation at this time. If the deadlines for relocating these facilities are not met then the State Attorney General should step in to negotiate a settlement and any damage awards should be placed in the Hudson River Improvement Fund or the New York City Environmental Fund to benefit and support the work of groups throughout the city to reclaim the waterfront.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.