

Statement
to the
New York City Council
Committee on Fire and Criminal Justice Services
and
Committee on Parks and Recreation
by
Carleen McLaughlin
New York City Department of Correction
January 20, 2016

Examining the Future of Hart Island

Good afternoon Chair Crowley, Chair Levine, members of the Committee on Fire and Criminal Justice Services, and members the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Carleen McLaughlin; I am the Director of Legislative Affairs and Special Projects at the Department of Correction. I am here to testify about the DOC's operation of Hart Island. The Department has previously testified before the Fire and Criminal Justice Services Committee about Hart Island operation and visitation in 2011 and 2012.

As you know, and as set forth by the city's administrative code, the Department of Correction operates and maintains the city cemetery located on Hart Island. DOC is responsible for burials of individuals who cannot provide for their own, who have not been identified, or for those whose next of kin cannot be located. In recent years, there have been about 1,000 individuals buried each year. All of the remains come to Hart Island through the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). OCME delivers the remains to Hart Island in individual coffins. Burial records can be accessed through our Hart Island website, www.nyc.gov/HartIsland.

Burials on Hart Island are performed by inmate workers, who are supervised by Correction Officers and a Captain. They travel from Rikers Island to Hart Island four days each week and access Hart Island by the ferry that is operated by the NYC Department of Transportation (DOT). Only sentenced inmates who have good behavior records are selected to work on Hart Island. The inmates who work on the island learn job skills, get to be outside and off of Rikers for a few hours of the day, and perform a meaningful service for the community.

In addition to the burials, DOC exhumes approximately 40 coffins each year. About a dozen exhumations, or disinterments, are done at the request of OCME and the rest are requested by a family member or friend of the deceased who wants to arrange a private burial. To request a disinterment, the family member or friend must obtain a disinterment permit from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Office of Vital Records. The permit must be sent to DOC with a formal request for disinterment on letterhead from a licensed funeral home.

Upon receipt of these documents, we make arrangements with the licensed funeral home to transfer the remains to its custody. This process to request a disinterment is described on our Hart Island website.

When they are not performing burials or disinterments, the staff and inmate workers do general grounds keeping around the island, including removing debris, mowing the lawns, clearing vines and weeds, and repairing plot markers. This grounds-keeping is important, both to maintain paths to more recent burial areas, but also to insure that, in advance of a requested visit, underbrush is cleared from access routes to older burial sites that, with the passage of years, would otherwise be inaccessible.

Last year, the City expanded visitation access for family members of those who are buried on Hart Island. Since July 2015, we have offered monthly gravesite visits for family members and their invited guests. These visits are in addition to the monthly gazebo visits that are open to the any interested individual. To participate in either type of visit, one must schedule attendance in advance by contacting DOC through the website or by calling (718) 546-0911. Calling the City's 311 line will also connect you to us. The DOC phone line is typically staffed during business hours. Anyone who calls outside of business hours should leave a message, which we strive to return on the next business day. Visitors are met on the City island ferry dock by DOC staff, who then escort them on to the island and to the visit areas. For safety and security reasons, DOC staff remain with all groups during the visit. We want to ensure that no one is hurt by tripping on the uneven ground or walking too near the buildings, and staff also observe to make sure that no tokens left behind present security concerns. The visitation information can be found in the FAQs on our Hart Island website. So far, the feedback we have received from family members visiting gravesites has been very positive. Everyone who has reached out to us following a visit has expressed how much they appreciated the experience and have been very complimentary of the staff they met. Overall, visitors comment that they are comforted by the experience, because they see that their loved ones are in a peaceful place.

The City does oppose Intro. 134, which would transfer jurisdiction from DOC to the Department of Parks and Recreation. DOC is capable of providing the burial and disinterment services that the city requires. It is in the City's interest to have these services uninterrupted in a city cemetery.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.



NYC Parks

Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Int 0134-2014- A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to a transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island from the department of corrections to the department of parks and recreation.

