

Next issue
in three weeks:
Sat., June 4

The Main Street WIRE

25th Year as Roosevelt Island's Independent Community Newspaper



Rivalry The Main Street Teen Theatre will present *Stage Door* next weekend (see *ComingUp*, page 3). In a confrontation over Lauren Ballard are Stefan Ilescu (left) and Morgan Callender. This weekend, The Main Street Children's Theatre is presenting a musical, *Orphans!*, though tickets (call 212 271-4449) may be hard to come by.

Octagon Suit May Have Downside for Islanders Wanting Park Protection

News Analysis by Dick Lutz

Activist Islanders who brought suit against the Octagon Apartments project are still sorting out the ramifications of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation's decisive victory in the case, reported in the April 30 *WIRE* (on line at nyc10044.com/wire/2517/wire2517.html). The nearly air-tight decision of Supreme Court Justice William Wetzel seems to shut out possible rationales for an appeal.

Trouble is, for the RIRA leaders who brought the suit, the result seems to present the possibility – even the likelihood – of RIOOC moves against other Island parkland. While the judge ruled that RIRA waited too long to bring its action against the project (a legal doctrine known as laches), the more serious concern rests on potential similarities between the Octagon circumstances and those at Southpoint Park.

- Octagon "Park" was considered a park. The judge ruled it's just "open space." Southpoint Park has the same status.

- Octagon Park had some areas fenced off, unavailable to the public. The judge took that into consideration in ruling that RIOOC was, in effect, increasing the available open space or park space available to residents. Southpoint Park also has a major area fenced off, the subject of a park proposal from the Trust for Public Land.

- The judge ruled that RIOOC used its lawful administrative discretion in trading open space for an apartment complex for the builder's restoration of the landmarked Octagon Tower. At Southpoint, the Renwick Ruin is also in need of restoration, presenting the possibility of another discretionary trade-off. The courts are loathe to second-guess the wisdom of discretion exercised by administrative bodies.

Lighthouse Park and Blackwell Park are also listed in the 2002 Open Spaces law and, in both cases, there are landmarks that might be restored. Blackwell House is in desperate need of restoration; the Lighthouse is already restored but might require further work at some future point.

While Wetzel's decision is not binding on other judges, they're likely to look at it. For that matter, another Island case of this kind could find its way into Wetzel's courtroom; he would certainly abide by his own precedents.

As for the decision itself, those who petitioned the court to rule against the apartments project still feel they got a bad deal. One of the attorneys who argued the case for RIRA, Reed Super of Columbia Law School's Environmental Law Clinic, told *The WIRE* this week, "We think that the judge's decision was wrong and that it's highly unfortunate that a law that was specifically passed to protect open spaces on Roosevelt Island from encroaching residential development was used to approve a massive apartment complex project that destroyed a significant chunk of Octagon Park."

But Super noted, "The judge specifically said, 'The only thing before me is Octagon Park.' The other parks mentioned in the 2002 Open Spaces Law were not part of this case, and Justice Wetzel said (paraphrasing), 'I'm not considering them here; I'm only dealing with Octagon Park.'"

One thing seems fairly clear from Wetzel's decision – that RIRA should have filed its case immediately. While the "Article 78" law providing for challenges against such construction allows four months for opponents to bring their cases to court, the separate legal doctrine of "laches" says, according to Wetzel's ruling, that they should have come to court immediately after RIOOC gave a green light to the project – before the construction that began a week later. But Islanders likely to bring future suits of this kind note that the Residents Association doesn't have the funds to keep a lawyer on standby. And Super says, "Where
See **Octagon**, page 3

Island Buildings Don't Get 50-Year Tax Relief, After All

by Dick Lutz

It may be a technicality of sorts, but Roosevelt Island buildings will not get the 50-year extension of tax abatements the State Legislature authorized the City Council to grant to Mitchell-Lama buildings.

"The [Legislature's] bill itself refers to taxes," said Jessica Lappin, an aide to Council Speaker Gifford Miller, "and the buildings on Roosevelt Island don't technically pay taxes. They look and smell and feel like taxes, but they're not technically taxes."

