

Holiday issue
in two weeks –
Sat., Dec. 17

The Main Street **WIRE**™

26th Year as Roosevelt Island's Independent Community Newspaper



Attorney Stuart Saft spoke Wednesday night to a meeting of the Island House Tenants Association, bringing the news that the Sheldrake Organization is completing purchase of both Island House and Westview from consortiums headed by Charles Lucido. Saft said Island House is likely to be removed from the Mitchell-Lama program by summer.

Sheldrake to Be Sole Owner of Island House and Westview

Tenant Groups Left With Fewer Options, More Time Pressure; In a Hectic Week, a Brief Dust-up Over Conflicting Strategies

by Dick Lutz

Barring any last-minute hitch, the Sheldrake Organization is about to become the full owner of both Island House and Westview. The process will be complete by early next week, according to Charles Lucido, who heads the groups that are selling the buildings. (Other sources say it will happen "within weeks.")

Robert Klehammer, the Sheldrake Vice President handling Roosevelt Island matters, declined comment on Thursday, but Stuart Saft, the attorney representing the Island

House Tenants Association (IHTA), told its members at a Wednesday night meeting that Sheldrake owner Chris Daly had lined up \$130 million in financing with two major institutional lenders.

"I presume that what's going to happen at this point," Saft told the tenants at the session in the Good Shepherd Community Center, "is that there will be a meeting at which the new landlord will advise you what is going to happen now that the building [will] no longer be covered by Mitchell-Lama. Our understanding is that he's planning to leave Mitchell-Lama on July 1."

Saft continued, "If, in fact, he does do that, he would be in a position to raise your rent to market."

"That's what we have to prevent from happening because, I'm fairly certain, without knowing what your rents are, that most of you will be forced to leave, and that's exactly what their intention is to happen, and I think that your business over the next six months is to try to stop this from happening to protect your homes." Saft went on to define "protect your homes" as meaning protection for rental tenants as well as trying to negotiate an ownership deal "to get Sheldrake out of the picture."

Saft warned, "My guess is, based upon what he did at other complexes that he's taken over, particularly in Hempstead on Long Island, he's going to be a very different kind of landlord than Lucido."

"And I expect things will never be the same. That's the bad news. The good news is I think that something can be done. It's most important that you coordinate with each other, to be organized, and more important that all of you be unified as a single tenant body. I've been involved in many tenant associations in similar circumstances, and the biggest friend that a landlord has is when the tenants break themselves up into little groups. You cannot allow that to happen here. You have to have regular meetings, you have to know everything that's going on, you have to be prepared to act on a dime, and you have to realize the seriousness of the situation."

He added, with illustrations, "There's nothing the politicians can do to help you. We've tried everything." Saft represented tenants when Ruppert-Yorkville was taken out of the Mitchell-Lama program, and he described that experience – a success

for his firm – at some length. Saft heads the 19-lawyer real-estate department at Wolf Haldenstein Adler Freeman & Herz. "I've been doing this for 34 years," Saft said, calling his firm's practice in this area "the largest" in the City. Saft also represents Rivercross, the cooperative.

Conflict on Strategies

There was a brief uproar Wednesday after Saft received a letter from the attorney representing West-

view, Chad Marlow of the Public Advocacy Group (PAG). In a letter since "withdrawn," according to Johan Markey of the Westview Task Force (WTI), Marlow had demanded Saft drop Rivercross and Island House as clients, in part because "your involvement in ongoing negotiations between the owner of Rivercross and Island House and the tenants association has involved taking positions that conflict with [the Westview Task Force's] position before the Department of Housing Preservation and Development; to wit, that transforming any portion of the affordable housing [in Northtown] to market-rate housing would violate [the buildings'] ground leases, Roosevelt Island's General Development Plan, and the Island's major lease." Marlow continued that a negotiated settlement on either Rivercross or Island House would "cause significant harm to the affordable housing provisions in those documents and might undermine WTI's legal position." The letter went on to suggest that WTI might "be forced to go to court to challenge" any agreements Rivercross or Island House might reach.

On Thursday, Markey said Marlow's letter had been sent without the Task Force's knowledge or permission. Both Markey and his WTI co-chair, Opher Pail, said that Marlow no longer represents the WTI in legal matters. But Marlow seemed unaware of that in a conversation with *The WIRE*, in which he took full responsibility for the turmoil. A WTI member, Matthew Katz, said Marlow's PAG still represents WTI as a public-relations consultant. In any case, by day's end Wednesday, another letter had been sent retracting the demand that Saft drop his Island House and Rivercross clients.

Leverage Needed

Speaking before Island House tenants Wednesday night, Saft recommended the building avoid litigation: "Can we litigate? Yes, but litigation is extraordinarily expensive. It is not an efficient way to resolve things."

