

Town Meeting open forum
following adjournment of the meeting of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation Board of Directors,
Thursday, April 11, 2007.

DHCR Commissioner Deborah VanAmerongen (chair):

I do, again, have to apologize because I'm going to have to leave before too long to get back into Manhattan; but I wanted to at least have the opportunity to open it up to have you to ask some questions and to have a little bit of opportunity for dialog and exchange. And I also again welcome the opportunity to talk with anyone about how to make this sort of exchange perhaps a little bit easier for everyone. I can't commit that I'm going to be able to come out once a month for hours at night, or something like that; but on a semi-regular basis, I'd like to have ... to really have the opportunity to really meet with people and talk. And, if people aren't really interested in coming to the Board meetings or sitting around waiting while we are in executive session, [I'd like people to] have other opportunities to interact, at least with me, and with Steve. And obviously, if other members of the Board wanted to, they'd be more than welcome to attend. So with that I'll open it up.

Judith Berdy:

Good afternoon. My name is Judith Berdy, and I'm President of Roosevelt Island Historical Society. We've already had

VanAmerongen:

We've had e-mails. Thank you. Nice to see you

Berdy:

Thank you, and welcome to the Island. And I've already met with Steve Shane, so welcome to the Island again.

RIOC President Steve Shane:

Thank you.

Berdy:

And he gets excellent recommendations from some of his previous co-workers, who we all remember fondly. And David, how many Chairs of RIOC have we gone through?

VanAmerongen:

I think Dave said at least five to date.

Berdy:

At least five. And he remembers

Resident Board member David Kraut [partly inaudible]:

Rosina [Abrahamson], Jean [Lerman] ... [Jerome] Blue, [Robert] Ryan ... [Herb] Berman... that's six

Berdy:

Well, first of all, I want to thank you in advance for, hopefully, a positive vote on public-purpose funds next month for the visitor kiosk that the Roosevelt Island Historical Society is building. We're trying to get it open at the Tram site. Unfortunately, the City of New York is our contractor for that, so when people think that sometimes with work on the Island is challenging, they can work with the City of New York to do work. It has been rather

VanAmerongen:

May I ask what City Department are you working with?

Berdy:

New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, whose funding is handling it. The money was from Gifford Miller and Jessica Lappin, then the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs who turned it over to the New York City Department of Design and Construction. And unfortunately, the staff of [Design and Construction] signed off on everything that wasn't correct. The ramp was too narrow. The steps were too shallow. And, at the moment, the Historical Society has hired an architect who is overseeing the project and it will be absolutely beautiful. It just takes a little while to do it. I bring no complaints tonight about anything on the Island

VanAmerongen:

Or any other thing.

Berdy:

...Or any other thing. No griping, no bitching, no moaning. We're starting with a clean slate. A new administration. And Commissioner, on behalf of the historical society, I want you to have something to read in the car going home to Albany. And we will see you next month.

VanAmerongen:

Thank you so much And just so you know, I am actually based here in New York. Different DHCR Commissioners have done it different ways. I'm based here in the City and I travel to Albany on an as-needed basis. So, I live on the Upper West Side, so it is pretty easy for me to come over. I'm delighted to be here with you. Thanks.

Betty Walker:

My name is Betty A. Walker. I am Chair of the Island Services Committee, part of RIRA, and I'm delighted to be here. I would like to – very quickly – We had a good meeting with Mr. Shane; and one of the things Mr. Shane said to us was [that] top on his list is communication.

VanAmerongen:

Absolutely.

Walker:

So I would like to very quickly say a couple of things to you. As a professor and psychologist, I can draw upon my own training and experience to a deeper understanding of how communication can thwart or enhance the effectiveness of organizations. We have a tremendous amount of strength and vision in both RIRA and RIOC, but the past – and it's past, we want it to be past – difficulties between us have hindered our ability to imagine and to act; and has not provided a solid foundation – as yet – for our common concerns. Therefore, we must work to diminish the negativity and dismay that has strained our relationships and instead find the positive and optimistic energy and resources uniting us in achieving goals that will offer us pride and satisfaction at what we can accomplish together. RIOC's responsibility and responsiveness to the community is of utmost importance to us, and from the meeting today, I think [it is] to you, also. We have to believe that the public's need and right to know must be an integral part of communication. Our principle, that we intend to work on, is that we will cooperate with you in this effort, and we will be ruled by the adage of being firm and fair in our dealing. Today represents a positive beginning in open and respectful communication. We look forward to the matching of your words with your actions. And I think it's fair for you to expect that from us. It's a very big "we'll see" and that captures our hopes and dreams and our efforts. As Kurt Vonnegut, who died today, would say, "And so it goes."

I would like to end with the fact that our committee, the Island Services Committee, has met and we have come up with five areas. We're not going to take too much of your time, but I'd just like to throw them out; and Mr. Shane has dealt with those.

The first is the communication between RIRA and RIOC. And I think we're together on that, knowing there are two members of your staff that are specifically assigned to that kind of communication effort. Then the RIOC Board membership with their specific duties would be addressed by Mr. Matthew Katz, who is our President of RIRA, our *elected* President of RIRA -- I say that with neon flashing all over the place, *elected*. Mr. Shane did mention the lighting problems around the Island, but he did not agree to go around and change light bulbs. We couldn't get him to agree to do that. Then, the bus, the transportation – I'm not talking about the MTA – I'm talking about the little Red Bus around the Island at either 25 cents or 10 cents a pass. So that, and then the retail situation – the retail shops is very big on our list, as well as any Island safety issues that are contingent with some of the other areas. So, let's go ahead with that, if we have your agreement, a few of these issues could be addressed by members Thank you.