January 20, 2016

Testimony By: Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations, NYC Parks

Good morning, Chair Crowley, Chair Levine, members of the Committee on Fire and Criminal Justice Services, and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation, my name is Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations at the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. Joining me on this panel are _____. Thank you for inviting me to testify today regarding Intro 134, pertaining to the transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island from the Department of Correction to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Hart Island is a 131-acre island located in the Bronx, near City Island, at the western end of Long Island Sound. The island has served many roles dating from 1863, including a Civil War internment camp, a psychiatric institution, a sanatorium, a reformatory and a Nike Missile launch site for the United States Military. However, its primary function has been that of a public cemetery for burials of indigent individuals, or for those whose remains are either unidentified or unclaimed by next of kin, managed under the jurisdiction of the NYC Department of Correction (DOC).

As you are likely aware, the burials are conducted by inmate workers supervised by DOC. DOC also maintains the grounds and coordinates travel to the island for staff, inmates and authorized visits from the public, utilizing transportation provided by Department of Transportation ferry from a dock in City Island. Public access to the island is available twice a month, through visits which can be pre-arranged with the staff at DOC.

The bill as currently drafted would compel the transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island to NYC Parks, which raises some concerns from our agency's perspective. NYC Parks believes that the operation of a public cemetery falls well outside of the agency's expertise and available resources. Parks has jurisdiction over a very small number of historic cemeteries, but none of these involve active burials. These tend to be less than one acre in size and require little to no maintenance.

We understand the desire to keep Hart Island in the best condition possible and provide a pleasant experience for friends and families of the deceased visiting to pay their respects. NYC Parks has worked with DOC to provide assistance and expertise regarding horticultural management and other efforts, including the management of invasive species. We also recognize that Hart Island has a unique and significant presence in New York City history, and the island features several buildings and structures of some historical interest, which are in varying conditions of disrepair. NYC Parks would welcome the opportunity to work with DOC and the Department of Buildings to assess these structures further and discuss whether any degree of historical preservation would be appropriate. However, we feel these efforts can and should continue without a change in agency jurisdiction.

Further, the transfer of jurisdiction to Parks could lead to the expectation for the expansion of public access to the island for recreational use. As a general practice, NYC Parks has concerns about acquiring new property of this size and nature without a clear plan to develop it for public access and the resources in place to do so. Based on ground settlement issues stemming from the decomposition of old graves, demolition and repair work projects that would be necessary, unclear environmental conditions, the presence of invasive plant species in its natural areas and other factors, it is fair to estimate that any renovation of the island to allow use for the general public could cost upwards of tens of millions of dollars. The agency feels that this allocation of resources would be difficult to

justify in light of current capital and expense budget needs for existing parkland already under NYC Parks jurisdiction. For context, keep in mind that NYC Parks currently holds jurisdiction over 5,000 individual properties throughout the city, including 1,900 parks, 1,000 playgrounds, 600 community gardens, and 10,000 acres of natural areas.

Developing Hart Island for broader public use poses logistical obstacles as well. Funding would be needed to secure expanded public ferry access to the island. The current ferry launch on the east side of City Island has very limited transit and parking access, which serves current visitors visiting the graves of loved ones, but would be problematic for expanded access. An alternative ferry launch or additional transit and parking access would need to be identified or constructed in order to accommodate park users. Additionally, the damage suffered by the island during Superstorm Sandy, and the presence of significant flood plains in portions of the park not used for burials also raise questions about the island's potential for either active or passive recreational use. Lastly, it is worth noting that given the island's proximity to Pelham Bay Park, the largest park in New York City at 2,765 acres, it is unclear whether usership levels would be high enough and consistent enough to warrant significant, long-term capital and expense investment.

We understand the challenges and issues that have been raised by advocates regarding public burials at Hart Island, and NYC Parks is committed to working with DOC and other city agencies to provide whatever expertise and assistance we can. But NYC Parks is focused on our primary mission- keeping our existing parks in the best condition possible, and reimagining and reactivating parks which have been traditionally underfunded, and to foster park equity and improved access throughout the city.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Statement
to the
New York City Council
Committee on Fire and Criminal Justice Services
and
Committee on Parks and Recreation
by
New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner
Florence Hutner, General Counsel
January 20, 2016

Issues Relating to Burial at City Cemetery on Hart Island

Good morning, Chair Crowley, Chair Levine, members of the Committee on Fire and Criminal Justice Services, and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Florence Hutner, and I am General Counsel to the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner. I am here to testify about the OCME's role in the burial in City cemetery on Hart Island of decedents who cannot provide for their own burial, or whose remains are either unidentified or unclaimed by next of kin.

