



CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

September 8, 2004/Calendar No. 33

C 040459 MCM

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted by the Department of Parks and Recreation, pursuant to Section 197-c of the New York City Charter, for a major concession for an aquatic entertainment center and related facilities in an approximately 26 acre portion of Randall's Island Park, generally located east of the Harlem River, south of the Bronx Kill, and north and west of the Triborough Bridge (Block 1819, part of Lot 203), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 11.

The application for a major concession was filed by the Department of Parks and Recreation on May 14, 2004 in order to facilitate an aquatic entertainment center and related facilities on an approximately 26-acre site on Randall's Island generally bounded by the Harlem River on the west, the Bronx Kills on the north and the Triborough Bridge on the east and south.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) seeks approval of a major concession for the development, construction and operation of an aquatic entertainment center and related facilities on Randall's Island.

Randall's Island comprises the northern portion of Randall's and Ward's Island Park, which is located in the East River below the Triborough Bridge, between the Harlem and East Rivers, the South Bronx and Astoria, Queens. The park encompasses 400 acres of active and passive recreational areas. Developed by Parks Commissioner Robert Moses in the mid-1930's, the park has long served to meet the demand for active sports facilities and open space for city residents. While once separated by Little Hell Gate Channel, Randall's and Wards Island were connected by infill more than 30 years ago and are today one island.

In addition to recreational uses, Randall's and Ward's Island also several non-park related uses, such as the Fire Department training facility, Manhattan State Hospital, the Charles Gay Men's Shelter and the Ward's Island Wastewater Treatment Plant, all of which are located south of the proposed concession site. Bus service is provided by the M 35 bus, which provides access from the East 125th Street Lexington Avenue subway station to all facilities on the island. Direct vehicular access is provided by the Triborough Bridge from the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens. Pedestrian access to the island is also provided by the Triborough Bridge and by a pedestrian bridge at East 103rd Street in Manhattan.

Randall's and Ward's Island Park is managed in public/private partnership with DPR, by the Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF), which has created a master plan for the park. In addition to the proposed water park, the master plan calls for the future development of a performance amphitheater. A world-class track and field facility, to replace the recently demolished Downing Stadium, is under construction. Named Icahn Stadium, the new track and field facility is nearing completion. The proposed concession complements the aforementioned facilities and proposed improvements, and comprises a key development objective in the restoration and development of Randall's and Ward's Island Park into a modern entertainment and recreational venue.

The proposed concession is being developed in response to a Request for Proposals (RFP) issued by the New York City Economic Development Corporation, in partnership with the applicant and the Randall's Island Sports Foundation. The Aquatic Development Group, Inc., was

competitively selected as the developer and operator of the proposed water park concession. The proposed concession would offer year-round aquatic-based recreational activity within the City limits, serving residents that would otherwise have to travel to similar suburban and rural park venues.

Proposed Aquatic Entertainment Center

The proposed concession would facilitate the development of a 26-acre site that is located at the northwestern area of Randall's Island, north of the Manhattan approach to the Triborough Bridge and to the west of the bridge's Bronx approach. The site currently contains lawns, paved paths and ten baseball diamonds, all of which would be relocated, as part of the island's master plan. The proposed concession site also includes a 125-car parking lot used by the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, also to be relocated. Adjoining uses included the Department of Parks and Recreation's Five Borough Garage, which serves as a citywide maintenance and storage facility and a Police Department Harbor Patrol facility, located on the Harlem River southwest of the site. The aforementioned public facilities will remain and continue to operate in their present locations.

The proposed concession would offer a variety of family oriented attractions in two principal components: an outdoor water park (18.75 acres) that includes wave pools, speed slides and an "adventure river" that would circumnavigate the park; and an indoor beach club (7.25 acres). The indoor beach club would be operated year-round, while the outdoor component would only operate during the Summer months. It is projected that the proposed water park would attract 1.3

million annual visitors, of which approximately 900,000 visitors would come between Memorial and Labor Day.

During the peak summer season, the proposed water park would need a maximum of 728 parking spaces on weekdays and 2,150 parking spaces on weekends and holidays. Moreover, approximately 23-29 parking spaces would be needed for charter buses. To accommodate the projected parking demand, as part of the island's master plan, the total number of parking spaces on the island for park-related uses would be increased from 1,000 to at least 2,800 spaces and would be generally located beneath the Triborough Bridge and near east of the track and field facility and the proposed stadium. A shuttle tram would be provided to transport visitors between parking areas and the entry plaza to the proposed water park.