VanAmerongen:

Thank you.

Residents Association President Matthew Katz:

Good evening, Commissioner. Good evening, President Shane. Welcome to you both, officially, on the Island. I had a couple of quick questions I wanted to pose to you. In preparing for tonight's meeting, I had downloaded the agenda from your website; and I noticed that in the Board listing, that John Mannix is still listed as a member of this Board. Now, two months ago I had e-mailed John to find out what his status was. I was just wondering. He had, in fact, resigned at the time of the November elections. And in fact, he has not attended a meeting here in seven months. My understanding is that his resignation has not been accepted, whatever that means. But he ain't coming back. I'm wondering what [process] has been anticipated for an appropriate replacement for number nine on the Board, and most importantly, whether the community will be involved in that process.

VanAmerongen:

Yeah, I understand that there was some confusion about Mr. Mannix. No one at DHCR – everybody that I asked couldn't find the letter of resignation. I don't doubt that he may have submitted it, and like you said, he ain't coming back. This is something... I hope you appreciate the fact that it's a brand new administration, and there are an unbelievable number of Boards of Directors of corporations and agencies that have vacancies and people whose terms have expired and things like that. So, in terms of dealing with that, and presenting people to the Senate for the confirmations. We haven't gotten through all of it. Steve and I have certainly talked about how to ensure that the community is involved in proposing names for Board membership; and I believe that you have had some discussion about that.

Shane:

Yep.

VanAmerongen:

Steve had mentioned that to me. So we're tentatively... Obviously, we need and want to have people who are members of the community as members of the Board, and we're open to talking with you about how we get names to suggest and what sort of process that might be. I'm sure that through your election process and the way you got about getting participation from all the buildings on the Island, you have some ideas you can share with us about that.

Kraut:

Commissioner, if I could just add something to the discussion here – Many years ago, the RIRA constitution maintained that the RIRA President should be a member of this Board; and in fact, I ran for the RIRA presidency on that issue, among others, and won. I then forced Governor Cuomo to grant me a chair on this Board, based on that. Since then, RIRA has changed its constitution, so that no longer part of the requirement. So, I [am] myself, as a former RIRA president and long-time resident here, very much in favor of RIRA taking a formal position as to their rights to see people on this Board, not just on an ad hoc basis or if you decide to talk to them. Whether they can make it so or not, it would be great if they continue to assist.

Katz:

I think David brings up a very interesting point in political philosophy. When I ran for RIRA President, it was with the understanding that I would not be involved with the RIOC Board because I considered this as a conflict of interest. And in fact, it has on a number of occasions proved to be so. So that was not something I was interested in

I did want to raise one other question...

Shane:

Matt, on this subject, you and I talked; and I've spoken with the Commissioner about the idea of... there are seven non-statutory positions on the Board of Directors. Those seven non-statutory positions can be filled and should be filled, and in my view, from Island people. We cannot change the statute because we'd like to, but we can certainly arrange – sort of memorandum-of-understanding-arrange – with RIRA – that you, through your democratic process – making sure that there's representation from the various constituencies on the Island, because you now have additional people from North and from Southtown... that they need to be represented as well. So, look at the constituency of the Board, with terms, and how you would arrange for staggered terms and elections under the auspices of RIRA where you could forward the candidates without having to change the

statute. We could then push them to the Governor's office for confirmation by the Senate. And then, I think democracy would be served, you would have a representative group, and in fact, among the things which concern Michael [Shinozaki] about having residents of the Island being able to interact with Board members, you would have a much more representative government. And you wouldn't need to be concerned about a Board of Directors who wasn't listening to the Island residents. That's sort of my view.

Katz:

Given that the RIO Board, as it is presently constituted, accomplishes that – not by statute. RIRA, on the other hand, by statute – must have a weighted representation from all new developments on the Island...

Shane:

So, puzzle it out if you can, among your constituency and among your Board to see if we can come up with a workable plan, because I think all of our hearts are in the same place in terms of representative government.

Katz:

That's a good idea. Thank you.

One quick technical question: I noticed that during your presentation of the FY 2007-2008 budget, that there was a line item for the Tram – a haul cable of \$5 million. Now my recollection was – it's been years ago – [that] when the haul cable was replaced, American Tramway cut the haul-cable eight feet too short, and we spent seven months determining what to do about that. The end result was that American Tramway paid \$350,000 for replacing the haul-cable, I think. And please correct me if I'm wrong. And I'm wondering where the figure \$5 million to replace the cable came from.

Shane:

It's not just the rope. I mean, it's the entire operation of replacing the haul cable. But that \$5 million for the haul-cable replacement has to be incorporated into an to an overall Tram over-haul – if you'll pardon the double use – because that is what we're contemplating right now. I mean, we have... There is a State budget appropriation of \$15-million for a complete overhaul of the Tram, and that is one of the items that this Board must consider in conjunction with its consultants as how best to go about the prospect of what do you do about the Tram going forward for the next 30 years. And if, in fact, there is to be a complete overhaul of the Tram, that money that is in there for new haul cable could be incorporated into all of that. That is exactly one of the reasons why we chose to recommend the extension of the contract rather than a new five-year contract with the present operators, because we don't know what we're going to have. We're debating exactly what we're going to have going forward and we don't know.