As I will describe, the OCME transports decedent remains to the Department of Correction (DOC) for burial, and occasionally transports disinterred remains from Hart Island. OCME also conducts often extensive investigations to find alternatives to City burial, including coordination with Public Administrators and veterans' affairs agencies.

In calendar year 2015, the OCME delivered 1137 decedent remains to DOC for burial on Hart Island. OCME had medical examiner jurisdiction over 30% of those remains pursuant to its medical examiner function¹, and jurisdiction over the remaining 70% in its capacity as the City's mortuary. As noted above, these decedents represent individuals who cannot provide for a private burial, whose next of kin specifically request burial in City cemetery, or who are unclaimed or unidentified.²

OCME transports decedent remains for transfer to DOC custody on Hart Island several times a week throughout the year, weather and tides permitting. In 2015, OCME provided decedent remains on 71 separate occasions. On average, between 13 and 36 individual remains are transferred at a time. Before transportation, OCME places each decedent in an appropriately sized pine casket that the agency purchases for this purpose; DOC personnel and inmate workers need not handle remains directly.

OCME is involved in approximately a dozen disinterments annually; in 2015, OCME arranged for 13 disinterments. OCME staff do not perform disinterments; DOC conducts the actual exhumation, and OCME transports the exhumed remains from Hart Island to an OCME facility. OCME has no role in private disinterments, which are arranged directly with DOC through funeral homes.

¹ Under City Charter 557(f), the Office of Chief Medical Examiner exercises jurisdiction over "bodies of person dying from criminal violence, by accident, by suicide, suddenly when in apparent health, when unattended by a physician, in a correctional facility or in any suspicious or unusual manner".

² For context, I note that the OCME receives approximately 10,000 decedents per year, and performs autopsies on approximately 5500 of those.

Before any individual is transported for burial in the City cemetery, unless next of kin have specifically requested burial at Hart Island, OCME's Outreach Unit conducts extensive investigation to identify next of kin and determine their plans for the final disposition of the decedent. For mortuary cases, this investigation begins by contacting the health care facility from which the decedent was brought to the OCME to obtain any information in their files about next of kin. The Outreach Unit also contacts the Public Administrator in the relevant county, as well as the two NYC organizations that hold information about prepaid funeral home plans.

As needed, the Outreach Unit also conducts an internet investigation, including in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NaMUS) and HHS databases. If a decedent is determined to be a veteran without known or interested next of kin, the case is referred to the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA), which investigates the subject's military service. If the decedent is eligible for military burial, DVA makes arrangements for the final disposition of the remains. When veteran eligibility cannot be determined based on available information, the remains may be buried on Hart Island. OCME also works with other agencies including the Department of Homeless Services, and various consulates for foreign residents. If needed, OCME coordinates with the New York City Police Department, which will conduct searches of missing person databases maintained by and for law enforcement agencies, and of restricted Department of Motor Vehicle records.

Clearly, like the citizens of New York City, the OCME has a strong interest in ensuring that the burial of indigent and unclaimed individuals on Hart Island continues uninterrupted. We appreciate your attention to this issue and thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer your questions.



THE CITY OF NEW YORK Department of Sanitation

INTRA - DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

Environmental Police Officers (E.P.O.)
Corrections Officers (C.O.)
Coast Guard

TO: Kevin Smyley, Inspector General

FROM: E.P.O. Thomas McMahon/Patrick Dugan ← Are E.P.O.'s McMahon & Dugan
still alive?

SUBJECT: Hart Island

Ferry from City Island to Hart Island - Captain Herity
(Deck Hands) Mr. Wilkenson
Aspinalli
Remicci
Harris

On this day, March 13, 1985, both Environmental Police Officers (McMahon & Dugan), met at 0730 hours on City Island to make arrangements to go to Harts Island. We approached a man standing on the ferry, Mr. Wilkenson, who is employed as a deck hand and asked him what time the next ferry would be leaving for Hart Island He informed us to check in at the trailer to the left of the ferry dock. We then spoke to Captain Herity who operates the ferry. He said that it would be around 8:30 a.m. when they would make the first trip. Accompanying the Captain in the trailer were three deck hands (Mr. Aspinalli, Mr. Remicci, Mr. Harris). We asked them about their schedule and they told us that they all work from 7a.m. to 3:30p.m. and that the last run from the island is at 3:00p.m. They are employed Tuesday thru Friday with no service on the weekend or Monday.