When the City Council granted the tax-abatement extensions earlier this year, materials accompanying the Council resolution specifically listed Westview, Island House, Rivercross, and Eastwood. It held out the possibility of a Mitchell-Lama future with tax costs remaining low. But that was a mistake.

What "look and smell and feel like taxes" for Roosevelt Island are PILOTs – "payments in lieu of taxes" – made to the State. For those who pay them, they are the functional equivalent of taxes, and for the

Chamber Plans Beautification

The Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation has invited Island merchants to be vendors this year at the Fourth of July viewing of Macy's Fireworks at Southpoint Park.

"This is the first time RIOOC is really working with the Chamber of Commerce," said Chamber President Julie Palermo this week. "Herb Berman has been very cooperative and willing to help."

Palermo said that her organization is also working with RIOOC and the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC) to apply for grants to fund a general beautification of Main Street shops with window boxes, awnings, and storefront modifications. She said the Roosevelt Island Visual Art Association (RIVAA) has already come up with some design suggestions.

A good deal of the motivation for the Main Street project comes from a survey of residents started some months back and completed in April. Palermo said that, in survey responses, residents expressed a strong desire for a return of an ice cream parlor (the Bakery, which used to sell cones, has been closed for well over a year). "That was overwhelming," she said. Also on the residents' wish list is "a real drug store," a general upgrading of the shops on Main Street, a bicycle-repair and sales shop, and "a fancy restaurant." There is little sentiment for franchise fast-food, according to Palermo's summary of survey results.

Palermo said that ESDC is also helping with plans to attract tourists to the Island, and that the Chamber intends to assemble an "Economic Task Force" with a limited number of Island organizations planning for a better mercantile environment on Roosevelt Island. She can be reached at 646-331-3445.

City Council Adds 50 Years to Mitchell-Lama Tax Exemptions Impact on Roosevelt Island Housing Uncertain

by Dick Lutz

The New York City Council has granted Mitchell-Lama buildings a 50-year extension of their tax abatements. The Council resolution specifically includes

because the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) has substantial "credits" with the City by virtue of its original development of the Island. The PILOT income slips in the State's coffers

These *WIRE* articles raised questions about tax abatements. It turns out they don't apply here.

Commentary – Tim Johns City Council's 50-Year Extension of Tax Relief Leaves Much Unanswered

Nearly five months after the City Council passed its resolution granting the extension of a 50-year extension of tax abatements to Mitchell-Lama buildings (reported in *The WIRE* February 25), no State or City official has yet offered a very convincing answer to either of two nagging questions: (1) What are the practical applications of the resolution? And (2) Does the resolution apply to all of the four Mitchell-Lama buildings?

Member Lutz. The Lutz is a contract that sets out the obligations of both parties. Among other things, it defines the amount of the City tax given to UDC, which UDC then passes on to the Mitchell-Lama buildings in their abatements. To make a long story short, the City holds UDC accountable for payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs) on each building, which so far have been collected in the same manner as the traditional Mitchell-

Island's Mitchell-Lama buildings, they are scheduled to rise significantly over the next couple of years – a provision of the ground leases under which the buildings were placed on land owned by the City, but leased from the City by the State. While there is no *certainty* the PILOTs will be raised by the State, there is also no certainty they will *not* be raised. In short, the matter is unresolved for Roosevelt Island's Mitchell-Lama buildings.

The WIRE raised questions about the Island's eligibility for the abatement extensions in February in a report on the City Council's action, and again in April in a commentary written by Tim Johns, an Island House resident who has kept close tabs on the laws, leases, and regulations that apply to the Island's Mitchell-Lama buildings. As a result, State and City lawyers looked into the matter and realized that earlier statements affirming applicability to the Roosevelt Island buildings were incorrect.

The importance of the question to Island House and Westview residents is limited, because the Shel Drake Organization has started the process of removing Westview from Mitchell-Lama, and could exercise that option in the case of Island House.