Katz:

It's my understanding that the \$15 million was a promise from Governor Pataki, and it's not part of the budget...

VanAmerongen:

No, that's incorrect. It was advanced by Governor Spitzer and approved by the Legislature, in answer to your question.

Shane:

It's in the current budget.

Katz:

Thank you.

VanAmerongen:

On that note, I apologize. You certainly should continue; but I really do have to go. I'm going to be back for the next month's meeting; and many of you will be talking to me again, and thank you.

Woman:

Excuse me, when is the next month's meeting?

Man:

It's on May 17th.

VanAmerongen:

May 17th.

Kraut:

May 17, 2007, at 9:30 a.m.

June 28, 2007, at 4:30 p.m.

September 6, 2007, at 9:30 a.m.

October 25, 2007, at 4:30 p.m.

November 29, 2007, at 9:30 a.m.

Shane:

Yes?

James Whalen:

My name is James Whalen... I'm a voice in the wilderness, as usual [laughter]

Shane:

Mr. Whalen, can I only suggest to you that the stairs have been suggested as part of our emergency evacuation plan, and we have had meetings – serious meetings – with the City's Office of Emergency Preparedness, and must, as a public agency, participate in these meetings. Anything that is done has to come with the approval of the coordinated City and State agencies. And whether there is a rational response to the need, is something that is to be considered by that ultimate coordinating body; but the needs of the Island for emergency evacuation will be considered like the needs of Manhattan emergency evacuation. It is a problem. And I appreciate your suggestion.

Nurit Marcus:

Hi. Good evening. My name is Nurit Marcus. I have been a resident here since 1983. Actually, though, the missing person at the table may be Matt. Maybe that's the one that Mr. Spitzer said is going to be elected? Remember? When Mr. Spitzer was here in October, he told us that we might get a member elected by the community, so maybe he's saving the spot for this one?

Shane:

I'm suggesting to you that we can go farther than that.

Marcus:

I have a couple of questions – actually, some facts, comments and questions. Regarding the budget, I do not remember the allocation for Southpoint. Maybe at the time when Southpoint Park was approved, RIOC set aside \$4-million. The City was supposed to give us \$3-million and another \$1-million coming up. And the State promised, I think, promised, to give us another \$4-million. So, I was wondering, was it in this budget? I don't remember seeing anything about it.

RIOC Staff member Carla van de Walle:

[off-mic., unintelligible]

Shane:

\$12-million has been aggregated for the first stage of Southpoint.

Marcus:

Okay. Wonderful. Do we know when we are going to start activating those funds?

Van de Walle:

[off-mic., unintelligible]

Shane:

They are hiring and they're doing planning and engineering development and all that sort of stuff.

Marcus:

Great.

Shane:

And I can tell you that I met with the FDR Memorial people and urged them to immediately interface with the Trust, because the time is now. If they want to get involved, if they want to do their thing on a coordinated basis, they must do it now.

Marcus:

Well, I can understand you telling them that, though it is quite controversial in the community – meaning, about, at least, more than 50% really don't want to see it there, but just want to see an open, beautiful park without cement and walls and walkways of stone and things like that.

Shane:

I understand that it is controversial in the community. I just remind you that in the original dedication of the island going way back when, under Governor Rockefeller, that the FDR Memorial was then a twinkle in everyone's eye and it was actually part of the planning. And to the extent that they want to go forward, and can prevail upon the public to do so, and they raise the funds for it, we're going to have to... The people on the island are going to have to demonstrate very convincingly that it would be a bad thing. But it depends upon your political sympathies, I suppose – but a very tasteful memorial to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, of which there is nothing else in this State, interestingly enough – or anywhere else. It would be a tasteful part of the Southpoint Park. That is what's proposed. I think we'll have to wait and see what comes back and see how it goes; but the planning is active at this point. And I met with Ambassador Van den Heuval, and he and his committee are quite anxious and encouraged by the fact that the Trust is actually formed with early planning money and that this is likely to become a reality. It should be a sensational thing for the people of Roosevelt Island and for the City of New York and for the State of New York.

Marcus:

I think it is politically... and I sure hope it's going to be a very small “twinkle” in Southpoint.

Shane:

It is entirely 3-acres of the total park. That is the area which is designated at the moment. To what extent that finally works out, we have a long way to go in the planning process before our shovel is in the ground. They were very optimistic at the Trust that they could get physically started this fall. It can't possibly happen.

Marcus:

There are lots of notes and lots of thoughts about it. I want to look at this...

Shane:

Well, they will be part of the public process. You will see what is going to happen, what is planned down there, what is proposed down there. You'll have a chance to interface with it and comment on it and affect it as it is ultimately developed.

Marcus:

Now I just want to state a couple of facts that were happening here before you came. We all know that the revenue did go up, but the services really went down, meaning the bus service was unfit for the community, we had problems with the Tram shutting down, and then the auxiliary engine didn't work for – really – admitted neglect. It was neglect that people couldn't get off the Tram. And also our commercial strip on the Island – three stores closed on us, active stores that we needed. The bakery closed down, the pizza closed down, and then the fish store. Those were small businesses that really needed to survive. We understand that it was an issue with contract, that they could not get a long-term [lease], and that's why they could not commit to having

long-range planning and beautifying the places. So, I want to ask, What do you predict for us? Because we really do need them. Even off-Island services don't want to deliver on the Island. We do miss this convenience. We really are a small place that is missing lots of services. What do you see happening? When is it going to happen?