We spoke to the Correction Officers at the entrance to the ferry (Konovitch, Alt, Sumpter) who informed us that ther are presently 48 inmates living on the Island. Ther is a Correction boat next to the ferry that provides 24 hour service to Hart Island for the Correction Department.

We then walked to the ferry and waited for it's departure. The ride to Hart Island takes about ten minutes. During the ride over we spoke to a Mr. Roberts who is the Chief Engineer on the ferry. Mr. Roberts informed us about the Coast Guard regulations concerning the water ways surrounding Hart Island. Mr. Roberts also told us that his ferry is used to transport supplies, personnel, hospital vehicles and a morgue truck. Since Hart Island is used as a Potters Field that is the reason for the morgue truck.

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NEW YORK.





THE CITY OF NEW YORK Department of Sanitation

INTRA - DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

When we arrived at Hart Island we were met by a Correction Officer (Moore) who took us to the Headquarters Office where we were introduced to Captain Ruppert. Captain Ruppert explained to us the complete use of Hart Island. Presently the 48 inmates on the island are assigned duties at the burial plots and the kitchen area, also at some of the maintenance buildings.

Captain Rupert then proceeded to take us on a combination walking and driving inspection of the entire Island. Our first stop was at a burial site where we watched a bulldozer digging a hole for approximately 150 unclaimed bodies, some of which would be arriving this morning. We then walked towards the northern end of the Island where we observed human bones. A skull was also seen on the beach area. It was explained to us that this was a rather common thing to happen since the city has been burying bodies there for almost 80 years and the water has caused some erosion at the older burial spots.

After we left the burial sites we proceeded to the old United States Army missile site.. Both Environmental Police Officers descended into the two missile launch sites for a closer examination. These launching sites are about thirty feet underground and are made of reinforced concrete. Ther is an accumulation of water in the missile cradle area (about 1 and 1/2), but aside from that the area was clean and free from any drums or other possible toxic materials. It must be noted however that also in the area was a stationary crane that was used for unloading the missiles into an underground compartment. This compartment has been cemented over and was impossible to examine. After leaving the missile site we began to examine the area and about forty (40) odd buildings on the ninety (90) acre island

It was obvious from the very beginning that there were many 55 gallon drums on the island. On closer examination it was found that these drums, or at least many of them did contain an unknown substance. About 150 five gallon drums were found under a crawl space in one of the buildings. These five gallon drums bore markings describing them as paint, belonging to the U.S.Navy at Brooklyn, New York. These cans were scattered around in many of the other buildings also. Almost all of these drums were full. We also noted that in most if not all the buildings there is a great amount of possible Asbestos material falling from pipes and laying on the ground.



Examining the Future of Hart Island:

The Value of Landscape

January 20, 2016

Committee Room

New York City Hall

FOR THE RECORD

Ann Sharrock, Landscape Architect

Ian Fisher, Senior Lecturer, Landscape Architecture

Manchester School of Architecture

In the current period of uncertain climatic change, any future landscape must also be intimately associated with the need to accommodate systems that can create more effective ecologically focused processes. These include dealing with run off, vegetation resilience, storm water management and rising sea levels as well as persistent or sudden pollution events.

Transferring the jurisdiction of Hart Island from the Department of Correction to the Parks Department will act as a catalyst for a reappraisal of the existing landscape infrastructure. This action will provide opportunities for various stakeholders who have an interest in the island's past, present and future to engage in a forum, where the landscape acts as a staging for both complimentary and contradictory functions.

The landscape will play a crucial role as a generator and mediator of ideas. It has the potential to act as an adaptive "surface" which reflects historical significance, provides an infrastructure for the current burial process (if retained) and at a personal level creates an appropriate setting for memorialisation/commemoration. It will also play an important role in how Hart Island is reintroduced in to the consciousness of New Yorkers.



NYCLU

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**Testimony of the New York Civil Liberties Union
to the Committee on Fire and Criminal Justices Services
and the Committee on Parks and Recreation
Concerning Int. No. 134: Transfer of Jurisdiction Over Hart Island**

January 20, 2016

The New York Civil Liberties Union submits this testimony to the City Council in conjunction with the hearing concerning Int. No. 134, which would transfer jurisdiction of Hart Island from the Department of Correction to the Department of Parks and Recreation. Because we believe that the transfer would significantly improve the ability of people to visit gravesites on Hart Island, the NYCLU urges the Council to enact the bill.

