

Testimony
Hudson River Park Trust Public Hearing
Pier 55
January 12, 2015

Good evening members of the Board of the Hudson River Park Trust. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the proposed lease agreement between the Trust and the Pier 55 not for profit organization. I think this is a great opportunity to develop a unique public space and provide our residents with an outdoor, waterfront venue for cultural events.

My main concerns center around one issue – ensuring maximum public access to the Pier and to its events.

Disabled Access

At an initial meeting on Pier 55 I had raised the issue of access for those with disabilities. We were told that the northeast corner of the Park which slopes upward to a greater elevation than the rest of the pier, would not be fully accessible. I am heartened to learn that a viewing area with a similar view will be constructed adjacent to this area which is fully accessible. It is important to allow the elderly, and those with physical challenges, to access the same views and have the same experience as all other visitors.

Public Access to the Pier Generally

Second, it is important in this and other public/private partnerships for public space improvements to ensure maximum public access. I understand that a primary purpose of this pier is to promote cultural events and having attractive space for such events enriches our City.

However, I am concerned that the lease language, in an effort to afford flexibility to the tenant, lacks adequate safeguards against public park uses being overwhelmed by permitted events.

The lease allows for permitted events to be held no more than 6 days a week during the six month season and for 8 consecutive uninterrupted weeks. In fact, a provision that requires a minimum of only four days a month to be free of permitted events – and then excludes the 8 weeks of consecutive permitted events

from that requirement – could conceivably result in just over 2 weeks in a six month season being free of permitted events.

I appreciate that the general language on permitted events evidences an intent that only the space needed for the permitted event is to be off limits to the public and that there are 3 spaces for permitted events – the central plaza, the amphitheater and the southern lawn space. However, the specific provisions on limiting access for permitted events specifically allow the tenant to limit access to other areas including those for furniture and equipment, queuing and crowd circulation and crowd control and public safety. While I am sure it is not the intent, I fear that this could allow large portions of the Pier to be off limits to the public for the majority of a season and for the entirety of the 8 week period which could occur between, for example, the Fourth of July and Labor Day.

I would ask that the number of days without permitted events be increased and that limitations on the portions of the Pier that can be closed be added to the lease.

Public Access to Permitted Events

I appreciate the language in the lease that requires a majority of permitted events to be free or low cost events. In our initial meeting on Pier 55 with the Trust, however, we were told that the low cost would range from \$5 to \$45. I am concerned that the higher end of this range -- \$20 to \$45 – would render many of these permitted events off limits to a large segment of New Yorkers. One of the amazing things about this proposal is the opportunity to bring cultural events – concerts, theater, public speakers – to a large segment of our residents in a beautiful setting. I know that is the goal of both the Trust and the Operator so toward that end I make the following recommendations:

1. That language be put into the lease limiting low cost to an affordable amount;
2. That provisions be made for groups of school children and seniors to attend events for free ; and
3. That programming be targeted to all demographic segments of the City's population.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I hope you will consider my recommendations to ensure that the benefits that are sure to result from this public space are enjoyed by as many New Yorkers as possible.