He concluded his presentation, before taking questions, by saying, "So that is what the situation is. It is not pleasant." Even so, he expressed optimism, in answering tenant questions, that a deal can be made that will work both for tenants and Sheldrake.

"It's important to develop leverage. Leverage includes getting RIOC not to give him [Daly] whatever he wants, getting economic development people not to give him whatever he wants, to make him recognize the fact that it's in his best economic interest to negotiate something that makes sense to him and makes sense to the tenants also, and it's not all one-way. Based upon my prior negotiations with Mr. Daly, he's a hard-headed businessman, and I believe a deal can be structured that makes sense.

See **Sheldrake**, page 2

Ponton, Out As RIOC Real-Estate Chair, Sees Lack of Vision in RI Development

by Dick Lutz

When Debra Boatright, the new Board Chair of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), announced a shake-up of the Board's committees at its November meeting, she characterized it as a "restructuring." While a variety of committee assignments were changed, only one was particularly significant: the removal of resident Board member Mark Ponton as Chair of the Real-Estate Development Advisory Committee.

It's the most important change because, these days, RIOC is all about real estate and little else. The Corporation's real-estate decisions will impact housing costs as deals are cut for ground rent at Island House, Westview, Eastwood, and (soon or eventually) Rivercross. The decisions will have a direct bearing on the financing of Island services. And real-estate decisions will also shape the Island's immediate and longer-term future as they impact on demographics, mass transit, traffic, the viability of Island businesses, parking, the disposition of open space and parkland – in short, the entire character of Roosevelt Island and what kind of neighborhood it will be.

But it's also the most significant change because Ponton has been a frequent "no" vote on a number of matters that come before the RIOC Board.

At almost every Board meeting, Ponton has shown himself capable of coming up with the unasked questions which, once raised, can challenge and, upon occasion, reorient thinking. There was an example in the Board's November 17 meeting, when he injected a question into discussion of a request from Southtown developers Hudson-Related, who wanted a general override of some City rules (example: a provision about parking facilities) for their building number 4. Ponton asked: "What happens if we don't approve this?" The question clearly wasn't theoretical. He later voted against the override even though his fellow Board members, RIOC officers, and Hudson-Related considered it routine – essentially a duplicate of routine exceptions made for building 3. Ponton hasn't said so, but the question and vote can be taken as a sign of his longstanding dissatisfaction with the entirety of the widely criticized Southtown deal, which RIOC and other Board members have come to accept as the established order of things.

It can also be taken as Ponton's response to a longstanding concern: "We don't have a plan for the Island," as he put it in an interview this week.

Boatright replaced Ponton, as real-estate chair, with Deborah Beck, a Rivercross resident and real-estate professional who was already a real-estate committee member. She retained non-resident John Mannix, another real-estate professional, and in her November 17 announcement, added Westview resident Alberteen Anderson, one of the two newest members of the RIOC Board.

When Ponton raised the "what happens if" question, RIOC President Herb Berman responded, "I couldn't speculate as to what their actions would be.

That's something they would have to decide." David Kramer, representing the developer partners, said that RIOC had agreed to the requests well in advance – during the planning for Southtown's housing. While Kramer's attitude was non-threatening, one developer option would clearly be to sue RIOC.

Ponton was alone in voting "no" on the Hudson-Related request. This not only illustrated his contrary view of real-estate matters, but it probably explains why Boatright replaced him as Chair of the real-estate committee – he isn't going along with the program. In fact, he found his fellow real-estate committee members and/or RIOC's real-estate consultant simply unavailable for meetings over the past half-year.

With Ponton's chairmanship of the real-estate committee chair now at an end, *The WIRE* asked him to sit for a series of questions about how real-estate development on Roosevelt Island has been managed. The full transcript of the conversation is available with this issue of *The WIRE* on *Website NYC10044* at nyc10044.com; what follows is a condensation. The first questions concerned "Requests for Initial Proposals" (RFIPs) recently issued by RIOC, offering to entertain developer ideas for a portion of Southpoint Park, a portion of a parking lot near the north campus of Coler-Goldwater Hospital, the properties surrounding the Tram station, as well as the Main Street retail strip and RIOC's interest in the Motorgate parking facility.

The WIRE: Since you have been the Board's person in charge of real-estate matters on the Board in recent months, I have questions about the recent requests for initial proposals (RFIPs) that RIOC sent out recently. Why did the Board approve an offering of land at Southpoint and at the Tram-station area?

Ponton: The Board did not approve the offering of any land anywhere. The Board did what I said they were going to do – go to the development community to find out if there was any interest in doing anything on Roosevelt Island.

Q: How were the parcels selected for possible development?

A: I think a fair statement was that whatever there is



Mark Ponton

The Island in Transition

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Not only was he on the other side of a previous deal, but I taught him when I was a professor at NYU. Unfortunately, he seems to be putting into effect the things that he learned from me in my real-estate masters program.