Shane:

As soon as possible. I would hope that appropriate service establishments will be back in business on Main Street. You need them. They are appropriate for the community. And vacant stores, dark stores are not a good thing for anybody. Not to mention, of course, that the revenue stream that would be produced from that is a plus, obviously. And I would hope that, with the assistance of the Real Estate Committee and with whatever brokerage services are needed off the Island, to attract people who will come here and give you back those kinds of establishments – whether it's a table-cloth restaurant, maybe, whether it's a bakery, whether it's a fish store. Whatever it is – a pizza [place]. I understand: It'd be nice to get a pizza, to have an ice cream store here again. Those are the kind of things that make for a nice Main Street, where you can go for a stroll and do your business. I would hope that the economics of it will support that kind of retail life on Main Street. You have an evolving community, you have people up in Octagon who may not ever stop to shop on Main Street. We have people from Southtown who may or may not come north to shop, and obviously the developers of Southtown have some of their own retail establishments that they're putting in there. It's going to be an evolving thing. We are mindful of the problem, and we'll pay attention to it and try and do our best, with the advice and help of the community, and with the people who are involved on the Board, to address it.

Marcus:

I would hope that you would take into consideration that this is a very unique place and that these establishments are supposed to be fitting our atmosphere, our 'quaintness,' as I would say, and we're not going to considering big, major stores and chains, because it is a unique place. And if ever the walkway is going to happen over the bridge, then we are going to be a destination for Manhattan. It's going to be an incredible place to come and visit and have a cup of coffee, not only from Starbucks. I would hope that you would consider that.

Shane:

OK. Thank you.

Marcus:

Very quick question also about the budget I was looking at. Eastwood –\$5 million is supposed to be coming in. Is this a one-time revenue or is this an ongoing thing? Would you be able to tell me?

Shane:

One time.

Marcus:

One time.

Shane:

It's a transaction payment, a one-time transaction.

Marcus:

And the ground rent is \$1 million a year, ongoing. Now, considering the background of Roosevelt Island and looking at the big picture, given that Manhattan Park is paying ground rent of \$2.5 million a year. You think this is a good deal? I mean, if this is still in the making, why are we asking \$1 million one time?

Shane:

No, no. The deal is done. It was concluded and approved by everyone years ago when the lease modification was executed at that time. It's a done deal. We don't have a right to re-visit it. What we have is the right to approve the transfer of ownership, but that approval shall not be unreasonably withheld, and what they have to give over to us, and they have in great detail, the names and qualifications of the transferees, and they include the State of Michigan Pension System, the New York Pension System. I mean, these are not fly-by-night entities that are buying into this. Those are the kinds of new owners you're going to have. They're not anybody to be concerned about. But the deal was made and done. So we are collecting the \$5 million as a transaction payment based upon the amount that the buildings are being sold for now.

Marcus:

How many years ago was this deal done?

Leitner:

I just want to add one point. The deal was actually done last summer to extend the ground lease for Eastwood. But the amount Eastwood pays is not \$1 million. It'll be closer to \$5 million or more. The portion that RIOC keeps is \$1 million. The remainder goes to ESDC [Empire State Development Corporation]. Overall rent is in excess of \$5 million.

Marcus:

Didn't you announce in public that we're not going to have any more one-time deals, and everything is going to be...

Leitner:

I think Steve could try to answer this, but... This is not a one-time deal. This is a transaction payment. As sometimes happens when a transaction occurs, like there's a change in ownership or they refinance or there's a major sublet, that condition occurs, any portion of the profit that's being made at that time, RIOC would get a piece of it – a transaction fee – which is typical in deals. We would get a payment to help the maintenance on the Island.

Marcus:

That's all we're getting for this major 1,000 apartments?

Leitner:

It's not being converted. The interest is being sold from one entity to another, and we're getting a \$5.5 million payment, which is a substantial amount.

Marcus:

That's amazing. I mean, from Octagon you got, what, \$11 million one-time payment?

Leitner:

You are confusing ground rent with a transaction payment...

Marcus:

I am.

Leitner:

They would have some type of transaction payment, too. Actually, the rent we get from Eastwood is in excess of \$5 million annually.

Marcus:

OK. One more question. The last one. How about Southtown, the building 5 and 6. Also one-time payment? And what is it?

Shane:

It is, as we speak, subject to negotiation and what is going to transpire.

Marcus:

OK, great, I hope you can squeeze them out for the Island, especially when you guys don't get the commercial strips over there to have some revenue coming up towards the Island.

Shane:

Well, remember that Southtown was developed and was done in terms of its economic relationship with RIOC at a time when new development was critical to the mass of population needed on the Island for the stores, and Tram, and other activities on the Island. So we got a lot of benefits – not necessarily immediate monetary benefits, but a lot of benefits of having the Southtown development go forward. The rest of that deal has already been negotiated, as well.

Marcus:

There is so much into it, but I would like to tell you that this is also very controversial. But if you could make a miracle happen and save the rest of the green spaces in Southtown, that's going to be [UNINT] reputation. Thank you very much.

Shane:

Yes, I mean, buildings 5 [through] 9 are deals that are going forward. I mean, we don't have the opportunity, we don't have any right to keep Related and Hudson from going forward and building those. It was part of the overall deal. And it's done. And it was done in a prior administration, done under circumstances which were

appropriate at that time, and which were discussed and approved by this Board approved in its then constituency. I mean, the then Board. It's a done deal.

