

April 1, 2013

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Executive Chamber
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224-0341

Re: Democracy for Roosevelt Island

Dear Governor Cuomo:

As a City Council candidate for the 5th District, which includes Roosevelt Island, I have been supporting “Democracy for Roosevelt Island” through my community’s hard fought battle for the freedoms and democracy appreciated by all other residents of New York City. This is because, unlike the rest of the City, Roosevelt Island is managed by Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (ROIC), a New York State Agency whose board members are appointed by the Governor.

Roosevelt Island activist and former Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA) President Matthew Katz brought to our campaign’s attention that there is now a vacancy on the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) Board as a result of the resignation of Sal Ferrara, a non-resident who was appointed in June of 2011 without being elected by Roosevelt Island residents.

We request that the Governor *restore democracy* to Roosevelt Island by filling this vacancy with a Roosevelt Island resident elected by fellow residents.

This past November, RIRA conducted an election where all Roosevelt Island residents who were voting for the President of the United States were given the opportunity to select candidates for appointment to the RIOC Board by your office. Larry Parnes and Lydia Tang won this election with 992 and 984 votes respectively.

Please join your predecessors, Governor Eliot Spitzer and Governor David Paterson, as a hero for democracy by appointing these candidates, Larry Parnes or Lydia Tang to fill Mr. Ferrara’s vacant seat on the RIOC Board, by priority of their total votes.

Both these candidates represent Roosevelt Islands’ vision for its future. Their passion and activism for the Island is equally matched by their experience. Mr. Parnes is a current member of Community Board 8 Manhattan and former Deputy Executive Director of the Department of City Planning. Ms. Tang is a businesswoman, civil servant and college professor. You can learn more about them by reading their biographies featured in the Main Street Wire for November 3, 2012, available at <http://old.nyc10044.com/wire/3305/WIRE.PDF>



Sal Ferrara
Resigned



Larry Parnes
992 votes



Lydia Tang
984 votes

The community has worked for more than a quarter of a century to restore democracy to Roosevelt Island, and as a candidate for City Council, it is an honor to help lead the charge.

The Thirty Year Struggle for Democracy on Roosevelt Island¹

As you may know, your father, Governor Mario Cuomo, created the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation in 1984.

Roosevelt Island Residents Appointed to RIOC

Fifteen years later, in 1997, the effort to hold direct elections of Roosevelt Island residents to fill the seven (7) public board seats began. In 1998, State Assembly Member Pete Grannis first introduced legislation to replace appointees with elected board members to the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation. In 2002, Governor George Pataki endorsed legislation from Grannis mandating that residents occupy at least five of RIOC's seven public seats.

Roosevelt Island Resident Elections to RIOC

In 2007, Governor Eliot Spitzer endorsed the idea of holding Island-wide elections to nominate residents for his appointment to Board seats. In 2008, Governor David Paterson appointed four of the top vote-getters from the first Island-wide election. In 2010, Governor Paterson appointed the top two vote-getters from the second Island-wide election, which took place in May 2009.

Democracy Lost on Roosevelt Island

In 2011, current Governor Andrew Cuomo appointed Sal Ferrara, an unelected non-resident, to a vacant seat. In February 2012, a third election was held, and the results of the top vote getters were sent to Governor Cuomo. A fourth election was held in November 2012 before the resignation of Sal Ferrara.

Fighting for Democracy on Roosevelt Island *30 Year Fight Continues After Completion of Four Freedoms Monument to FDR*



Gov. Mario Cuomo

1984 Creates Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC)



Gov. George Pataki

2002 Requires that half the RIOC Board live on Roosevelt Island



Gov. Eliot Spitzer

2007 Approves Direct Elections of Roosevelt Island residents to RIOC Board



Gov. David Paterson

6/2008 & 5/2009 Appoints Four Top Candidates from First Election and Reappoints Resident Serving since 1994.

1/2010 Appoints Two Top Candidates and Reappoints Resident Elected in 2008

Milestone All 7 Board Members are Residents with 6 Elected



Gov. Andrew Cuomo

6/2011 Appoints unelected non-resident to vacant seat

2013 Choice to Restore or Destroy Democracy?

¹ "Roosevelt Island Residents Meet with NY State Governor Cuomo's Secretary Larry Schwartz - Discuss Democracy, RIOC Board Elections and Appointment of Non Residents to the Board," Roosevelt Islander, January 9, 2013 featuring the enclosed briefing submitted by RIRA President Matthew Katz available at <http://rooseveltislander.blogspot.com/2013/01/roosevelt-island-residents-meet-with-ny.html>

We are now calling on you as Governor to:

- (a) appoint a resident-elected candidate to fill the current vacancy on RIOC Board; and
- (b) propose “Democracy for Roosevelt Island” as a program bill; and
- (c) pledge to fill all upcoming vacancies with residents elected in the most recent elections in order of those with the most votes;

Please be the hero we know you to be by restoring democracy to Roosevelt Island.