“Based upon my last negotiation with him, I feel very comfortable in telling you that there is a deal that makes sense provided the tenants are protected – those who want to remain as tenants.”

Saft said that, based on conversations with Sheldrake’s lawyer, “his plan is to come out with a red herring in February or March. I think it will be much more difficult, once that red herring comes out with prices contained in there and not giving any rights whatsoever, to negotiate a deal. So I think that if there’s going to be protection, it has to be built in before the red herring comes out, which makes the next 30 days extremely critical.”

Lucido told *The WIRE* on Thursday, “We negotiated this transaction two years ago at what we deemed to be a good price, and the contract is still in place, and we will honor our obligation when the buyer honors his.” Referring to prices at the first Riverview building in Southtown, Lucido said, “The value is mind-boggling. We’re two years behind the times.” But he pointed out that real-estate run-ups can become declines. “It depends on your timing.” But, he said, “I’m encouraged that interest rates are still quite reasonable so that the ability of the tenants to get reasonable loans, if they wind up buying their apartments, is good.”

Ground Leases

Islanders speculating about the future of Island House, Westview, and Rivercross had thought that any final acquisition of the buildings would depend on having a ground lease in place, since lenders are uncomfortable lending on a building where the ground could suddenly become too expensive or, conceivably, unavailable.

But Lucido explained, “I think at this day and age we all understand that a ground-lease extension is in prospect and it will be negotiated, and all the affected parties will be at the table to negotiate the terms.” (However, RIOC Board members have pointed out that RIOC’s ground lease deals are with the building owners, and that they are not in a position to negotiate with tenants. Yet, Board members have frequently reiterated a commitment to affordable housing on the Island,

and a lack of disruption for existing residents.) “It’s a RIOC decision,” Lucido continued, “and the RIOC Board is going to have to explain why it thinks the terms of the ground lease extension make sense, and the owners and tenants will have to tell RIOC and the public what the terms should be.”

Speaking of the new owner, Lucido said, “My discussions with Chris Daly give me comfort that affordable housing will be a priority.”

The IHTA Chair, Dorothy Davis, said its board is attempting to take the most recent developments in stride. “We’ve been anticipating some kind of change. We didn’t know quite what it would be, but now it’s concrete. In some ways, that’s good, because at least we know who to work with. We’ve had a good relationship with Sheldrake over the last few months and believe we’ll continue to have a good relationship with them. We don’t know how it’s going to turn out, in terms of how Sheldrake operates buildings, but when they were in the intermediary role between Lucido and us, they always left a line of communication open. We anticipate that will continue.”

Changing Law

Both Saft and Davis made note of the State’s Public Authorities Act, which will become law January 1. It requires State agencies and authorities to get best value for any of their holdings, and it will apply to Roosevelt Island real estate. While at least one member of the RIOC Board has said that the Board should get best value in the context of the Island’s commitment to affordable housing, Saft is not sure that position wouldn’t have to be litigated, perhaps for years. That means there’s pressure on to reach a deal before midnight on December 31 of this year.

Westview Situation

While the Island House team has been meeting with Sheldrake in an attempt to frame a deal as soon as possible, the Westview situation is somewhat different: There have been no serious conversations since April or May, and there’s clear animosity over Westview’s assertion that no action can be taken that will alter the housing balance in the “WIRE” buildings (Westview, Island House, Rivercross, Eastwood). Thursday night, after *The WIRE*’s press deadline, the Westview Task Force had a meeting scheduled to discuss their situation, given the change in ownership and the failure, thus far, to have any meaningful negotiations with Sheldrake.

Letters

To the Editor:

I have read the analysis of Lillian Shuey Picchione in the last *WIRE* regarding the problems we are having with the overcrowded transportation to and from the Island. While I completely agree with her analysis, I will disagree with her conclusion that “there are no obvious answers” that could at least alleviate the problem. As any Islander who rides the F to Manhattan below 50th Street, I see the obvious solution every day: it’s the V train, almost empty even at rush hour! If the V train would be the one going through Roosevelt Island, instead of the F, our problem would be solved. The Queens riders who want to get off upwards of 50th Street would have to change trains at Roosevelt Avenue in Queens, and switch from the F to the V. I am counting these people each morning when I ride the F and there are very few of them, compared to those who get off at Rockefeller Center. My point is that there would be a lot fewer people from Queens affected by this switch (those who get off at Lexington or 57th) than people from Roosevelt Island who would benefit from a much less crowded train.

I don’t know how to petition the MTA to at least look at this solution, but maybe you could transmit this to Ms. Picchione and she could help. I am certain that this is a real problem that will be impacting more and more on our quality of life on the Island.

