

ONLINE-OFFSHORE: News from the Governors Island Alliance
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A periodic newsletter by and for people who care about metropolitan New York and its “new” (300-year-old+) special space. The Governors Island Alliance is an association of 30-plus local, regional and national organizations dedicated to planning, conservation, historic preservation and the environment. To be deleted from the e-mailing list, to ask questions, or to submit letters for publication go to governorsisland@rpa.org.

Glossary: GIPEC is the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation, the state-and-city agency that owns most of the Island: www.gipec.org. NPS is the National Park Service, parent of the Governors Island National Monument (Fort Jay, Castle Williams and land between: www.governorsislandnationalmonument.org. GIA is us.

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GIPEC’s PUBLIC MEETING

More than 200 people turned out for GIPEC’s second public meeting, held on October 19 in a large hall at the Fashion Institute of Technology on West 22nd Street in Manhattan. The purpose was to expose the four concepts for Island development that GIPEC is pondering, and to invite public comment – of which, surprisingly, there was little given the large attendance. The four concepts are based on the 101 responses to its earlier Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI). They are, essentially, 1.) wide open park space, labeled Minimum Build, 2.) Destination Island: an entertainment and amusement park (3.) Innovation Island: a research park and 4.) Iconic Island: a mix of an amphitheater, a gallery, an ecocenter and a beach. At an earlier presentation in City Hall, cost estimates ranged from \$212 million for “minimum build” to \$368 million for “full build.”

These are not “either-or” proposals, but an attempt to package four general scenarios for the Island’s development. Selecting from these and other ideas, GIPEC plans to issue a draft general project plan and a formal Request For Proposals (RFP) early next year. No construction is contemplated before 2008. (The Slatin Report, a real estate newsletter, headlined its article about the meeting: *Isle of Wait.*) .

Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff, current chairman of the GIPEC board, opened the meeting with a pledge that “the Mayor and I are making Governors Island one of our top priorities.” He also mentioned Brooklyn Bridge Park, the East River Waterfront Park and the High Line. “Great cities are defined by great places,” Doctoroff said, “and Governors Island is undeniably a great place.”

GIPEC's acting president Paul Kelly promised "numerous public meetings," this one being only the second since GIPEC took control of the Island in early 2003. The next one is tentatively scheduled for February in connection with the release of the RFP's.

Two real estate consultants to GIPEC also spoke: David Malmuth, of Robert Charles Lesser & Co., based in Bethesda, Maryland, and Joe Berridge, co-founder of Urban Strategies Inc., based in Toronto. Malmuth cited three "key findings" – the issue of transportation to and from the Island, the need to repair and rehabilitate structures for future use, and a plan to level all buildings in the southern, non-historic end of the Island. Berridge, describing various merits of the four scenarios, said that a research park could play a strategic role in the future of New York City. With the "iconic" scenario, the Island's development would be more flexible, he said, less dependent on a theme park configuration that could become outdated.

Details of the four scenarios can be viewed on the GIPEC website: www.govisland.com. Click on the link to the "demonstration panels" and scroll through several pages until you come to Minimum Build, Destination Island, Iconic Island and Innovation Island. This link is more accessible than the link to the "presentation," which requires a Power Point installation.

A list of the 101 respondents to the RFEI – from A (Added Value) to Z (Zapp Building Companies), including two from London and one each from Belgium and Brazil – is also posted on the GIPEC site. It gives names and addresses, but not what they proposed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Among those who intervened at the GIPEC meeting, Robert Pirani of the Regional Plan Association, executive director of the GIA, made three points: 1.) Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki must commit \$200 million "now – up front" for the infrastructure, laying out parks, repairing historic buildings and improving ferry service, 2.) GIPEC should start developing a plan for at least 40 acres of real parkland – designed space, not just open acreage – and a continuous waterfront esplanade with boating facilities on the rim of the Island, and 3.) GIPEC should start planning and allocate staff for early uses of the Island, starting next summer. [On the last point, the proposal to move the Harbor High School to the Island from Brooklyn in the fall of 2006 has been thwarted by GIPEC's decision that there won't be any construction work until 2008. Meanwhile Harbor High, currently installed in Bushwick High, is looking for new waterfront quarters.]

