

**Testimony of City Council Candidate Benjamin Kallos for the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island before the City Planning Commission Public Hearing ULURP Review on February 6, 2013 for Items 20 – 23 relating to the Cornell NYC Tech Campus**

Testimony by Joseph Strong, Campaign Co-Director for Roosevelt Island

My name is Joseph Strong, I am the Co-Director for Roosevelt Island, here on behalf of Benjamin Kallos a Democratic candidate for New York City Council seeking to succeed Jessica Lappin in representing the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island where the Cornell NYC Tech is currently seeking approval for this ULURP.

The core value of our campaign is to have a City and State government that better serves the people with improved transparency, openness, accountability and a vision for a better city. To that end, much like the City Planning Commission our testimony will focus on how you can use your power to approve the application before you with modifications under Section 2-06.

We are submitting for the consideration of the NYC Planning Committee, comments regarding the creation of the Special District (zoned C4-5) on Southern Roosevelt Island. The creation of this district as currently proposed, would significantly affect the environment of Roosevelt Island. Particularly impacted will be the operation and services provided to the island and its residents by its governing body, the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC).

*Sustainability Means That Cornell NYC Tech Must Support Their Own Infrastructure*

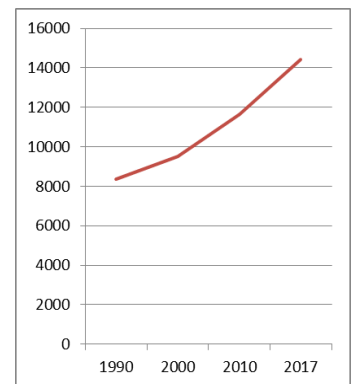
As a campaign to represent Roosevelt Island in the City Council we will be tasked with a responsibility to pass an annual City Budget supporting the needs of all constituents in the district. However, Roosevelt Island is in a unique position because the City of New York has never included the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) in its budget. In addition to the lack of support from the City of New York, in 1997, Governor George Pataki declared Roosevelt Island financially “self-sufficient,” and removed the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation from the State budget. Without City or State support, RIOC is stuck paying the bill but has been able to be self-sufficient and provide services to the community.

**“Cornell NYC Tech can’t claim to be sustainable unless it supports the local infrastructure of Roosevelt Island on which it relies.”**

RIOC currently solely funds infrastructure upon which Cornell NYC Tech (“Cornell”) will rely, including transportation to and from the island, by maintaining the tram, the roads, the “helix,” sanitation (AVAC) services, and the public safety department. All of these services are funded by the ground leases of developments on Roosevelt Island.

Cornell is receiving billions of dollars in windfall in the form of 12.5 acres of land on Roosevelt Island. However, Cornell's campus, unlike the buildings already on the island, will not contribute any funds to RIOC. Unlike the other land-leases held by the developments, Cornell will not pay a penny for its 99-year lease of 12.5 acres of land, which represents 8.5% of the 147 acres of land on Roosevelt Island.

Roosevelt Island is struggling to support existing infrastructure with some of the largest growth in New York City. With the addition of 1,500 residences on the Island, population has grown from 8,345 in the 1990 census to 9,520 in the 2000 census to 11,661 in the 2010 census. Cornell's proposed plan will increase the population of the Island by at least 20% with 2,780 residents including students and faculty. This dramatic growth in local population not to mention non-residents who will be using the campus will put a huge strain on existing infrastructure. Cornell NYC Tech cannot claim to be sustainable unless it supports the local infrastructure of Roosevelt Island on which it relies.



Hosting Cornell on Roosevelt Island will require numerous infrastructure improvements. The seawall around the Island, including the areas near the Special District, is in need of repairs. Planned changes to the seawall during the campus's construction should take place alongside repairs and modernization of this vital piece of Roosevelt Island infrastructure. Additionally, the Roosevelt Island Helix and the Island's streets, which will be used during construction and once construction is completed, will require increased maintenance. Cornell cannot expect to make use of Roosevelt Island's only driving link to the rest of New York without helping maintain it.

Cornell's current short-sighted, zero-sum approach has them positioned against existing residents, relying on a sweetheart deal that does not require the university to contribute a penny toward Roosevelt Island infrastructure, while seemingly failing to realize that the same problems that current residents express will be magnified for Cornell's own constituency after construction is complete.

A Roosevelt Island without adequate transportation because they cannot afford to maintain the tram, helix and roads will be a Cornell campus that is inaccessible.