Ruxandra Predescu

To the Editor:

Subway service from and to Roosevelt Island during weekday rush hours is already a problem and will become a much more serious one for existing residents as new housing develops. It will also be a significant impediment to future sales and leases to new residents, as reported in *The WIRE*’s last issue.

But the otherwise comprehensive article did not explain why a “shuttle” could not be instituted between 21st Street/Queensbridge and 47-50th Streets/Rockefeller Center. Thus, the F train would operate as an express and proceed directly from Jackson Heights-Roosevelt Avenue in Queens to Rockefeller Center, speeding its Queens residents into the heart of midtown. Between the headways required for the F trains, those living in Queensbridge, Roosevelt Island, 63rd Street-Lexington, and 57th Street, would commute into midtown on the “shuttle,” which would be a local train stopping only at those four stations.

I do not know of any reason why such a “shuttle” run could not be instituted. There are no other trains, other than the F, now running between 21st Street/Queensbridge and Rockefeller Center, so coordination between the two should be simple enough.

Robert Chira

To the Editor:

I was quite shocked when I received a letter offering affordable housing in the Octagon Apartments. The rents are substantially higher than those listed in a past issue of *The WIRE*, and not much less than rents at Manhattan Park, a market-rate building.

I was under the impression that the purpose of the affordable housing was to accommodate individuals such as teachers, firefighters, police officers, etc., who serve our communities. Perhaps real-estate tycoons now view these service professionals as low-income individuals, since the starting salary for all of them is significantly below Octagon’s guidelines. I was also under the impression that Island House and Westview were also for middle-income individuals and, if one looks at the income-range guidelines for renting an apartment in one of these buildings and the initial rent for an apartment, both are far less than Octagon’s offerings. Although the minimum income required to gain entrance into either Island House or Westview is significantly higher than what it was a few years ago, the minimum income requirement for a one-bedroom in Island House is almost \$20,000 less than that required for Octagon, and the minimum rent for a one-bedroom in Island House, including utilities, is \$500 less than the posted minimum rent for a one-bedroom in Octagon, not including utilities. Since the Octagon building is located on Roosevelt Island and not the Upper East Side, why did the Octagon management not use Westview and Island House as models for affordable middle-income housing?

Many of us are very concerned about the middle class and lower-middle class being pushed out of the City. The original purposes of the planned community on Roosevelt Island was to allow these income groups to stay in the City in affordable housing. This “experiment” was highly successful. I am grieved at the greed I see in the real-estate market. We need to see compassion, fairness, and justice in the housing market and I wonder if there are leaders in the real-estate community who are brave enough to exhibit those character traits and accept less of a profit margin for that which is right. Honestly, no one is going to take this wealth with them when they die and the relationship each of us has with God is far more important. I personally do not want to live in a city that houses only the rich and the very poor. Such a city loses its texture, vibrancy, strength, and character.

Katherine Teets Grimm

Letters deadline for Dec. 17 issue: Tuesday, Dec. 13

Letters received after deadline are considered on a space-available basis.

Letters Policy

The WIRE welcomes letters to the editor, to the community, and to/from officials. Name withheld publication will be considered, but the writer’s name, address, and phone number must be provided for verification and for our records; letters submitted anonymously will not be published.

Preferred method of submission: E-mail to **Letters@MainStreetWIRE.com** (plaintext e-mail format preferred, or attach a file), or on a PC-standard 3.5" disk left at the desk at 531 Main Street, addressed to *The WIRE*. **Alternatives:** Typed copy left at 531 Main Street, but allow extra time before deadline for typesetting. Clearly handwritten letters will be considered if brief, but we are not able to take telephone dictation of letters. **All letters are subject to acceptance and to editing for length and clarity.** Recommended maximum length, 300 words; longer letters will be considered if their content merits the required space.

To the Editor:

I am extremely uneasy over the RFIPs that RIOC has posted in the appropriate State periodicals and developer house organs. The new, more open RIOC failed to inform the community of these Requests For Initial Proposals on five Roosevelt Island sites. We would still be blissfully unaware of these initiatives were it not for the front-page stories and editorial in this newspaper on October 8 and 22, and the commentary in *The RIRA Column* written by Steve Marcus. I seriously doubt that there would have been any comment at all at the last RIOC Board meeting were it not for *The WIRE* “outing” the story. There has still been no comment regarding these inquiries for further development in the RIOC column written by RIOC President, Herb Berman; perhaps he intends to hold his comments for the first issue of the promised RIOC newsletter, due any time now.

