



Good morning,

My name is Geoffrey Croft. I am the president and founder of New York City Park Advocates.

The amount of commercial activity and events has exploded on city parkland. The City is increasingly relying on these revenue deals to help make up cuts in the city's general budget by turning our public parks into cash cows.

Ms. Smith's division at the parks department is now in charge of over \$110 million in revenue from concessions and lease agreements for parks.

Just two weeks ago Ms. Smith told Brian Lerher that the Mayor looks at the parks revenue when deciding the parks department's budget. This is outrageous. The mission of the parks department is not to provide revenue for the city, or prevent the public from accessing public parkland.

"We have achieved our target for 12 percent savings through our agency's revenue and expense budget," parks commissioner Adrian Benepe said last year.

As we are all aware, community based planning and consultation is a major source of contention in this administration with regard to parks. Many communities do not feel they have a say.

The recent attempt to seize a popular ballfield under the 59th St bridge is just one example: It began with a 'for profit' tennis club enclosing the park in a bubble for 6 months of the year. Over the years the private tennis group slowly encroached on this community's public space and 'the bubble' was eventually expanded to 8 months. Without community consultation or approval, the city made a 'behind closed door' deal to extend the tennis concession to 12 months a year.

Even though this ballfield is the only publicly accessible lit, non-asphalt field available for miles. Even though this community has the least amount of park and open space in the entire city, Mayor Bloomberg and Betsy Smith attempted to displace children and the community by taking it away. This agreement would have displaced hundreds of children and community residents in order to accommodate a pay-to-play concessionaire who charges the **highest rates** of any tennis facility on city parkland - up to \$180 an hour! The concessionaire planned to charge \$ 795 dollars per child, per week for their Summer camp which would have displaced children when they have few options.

This is **NOT** a public amenity but instead a private business being allowed to operate on city parkland!

The local community board had its first meeting about this issue three months AFTER the contract had also been signed with the concessionaire. Unfortunately this battle, like many others had to be played out in a very public battle in order for it to be resolved, in this case defeated. This is yet another example had the city sat down with the community in the *planning stages* long *before* they made this decision this could have been avoided. Simply sending a letter to a community board, or putting an ad in the City Record is not sufficient notification as they City is fully aware.

We are also helping to defeat the proposed tennis bubbles in Central Park as well: The City, it was recently revealed was already in negotiations with the chosen concessionaire *before* the local community board even had a chance to discuss the issue.

Randall's Island each year is consumed with commercial events that prohibit the public from accessing major parts of the island. For a fee, each year Mayor Bloomberg is allowed to rent out 24 acres on Randall's Island for this company's annual picnic. Many commercial events are being held on the island at the expense of the public. In fact the Randall's Island Sports Foundation and the City are now officially calling the southern area on the island an "Event Space." Who approved this?

And in Union Square, the City and the Union Square partnership have spent millions of dollars to develop a restaurant at the expense of children and the community. Despite having the **least** amount of playspace of any community board and the **highest** concentration of restaurants in the entire city, they are still trying to install a restaurant in the park's historic pavilion. The community wants the pavilion restored to its former use as a children's recreation center and community space.

And in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn Borough president Marty Markowitz and the Mayor are attempting to spend \$ 64 million dollars to install a 8,000 seat commercial amphitheater in the middle of a park in the middle of a quite residential community. This would destroy the community's only green space. More than 12 thousand people have signed a petition against this irresponsible project. The list goes on and on.

Enforcement is also a huge issue: The lack of full-time inspectors in the revenue division charged with enforcing the terms of more than 500 concessions must also be addressed.

In closing: Communities must have a say in significant land use decisions. Unfortunately tthis is not the case.

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