

NYC REDISTRICTING COMMISSION  
Public Testimony – August 23, 2012

My name is Matthew Katz and I have represented, by Island-wide election, the residential community of Roosevelt Island through four terms—eight years—on the Roosevelt Island Residents Association (RIRA).

Roosevelt Island was created in 1969 through a 99-year lease between the City of New York and New York State. Prior to that, the island, then known as Welfare Island, had a negligible population, now grown to 14,000 people. It was intended to be a diverse demographic, and in fact, encompasses low-income, middle-income and affluent residents with 60 languages spoken here. By virtue of its island insularity and the presence of a State peace officer department, Public Safety, the Island is recognized by the diplomatic community as a safe place to relocate families, and we have welcomed many United Nations families to our shores.

The Island is administered by a State public authority, the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), whose officers and directors are appointed by the Governor. RIRA has worked for fifteen years to require and increase resident influence in the decision-making processes, and in fact, legislation was enacted in 2002 requiring the RIOC Board of Directors to include a majority of Island residents. In 2008 and 2009, we presented six Island residents to the Governor, chosen in Island referenda, who were ultimately appointed to that Board.

These steps towards grassroots democracy did not take place in a vacuum. We have been supported down the line by our elected representatives, whose primary district areas are located on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. These public servants have made our goals their goals. They have learned the often-Byzantine details of Island politics, where the balance between City and State authority are invented on a daily basis.

We are beholden to City Council Member, Jessica Lappin, and her predecessor, former Speaker Gifford Miller. We are beholden to State Assembly Member, Micah Kellner and his predecessor, Alexander (Pete) Grannis, and to State Senator Jose Serrano and his predecessor, Olga Mendez. And of course, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney has always had us under her wing. In addition, we have a close working relationship with Community Board 8 Manhattan, and in fact, Island residents serve on the Roosevelt Island Committee of CB8 and on the Roosevelt Island Task Force, supervising the ULURP and EIS responsibilities as the Cornell University graduate facility takes shape.

My point is that busy officials in districts encompassing large areas have taken the time to help us obtain City services, to help fund Island organizations and to support our efforts for increased self governance. These relationships don't evolve overnight. Our districts, and especially our 5<sup>th</sup> Council District, must remain within the Upper East Side, Manhattan constellation, where they have remained since our founding as a residential community. To consider otherwise would be to cripple all our efforts.

Thank you,  
Matthew Katz  
President, RIRA