Marcus:

If you are going to be able to stop it, my hat is off to you.

Shane:

No.

Marcus:

Thank you very much.

Shane:

Thank you.

Cynthia Ahn:

Good evening. Welcome to Roosevelt Island. [Mr.] New President, Respected Board Members, and Community Leaders, and Guests: My name is Cynthia Ahn. I am running Roosevelt Nail Salon on Main Street, and lived here for 20 years. First, since I am [a] member of Roosevelt Island Merchants Association, we welcome Mr. Steve Shane as the new President of RIOC and we are very hopeful and happy to meet you and looking forward to working with you. Of course you [are] already aware [of the issues that] all other members [of the community who have] addressed, so I am very appreciative [for] your concern about Main Street merchants. One thing I [would] like to point out: As you mentioned, the Island has a growing population [which is] developing very rapidly; and we are very pleased in a lot of ways. But at the same time, as you already mentioned, we are right next to the great big City of Manhattan, where there are hundreds of very fancy hundred stores that are our competitors for the business. At the same time, north end residents, they [are] leaving only in the morning [and] they [are] coming back very late. And the same as [in] the future, Southtown residents right next to the Tram and the subway station, also they [are] leaving early in the morning, and coming back late [in] the evening. They [do] not have much time consume at the Main Street merchants. Therefore, we have been struggling. [There is] less traffic and not enough business for the last 20 years. We've been working hard to build up [and to] maintain [our] small businesses. So, for the last few years, many of us didn't have a lease extended or renewed, which really gives [us cause to be] nervous [about] our life, and our business and our community. We have [found it] difficult to renovate because of no lease. Please give us lease[s] and continuous space and respect that we have been work[ing] hard for [a] difficult period that we build up the business. So any other private business, we will respect that. And I hope our Island operating corporation [will decide] to consider this situation. And one other things that I was aware, last two years, outside developer, developing management were trying to handle the Main Street merchants. It seems like they do not really understand community need[s] or they do not really care. I don't know what the reason. The pizzeria, the fish store – all those stores [have] been empty. And lease not renewed. So hopefully, this time RIOC will care. RIOC management knows about the Island and cares about the community. Handle this, please, directly. I hope that [will] happen. Thank you for your time and I'm looking forward to your support.

Shane:

Thank you.

Sharon Bermon:

I'm Sharon Bermon. I'm a 30-year resident. It's B-E-R-M-O-N, and thank you. That's very gracious of you. I'd like to welcome you to the Island, and to your first meeting. I'm sure that you already know, Roosevelt Island doesn't have a lot to do now because our stores and restaurants are mostly closed. So, we have a popular local game. It's called "Throw Rocks at RIOC Staff." [PAUSE] You were supposed to laugh when I said that.

Shane:

Oh, okay. We have a very agile staff. [laughter] They dodge ...

Bermon:

You dodge well ...? Okay. I'd actually like to say something positive, and I'd like to thank Charlee Miller for inspiring me. I met Charlee a couple of months ago, right after she was appointed. She came to an event at my building, Island House. She was extraordinarily gracious. I responded to your graciousness by sending you an e-mail in which I bitched about the fact that nothing was being done for bikers on the island. And, in particular, a huge deal compared with some of the things that people are bringing up – that there are no bike racks in the new... Wow, he's really making notes. I'm really inspired. That there are no bike racks at Tram Plaza, despite the fact that they spent a whole lot of money, and you can get bike racks for free. I'd be happy to tell you about it. At any rate, I felt kind of guilty after dumping this on you. So I decided that, rather than curse the darkness, I would light a candle. So, I don't know if you're aware of it – you've already said you don't like climbing stairs too much – but perhaps you like bike rides.

Shane:

Have you been talking to my wife? [laughter]

Bermon:

I'm sorry. I'm hard-of-hearing.

Shane:

I said, "Have you been talking to my wife" who always encourages a lot of exercise.

Bermon:

Bike riding is good and every year is bike month during the whole month of May. I just got a couple hundred of the bike-month calendars for all five boroughs. And I'm about to give you a copy. On page six, there's a ride called "Tai-chi at Twilight on Roosevelt Island." And I've managed to involve Bruce Becker from the Octagon, and I've got a whole bunch of other people – somebody from Jessica's office to come talk about recreation – [Someone says "microphone"] You guys can't hear me? Okay, well anyway – we're going to have a bike ride. It's going to be part of Bike Month and it's going to start at the Tram Plaza. We're going to all take our bikes over to Roosevelt Island and ride around, stop at the Octagon, listen to somebody from Jessica's office, etc. Okay. So

Shane:

As a practical matter, how many riders and bicycles can get on the Tram? You may be a victim of your own success.

Bermon:

I've already talked to Erica, and we've discussed it, and we're pretty sure that no more than about 25 people will show up if worst comes to worst. And some of us won't have our bikes. I'm certainly going to leave my bike on the Roosevelt Island side, and I think it'll be ok. If necessary – I've asked for e-mail RSVPs and if it looks like 50 or 100 people are going to come, I will then panic and then we'll talk about having some extra Tram runs. OK? Well, hopefully – well, on the other hand, it will be very nice if the people want to show up. But I think it'll be okay.