Herb has stated that these are simply requests for ideas to build on the sites of the Coler Hospital parking area; Motorgate; our Main Street commercial strip; the steam plant, Sportspark and tennis bubble, and, most egregiously, Southpoint Park. Apparently, RIOC’s sales representative, Paul Mas of Jones Lang LaSalle, has been given no parameters by which to judge what is appropriate and, most importantly, what is not. This fills me with dread for the following reason:

We remember Mr. Mas’s brilliant choice of a DVD rental store for the site of the old Montauk Credit Union. This at a time when U.S. Alliance Credit Union, a well-established institution with huge assets available for Island mortgages, has shown interest in that site for over a year! The RIOC Board voted down the DVD vending machine by a four-to-four vote (one member being absent), suggesting that future bright ideas would be dependent on a very slim margin. And further, RIOC Director and Island resident Deborah Beck stated that the vote was “unprofessional” in that Mas had made a “handshake deal to accept the DVD store!” At the November Board meeting, Director Michael Shinozaki assured the community that any deal would require Board approval to be implemented. At least one other Board member feels that this Board of Directors is bound by any deal their sales rep chooses to make.

What is one to make of these developments (in the non-construction sense of the word)? First, this RIOC continues to operate in secret just as the two previous administrations did; second, this RIOC is willing to give *carte blanche* to a sales representative whose commission depends on the size, not the quality, of his sales; and third, the only thing standing between this community and the further rape of Roosevelt Island is the RIOC Board of Directors.

I am extremely uneasy.

Matthew Katz

Robert Samon



Robert Samon of 560 Main Street, long an Island resident, died Friday, November 25, at age 50.

COMING UP

— This Weekend —

Youth Program Concert featuring **Carlton J. Smith and Friends, tonight** (Sat., Dec. 3), 8:00 p.m., PS217 auditorium. Free.



◀ **J. Wayne Olson's *Questions for a Fetus***, a series of art installations, continuing through December, Rivercross Window Gallery, sponsored by the Mother Earth Committee. December: *Routes* (the paths of cultures and races).

Holiday Bazaar and Craft Fair, Sat.-Sun., Dec. 3-4, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., at the Senior Center, 546 Main St., 1st floor, sponsored by Roosevelt Island Senior Association. Admission is free.

Holiday Tag Sale, Sun., Dec. 4, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., 548 Main Street. Call **212-371-4449** to donate new and/or gently used merchandise. (See ad on page 5.) Vendors needed; call **212-759-3952**.

Winter Chromatic show at Gallery RIVAA, continuing through Jan. 8. Gallery hours Wed. and Fri., 6-9 p.m.; Sat. and Sun., 11 a.m.-5 p.m.▶



— The Coming Week —

Residents Association Common Council meeting, Wed., Dec. 7, 8:00 p.m., Good Shepherd Community Center. Meetings begin with an opportunity for members of the public to make presentations to the Council.

Introductory Lecture on Transcendental Meditation, Thur., Dec. 8, 7:30 p.m. Free. Call **917-628-0438** for location, reservation, and other information.

— Future Events —

Annual All-Ages Sock Sale sponsored by the Roosevelt Island Jewish Congregation, **Sun., Dec. 11**, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Cultural Center, 548 Main Street (upstairs entrance).

City Councilmember-elect Jessica Lappin in a public forum, **Tue., Dec. 13**, 7:30 p.m., Good Shepherd Community Center, lower level, sponsored by the Roosevelt Island Committee of Community Board 8. (See ad on page 5.)

The Main Street WIRE – Next issue, **Sat., Dec. 17**. (To receive e-mail bulletins between issues, send an *AddMe* message to Bulletins@MainStreetWIRE.com.)

Advertising Deadline: Ads in the paper, Thursday, Dec. 8; decision on circulars/inserts for *The Bag*, Tue., Dec. 13; they are due Thur., Dec. 15.

Future issues: Fortnightly publication resumes Jan. 14, 2006. **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 in this column**, 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.

Revised registration deadline for *Southpoint from Ruin to Rejuvenation*, design competition of the Emerging New York Architects Committee (ENYA), **Sun., Dec. 18**. (Submission deadline: **Fri., Jan. 13**.) For information: www.enyacompitions.org.

Holiday Get-Together with music and songs of the season, **Sun., Dec. 18**, 2:00 p.m., 548 Main Street, sponsored by The Main Street Theatre and Dance Alliance.

La Leche League meeting for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, **Mon., Dec. 19**, 10:30 a.m., 536 Main Street (behind Capri Pizza). Free. Information: **212-832-1188**.

Book Discussion Group, Thur., Dec. 22, 6:30 p.m., at the Library. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi.

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— The Coming Year —

Residents Association Common Council meeting, Wed., Jan. 4, 8:00 p.m., Good Shepherd Community Center. Meetings begin with an opportunity for members of the public to make presentations to the Council.