The NYCLU, the state affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization with eight offices across the state and nearly 80,000 members and supporters. The NYCLU's mission is to defend and promote the fundamental principles, rights, and constitutional values embodied in the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution and the Constitution of the State of New York. As part of this mission, the NYCLU supports the rights of familial association, which encompasses a right of individuals to visit and maintain contact with family members and others with whom people have family-like relationships.

The NYCLU's Interest in Hart Island

As the Council is aware, Hart Island serves as the potter's field for New York City, which estimates that nearly one million people may be buried on the island. In December 2014 the NYCLU filed a class action lawsuit against New York City over its longstanding policy and practice of barring family members from visiting gravesites of loved ones buried on Hart Island. Brought on behalf of a class of tens of thousands of people with relatives buried on Hart Island, the NYCLU case alleged that the City's policy violated the constitutional right of familial association.

Shortly after we filed suit, the City indicated it wished to settle the matter and to open Hart Island to gravesite visits for family members. Despite this willingness and the readily apparent injustice of the City's policy, it took nearly six months to negotiate a settlement, and that final settlement, while an excellent resolution of the legal case, nonetheless falls well short of an ideal visitation regime. That this is so is attributable to one cause: the fact that the Department of Correction has jurisdiction over Hart Island.

Throughout our negotiations, proposals we made regularly were rejected in the name of claimed security concerns related to the fact that Hart Island is treated as a DOC facility and because inmates are used to perform burials and do maintenance on the island. As a result, the final settlement contains numerous provisions bearing on gravesite visits that otherwise would never be in place at a cemetery.

Improving Gravesite Access to Hart Island

The NYCLU takes no position on the issue of which city agency should have technical jurisdiction over Hart Island. What the NYCLU feels strongly about, however, is that administration of Hart Island be removed from the Department of Correction and placed with an

agency that will operate it in a manner befitting the fact that Hart Island is the resting place for nearly a million poor or abandoned New Yorkers.

The settlement in our case, which awaits final court approval, is necessarily limited because the formal legal rights bearing on gravesite visitation are relatively modest and fall well short of what sound public policy and plain commonsense would dictate for New York City's potter's field. Administration of Hart Island as a cemetery and not a correctional facility would result in a gravesite-visitation regime that goes well beyond the one mandated by the case settlement in the following ways:

- * Any member of the public should be allowed to visit a Hart Island gravesite, regardless of whether they are a relative of the deceased. Under the settlement, gravesite visitation extends only to family members of those buried on Hart Island. Yet, because the island is a potter's field, many people buried there long ago lost connection with their families and instead may have had their strongest bonds in life with friends or even caretakers, neither of whom qualify as relatives. As a matter of public policy, gravesite visits should extend to these people.
- * Visits should be more readily available and should not require registration with the government- Under the settlement, gravesite visits take place one day a month, are limited to 50 people, and require visitors to register in advance with the Department of Correction. In a normal cemetery, by contrast, visitation would be much more open and of course would not require visitors to register with the government. While it is true that Hart Island access is dependent on ferry service that makes unlimited access infeasible, the City should expand access and eliminate the need for grieving New Yorkers to register with the Department of Correction to visit the gravesites of their loved ones.

* Visitors Should Not Be Subject to Searches and Should Be Free to Take Pictures on Hart Island- Because Hart Island currently is a correctional facility, the City insisted in the settlement that the Department of Correction reserve the right to search visitors to Hart Island and the right to bar any electronic devices on Hart Island (a bar that significantly limits the ability to take photographs on the island). These types of restrictions are wholly contrary to the notion of a cemetery and presumably would disappear immediately if the island were managed by a city agency other than the Department of Correction.

* * *

The NYCLU urges the City Council to improve public access to gravesites on Hart Island and to take all steps necessary to assure that the island is managed with the dignity that an important cemetery deserves. Because we believe that passage of Int. No 134 help will accomplish these goals, the NYCLU supports the bill.

