

**Testimony of City Council Candidate Benjamin Kallos for the
Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island before the New York City Council
Land Use Committee's Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises Hearing on Land Use
Items 796 – 799 of 2013 relating to the Cornell NYC Tech Campus
April 30, 2013**

Saul Nadel, Campaign Director for Roosevelt Island

Executive Summary

Thank you, Council Members. Before you is the opportunity to literally build a better City. Thank you to my Council Member Jessica Lappin. We look forward to your strong leadership in delivering the necessary amendments we are seeking.

My name is Saul Nadel, I am the Roosevelt Island Director for City Council Candidate Benjamin Kallos who is running to represent the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island. Our campaign empowers residents to take a larger part in City government, so as a lifelong resident of Roosevelt Island, I am here to provide our advice on amendments to build a better City.

Our key points:

- Require Cornell NYC Tech to be truly “sustainable” by supporting their own infrastructure;
- Direct tax revenues from businesses on the Cornell NYC Tech campus to RIOC;
- Require transportation improvements ahead of Cornell NYC Tech’s move-in day;
- Support local renewable energy through the Cornell NYC Tech “applied sciences” mandate; and
- Support and extend the AVAC to remove waste sustainably from Cornell NYC Tech.

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

Following our testimony on February 6, 2013 before the City Planning Commission, [Commissioners Michelle de la Uz and Anna Hayes Levin](#) actually agreed with our testimony. Commissioner de la Uz said the following prior to voting no: “Services on the Island are paid for by residents through ground leases. Although Cornell has agreed to provide private security and pay for a few other things, I am not happy with their exemption from paying for services.”

Please review our testimony and respect their opinions by amending the proposal to require that Cornell NYC Tech pay their fair share to support the local Roosevelt Island infrastructure.

Direct Tax Revenue from the Cornell NYC Tech to RIOC.

The Cornell NYC Tech Campus currently plans to include a hotel, corporate co-location and residential housing. Please amend the proposal so that the City receives the same taxes as it

would from any other business in New York City, directing all revenues to Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation to support local infrastructure.

The ‘nerd boat’ must be funded in next year’s budget to go online in time for Cornell NYC Tech move-in day in 2017.

The Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation’s “[Ferry Landing Feasibility Study](#)” placed the cost between \$5.3 and \$7.2 million with a 12 to 18 month implementation timeline. In order to support the 2017 move-in day, funding must be secured in time for the 2014 – 2015 fiscal year. The “nerd boat” must be funded in next year’s budget to go online in time for Cornell NYC Tech move-in day in 2017.

Please amend the proposal to require the Cornell NYC Tech contribute towards transportation infrastructure improvements such as a ferry landing (in the absence of federal funding).

Cornell NYC Tech can fulfill its mandate of “applied sciences” by supporting local renewable energy.

New York State is facing an energy crisis according to the New York Power Authority, with insufficient energy to meet demand within the next five years. Cornell NYC Tech is uniquely positioned to fulfill its “applied science” mandate by identifying and developing new renewable energy locally and partnering with existing projects such as Verdant Power’s Roosevelt Island Tidal Energy (RITE) Project.

Cornell NYC Tech should have a sustainable waste management plan that includes supporting and extending the existing AVAC system.

Roosevelt Island is the [home of the United States only Automated Vacuum Waste Collection System](#) (known as “[AVAC](#)”) serving a residential population. Rather than relying on the unsustainable and environmentally unfriendly model of trucking garbage, Cornell NYC Tech should be required to support and extend the existing AVAC system to serve their campus.

In Closing

Please consider our testimony and make the amendments that we, the City Planning Commission Commissioners and other Roosevelt Island residents are requesting, including supporting local infrastructure, directing City tax revenue to RIOCI, implementing transportation improvements for move-in day, and using applied sciences to support local renewable energy.

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Saul Nadel, Campaign Director for Roosevelt Island

Full Testimony

My name is Saul Nadel. I am the Co-Director for Roosevelt Island on the Kallos for Council Campaign, here on behalf of Benjamin Kallos, a Democratic candidate for New York City Council to represent 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, our testimony will focus on amendments we suggest to the application before the council.

We are submitting for the consideration of the New York City Council Land Use Committee's Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchise 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). As a campaign dedicated to solutions, we also suggest the inclusion of certain sustainability measures, including supporting local renewable energy production and transportation alternatives to and from Roosevelt Island.

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.

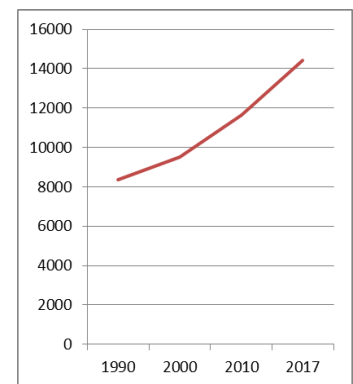
"Cornell NYC Tech can't claim to be sustainable unless it supports the local infrastructure of Roosevelt Island on which it relies."

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 ground 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.

We join Commissioner Michelle de la Uz, who said the following prior to voting no: "Services on the Island are paid for by residents through ground leases. Although Cornell has agreed to provide private security and pay for a few other things, I am not happy with their exemption from paying for services."