Now that it is known that the abatements don't apply to the four Island buildings, a new question arises for the owners and tenants: If they stay in Mitchell-Lama, can negotiators for the owners or the

building residents parlay the apparent legislative intent into a deal with the State (the Urban Development Corporation and/or the Division of Housing and Community Renewal) for lowered tax equivalency payments comparable to amounts under a 50-year tax abatement?

But for Island House and Westview, the question will become moot with withdrawal from Mitchell-Lama.

At Rivercross, the possibility of some form of extended tax relief could make a Mitchell-Lama future more appealing in a competitive face-off with privatization but, as yet, there is no reliable indication

See **Taxes**, page 2

Briefly...

Maurice Bleifeld, who headed the Island's Tree Board and emceed many Arbor Day events here, died this week. *The WIRE* hopes to have a reminiscence of his life next issue.

Rumors flew after an Eastwood resident died in a 546 elevator Tuesday morning. They ranged from a stabbing in the elevator to mayhem in other locations. All were wrong. The facts, confirmed by both Housing Management and Inspector David Barrere of the 114th Precinct: Gloria Knight died when a stent was dislodged, and an artery was pierced. She apparently did not call 911, but instead made her way to an elevator, where she bled to death before reaching help.



Wham! A Bouchard barge clobbered the seawall in the wee hours of Tuesday, May 3, taking out several fence stanchions and exposing rebar in the wall itself.

Letters

To The Editor:

I forced myself to read the most depressing April 30 issue and I must respond to the more egregious statements.

RIRA President Steve Marcus has been chastised for somewhat caustic remarks on the recent Article 78 judgment (which was against the *entire* community, not just RIRA's named litigants). I think his comments were pretty restrained when you consider the frustration over lack of any democratic representative governance here while trying to get an intractable RIOC to work with the community.

Bob Chira (commentary, April 30 issue) had one thing right: Judge William Wetzel did show his contempt for this community by making clear that our Octagon Park, Lighthouse Park, and Southpoint Park, are not parks at all, as you and I might have thought, but only open spaces that can be developed in any way by the unelected representatives of Governor Pataki at RIOC. We knew there were holes in the 2002 "Open Spaces" law, but Judge Wetzel has seen to it that a bulldozer can ram any development down our throats in our damned non-park "parks" at will. If this was true of Central Park or Prospect Park, you would see a neighborhood and politicians turn out in droves.

I take exception to RIOC President Berman's disingenuous remarks: "RIOC was forced to divert nearly \$300,000 in resources to de-

fend the lawsuit brought by RIRA... How unfortunate that RIOC had to spend its money defending against RIRA's claim, rather than channeling these funds into much more worthy causes, like fortification of the Renwick Ruins..."

But the minutes of RIOC's Board meeting of December 23, 2003, note that: *Mr. Berman addressed the Board, stating that although the Board had authorized the expenditure of \$200,000 for the stabilization of the Renwick Ruins, upon further inquiry it was discovered that permanent stabilization work on the Ruins would require the stones to be taken down and then reset. Mr. Berman then referred to the alternative process of photometrics, at a cost of \$25,000-30,000, whereby detailed photographs of the individual stones are taken so that after the stones are removed, they can later be reset. This would enable RIOC to go through the winter without the expense of the stabilization work... Mr. Berman advised that the cost savings obtained from utilizing the photometrics approach could be transferred to the Good Shepherd Center and Blackwell House projects.*

So the funds were "diverted" long before the lawsuit. But Blackwell House remains in ruins and much work remains to be done on the Chapel – and to date we have only excuses instead of starting dates.

Did or did not RIOC have the \$300,000 all along? And how much

of the legal cost did the developer pick up?

Finally, if RIOC had to divert so much to pay attorneys, perhaps their own counsel was ripping them off.

Berman also suggests the suit may have cost our seniors any "more frequent bus trips." C'mon now – first RIOC tells us they can't take Red Buses to Queens, after the blackout, due to *insurance issues* (which never existed before); then, when that can't be backed up, they say the buses are too old and can break down (whose fault is that?); then they go back to the insurance issue; and now it's the lawsuit.