Examining the Future of Hart Island
Public Hearing January 20, 2016
Committee Room
New York City Hall

Melinda Hunt, President
The Hart Island Project

Chairwoman Crowley and Chairman Levine, thank you for inviting me to speak today on the topic: Examining the Future of Hart Island. On behalf of The Hart Island Project, I speak for hundreds of families who are grateful to you for introducing legislation to update the administrative code for operations on Hart Island. In the words of Honorable Vernon Broderick at the settlement hearing for the recent federal lawsuit: "It's an unfortunate part that it [Hart Island] is a Department of Correction facility."

In 1924, the City Council discussed either building a new prison on Hart Island or turning it into a recreation park. The precedent of turning potter's field into parks (Washington Square was cited) was the reason they decided to build a new prison on Riker's Island instead of Hart Island. The question raised today is not new. Ninety years ago the plan was for Hart Island to become a park.

Hart Island remains part of the penal system because young, incarcerated men still bury unclaimed bodies. We need to reform the burial process as part of passing this legislation.

Each year, around 1500 out of 50,000 people who die in New York City are buried Hart Island. Burials consist of mass graves of 150 adults or 1000 infants. Recently, these burial plots have grown into long, contiguous, trenches now stretching halfway across Hart Island, one blending into the next, each section marked through GPS.

Starting last July, relatives of the recent dead began to visit these gigantic, partially filled open pit gravesites. The mother of a stillborn child delivered a year earlier was taken to her baby's a still open grave. She signed a legal waiver agreeing not to sue New York City before boarding the ferry. These industrial scale burials are intimidating instead of comforting.

Visitors will tell you that they are glad for the opportunity to visit even if it involves prison guards and confiscated cell phones. Captain Thompson and his officers are welcoming and courteous. The public is going along with these arrangements. But Judge Broderick had his doubts. He asked: "Electronic devices are fairly common. Is

there an actual consideration that the City will have concerning moderating devices? ... With regard to the issue relating to access to the Civil War Cemetery, another litigation might have to be filed. The court has a concern that this continue as an issue."

It is no longer acceptable to use the city prison system to manage Hart Island. In 1966, the Department of Correction asked New York City to transfer jurisdiction to Parks in anticipation that they would not be able to manage the landscape. Instead, Hart Island became home to adolescent residents of Phoenix House. When they moved away a decade later, the island was continually vandalized and burial records burned. Still, the City Council did nothing to secure City Cemetery and assign an appropriate caretaker. More than thirty years have passed and the buildings are now total ruins.

Current DOC burial practices are destructive of the ecology. When the 1918 flu epidemic struck New York, large graves might have been necessary to bury 22,000 dead. A century later, it is unacceptable to put people in graves as long as Olympic swimming pools. These fill with water because they are left open for months. Nothing is planted to hold the soil in place. Each time a big storm sweeps down the Long Island Sound human bones are exposed along the eroding shoreline. I am told that gold teeth are scavenged from the sand on Orchard Beach. Skulls wash ashore on City Island.

We need to stabilize the landscape so that human remains stay buried on Hart Island. We can do this with smaller graves and planting vegetation. The taxpayers rightfully expect graves to be closed and bodies to remain buried. We need a landscape strategy that is implemented as part of the burial process so that graves don't collapse or erode in short order. Visitors should be shown a natural landscape rather than a forbidden landscape.

After decades of neglect, Hart Island must be made safe. This will require a capital plan. Without a new strategy for burying the unclaimed dead, we are going to continue on a path of endless litigation as various interest groups demand that their needs be addressed in court. Judge Broderick could see it coming and asked for further consideration prior to accepting settlement.

I believe the Department of Parks and Recreation can manage Hart Island. The earliest parks, including City Hall Park, were burial grounds. In 1807 the Common Council determined that Madison Square would be left open a public square forever because it had been a burial ground. The question now is whether it is a priority for the city to revise the administrative code so that we move beyond a Civil War system of burials involving the penal system.

Elaine Joseph January 20, 2016

Committee on Fire and Criminal Justice/ Committee on Parks and Recreation

My name is Elaine Joseph and I am a resident of Fresh Meadows, Queens. Today is the 38th anniversary of the death of my baby daughter, Tomika. In a series of unfortunate events, she died after having heart surgery at Mt Sinai Hospital during the blizzard of 1978 when the city was shut down. Her body was lost between the hospital and the Medical Examiner's office and it took me till 2009 to find out where she was buried.