Carter Craft, director of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, spoke at the meeting in favor of Staten Island-class ferries making a triangular run that would link the southern tip of Manhattan, the Island and Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. It would be beneficial in normal use, he said, as well as in an emergency evacuation.

City Councilman David Yassky, chairman of the Waterfronts Committee, was represented by Neal Kronley, a member of his staff. Yassky's statement said, among other things: "Unfortunately, development is behind schedule. These delays translate into increased costs. The Mayor and Governor should dedicate funds now.... The 40 acres of open [parkland] space should be a minimum requirement, not a maximum, and should maximize the amount of contiguous open space.... GIPEC should adopt restrictive

language to ensure that uses benefiting the public are implemented prior to, or simultaneously with, revenue generating uses.”

Suzanne Wertz, representing the New York Chapter of the AIA, and several others cited below supported the points raised by the G.I.A. and added one of her own. She pointed out that one of the scenarios included a tower of unknown height. If GIPEC presented a three-dimensional model of the plan, the tower would be noticeable and people could discuss its appropriateness, but in two-dimension posters and online images no one can see what it does to the landscape.

Geoffrey Ryan of New York City Audubon urged that consideration be given to the importance of the Island for migratory birds passing through the Harbor in the spring and fall.

Several people who could not attend the meeting sent written statements:

David Sharps, president of the floating Waterfront Museum on the Brooklyn waterfront, urged GIPEC to provide docking for historic and education vessels: “Historic vessels could be used not only in the long run but also during any interim use period to provide creative programming, attract media attention and to signal the public that the Island park is coming to fruition.”

Robin Dropkin, executive director of Parks & Trails New York, said in a statement, “Public commitments for contiguous parkland, historic preservation and public access for Governors Island must occur before and not after development deals are made.”

Written comments are still being accepted. Send them to comments-gipec@empire.state.ny.us or mail to: GIPEC, 10 South Street, Battery Maritime Building, Slip 7, New York, NY 10004.

SUMMER VISITORS

Estimating the number of people who visit the Island when it is open to the public is not an exact science, but an unofficial estimate puts it at 13,000 last summer. That’s some 3,000 less than the summer of 2004 for several known reasons and probably some unknown. For one thing, the season was shorter, ending September 11 instead of September 25; in those two extra weeks last year there were 2,000 visitors. Another thing: Weather – many oppressively hot days this year, and pouring rain on one of the two days of Open House New York in October, when museums and parks and lots of other places are open to the public. GIPEC’s ability to generate attractive programming on the Island was limited due to lack of funding. A staff position for helping organize public uses of the Island was never filled, so the burden falls on existing staff.

FALL VISITORS

A covey of stage, screen and TV stars spent most of October on the Island, filming an adaptation of Rebecca Gilman’s hit play *Spinning into Butter*. It’s a story about the investigation of a hate crime against an African-American student at a New England college – think Pershing Hall in the cluster of 1930’s buildings at the north end of the Island, the 1890’s Victorian houses on Nolan Park and the 100-year-old neo-Gothic Chapel of St. Cornelius the Centurion. The human cast includes Sarah Jessica Parker, Beau Bridges, Miranda Richardson and Mikelti Williamson. Filming lasted three weeks, plus another two setting up and tearing down – the longest rental to date. “The variety of

looks here has exceeded our expectations,” said producer Lou Pitt. “After all, we are filming New England in New York City.” He pronounced the GIPEC staff “immensely cooperative” and said “we are having a wonderful experience.”

The Island participated again in Open House New York, an architectural event which lets people see private residences, galleries, institutions and other places usually closed to the public. As anyone who has visited the Island knows, its architecture is a sight to behold. This year’s Open House came on the second weekend of rainy October this year. Rain reduced the Saturday turnout. Sunday was a nicer day and a bigger turnout.

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