It is anticipated that the park would employ approximately 600-700 seasonal workers during the peak summer months and offer approximately 125-150 year-round positions. Moreover, approximately 25-30 managerial positions, some of which would not require water park-specific experience, would also be available.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This application (C 040459 MCM) was reviewed pursuant to the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), and the SEQRA regulations set forth in Volume 6

of the New York Code of Rules and Regulations, Section 617.00 et seq. and the City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Rules of Procedure of 1991 and Executive Order No. 91 of 1977. The designated CEQR number is 02DPR010M. The lead agency is the Department of Parks and Recreation.

After a study of the potential environmental impact of the proposed action, a Negative Declaration was issued on April 23, 2004.

UNIFORM LAND USE REVIEW

This application (C 040459 MCM) was certified as complete by the Department of City Planning on May 24, 2004, and was duly referred to Community Board 11 and the Borough President, in accordance with Article 3 of the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) rules.

Community Board Public Hearing

Community Board 11 held a public hearing on this application on June 15, 2004, and on that date, by a vote of twenty-four to two with four abstentions, adopted a resolution recommending approval of the application.

Borough President Recommendation

This application was considered by the Borough President, who issued a recommendation approving the application on June 29, 2004.

City Planning Commission Public Hearing

On July 28, 2004, (Calendar No. 11), the City Planning Commission scheduled August 11, 2004 for a public hearing on this application (C 040459 MCM). The hearing was duly held on August 11, 2004 (Calendar No. 16). There were four speakers in favor of the application and none in opposition. The four speakers in support represented the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF), the Economic Development Corporation and the developer, Aquatic Development Group, Inc..

Representatives from the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) described the economic benefits of the concession agreement, stating that the proposal would generate significant revenue for the City. The representative from EDC further described the proposed ticket structure. It is anticipated that the proposed admission price would be comparable to the nationwide average of approximately \$30 for adults and \$25 for children. However, the speaker further stated that most amusement park patrons do not pay the full admissions price and that discounts would be made available to reduce the ticket price.

The representative from the Randall's Island Sports Foundation spoke about the RISF's summer recreation programs and how the proposed water park/concession would enhance their ability to provide year-round aquatic fun and water safety instruction for the area's children. She stated

that the RISF provides free summer camp and that campers would be allowed to attend the water park for free as part of the camp's program. She also underscored the extensive outreach to be undertaken by the RISF to promote employment opportunities in the proposed water park.

The concession developer described the different elements of the proposal. He stated that his firm, Aquatic Development Group, Inc. (ADG), has extensive experience in managing water parks throughout the country. ADG also manufactures and would oversee construction of the water park's entertainment elements, such as water slides and wave pools.

There were no other speakers and the hearing was closed.

Waterfront Revitalization Program Consistency Review

This application was reviewed by the Department of City Planning for consistency with the policies of the New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program (WRP), as amended, approved by the New York City Council on October 13, 1999 and by the New York State Department of State on May 28, 2002, pursuant to the New York State Waterfront Revitalization and Coastal Resources Act of 1981 (New York State Executive Law, Section 910 et seq.). The designated WRP number is WRP04-03.

This action was determined to be consistent with the policies of the New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program. This consistency determination is only applicable to the information

received and the current project proposal. Any additional information or project modifications would require an independent consistency review.

CONSIDERATION

The Commission believes that the application by the Department of Parks and Recreation for a major concession for a water park on Randall's Island is appropriate.

The proposed concession would facilitate the development of a 26-acre aquatic recreational facility. The site is located at the northwestern area of Randall's Island, north and west of the Manhattan and Bronx approaches, respectively, to the Triborough Bridge.

The proposed concession would offer a variety of family oriented attractions that include outdoor wave pools, speed slides and an "adventure river" that would circumnavigate the park, and an indoor beach club. The indoor beach club would be operated year-round, while the outdoor component would only operate during the Summer months. It is projected that the proposed water park would attract 1.3 million annual visitors, of which approximately 900,000 visitors would come between Memorial and Labor Day.

During the course of its review, the Commission expressed concerns regarding local hiring, ticket affordability for area residents, athletic programs for neighborhood youth, pedestrian access, projected park attendance and ballfield displacement.

In response to concerns raised by the Commission, in a letter dated August 18, 2004, the applicant stated that they had met with Community Board 11 and the local Councilman's representatives to discuss future employment opportunities for area residents in the proposed water park. The applicant indicated that they would undertake a comprehensive outreach effort to engage and hire the local labor pool. Community outreach would include, but not be limited to job postings on the websites of Manhattan Community Board 11 and the Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF). Additionally, the Randall's Island Sports Foundation would reach out to high schools in the surrounding area and collaborate with the Department of Small Business Services-Employment Division to promote employment opportunities in the proposed water park.