You can take your pick of the ever-expanding list of excuses at the root of RIOC's ever-expanding list of administrative failures. Just be sure to note that none of the failures are ever theirs.

Finally, regarding Herb's last remark inviting "all residents to engage in a constructive dialogue..." Berman doesn't live here and he missed all the meetings about the Octagon project in which the community consistently condemned it as ugly and overblown and an improper use of parkland. Dialog, indeed. In any case, Berman is never seen on the Island after 5:00 p.m. Every community event that might have required him to stay late or come to work on a Saturday – Roosevelt Island Day, for example – found occasional substitutes in his place.

Once past those early community "open houses" at RIOC, Berman's interactions with the community have been minimal to the point of being cursory.

There was Jerry Blue, then there was Robert H. Ryan. Now we have Herbert E. Berman, and sad to say, he appears to be cut from the same bolt of Pataki fabric.

Herb, Marybeth Labate, are you paying attention? What this community wants is *not* to lose our parkland/open spaces to every developer that comes along and promises you a pittance for the use of the land. We would, however, love to lose you and this politically appointed Board whose primary mission seems to be to rubber-stamp any project for any developer who will contribute to the governor's campaign coffers.

Deal after deal cut at 591 Main Street is malodorous. Southtown land is essentially given away; parkland is destroyed for truly ugly developments, and RIOC continues to be run by a marginal bunch of political cronies whose astronomical salaries are matched only by their towering incompetence.

Sherie Helstien, Secretary,
RIOC Common Council

To Jerome Belson:

Before you thoroughly destroy the original conception of our Island, consider making substantive, not just cosmetic improvements. For example: Create a viable, safe means of washing high-floor apartment windows outside; create a means to track switches for hallway heaters; renovate elevator motors; and clean vent ducts and repair fans so they pull bad air out, not blow it in.

While you're at it, a cosmetic overhaul might help too; the place looks like hell.

Sharon A. Stern

Letters deadline for June 4 issue: Tuesday, May 31

After deadline, letters are considered on a space-available basis. *The WIRE's* Letters Policy is available on line at

nyc10044.com/wire/letterspolicy.html.

To the Editor:

I would like to respond to several of the statements made by RIOC Board members about the dismissal of the Octagon lawsuit (*The WIRE*, April 30). I believe they are not factual or are misstatements.

Deborah Beck stated, "When I attended the January RIRA meeting to alert Common Council members to the risk and cost to Roosevelt Island residents [regarding the Article 78], I was not allowed to speak." Not exactly. I was sitting next to Deborah and the facts are these:

Deborah declined to ask for recognition during the RIRA Common Council "Public Access" portion of the agenda that begins every meeting and sought to speak after Public Access ended and only elected Councilmembers could participate. I don't know if she has ever attended a RIRA monthly meeting in her many years residing here, but there are rules as to how and when one may address the Council, just as there are at RIOC Board meetings. Community members who wish to address the RIOC Board learn that this is possible only every other month, when the Board meets in the afternoon, and not during the bi-monthly morning meetings. Further, a resident must wait until the Board meeting has adjourned and the Town Meeting is called in order to be recognized. What makes this process so frustrating and so insulting is that the Board often will call an executive session that can last hours prior to adjourning, leaving those with issues to share cooling their heels, waiting for the Board to return. Deborah should have known that anyone will be heard at RIRA Common Council, and prior to any other business, if only they will learn and abide by the rules. And clearly, neither RIRA nor RIOC could function if anyone could interrupt the work of the members as defined by the agenda.

John Mannix discussed RIRA's use of "...its resources in productive ways to improve the community." RIRA's resources are a couple of thousand bucks; RIOC's annual operating budget is \$12 million. RIRA accomplishes miracles with its minimal resources; RIOC threatens to spend \$300,000 defending a suit that RIRA brought for peanuts (because of the many courageous lawyers who volunteered to work on our behalf pro bono) and then uses this as an excuse for why our landmarks have been trashed for years. Give me a break!