On that serious note, I would also like to say something about the possible stairway. I certainly appreciate Jim's comment, and I'm glad he's going to take time off from his work with the Flat Earth Society. Some of us are not so negative about things. Some of us think that having stairs would be a really good idea, and not just for emergencies. Last summer, when the subway was frequently not really working on weekends – I assume that you know about what happened on weekends? I mean, it was really awful. And the Tram wasn't running. For those of us who wanted to do recreational things, whether it was to get to runs or go to bike rides or to do almost anything, and just for people who just wanted to a movie in Manhattan, it was almost impossible. If we had a stairway, some people would go up the stairs, and if there was an elevator, it would be even better. If there was an elevator, it would be an alternative way for people with mobility problems to get off the Island, not just in an emergency...

Voice from audience:

Or a ramp.

Bermon:

Well, if it was a ramp that people could use, that would be wonderful, but the point is

Shane:

We have been in touch with DOT.

Bermon:

But we're anticipating – what? Six months of the tram being down?

Shane:

Unfortunately, DOT, who controls the bridge, is not about to give up any space on the bridge from traffic, which is overwhelming already, for an elevator.

Voice from audience, off mic.:

You don't have to, there's a walkway already.

Shane:

I understand that, but if you run an elevator structure up to the bridge, you need a landing area and all that kind of stuff.

Bermon:

I don't want to get into the details right now. I just want to remind you that for years – for years – we kept saying that we wanted to get the Tram on the MetroCard, and it didn't happen. And then, somehow, Matt Katz and some other people made it happen. And now, we're on the MetroCard, and it's fantastic. So, I'm just saying – look, there are always negative things we can think about, but this is a new administration. Let's try to be positive and think about all these wonderful things

Shane:

We are. We have talked to the DOT, and they're not terribly receptive to the idea. But we continue to dialog and see what other alternatives [there may be]. A ramp up 200 ft. with switchbacks is a daunting engineering prospect. And any structure that's built, which has to comply with ADA issues, is also a problem. So...

Bermon:

I'm sure it would be challenging. But I think it would be something that it would really be worth putting some effort into.

I would like to bring up one more thing which is pretty trivial, but maybe not. We have almost no place to eat now on the Island. We can take food out from the Chinese restaurant. And they actually have put a couple of tables in in the last few months. And occasionally you'll see people eating there. it's not a very esthetic experience, I guess. I wonder if you know – some of us remember that, in previous incarnations of Chinese restaurants there, that there is a door on the left which leads into a room; and from what I've seen, they just have lots of cans of oil and things like that – soy sauce stored there. But it's a whole room, and it used to be a dining room. Now, if there is any way that you can use your influence to persuade them to even turn the back half of that room into storage but to put the front half back into a dining space where people could actually sit. I mean, it wouldn't have to be a fine dining experience, but it would be something that would be more appealing than the tables that are there now. And it would be really simple compared to building a ramp up to the bridge or some of these other things. I mean, it could be done in a weekend. I'd go over there and I'd move cans of soy sauce myself if they would let me. I just thought I'd bring that up.

Shane:

There's nothing in the RIOC lease with the Chinese restaurant that permits [RIOC] to give out such direction. I would suggest that as constituents and customers of the Chinese restaurant, that you go in there and try and persuade them that you could be patrons and that this could be a great money-making venture.

Bermon:

OK, I'm willing to do that. I'm just wondering if there was something you could do which could help to persuade them or to be somehow supportive.

Shane:

Well, to whatever extent they would need RIOC's cooperation from an engineering or changing storefronts or whatever, I mean, we'll be glad to cooperate if, in fact, they wanted to do that kind of thing.

Bermon:

Actually – and this is a ridiculous thing to say – it would improve the quality of life on the Island enormously. That’s how bad our choices are for dining right now. OK. At any rate, thank you very much for listening and for making notes. It gives us all some hope that you really are going to pay attention to our needs.

Shane:

I’m going to try.

Resident Board Member Patrick Stewart:

When Kathy Johnson was here – you might want to check with Jim Fry – there were plans being made for bicycle racks, both at the Tram and at the subway. So, if you would check with Jim, he may be able to help you.

With regard to the stairway, the members of the Residents’ Association made a very impressive presentation at the Community Board the other day with regard to that stairway. The Community Board’s Transportation Committee voted to support that in a resolution which will be forthcoming. You have the support of at least the Community Board’s Transportation Committee. And then, the Community Board will be meeting here on Wednesday, and they’ll probably approve the resolution.

Bermon:

That’s good to know, because... Now who should I talk to about the bike rack?

Shane:

Jim Fry.

Bermon:

... because you can get bike racks from the City for free.

Resident Board member Michael Shinozaki:

Right. The MTA is remodeling that plaza, and we were going to put the bike racks back once they were finished with the scaffolding there. They already committed to put the bike racks back at the subway once they’re finished remodeling.

Bermon:

Okay, I can wait, if it’s...

Shinozaki:

As to the stairway at the bridge, you can’t just put in a stairway. It has to be accessible for [compliance with] the Americans [with] Disabilities [Act]. If we put in an elevator [UNINT SECTION], and two, how do you protect it when somebody comes back at night, and they’re riding the elevator, and they get raped, which happens, and then you’ve got trouble.

Stewart:

Also, you should know that, in doing this, in compliance with the City of New York. We discussed this at the Community Board the other night ... and you need, among other things... The 59th Street Bridge is a landmark, so you have to get the Landmarks Commission's permission to do it. You also need Bridge and Tunnel, Department of Transportation, Homeland Security, the United States Coast Guard, and so on, and so it's a lengthy and laborious proposition.

Bermon:

Well, all of those are complications; but I can only say something idiotic like: If we can send people to the moon, we should be able to find a way to get them to the top of the bridge.