Regarding ticket prices, the applicant further stated in their August 18, 2004 correspondence that the anticipated ticket or gate price would be in line with the national average, approximately \$30 for adults and \$25 for children. They further stated that more than 50 percent of visitors to amusement parks do not pay the full admission prices. Reduced-priced tickets, generally offered in the form of midweek, group and on-line discounts, can reduce the cost by \$3.00 to \$7.00 per ticket.

With respect to current and future programs for less-advantaged children in the surrounding neighborhoods, the Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF) informed the Commission that they currently provide free summer camp on Randall's Island for the children from the surrounding communities. Further, RISF would provide learn-to-swim programs for neighborhood children at the proposed aquatic facility, and would continue to expand its menu of athletic programs for area children, as new ballfields and facilities, such as the nearly completed Icahn track and field facility, become available for use. Moreover, summer campers would attend the water park for free as part of the camp's program.

During its review, the Commission also raised concerns regarding pedestrian access to the proposed water park. The Commission was informed by the applicant that the primary pedestrian access to Randall's Island is provided by the Ward's Island pedestrian bridge, which connects to the East River Esplanade at East 103rd Street in Manhattan. Pedestrian access is also provided by the Triborough Bridge by means of six-foot-wide walkways accessible from Hoyt Avenue and 26th Street in Astoria, Queens and from East 125th Street in Manhattan. Pedestrian access is also available via stairs/ramps from East 134th Street and Cypress Avenue in the Bronx.

With respect to projected park attendance, the applicant stated that the proposed aquatic park would attract approximately 1.3 million annual visitors, which would peak in August when the projected attendance would be approximately 272,130 visitors for that month. The applicant also estimated that there would be approximately 5,443 visitors per day and 14,843 visitors on any given weekend. To accommodate the projected number of visitors, the Randall's Island

Sports Foundation, as part of the master plan, would increase parking from 1,000 to at least 2,800 spaces, which would be available for use by anyone using any of the island's recreational resources. Parking would also be provided for 23-29 charter buses. A shuttle tram system would be instituted to transport passengers from the parking areas to the proposed water park.

Additionally, the applicant has informed the Commission that they have coordinated with MTA New York City Transit to expand bus service to Randall's Island to serve the proposed water park.

The Commission notes that the proposed concession would displace 10 ballfields. In response, the applicant stated that the ballfields would be relocated to other locations throughout the island and reconfigured to provide larger venues for field sports, such as baseball, football and soccer. However, such reconfiguration would not reduce the existing number of ballfields on the island.

The Commission believes that the proposed concession would facilitate the development a modern facility that would provide year-round aquatic recreation for the city. The proposed concession would provide Harlem and South Bronx youth additional opportunities for summer jobs and would further enhance the Randall's Island Sport Foundation's ability to provide innovative year-round athletic programs for the city's youth. The proposed concession would also generate additional revenue for the city. The Commission, therefore, believes that the approval of a major concession for the construction, maintenance and operation of a water park on Randall's Island is appropriate.

RESOLUTION

RESOLVED, that the City Planning Commission finds that the action described herein will have no significant impact on the environment; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the City Planning Commission, in its capacity as the City Coastal Commission, has reviewed the waterfront aspects of this application and finds that the proposed action is consistent with WRP policies; and be it further

RESOLVED, by the City Planning Commission, pursuant to Sections 197-c of the New York City Charter, that based on the environmental determination, and the consideration described in this report, the application (C 040459 MCM) by the Department of Parks and Recreation, pursuant to Section 197-c of the New York City Charter, for a major concession for an aquatic entertainment center and related facilities in an approximately 26 acre portion of Randall's Island Park, generally located east of the Harlem River, south of the Bronx Kill, and north and east of the Triborough Bridge (Block 1819, part of Lot 203), Borough of Manhattan, Community

District 11, as generally shown on drawings submitted with the application on May 14, 2004, is approved.

The above resolution, (C 040459 MCM), duly adopted by the City Planning Commission on September 8, 2004 (Calendar No. 33), is filed with the Office of the Speaker, City Council, and the Borough President in accordance with the requirements of Section 197-d of the New York City Charter.

AMANDA M. BURDEN, AICP, Chair
KENNETH J. KNUCKLES, ESQ., Vice-Chairman
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