David Kraut argues that, "...hundreds of construction jobs have been saved." I didn't know this was a concern of the RIOC Board of Directors, but even if it is, building an Urban Ecological Center, as required by our General Development Plan, rather than 500 units of housing on our parkland, might have accomplished the same thing. This is the argument that the construction unions have used to build the Westside Jets stadium instead of housing and I don't think it flies.

Bottom line: You will be hearing much rhetoric from RIOC about the foolish Article 78 suit just as you did after the Southtown suit. The premise is, if the suit failed, it must be frivolous. Don't you believe it. We Roosevelt Islanders are in a desperate fight to have input in development that has no correlation with the planning that our community's founders had in mind. And one thing is clear: You can't win if you don't fight.

Matthew Katz

To the Editor:

Bob Chira, in his April 30 letter to the editor [responding to my commentary published April 2], announces that (1) I have not "correctly understood the meaning of the City Council's recent 50-year extension of tax abatements" to Mitchell-Lama buildings; that (2) I am mistaken in stating that a Mitchell-Lama building normally loses its tax abatement when it retires its mortgage ("not correct", according to Chira); and (3) that the lease agreement between the City and the Urban Development Corporation poses no problem whatsoever to the applicability of the resolution to Roosevelt Island.

Had Mr. Chira troubled himself to read either the text of the resolution itself, or the applicable statute which defines the terms of Mitchell-Lama tax abatements, he might not have ventured such unsupported pronouncements as, "Buildings can remain in the Mitchell-Lama system after they retire their mortgages and still receive the benefits of the system, including tax abatements. The one does not depend on the other." To use Mr. Chira's language, this is not correct.

The one *does* depend on the other – unless the local legislative body grants an extension, which the statute recently gave it the right to do. If Chira had bothered to read the Council's resolution even as far as the second paragraph, he might have paused over the following sentence, which announces the problem the Council was seeking to redress: "...Whereas, each of those real property tax exemptions [for Mitchell-Lama buildings] is or was for a period of time that was limited to the length of the mortgages [emphasis mine] of the respective housing developments..." The Council, in its resolution, was exercising the authority given it by recent legislation, to grant an extension of a tax abatement to a Mitchell-Lama building commencing from the moment the building has retired its mortgage – not before ("to take effect upon the expiration of the current real property tax exemption").

Had Mr. Chira further troubled himself to consult Article II of Private Housing Finance Law (referred to by the Council), he might have found in Section 33 "Tax Exemption" a clear statement of the period of the tax exemption (repeated for every variety of project, including State urban development projects): "*The tax exemption shall operate and continue so long as the mortgage loans of the company ...are outstanding.*" – §33.1(a) of PHFL.

Finally, subdivision 6 of that section gives the local legislature the authority "*upon the expiration of the tax exemption period*" [i.e., the retirement of the mortgage] to grant an additional tax exemption period of up to fifty years – effective on the expiration of that period. It was this recently granted authority which the City Council was exercising in its recent resolution, a resolution which Mr. Chira clearly neither read nor understood.

Tim Johns

Taxes from page 1

that PILOTs will remain low. With a little more certainty, the option of staying in Mitchell-Lama in favor of some form of reduced PILOT (or tax) expense could be a factor in ground-lease negotiations with RIOC.

Eastwood's owner has indicated an intention to leave the Mitchell-Lama program, in any case.

It's likely there's more to be heard on this subject.

Abe Tauchner

Abraham Phillip Tauchner died of cardiac failure April 25.

A Community Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Tauchner's career of 44 years started off as a substitute teacher. He maintained peace at his schools in Bedford-Stuyvesant during the turbulent 1960's by working closely with the parents. He was a graduate of DeWitt Clinton High School; then graduated from City College in 1938, later doing graduate work at Colorado University, the University of Vermont, and the University of Rhode Island.

Dr. Tauchner was an active member of Free Synagogue of Flushing for many years. He and his wife Frances moved into Rivercross opening day, August 25, 1976. She predeceased him last fall after 66 years of marriage. He is survived by his grandson, David.