A Roosevelt Island without intact seawalls is a multimillion dollar Cornell campus under water.

Regardless of the deal offered to Cornell, it is in Cornell's best interest to voluntarily commit to supporting the infrastructure on Roosevelt Island to provide for its students, faculty, and partners, who will need to easily access a campus that is not underwater.

The City Planning Commission must recommend that Cornell agree to contribute towards the infrastructure of Roosevelt Island, and the Special District should be approved with the amendment that it be subdivided so that all spaces not used for open space or educational purposes automatically support local infrastructure.

*Rethinking Long Term Zoning and Phasing of Cornell Construction*

The City Planning Commission with community support will rezone a location with a specific project in mind by a specific entity. But all too often, that specific project will fall through, leaving the newly rezoned land open to a new entity to develop a completely different project that often does not match the needs and desires of the City Planning Commission and community that originally supported the zoning change. We ask that this ULURP be narrowly tailored to this specific project and entity so that if the project falls through the land cannot be used by a new entity to build a completely different project.

Pertaining to section 133-50, an additional section should be added requiring completion of all academic buildings before the construction of residential or commercial buildings. Cornell should not receive a certificate of occupancy until academic buildings in that phase are completed. This will ensure that Cornell meets its goals of having a fully functioning educational campus by 2017.

Moreover, section 133-00 should be amended and narrowly tailored so that only Cornell NYC Tech or a similar educational body may use the Special District, and only for specific purposes. Section 133-00 should be amended to require that Cornell NYC Tech designate no less than a certain amount of floor space for academic, research, and community use. This amendment should also include a limit on residential or commercial construction on the site.

As written, 133-00(b), which allows for “a mix of residential, retail and other commercial uses,” strays too far from Cornell’s primary mission as an educational institution. More than 75% of the space within the Special District should be required to be allocated for academic and community use.

Additionally, the City Planning Commission should cap the total number of occupants for which the Department of Buildings may provide a certificate of occupancy in order to conform to Cornell’s current projections and not to exceed 5,000 in total occupants for all building in the entire Special District.

The City Planning Commission should approve the Special District with an amendment providing for:

- A requirement to build academic buildings first;
- A requirement that the site be 75% academic or community use; and
- Cap the total number of occupants that the Department of Buildings may provide a certificate of occupancy for in order to conform to Cornell’s current projections and not to exceed 5,000 in total occupants for all building in the entire Special District;

*The Cornell NYC Tech Campus Must Be Fully Accessible for the Disabled*

Roosevelt Island was founded on the enlightened idea that it be a fully disabled-accessible island; it is only natural that the Cornell site include the need of being 100% disabled accessible.

A certain amount of seating is currently required to be provided per square foot of open space by 133-32(d). In order to ensure equal access to public spaces for people with disabilities, we urge that 133-32(d) be amended to require that any fixed seating be accompanied by movable seating where wheelchair bound disabled may have equal access.

*Amending the ULURP to Conform with Cornell's Public Presentation of the ULURP*

The plans that Cornell NYC Tech has presented to the community provide much more than the 20% green-space required in 133-32(d). We recommend that the City Planning Commission approve 133-32(d) with the amendment that the section conform to the 35% presented to the public.

*The Cornell NYC Tech Campus Must Support Access by Bicycle*

With regards to bike parking, New York City has seen increased use of bicycles for travel and recreational use. Section 133-00(e) encourages alternative forms of transportation by eliminating required parking and placing a cap on permitted car parking. Because of its location and infrastructure, biking on Roosevelt Island is a convenient and viable alternative to driving. We fully support the requirement for bicycle parking and suggest an amendment to create bicycle lanes within the Special District in order to provide a safe and accessible commute to those traveling to and from the campus by bicycle.

Our campaign has taken a strong stance with the Roosevelt Island Residents Association and the Community Board in support of the BikeShare program and bringing it to Roosevelt Island. We request an amendment to specifically provide space for a BikeShare station upon request by the City.

*Conclusion*

The City Planning Commission is responsible for the conduct of planning relating to the orderly growth and development of the City, including adequate and appropriate resources for the housing, business, industry, transportation, distribution, recreation, culture, comfort, convenience, health and welfare of its population.

Please approve Cornell's ULURP with the amendments we and other representatives of Roosevelt Island have proposed in order to provide for the responsible planning and orderly development of the Island with adequate and appropriate infrastructure for existing residents as well as Cornell.