

## LOBBYLAND

Why is our neighborhood's City Council representative supporting the toxic expansion plan of the museum of natural history over the concerns of thousands of her constituents? The answer is simple: lobbyists. For several years, the museum has hired the best lobbyists money can buy, and charged them with influencing the Mayor, the City Council Speaker, and Councilmember Rosenthal on behalf of the museum's proposal.

The museum, according to the Joint Commission on Public Ethics, has spent nearly \$2,000,000 to influence Federal, city and state officials. They hired the Podesta Group, Manatt, Phelps Phillips and other high-powered firms to promote their expansion and to blunt the voices of opponents.

The lobbyists have been busy. First, they had to ensure the cooperation of the Parks Department. They had to convince the Parks Commissioner to betray his oath of office to "protect all parks" and sacrifice another part of Teddy Roosevelt Park, the intended site of the expansion. Then the lobbyists had to persuade state officials to disregard the alienation of parkland statutes, which are supposed to apply any time any part of a NYC park is annexed. Finally, they needed to recruit the City Council to allocate tens of millions of dollars to underwrite a huge portion of the museum's misguided proposal.

What do lobbyists do that enable them to persuade, convince and recruit this support? They offer. They offer opportunities to help elected officials advance their careers. They bundle campaign funds for electeds. They host fundraisers, sponsor meetings, hold meet & greets and connect our public servants to the goals of those who pay the lobbying firms.

In the case of the museum's expansion proposal, however, the lobbyists have run into a roadblock. They've confronted a community that loves its neighborhood park and doesn't want to see any more of it alienated. They've come up against a petition drive that garnered thousands of signatures opposing the expansion. And, now they face the prospect of losing the City Council seat, which is the lynchpin of their public financing hopes.

In Chicago, a year ago, another museum-in-the-park project met with a similarly resistant neighborhood. The community refused to be intimidated by the museum's prime sponsor, movie-maker, George Lucas. They refused to be cajoled into supporting the destruction of public parkland by their mayor and other elected officials. Ultimately, the museum proponents and their lobbyists were forced to give up.

I'd say it is our neighborhood's turn to stop the lobbyists and convince the Mayor and the museum that this fool-hardy plan should be abandoned.