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COMING UP

— This Weekend —

Love, Hallie group march in the **20th Annual AIDS Walk New York**, today (**Sat., May 14**), gathering at sign-in area at 60th Street and Fifth Avenue; register on line at aidswalk.net/newyork/registration/reginfo.html or RSVP to marc@runner.org. Also collecting contributions for the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC).

Main Street Children's Theatre presents **Orphans!**, **Fri., May 13**, 7:30 p.m.; **Sat., May 14**, 2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; **Sun., May 15**, 2:00 p.m. \$10, Main Street Theatre (down the stairs behind the video store); Mats for children 4-10 years, \$5. Reservations, **212-371-4449**.

Senior Day Open House, **Sun., May 15**, 1:00 p.m., Senior Center, 546 Main Street. Entertainment and food provided. Free.

Orphans!
BY THEATRE

— The Coming Week —

New York Junior Tennis League instructional program, continuing Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays until further notice, at the Roosevelt Island Racquet Club tennis bubbles near the Tram station; for information, call **718-786-7110**. Ages 8-18; equipment supplied by NYJTL (bring sneakers and a smile); free; no pre-registration required.

Community Board 8 meeting, **Wed., May 18**, 7:00 p.m., Memorial Sloan Kettering auditorium, 430 East 67th Street (between York and First Avenues). Information: **212-758-4340**.

RIOC Board of Directors Meeting, **Thur., May 19**, 4:30 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd. The Board's afternoon meetings usually conclude with an opportunity for public comment, specific time uncertain.

Book Discussion Group at the Library, **Thur., May 19**, 6:30 p.m., *A Prayer for the Dying*, by Stewart O'Nan. Copies of book available at the branch.

Main Street Teen Theatre presents **Stage Door** by Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman, **Sat., May 21**, 7:30 p.m., with additional performances **Sun., May 22**, 2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., and **Mon., May 23**, 7:30 p.m., Main Street Theatre (down the stairs behind the video store). \$10. Reservations, **212-371-4449**. (See ad, page 5.)

STAGE DOOR

Opening Reception for Art from the Heart, a collection of visual art by patients and residents at Coler-Goldwater, **Sat., May 21**, 6-9 p.m., Gallery RIVAA, 537 Main Street; exhibit continues through June 19. Gallery hours: Wednesdays and Fridays, 6-9 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays, 11-5.

— Future Events —

Education Forum with City Councilmember **Eva Moskowitz**, **Mon., May 23**, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Auditorium, PS/IS 217. Public invited.

Toastmasters Public Speaking Group, **Mon., May 23**, 8:00 p.m. Visitors welcome. Additional information: **212-751-9577**.

Residents Association Common Council Meeting, **Wed., June 1**, 8:00 p.m., Chapel of the Good Shepherd (lower level). Open to all; an opportunity to address the Council is included near the start of each meeting.

Career Day at PS/IS 217, **Fri., June 3**, morning. The organizers are seeking speakers to cover a wide variety of careers. To volunteer, call Susan Cohen, Guidance Counselor, at **212-980-0294**, ext. 2323.

The Main Street WIRE – Next issue, **Sat., June 4**. (To receive e-mail bulletins between issues, send an *AddMe* message to Bulletins@MainStreetWIRE.com.) **Advertising Deadline:** Ads in the paper, Thursday, May 26; decision on fliers for *The Bag*, Mon., May 30; inserts due Thur., June 2. **Future issues:** June 18; July 2, 30; Aug. 27; Sept. 10, 24; Oct. 8, 22; Nov. 5, 19; Dec. 3, 17. **News phone, 212-826-9055**; urgent matters **917-617-0449**. **Phone** for display and classified advertising placement and information, **212-751-8214**. **To list your organization's Island-related event here**, e-mail information to ComingUp@MainStreetWIRE.com, or leave it, addressed to *The WIRE*, at the lobby desk at 531 Main Street; provide a telephone number for follow-up questions. There is no charge for such listings.

Eastwood Fun-Raiser Luncheon, **Sat., June 5**, 2-4 p.m., 546 Main Street (Senior Center). \$10 at the door; \$7 in advance. Tickets: **212-755-4089**.