Berdy:

Excuse me. May I add one thing.

Bermon:

Yes.

Berdy:

Unfortunately, the subway – the N and the R train – that grey building just south of the Tram station with the point. That is the air shaft for the subway. There is no way that the MTA is going to let you build anything going north of the bridge because it is a subway tunnel. There's no way you can build that. It's the same thing as there's a park over the subway tunnel in Southtown. You cannot build anything over a subway tunnel. You cannot build any kind of building that will require a foundation. That's one reason why the kiosk is where it is. We had to get MTA approval. You don't go near their tunnels. It's... So there's no way you're going to build a staircase at the north end of the bridge if it is going to require a foundation. [applause]

Bermon:

I yield to Judy, who is, of course, the expert on all things. I didn't mean that. As long as I'm still here, let me say one more thing. Last year, when candidate Spitzer was here in August, I asked a question that, at the time, I thought was kind of dumb. I mean, a lot of people were standing up and asking very thoughtful, intelligent questions and I called... I asked him, if he was elected Governor, would he authorize having the Tram repainted back to what it used to be. Now everybody who was here that night will tell you that I got more – not me, the question brought up a lot of issues and a lot of anger at RIOC. I think you ought to repaint the sides or the ends of the Tram cars. They used to say "The Tram," right? Now they say RIOC. And you know what, the Tram does not belong to RIOC, it's "The tram." A lot of people feel that way. If you want me to stand on Main Street and have people sign petitions, I bet you that I could get you 5,000 names in a couple of days. There is a huge, huge, huge feeling that this is something that needs to be done. And I think it would be a really good signal that – yeah. So, you might want to talk to some of the people who were there last August, and see what the mood was and decide whether that might be a politically expedient thing to do. Thank you.

Shane:

Thank you.

Ellen Polivy:

I have two questions, and I'll ask them both at the same time so that you can address them both.

Shane:

Could I have your name please?

Polivy:

Ellen Polivy.

Voice from audience:

Title.

Polivy:

Hm?

Voice:

What's your title?

Voice from audience:

Community Board 8.

Polivy:

...and I was just recently appointed to Community Board 8. So, two questions:

We had tried to get the constituents of our RIOC Board members, the Community Board members... We tried to get them together to talk to them. And they weren't allowed, we learned, to meet as a group so we could express our needs to our community members that would be representing us, because there's some rule about that. So, I'd like to find out whether they can meet with us as a group so we can get them together and express our needs in, you know, in small groups over coffee. We can all sit together in Trellis and have a, you know, a casual meal and express our needs so that they can actually represent us. That's one question.

The other question are the stores. The... I noticed in the budget presentation that 5% of the budget is actually from retail space. That's not very much. Perhaps we could just do what we did for Southtown, which is give them some incentives. So that we can get stores in there fast.

The other question are the stores. I noticed in the budget presentation that 5% of the budget is actually from retail space. That's not very much. Perhaps we could just do what we did for Southtown, which is give them some incentives. So that we can get stores in there fast for the community?

Handicapped people here... Handicapped people are not represented here tonight because they couldn't show up because it was raining. They can't make it in the elevators, they can't go off-Island because they can't get... the elevators don't level at the train, the Tram doesn't have the right size elevator for the scooters. They're really

stuck here. If we don't have stores for them to shop in, they can't go shopping. They were stuck. Maybe they had a hard time making it down to the grocery.

So I think that when we close a store we have to be really careful about the impact on the community, and I personally would like to see free rent for all the stores for at least a year so they can upgrade their stores and make it a real nice place to shop.

Do you have any answers?

Shane:

No, there are no answers. In the context of – as a public authority, we can't give away the space. We have legal constraints. On the other hand, we can certainly deal with space that serves community needs at a subsidized rent. We can try and encourage retail tenants of diversity in order to try to meet the needs of people, which certainly include the handicapped. These are problems that we will address. We are mindful fo them. And we will address them. I don't know that there are any easy solutions, but we will try and certainly address them. And we will involve the community in addressing them, because we welcome your idea.

Polivy:

You know, I want to point out that the kind of stores we have create public health issues. So, if all you have is an ice cream store, and you don't have anything else, you get people who are hungry eating ice cream and then you have obesity, and then you have diabetes problems.

Shane:

How about the pizza place?

Polivy:

I know, I know. We need a broad aspect. My point is, you – meaning RIOC – gave some concessions to Southtown. Why not give some concessions to the retail space?

Shane:

We will address the appropriate rents for retail stores, mindful of the need to serve the community. That's what we're here for. So, to the extent that we have to get less than "market rents" from a particular kind of store if it's a needed service establishment, then that's the kind of thing that we're prepared to do.

Shinozaki:

Quite a number of people on the Island know that there have been a variety of vendors who have approached RIOC representatives to try and rent a place here, and they've gotten no response at all.

Shane:

No. That's not appropriate

Shinozaki:

Those bids never even came before the Board. They were rejected out of hand. So I think that what we need to be doing is to make sure that our agents do not overreach their authority by “voting” on behalf of the Board with a “no” answer before those bids reach the Board for a vote. That is, prior to your coming, part of a big discussion that I had with Mas and [I explained to him] that by you not responding, you are saying “No” on behalf of the Board and that is our right to say yes or no... I want to see it.

Shane:

My understanding is that Mr. Mas’s retainer extends only to...

Shinozaki:

Now.

Shane:

...only to the current negotiations with respect to the ground lease for Island House and Westview.