Book Discussion Group, Thur., Jan. 19, 6:30 p.m., at the Library. *Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

Senior Center

Monday

9:30, **Yoga**
10-11:30, **English as 2nd Language**
10:30, **Blood Pressure Screening**
12:30, **"Oldies" Movies**
1:00, **Tai Chi**
7:00, **Dance Class** (Beginners)

Tuesday

10:00, **Chinese Massage**
10:30, **Shoppers' Bus**
2:00, **Bingo**
2:00, **Painting and Sculpting**
7:30, **Games (RISA)**

Wednesday

9:15, **Stay Well**
10:00, **Heart Health Care**
10:30, **Computers**
10:30, **Shoppers' Bus**
7:00, **Pokeno (RISA)**

Thursday

10:00, **Get Stronger Bones**
10:30, **Creative Arts**
12:30, **Movie**

Friday

9:30, **Yoga**
10:30, **Computers**
1:00, **Bridge**
7:00, **Games (RISA)**
Saturday
7:30, **Bingo (RISA)**

Special Events

Sat.-Sun., Dec. 3-4, RISA Flea Market, 9-5, 546 Main Street
Fri., Dec. 9, 11:15, Stop & Shop
Tue., Dec. 13, RISA general meeting
Sat., Dec. 17, 7:00, RISA Holiday Party
Wed., Dec. 21, Atlantic City trip
Sat., Dec. 31, 8:00, RISA New Year's Eve Party

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

Those of you who saw "Mars Attacks" probably haven't forgotten how the Martians kept calming beleaguered earthlings with the announcement, "Do not be afraid, we will not harm you," as they were gunning them down and destroying their neighborhoods. I was reminded of this scene when I read Mr. Berman's column in the last issue of *The WIRE*, where he claimed that RIOC's plans to sell every remaining valuable piece of the Island to private interests are merely a harmless "request to see what kind of ideas are out there for the sites." The fact is that the very thought of constructing on Southpoint Park, or razing everything by the bridge for a big box retail center, or privatizing the garage is totally repugnant to almost every resident and absolutely contrary to what Berman identifies as

The RIRA Column

"the guiding principles of the General Development Plan that guide our progress." RIOC is charging interested parties \$4,000 to \$8,000 each to file their "request for initial proposal" (RFIP). Of course there are no strings attached, and these friendly "interested parties" don't at all expect to be granted any special consideration. I wonder how Manhattan residents would react to an innocent request to convert Central Park to a shopping mall. Any politician who proposed it would rightfully be ridden out of town. But we are stuck with these aliens in RIOC who tell us, "Do not be afraid, we will not harm you," while they proceed to wreck our community.

In actuality, RIOC has farmed out all of its real-estate marketing, including the negotiations with Sheldrake for Island House/Westview ground leases, to a private real-estate company called Jones Lang LaSalle. This company will get a nice percentage of every contract negotiated and, of course, shares Berman's overwhelming concern for "the guiding principles of the General Development Plan."

I also think it is disgraceful that RIOC will be spending the money we give them to put out a publication explaining what a great job they are doing. RIOC has always had an opportunity, graciously provided by *The WIRE*, to say whatever they wanted. I've been reading the RIOC column ever since Mr. Berman came into power here, and given the small amount of actual information he has chosen to provide, how can a separate publication, at our expense, be warranted? Why is it that, in the Cuomo years, when RIOC had a good relationship with the community, they never felt the need to issue a separate newsletter? But, when they fail to perform to standards set by the community, all of a sudden it's because the community is uninformed.

To Mr. Berman: RIOC has been an extraordinarily

secretive organization for many years. So, let me make a few helpful suggestions for topics in your informative newsletter. Please explain your vision for the future. Explain how much money and concrete is necessary before you decide that our community is developed enough. Explain how you intend to charge residents in Island House, Westview, and Rivercross to extend their ground leases and how much you intend to charge Jerome Belson, who has already privatized Eastwood and raised tenants' rates, for the same extension. Explain why you went to Mayor Bloomberg to amend the General Development Plan to build the monstrosity at Octagon, and under what circumstances you want to mangle the GDP again. Discuss your planning for traffic and transit to and from the Island. (You may want to read Lillian Picchione's excellent article on this topic in the last edition of *The WIRE*.) Tell us how many more people you think our Tram and train can accommodate during rush hours. Share with us your Capital Plan. Tell us what you expect from Public Safety. Perhaps you'd like to tell the residents what role you envision for their input, or do you and the RIOC Board intend to continue to make decisions by fiat? Since you claim that your publication will educate us on the "legal underpinnings" of RIOC, then explain why your highly paid lawyers aren't finding a way to re-negotiate the remaining six buildings of Southtown that your organization uniformly condemns as a financial disaster for the Island.



Steve Marcus, President
Roosevelt Island Residents Assn.
e-mail: SteveAtRIRA@verizon.net

Finally, how about detailing your relationship with the real-estate company, Jones Lang LaSalle, along with the financial considerations they get for all their great initiatives.

So, folks, when you read the stuff that RIOC puts out, remember that a) they are writing it on your dime, b) "Do not be afraid, they will not harm you!"