I am grateful to NYC for now permitting me to visit her grave site. As nice as Captain Martin Thompson was to me, I still wish he wasn't wearing a DOC uniform and carrying a gun while directing my visit.

In addition, as a retired naval officer, I would also like to be able to pay respects to the thousands of veterans buried on Hart Island since the Civil War and to walk to a Soldier's Plot which I could see in the distance during my visit. As a veteran myself, I feel it is important that military vets be remembered and memorialized.

I strongly urge the City Council members to amend the administrative code and transfer jurisdiction over Hart Island from the Dept of Correction to the Dept of Parks and Recreation.



**New York City Council Committees on Parks & Recreation and
Fire & Criminal Justice Services
Hearing on Int. No. 134
January 20, 2016
Tupper Thomas, Executive Director**

Good morning, my name is Tupper Thomas, and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. I want to thank the City Council Committees on Parks and Recreation and on Fire and Criminal Justice Services for inviting me to speak on this issue. New Yorkers for Parks does not support the current proposal to transfer the jurisdiction of Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Department of Parks and Recreation. As a final resting place for close to a million New Yorkers, we recognize the critically important need to increase public access to the island, but we have concerns that there are not enough details in the current plan to lay out a reasonable process for converting this land to NYC Parks.

As it stands, the Parks Department has not had the budget needed to adequately maintain its existing citywide network of almost 2,000 parks, and the current conditions on Hart Island would require significant remediation before increased public access could become a reality. The restoration of this land would be prohibitively expensive for a city parks system that is already stretched thin. With conditions on the island ranging from dilapidated structures from the 19th century, to a Cold-War era missile testing site, to the mass graves that are still being actively created, we are concerned that the cost to NYC Parks would be significant. There is also the question of ferry service to and from the island, which is currently outside the realm of service provided by the Parks Department. Additionally, there is the question of how NYC Parks will manage the burials, as that is not currently a task overseen by parks workers.

We recognize the important efforts to increase visibility and access to Hart Island, but we feel that the transfer of the island to the Parks Department is not currently feasible, given the financial constraints facing NYC Parks. As of now, there are too many unanswered questions about the management of this unique space that must be addressed before such a transfer can be made. We do hope that this can be the beginning of productive dialogue toward a meaningful plan for increasing access to Hart Island, and believe there may be alternative ways to improve access that would not necessitate a jurisdictional transfer.

Thank you.

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January 19, 2016

1863 " A Military Resurrection " 2016

Spirits of the past engulfs us all, but only a few bear their burdens...

Herbert Sweat

Warrior and Survivor of Viet Nam

We the Veterans of the United States Dept. of defense come before this honorable formed committee of legislators in order to form a more perfect union, where as veterans and civilians are able to pay their homage and give rights to their fallen comrades. Which they've not been given property since they have been interned at hart island, NY. By establishing justice in a form to where as Hart Island, be hailed as a free National Preservation Memorial Site or Park, for public access for those known and the unknown which would result in a zeal that all lives matter's.

History rivals that beneath the crust of Hart Island lays the remains of some forbearers of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. The 20th and 26th Regiments of the United States colored Troops were muster at FT. Hart Island and Rikers Island during the Civil War, This was the union which United America as one. United States of America.

So be it may, to our prosperities, that we create and maintain an atmosphere that surrounds this holy grounds, that bears the remains of our past, enabling us to stand for honor, respect the lives and deaths of our ancestors, to whom we owe this to. So let's not forget their trials and tribulations to enables with their fruits of their labors to be who were today.

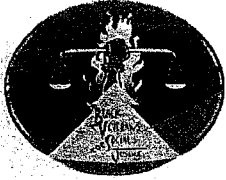
"I am proud to be an American"

FREE

"Who would be free themselves must strike the blow. I urge you to fly to arms and smite to death the power that would bury the Government and your Liberty in the same hopeless grave. This is your golden opportunity."

Thank you
Veteran Action Group

"We Served This Country too!"



BLACK VETERANS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, INC.

