



JEFFREY DINOWITZ  
Assemblyman 81<sup>ST</sup> District  
Bronx County

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March 15, 2011

Commissioner Adrian Benepe  
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation  
The Arsenal, Central Park  
New York, New York 10021

Dear Commissioner Benepe:

I am writing to you with respect to a proposal to locate an ice skating rink in Van Cortlandt Park. Let me make it very clear at the onset: I like the idea of having an ice skating rink in the Bronx. Serious questions, however, have arisen as to the process, or lack thereof, being used to make this proposal a reality.

The idea of an ice skating rink in Van Cortlandt Park was discussed at a meeting of the Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy as far back as June 2010—nine months ago. Yet it did not become known to the public until the Mayor's budget message last month.

Despite nine months of closed-door discussions, there has not even been one public hearing on this matter. It is my understanding that there were public hearings before a similar ice skating rink was placed in Bryant Park. Why are no similar hearings being held in the Bronx? I am very concerned that meetings of the Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy are not open to the public and minutes are not made available to the public.

The Community Board 8 Parks Committee recently met with representatives of the Parks Department and the Chair of the Conservancy. They were asked a number of questions regarding specific details of the rink, which they either declined to answer or were not capable of answering. The Parks Committee was told that the details of the project wouldn't be available to the public until after a successful bidder on the project is chosen, meaning that details would be available only after it's too late to have any influence or even express an opinion.

At the moment, the public has not been informed of the size and footprint of the project. This *is* still a public park, isn't it? Given the way in which the City treated Van Cortlandt Park in its dealings over the Croton Water Filtration Plant (a project which is in excess of \$2 billion over budget and counting), I am naturally concerned about the future of this area of Van Cortlandt Park along Broadway.

What is the cost of this project? Who will pay for it? Will there be any ongoing cost to the City taxpayers? Who will profit? Who will be allowed to use the rink? What efforts have been made to determine the impact of this project on the community, whether or not there is adequate parking, or if there are better alternative locations, either in Van Cortlandt Park or elsewhere in the Bronx?

There is much legitimate concern in New York by the public about reform, transparency, and openness in government. This project is on track to become a prime example of the desperate need for reform, transparency and openness. It was presented to the community as a *fait accompli*. There has been no public input. There has been no public review. There was no opportunity for anyone to express their opinion. It appears that the rink was conceived in the proverbial "smoke-filled room," and any decisions made with respect to it were and continue to be done in secrecy.

While I think having a skating rink in the Bronx would be great, it was never on the priority list of Community Board 8, and other parks' projects are languishing in delays. This project seems poised to jump ahead of every one of the projects that the Community Board and the community have supported, in some cases for many years.

Given the incredibly poor way this issue has been handled and given the many unanswered questions, I ask that a detailed plan be presented to the public and a thorough review and public hearings be conducted before any further action is taken on this proposal. Democracy, transparency, and good government demand nothing less. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Dinowitz  
Member of Assembly

cc: Bronx Borough Commissioner Hector Aponte, Department of Parks & Recreation  
Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.  
Council Member Oliver Koppell  
Comptroller John Liu  
Mayor Michael Bloomberg