

# FRIENDS OF THE EAST RIVER ESPLANADE 60TH - 120TH STREETS

August 15, 2022

Dear Chair Walcott and NYC Redistricting Commission Members:

I submit this testimony in connection with the Commission's proposed redistricting plan on behalf of our organization, which advocates for the restoration and revitalization of the Esplanade waterfront from 60th – 120th Streets. The Esplanade provides vital public green space for the residents of the Upper East Side and East Harlem. Especially during the pandemic, the Esplanade has served as a physical and emotional sanctuary for community members, allowing residents to walk, run, cycle, fish and connect with nature, despite many stretches having been neglected and poorly maintained in the past.

The Commission's plan to unnecessarily divide a small section of the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island from the rest of the Upper East Side represents a true hardship for our constituents by diluting the community's resources and potentially taking away engaged and focused local political representation for this area. It will particularly and uniquely impact the Esplanade, as a continuous piece of important greenspace that under the proposed lines would span three different city council districts, including District 26, which is mostly comprised of neighborhoods in Queens. There are currently major projects on going along the East River waterfront, such as the construction of Phase 2B of Andrew Haswell Green Park planned reconstruction of the condemned Pier 107 and the extension of the NYC Greenway via the Midtown Greenway Project, the completion of all of which could be put at risk if the proposed district lines are approved. These projects will rejuvenate the Waterfront for pedestrians, cyclists and residents, and their success depends on the critical support of our current elected officials, including City Council members, who are familiar with and heavily invested in these projects. The proposed new lines that would result in a large section of the Esplanade being represented by a City Council Member based in Queens could undermine the effective collaboration among elected officials and

established neighborhood organizations such as Friends of the East River Esplanade and the Sutton Area Community in moving these projects forward.

We believe that the proposed lines violate the City Charter requirements to keep neighborhoods compact and intact. Practically and logistically these lines do not take a common-sense approach to addressing the area's needs in an effective manner. Breaking up the Upper East Side and including a small sliver of the community in a district across the East River is disruptive, confusing, and unnecessary. It is very likely that the far east section of the Upper East Side and neighborhoods in Queens will not share common goals for resource distribution and funding. While other districts may have physical boundaries in more than one borough, they are directly adjacent to one another and do not have a river separating them as in this proposed plan. Much of the East River Esplanade and Andrew Haswell Green Park Phase 1 & 2A—2B is under construction at this time and Phase 3 will start soon and will likely cost \$25 million to complete. Capital funding from City Council Members has been instrumental in providing necessary funds for this project. Will a Council Member in the Queens-based district be willing to allocate those funds for an area that represents only a quarter of the voters in her or his District? It seems likely that most of the Council Member's funding will be spent in the Queens section of the district.

Our organization depends greatly on the support of District 5 Council Member Julie Menin, and her centrally located office staff. Our success in advocating for a vibrant and revitalized East River waterfront may be jeopardized if we are not able to work effectively with our local elected representatives. Community members rely on being able to access the East River Esplanade for their physical and mental wellbeing and it is imperative that the Esplanade continue to receive the funding and support it needs to thrive. We strongly urge the New York City Districting Commission to reconsider this misguided redistricting plan that will illogically carve up our communities and put critical development projects, including those along the Esplanade, at significant risk.