Kraut:

Steve, it’s 7:00 o’clock, I have another engagement. I’m sorry.

Shane:

Thank you, David. It is getting late, so

Sherie Helstien:

OK. One very brief thing, excuse me, Nait. One very brief thing. I think what Ellen [Polivy] was talking about was in RIRA, we have – of the groups of people, one of the committees or a sub-committee was trying to put together RIRA members – four or five RIRA members who will meet on a regular basis with our RIOC, our local, resident RIOC Board members; and what we were told when we tried to organize these meetings is that if there were three or more RIOC Board members in a meeting together, whether it included residents or not, it was considered a Board meeting, whether or not... They couldn’t do it. Now there’s no vote being taken and if it needs to be public, if it needs to be a public meeting because there are three or more Board members, we’d like to meet with all the Board members altogether as a... you know, with RIRA representatives, who are elected by the community – not appointed. The point was to get some kind of communication going, some line of communication with the people who sit on the Board and who live in the community. And we were stonewalled – I think that’s the correct term – by this comment that they could not have a meeting of three or more of their members without it becoming a “public” meeting. And to that, I say: Then let it be “public.” Let the public come to a meeting where all of you are sitting without a regular RIOC meeting going on and have a discussion with the people who are here supposedly representing. And that’s one of the communication problems that we’ve had in... on Roosevelt Island. Is that correct? Thank you. That’s it.

Stewart:

You will recall that, at the request of RIRA, there were three Board members, namely Mr. Ponton, Mr. Kraut, and myself, who came to, I think, three meetings.

Helstien:

Right.

Resident Board member Alberteen Anderson:

...I was....

Stewart:

Oh, I'm sorry. It was Anderson. And, speaking for myself, I was perfectly prepared to continue to come, but nobody asked me.

Helstien:

But that's not the point. It doesn't matter which of you. What the point of this is we were told that if three or more Board members came together, it would be considered a "public" Board meeting. And our point is, fine, let it be "public." And not taking any votes, come together and make an actual meeting with the community where you listen to what is going on and what's happening. You guys don't always know everything that's going on. We've understood that. Sometimes we need to tell you when there are problems or issues, and we were told that could not happen and the thing fell apart. That's the only question. I don't care which three or five or seven members come together, we wanted to meet with as many as possible...

Shane:

The "open meetings" requirements of the Public Authorities Law are a pain because they are quite often counter-productive. We cannot have, as I understand it, a "quorum" – and out of the nine members of the Board, that would be five – assemble in any one spot where they might do business.

Helstien:

Well, they're not going to do business. They're talking to the community...

Shane:

I cannot

Helstien:

They're not voting on anything.

Shane:

But they could, OK? That becomes...

Helstien:

Well, then perhaps its up to you, as the head of RIOC, and Ms. vanAmerongen to see, to go back to the people who wrote the law, or to go back to the State, and say we need to have a real decisive indication for a community. That's another thing. When you're talking about a Board that runs an entity that is an agency, but is not a community, that's another kind of thing. This is a community that we're talking about... We need to meet with the people who sit on this Board.

Shane:

I understand how difficult it is. And I understand that the Public Authorities Law is not particularly well-suited to RIOC

Helstien:

Can you get that fixed?

Shane:

No, I cannot

Helstien:

Well, we have an attorney on line. Why doesn't he look into seeing if there's a way to...

Shane:

Stop. This is a purely legislative matter. It is a law that is written and codified. So, in order to be able to be able to change it, you can't just have a lawyer change it. You have to back to the legislature and change it. And that requires a considerable effort through a whole host of steps, as you might guess, in order to change it only for Roosevelt Island.

Helstien:

What I would like is that we have elected representatives here. We have an elected State Assembly – well, we don't have a State Assembly person yet, we're now without. But we have a State Senator. We have all of these folks. You guys are in the State. Why can't you, on our behalf, talk with them about it; and when we do have an Assembly member, do something to try to find a way to make this, to change or to adjust or amend that legislation so that, for a community such as this, those kinds of impediments can be met, can be

Shane:

I'm sympathetic with your plight and

Helstien:

Then how do we resolve this?

Shane:

We can't resolve it. You must accept the fact that *we* cannot resolve it. This will require an act of the State legislature...

Helstien:

So we can meet with as many as four RIOC Board members, but not five at a time.

Shane:

That is correct.

Helstien:

How about if we put four in one room and two in another? Or three in another and we just go room to room?

Shane:

We have a bigger problem because we have a vacancy on the Board, so we're down to eight, so it can't be more than three at this point until we have a full Board. To the extent that you try and circumvent the meaning of the law...

Helstien:

I mean, who's going to care, really, about Roosevelt Island? If we meet with our Board members, is somebody really going to come after us, Sir?

Shane:

It's the law.

Helstien:

It's the law, but who's going to come after this community for meeting with the people who make our law, our rules here?

Shane:

We are officers of the Court, those of us who practice law

Helstien:

What is the worst that can happen to you? You'll be taken off the Board. That's a big...

Shane:

All of the members of this Board, under the Public Authorities Law, are sworn to uphold the Constitution of the State of New York and the laws duly enacted by the legislature thereof...

Helstien:

OK, all I'm asking...

Shane:

...and it will not behoove us, it will not behoove anybody to support activities which suborn those laws. And I am sympathetic with trying to get it amended, but I don't think anybody is going to support going around the back door.

Helstien:

Okay. I thank you.

Shane:

All right. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.

END