In the movie, the aliens are finally repelled by the yodeled melodies of Slim Whitman. I don't know what the formula is to keep the aliens at bay who have been dumped in our midst by Pataki and Co. But, I am certainly open to suggestions.

In my September, 2005, column, I highlighted the work of the Roosevelt Island Community Emergency Management Committee. This Committee is made up of representatives of RIOC, the housing management companies, Island organizations, RIRA, Community Board 8, Speaker Miller's Office, and State and City Emergency Planning offices. The Committee has met monthly since last spring to develop a coordinated Island plan.

It is important to keep in mind that Roosevelt Island is part of the City and State's emergency planning. What that means is that, for instance, if an evacuation of the City was mandated, City resources would be brought forth to evacuate Island residents to designated

The RIOC Column

shelters. The City and State plans incorporate the use of boats and all other means necessary to evacuate residents of the City that live on islands (Roosevelt is not the only City island). Some residents believe that the Island should be self-sustaining in an emergency. A representative from the City Emergency Management Office who spoke at the last meeting of the Committee highlighted that this is exactly what island communities do *not* want to do – isolate themselves from emergency services and assistance. Isolating yourself makes it harder for emergency personnel to reach you. As we all witnessed in New Orleans, the many people who opted to remain in their homes actually created more dangerous situations for themselves and the emergency personnel who had to rescue them.

Therefore, a plan for Roosevelt Island should seek to enhance/complement the City/State Emergency planning efforts. Each of the groups on the Roosevelt Island Emergency Management Committee has been asked to develop its own individual emergency management plan that addresses its own area of responsibilities. Many people believe that RIOC is responsible for all aspects – this is not true. Housing Management Companies, for instance, have the responsi-

bility to ensure basic services within the buildings, such as emergency lighting, etc. What we all seek to do is coordinate our efforts and share our resources Islandwide. This brings to bear the best of everyone in emergency situations.

I would like to share with the Roosevelt Island community the key components of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation's plan. Soon, this plan will be available on our website as well as a Question and Answer section on what to do in emergencies.

In any City-designated emergency, RIOC is responsible for ensuring:

- communications both by telephone and on-site with the Public Safety Department so Island residents can contact Public Safety for assistance;
- transportation – maintaining the Island bus and Tram transportation systems, as much as possible, to assist residents in reaching their destination;
- warehouse operations to make available RIOC resources (e.g., gasoline or generators) to housing management to address emergency situations;
- illumination of Main Street from Manhattan Park to the subway to ensure resident safety;
- safety of RIOC employees;
- coordination of an Emergency Communications Center, as needed.

This is an overview of the plan for RIOC. For instance, the plan articulates that RIOC bus transportation would assist City transportation in evacuating

See **Berman**, page 6



Herbert E. Berman, President
Roosevelt Island Operating Corp.
e-mail: HBerman@rioc.com

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Ponton from page 1

should be looked at, since we were only talking conceptually, anyway. It was a question of looking at the Island in total, determining what areas presented interest, and then having the Board decide whether they wanted to make those available.

Q: Who chose those specific parcels?

A: I don't think anybody made a decision to offer those specific parcels. I think, when we said, "Look at the whole Island," naturally, that included every parcel of land on the Island. And now you ask, "Well, who highlighted these [particular parcels]?" I guess you'd have to say that the highlighting of these five or six parcels happened with the company to whom we've given the responsibility for marketing, and that's Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL).

Q: It seems to me residents have good reason to wonder why JLL has put protected parkland at Southpoint forward for possible development. Can you explain that?

A: When you give a company the permission to look at the whole Island, then I think you can expect that they'll look at the whole Island within the constraints that they see where they shouldn't build things or offer things. For instance, when the talk about "big box retailers" came in [for the Tram station area], I said, "I don't think you can build anything permanent under a bridge." I made that concern known, and apparently JLL pursued that and found that either you could or there was a way around it, and so that parcel came up for offer.

Q: But why look for a big-box retailer?

A: That was a suggestion of JLL.

Q: Not approved by any real-estate committee specifically, or by the RIOC Board?

A: Neither approved nor disapproved. If somebody had said, "I think we can put a blacksmith shop there," the real-estate committee might have said, "Well, I don't think we want one." But when somebody said, "We think we can put a Big Box Retailer there," some people, including myself, didn't like that idea, but there was no reason at that point to say, "Wait a minute, don't consider that."

Q: You said you wouldn't favor that yourself, so it sounds as though it was a two-to-one vote, or a two-to-one sentiment, and your sentiment against big-box at that location lost out.

A: That's a little stricter than my recollection. I don't think it was a yes or no in most of the things we talked about. I think it was a question of, unless there's some gigantic, huge objection unanimously felt by everyone, that the recommendation of JLL would be followed. I think that's a fair portrayal.

