

The Council of the City of New York Joint Oversight Hearing:
Governors Island Update on Open Spaces and Current Development Plans
Committees on Lower Manhattan Redevelopment and Waterfronts
Friday, April 3, 2009 at 11:00 a.m.
Council Chambers, City Hall

Thank you, members of the Council, for convening this important hearing on the closure of the Governors Island fire house and the funding status of the island, and for giving me the opportunity to testify on behalf of Manhattan Community Board One. I am Michael Levine, Director Planning and Land Use for Community Board One. I am speaking for our Chairperson Julie Menin, Waterfront Committee Chair Bob Townley and the other members of the board. We are enthusiastic about the potential for Governor's Island because it is important not only for our district, but for the city and state as a whole.

With regard to the fire house, Community Board One believes that regardless of city budget constraints, protection of citizens should not be compromised. Closing the fire house on Governors Island would endanger visitors and jeopardize dozens of landmarked buildings that are required to be protected under national and City historic district designation.

On the crucial issue of the budget, we are pleased that the proposed State budget includes capital funds, and even more fundamentally, operating funds to prevent the island from being closed to the public. We ask that the State and City guarantee that operating funds are allocated in the future to prevent such a closure.

Community Board One has a special role in making this request on behalf of our own district and all New Yorkers. Governors Island belongs to the citizens, and we have waited six long years—since Washington transferred ownership of the island to the City and State – for meaningful progress to occur in its development. A lack of proper funding could put in jeopardy the use of this island as a great public space.

Furthermore, Governors Island is a part of District One, and our district is severely lacking in parks and open spaces. Our population has grown tremendously in the past 30 years and we have kids who desperately need more ball fields and residents of all ages who need the tranquil oasis offered by undeveloped open space. Most importantly, we need easy, convenient and inexpensive access to the island for all residents, workers and visitors.

These are difficult fiscal times, but we have a unique opportunity that must not be squandered. CB1 has worked with the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation very closely over the years to plan for community activities, and we hope to see these plans come to full fruition.

We are grateful for the efforts of our elected officials with respect to Governors Island, and we call on Speaker Sheldon Silver, Assembly Member Deborah Glick, State Senator Daniel Squadron, and Council Member Alan Gerson to continue urging the Governor and Mayor to provide all the funds needed to keep plans for Governors Island on track.

Community Board One also reiterates the following specific design and operational requests:

- Maximize use of the island's existing landscape and inherent natural features rather than create overly artificial landscapes
- Open the facility during the summer for camps to serve children including those whose parents work and who can not leave the city during the week.
- Build athletic fields dedicated to use by the Downtown Little League and other local sports groups during the times the leagues play; and provide lawns, public walkways, and bike and pedestrian pathways
- Provide the public with a full selection of water-related physical activities to enjoy, and

- Develop environmental and research programming
- Provide efficient waterborne transportation to and from the Island.

Finally, we applaud the effort, which was presented to Community Board One last month, to build beach volleyball and music venues on the Island this summer, and we look forward to similar activities in the future.

Thank you for considering our point of view.