Respectfully requested,



Benjamin Kallos

DEMOCRACY and THE ROOSEVELT ISLAND OPERATING CORPORATION

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- 1984 Legislation creates the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), a public benefit corporation, to administer and further develop the residential community.
- 1984-97
(and
beyond) Many decisions that adversely affect the community and residents are made by non-resident Board members and managers, who are ill-equipped to grasp and solve local problems and capitalize on local opportunities. In addition, patronage and/or conflicts of interest characterize most Board and executive appointments.
- 1997 Fed-up residents begin seeking both better Island administration and representative democracy, with direct election of residents to all seven public Board seats. (In advisory referenda conducted during the ensuing years, large turnouts repeatedly indicate overwhelming community support, ranging from 80-96%.)
- 2002 **Governor George Pataki endorses legislation mandating that residents occupy five of the Board's seven public seats.** (There are two *ex officio* seats.)
- 2007 **Governor Eliot Spitzer's administration offers residents the opportunity to create an Island-wide election to nominate residents for his appointment to Board seats.**
- 6/2008
& 5/2009 **Governor David Paterson appoints four of the top vote-getters from the first election (2/2008), and reappoints an unelected resident first appointed in 1994.**
- 1/2010 **Governor Paterson appoints the top two vote-getters from the second election (5/2009), and reappoints a 2008 elected appointee whose term was only one year. *Of the seven public Board members, all are residents and six are community nominees.***
- 6/2011 **Governor Andrew Cuomo appoints an unelected non-resident to the just-expired seat of an elected resident.** The other two resident Board members with expired appointments (one of them unelected) continue to serve.
- 2/2012 **Residents hold a third election, for three expired seats, and send Governor Cuomo the names of the three top vote-getters as the community's nominees.** The highest vote-getter is the former elected-resident member who was replaced in 6/2011 by the unelected non-resident; the other two are incumbents. **There is no gubernatorial response.**
- 11/2012 **Residents hold a fourth election, for the three seats whose appointments will expire in mid-2013, and send Governor Cuomo the names of the three top vote-getters as the community's nominees for this separate group of seats.** One nominee is an incumbent. **The resumes of the two non-incumbents are requested by, and provided to, the Appointments Office.**

DEMOCRACY and THE ROOSEVELT ISLAND OPERATING CORPORATION

REQUESTS

In light of this history of Roosevelt Islanders striving for local democracy, and with knowledge of Governor Cuomo's commitment to "strong and vibrant urban communities," we are respectfully seeking the following:

Ultimate Goal

Legislation providing that all seven public RIOC Board members be

- Roosevelt Island residents
- elected by the Roosevelt Island community
- seated in order of election results (even if executive appointment and legislative approval must be retained because Board members are State officers)

Intermediate Goals

Restoration of our recent electoral precedent

- by having the nominees from our February 2012 election be appointed to the three expired seats. (Two nominees are incumbents; the other, a former Board member, would replace an unelected resident. See related request below, in Regularization of Board term expirations.)
- by having the nominees from our November 2012 election be appointed in June-July 2013 to the three seats that will expire then. (One nominee is an incumbent.)

A Memorandum of Understanding

- documenting agreement to the Intermediate Goals.
- agreeing to honor our Ultimate Goal, while the legislation is sought, by continuing the process of recognizing our elections (which, in the future, will always precede expirations).

Regularization of Board term expirations (related to February 2012 election goal, above)

- Durations of Board terms are covered by the legislation governing RIOC, but expirations are not. They appear to have been set by the timings of the first appointments.
- The term expirations of two of the seats contested in the February 2012 election are out of synch with those of the other five public seats.
- If the nominees for those seats, who are incumbents, are reappointed, we hope that a simple administrative adjustment in term expirations can be accomplished at the same time.
- The two requested changes are illustrated by arrows and dashed-line boxes on the second page of the attached table (RIOC BOARD TERMS), which contains detailed information about elections, appointments, and term expirations for Board members and nominees since 2008.
- Further context will be provided when relevant.