The City Council must heed our testimony as well as the [agreement we received from Commissioners Michelle de la Uz and Anna Hayes Levin](#) and amend the application to require that Cornell contribute towards the infrastructure of Roosevelt Island. 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.

The City Must Direct Tax Revenues from the Cornell NYC Tech Campus to Roosevelt Island

The Cornell NYC Tech Campus currently plans to include a hotel, corporate co-location and residential housing. The City must collect real estate and other taxes from residential apartments, hotel rooms, and corporate offices, earmarking them for the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation to support local infrastructure.

Please amend the proposal to require that business uses on the Cornell NYC Tech campus be subject to the same taxes as any other business in New York City, with all collections earmarked and provided in whole to the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation to support local infrastructure.

Cornell NYC Tech Must Support Transportation Improvements Now So They Are Implemented for First Students, Faculty and Staff

Roosevelt Island has inadequate transportation infrastructure to support the existing 11,661 residents. On April 13, 2013, the [Roosevelt Islander](#) reported over 4,500 people visited the island as part of the Annual Cherry Blossom Festival, roughly the same number as will be added with the completion of the Cornell NYC Tech campus. On that weekend, with no Manhattan bound subway service, the result was long lines at the tram without any other way off the island for the visitors.



I am pleased to join Senator Charles "Chuck" Schumer, with whom I served as an intern, and the New York City Economic Development Corporation to call for the "nerd boat" to serve technology hubs like DUMBO, Astoria, and, most importantly, the Upper East Side and Roosevelt

"The 'nerd boat' must be funded in next year's budget to go online in time for Cornell NYC Tech move-in day in 2017."

Island. The Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation's "[Ferry Landing Feasibility Study](#)" placed the cost between \$5.3 and \$7.2 million with a 12 to 18 month implementation timeline. In order to support the 2017 move-in day, funding must be secured in time for the 2014 – 2015 fiscal year. The "nerd boat" must be funded in next year's budget to go online in time for Cornell NYC Tech move-in day in 2017.

Cornell NYC Tech must publicly support Senator Schumer and our Congressional delegation in seeking Department of Transportation funding. To the extent that we are unable to secure Federal funding, Cornell NYC Tech must commit to supporting their fair share of the ferry landing costs to serve their new constituency.

Additionally, we support an amendment to Section 133-00(e), encouraging alternative forms of transportation by requiring bicycle parking, including space for NYC BikeShare along with 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.

The City Council must amend the proposal to require the Cornell NYC Tech contribute towards transportation infrastructure improvements such as a ferry landing (in the absence of federal funding).

Cornell NYC Tech Can Fulfill Its Applied Sciences Mission by Partnering to Support Local Renewable Energy on Roosevelt Island

New York State is [facing an energy crisis](#) according to the New York Power Authority, with insufficient energy to meet demand within the next five year. Cornell NYC Tech is uniquely positioned to fulfill its "applied science" mandate by identifying and developing new renewable energy locally and partnering with existing projects such as Verdant Power's [Roosevelt Island Tidal Energy \(RITE\)](#) Project.

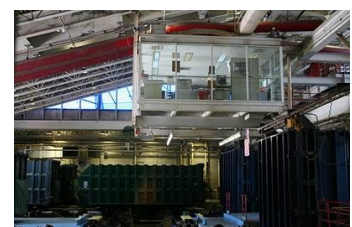
The RITE Project is now in Phase 3. Having received the first-ever issued commercial ten-year license for tidal power last year, Verdant is building its next generation of tidal turbines. Cornell NYC Tech should investigate a partnership with Verdant Power as well as other companies in the renewable energy area.



Cornell NYC Tech can fulfill its mandate of "applied sciences" by supporting local renewable energy.

Cornell NYC Tech Should Extend the Current AVAC System to be Greener and More Sustainable

Roosevelt Island is the [home of the United States' only Automated Vacuum Waste Collection System](#) (known as "[AVAC](#)") serving a residential population. The system, built in 1975, is also used at Disney World as well as in 30 countries, with Montreal and Indiana planning to implement the system.



Rather than relying on the unsustainable and environmentally unfriendly model of trucking garbage, Cornell NYC Tech should be required to support and extend the existing AVAC system to serve their campus.

The City Council should amend the proposal to require a sustainable waste plan that would support and extend the existing AVAC system to serve the Cornell NYC Tech campus.

Conclusion

Please approve Cornell's ULURP with the amendments we and other representatives of Roosevelt Island have proposed, including:

- Require Cornell NYC Tech to be truly “sustainable” by supporting their own infrastructure;
- Direct tax revenues from businesses on the Cornell NYC Tech campus to RIOC;
- Require transportation improvements ahead of Cornell NYC Tech's move-in day;
- Support local renewable energy through the Cornell NYC Tech “applied sciences” mandate; and
- Support and extend the AVAC to remove waste from Cornell NYC Tech.

It is only with these amendments that we can provide for the responsible planning and orderly development of the Island with adequate and appropriate infrastructure for existing residents as well as Cornell NYC Tech.