La Leche League meeting for pregnant and breastfeeding women, **Mon., June 6**, 10:00 a.m., Island Kids space at 536 Main Street. Free. Information: **212-832-1188**.

Roosevelt Island Day, **Sat., June 11** (changed from June 18, date announced earlier), all day, sponsored by Roosevelt Island Housing Management and the Roosevelt Island Youth Program.

Senior Center

- | | |
|--|--|
| Monday | 12-2, Painting & Sculpting |
| 10:00, Computers for Beginners | 7:00, Pokeno (RISA) |
| 10-11, Latchhook Class | Thursday |
| 10-11:30, English as 2nd Language | 9:30, Chinese Massage |
| 10:30, Blood Pressure Screening | 10:30, Creative Arts |
| 12:30, "Oldies" Movies | 12:30, Movie |
| 1:00, Tai Chi | 7:00, Dance |
| 7:00, Dance Class (Beginners) | Friday |
| Tuesday | 9:30, Yoga |
| 10:00, Chinese Massage | 10:30, Computers |
| 10:30, Shoppers' Bus | 1:00, Bridge |
| 2:00, Bingo | 7:00, Games (RISA) |
| 6:00, Yoga Class | Saturday |
| 7:30, Games (RISA) | 7:30, Bingo (RISA) |
| Wednesday | Special Events |
| 9:15, Stay Well | Sun., May 15 , Senior Day Celebration, 1:00 p.m. |
| 10:00, Computers | Mon., June 13 , five-day motor coach tour to Niagara Falls. |
| 10:00, Spanish Class | |
| 10:30, Shoppers' Bus | |

Home-delivered meals: **212-744-5022**, ext. 1203

The **Public Safety Blotter** for the first half of May, when ready, will be posted at nyc10044.com/wire/2518/blot2518.html.

When my husband and I decided to move to Roosevelt Island this September, we got our share of questions. "Is that the place with the Tram?" "I've heard there are no cars there." "Isn't that the place with the ruins?" And my favorite: "Really? You're the first people I know who actually live there."

As a transportation planner, I get more specific questions. My colleagues want to know, "Where were the

The RIRA Column

Tram cars manufactured?" "What is the parking ratio?" "You have circulation buses? What model?" Roosevelt Island is an especially hot topic among urban planners because it originally developed along a master plan. Urban planners tend to be fascinated by planned communities. The truth is, most urban planners work in cities and towns where real people vote, raise objections, and throw curveballs at plans that the planner spent a lot of time on and looked very nice on paper. Just because the planner knows that a four-lane highway would be the best fit for traffic patterns doesn't mean that the person who lives on that street agrees. A lot of planners secretly wish they were dictators.

Of course, we all know that dictatorships are a terrible idea. They can be efficient, mind you, but they leave no room for protest. This problem is particularly evident in transportation. A good example of the benefits of a messy democratic process is Manhattan's West Side Highway. When the elevated portion needed to be replaced, the transportation planners were ready with a complex, expensive rebuilding plan. The West Side community objected, and after years of protest managed to scale the project down to the road you see now – a smaller highway with some stoplights that allows limited access to the waterfront. Most planners would now agree that the smaller highway was a better solution.

I bring this up because I think that Roosevelt Islanders face a long-term question of self-representation. Back when the Island was first being developed, there were few residents, and a State-appointed board was the only way to make anything happen. But now that we are a community of 10,000 and growing, shouldn't there be some way to express our suggestions, our problems, and even our displeasure?

If our governing body, RIOC, makes a planning decision, what kind of input do we have? As Chair of the RIRA Planning Committee, I'm not sure how we can ensure that some of our basic quality-of-life is-

sues are addressed under our current system. How can we contribute to discussion of the Island's economic development? How can we ensure provision of recreational facilities and open space? How can we help our Island retain affordable housing? We have no recourse if the RIOC Board disagrees or if it has priorities that differ from those of residents.