Q: Perhaps followed through to its logical conclusion of actually having a big-box retailer there?

A: I think you would have to expect that if the Board did not turn it down.

Q: So your sense of this, I gather, is that a big-box retailer could end up under the bridge in the Tram-station area, and some kind of commercial development could end up on the northern edge of Southpoint Park, based on the way this process has been executed so far.

A: I think "could" is correct, but I think it would take the approval of the Board. The way that I tried to set the situation up – and,

unfortunately, I wasn't very successful at it – was that JLL was going to report to me. They were going to tell me what they had in mind and what they were doing and why. I was going to review that with the real-estate committee and, based on what we as a committee decided, I was going to tell the Board. I was not successful in getting that process in place.

Q: Then how did it work?

A: It worked out a number of random ways, as a matter of fact. Occasionally, someone would call RIOC directly. Occasionally, someone would call a member of the real-estate committee directly; and, occasionally, someone would call JLL directly. In my opinion, we never had the channeling and funneling of that information through one central point that I would have liked us to have.

Q: Is the process out of control?

A: I can't say "out of control." I can say that I was unsuccessful in implementing [real-estate committee procedures] the way I wanted to. As far as today's process is concerned, I'd suggest you'd have to ask the [new] chair of the real-estate committee.

Q: Are there dangers in the way the process works?

A: In my opinion, the single biggest danger is that we will be offered, for Southpoint, an amount so obscenely large that we will not have the courage to turn it down, and that all the dreams of parklands and open land will go away, replaced instead by a 100-story condominium. When you look at that land and what it has and the uniqueness of it, it's impossible for me to believe that money will not come into play in a way that's irresistible for those who chase money over quality of life.

There's a second danger, and that is one that I've been talking about since the first night I was on the Board, and that is that we have no plan for the Island. There's no question in my mind that *someone* has a plan for the Island. We have a capital expense plan, but what we don't have is the vision – the strategy [which] that capital expense plan supports. You have to start with a vision of what this Island is going to be when it's reached its full maturity. That can be an amusement facility, it can be a residential community, it can be a military-industrial complex, it can be whatever.

But we have that [vision] only in the vaguest, vaguest terms. We don't know, for example, if we ever have to sell another piece of land in order to remain [financially] self-sufficient. You can tell me yes, and show me data that supports that, and I can tell you no, and show you data that supports that. And the reason is, we don't have the vision, supported by a strategy, supported by a financial plan.

Q: What can be done about that?

A: Somewhere, the leadership has to say, "We are going to stop now doing anything we're doing, other than preventive maintenance, until we have an agreed-upon vision in place, supported by a strategy, supported in turn by a plan.

Q: What leadership?

A: It either has to be the Board or it has to be at the direction of a committee appointed by the Board, or it has to be, in my opinion, by the President of RIOC.

Q: Do you see that leadership coming from the Board?

A: I have not seen it so far.

Classified

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Berman from page 3

residents should that be necessary. If public transportation is unavailable, RIOC bus routes will be adjusted to pick up residents at the top of the Roosevelt Island bridge ramp should they be forced to walk. I hope sharing information about what the Corporation is responsible for will aid residents.

The Corporation plans an emergency drill to test our procedures on December 14. You may notice large generator lights along Main Street. We don't want residents to be alarmed. An emergency drill helps us ensure that our procedures work successfully and can be put into place quickly in an emergency situation.

During the recent telephone outage, RIOC notified NYPD and NYFD and secured additional patrols on the Island throughout the outage. Our responsibility is in the overall safety of our residents, working collaboratively with housing management and the various Island organizations.

The Committee is encouraging the establishment of a CERT team on the Island. A CERT team is a trained group of residents who can provide valuable assistance in an emergency and augment services available. RIOC will be hosting an information session in January in anticipation of training, which begins in February, 2006. More information will be forthcoming. I hope Island residents will consider participating on a CERT team. It can be an essential part of an effective community emergency plan.

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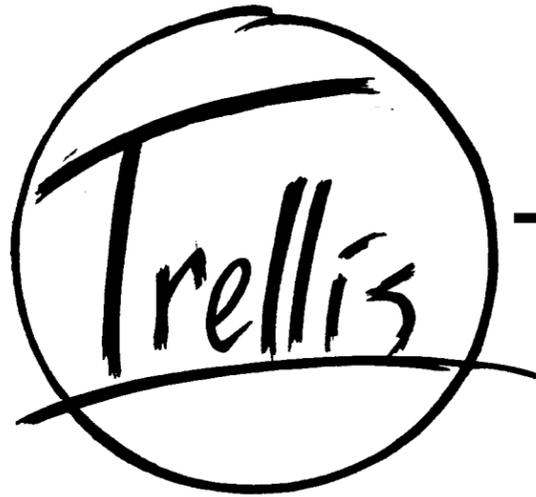


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