While there has been plenty of discussion about the sins of RIOC in this column, I am too new to the community to have any grievances. Each RIOC Board member may be a dedicated public servant trying to ensure that Islanders have a great quality of life. They could be the best-educated planners. But frankly, I know enough about my profession to know that no one should be planning without being directly accountable to the will of the people they serve.

There are so many things we might do to improve the Island. Your RIRA Council is already taking on a number of projects that Steve Marcus has discussed here. But there are so many changes that a governing body might make. Small things: better signage upon arrival at the Tram, subway, and Motorgate; new recreational facilities; reworked signage at the foot of Main Street; better ways to manage traffic at school drop-off time. And big things: business development support; environmentally efficient energy; affordable housing schemes, and support for the large number of long-term residents now facing uncertainty about their ability to remain on the Island.

These projects require energy and the engagement of a locally responsive governing body. No matter how well-intentioned board members may be, the RIOC Board isn't elected. What incentive do they have to respond to the will of the people who live here? I urge you to get involved early this campaign season: demand that candidates deliver a locally elected government. Political change is the first step towards a better Roosevelt Island.

in rescuing a person late last month who had fallen onto the seawall and was in danger of being swept into the East River.

Shortly before 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 20, a person was spotted injured on the rocks, nearest to 200 Main Street. Public Safety Officers Beman, Dentone, Sgt. Jones, and Deputy Director Bryan all responded to the scene along with two Health and Hospitals Corporation officers. Bryan jumped down to the victim and helped lift him to safety. He was treated for cuts and bruises at Goldwater Hospital, where he is a patient. Also alerted were the NYPD and FDNY, who also responded to the scene. FDNY Engines 116 and 260 arrived before the extra manpower was cancelled.

In all, let's give a thanks to our Bravest, our Finest and the personnel of our Public Safety Department for demonstrating a highest level of professionalism in this incident. All the right moves were made. We thank them all.

torts the intent of the law he sponsored in the State Legislature. Failing success in such a challenge, it would appear the only way residents could ensure that restoration of the Renwick Ruin won't become a trade-off in which an apartment complex goes up at Southpoint is to ask for, and get, a strengthening of the law – a change considered unlikely to make it past the governor's desk while George Pataki occupies the office.



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The RIOC Column

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There will be several other enhancements to the tennis courts this year. Low mass lighting, a message center, vending station, and new proximity cards will all enhance the players' experience using the courts.

Finally, on a completely different note, I'd like to single out Public Safety for kudos for a rapid response

Octagon from page 1

laches is being interpreted in such a strict way that you have to get into court within a matter of days, it's really shutting the courthouse door to a majority of the citizenry – except for those wealthy enough to have an army of lawyers ready to go immediately. When Justice Wetzel said that the project was in the works for years, he missed the critical fact that until RIOC's Octo-

ber 14 vote, it appeared RIOC would not go forward with the project without legislative approval." (An earlier RIOC resolution had included a provision that specific approval would be sought for the project from the Legislature.)

As things stand, it appears the only likelihood of an appeal in the case – which must be filed by May 20 – is if Assemblymember Pete Grannis chooses to contest the case because, as he sees it, it dis-

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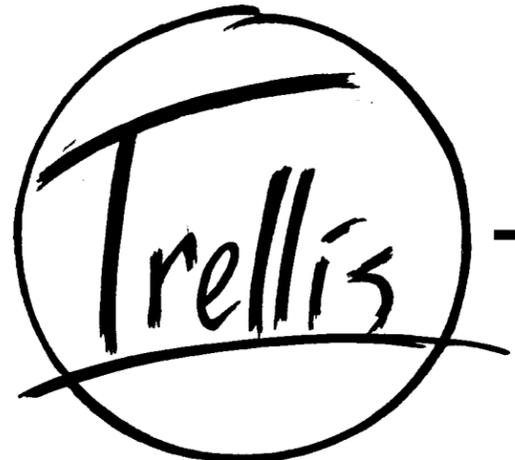
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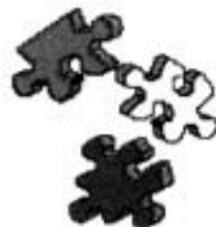
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