665 Willoughby Avenue ~ Brooklyn, New York 11206-6903

Phone 718-852-6004 Fax 718-852-4805

Email: admin@bvsj.org Web: www.bvsj.org

October 6, 2011

Commissioner Terrance C. Holliday
Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs and Committee
346 Broadway, RM 819
New York, NY 10013

Dear Commissioner Holliday,

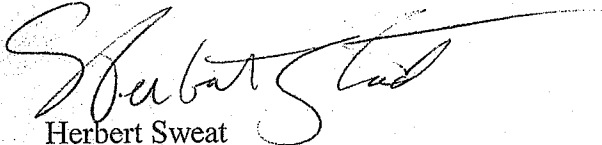
My name is Herbert Sweat, a veteran of Vietnam and 9/11 survivor. I am most concerned with justice for all and in this endeavor I am requesting your assistance. From 1863-1864 NYC hosted the Union Army on a few sites around the city and state, particularly Ft. Rikers and Ft. Hart, which became the training grounds for units known as the 20th, 26th and 31st U.S. Color Troops. These units were honored for their meritorious deeds in service of the Civil War (e.g. the surrendering of General R. Lee) Now many remains of these soldiers are still interred at Ft. Hart, which is now Potters Field NYC Ft. Rikers is now a NYC correctional facility. We need an investigation in order to identify and honor the soldiers who served.

Black Veterans for Social Justice, veterans Advocacy Group and National Association of Black Veterans have memorialized Veterans of all ethnicities at Evergreen Cemetery located on Bushwick Avenue in Brooklyn, NY. Many of those memorialized were members of the 20th and 26th U.S. Colored Troops. This cemetery was N.Y.C's first to receive people of color during the Civil War Noticing that these were veterans from N.Y. We are requesting your assistance of these two items:

- We request this committee to investigate the identity of the soldiers of color, that have been buried at Ft. Hart (Potters Field) and Evergreen Cemetery located in Brooklyn, NY. We propose that new head stones be placed and the burial area cleaned and rightly titled in honor of these military veterans.
- We are asking that the flag of the 26th U.S.C.T with ribbons and honors be flown at Ft. Rikers.

- We request this committee and others to partake in an event titled "Soldiers of Color Unveiling" tentatively scheduled for May 23rd 2012 at: 665 Willoughby Ave. Bklyn, NY

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Herbert Sweat". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Herbert Sweat
BVSJ Inc., Chairman
United States Veterans Service Officer

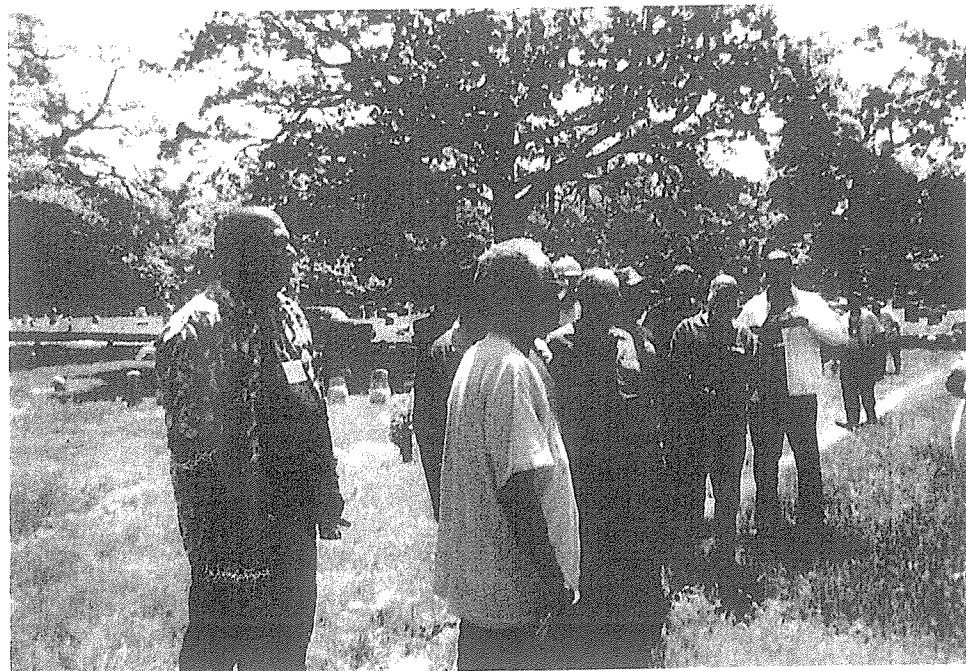
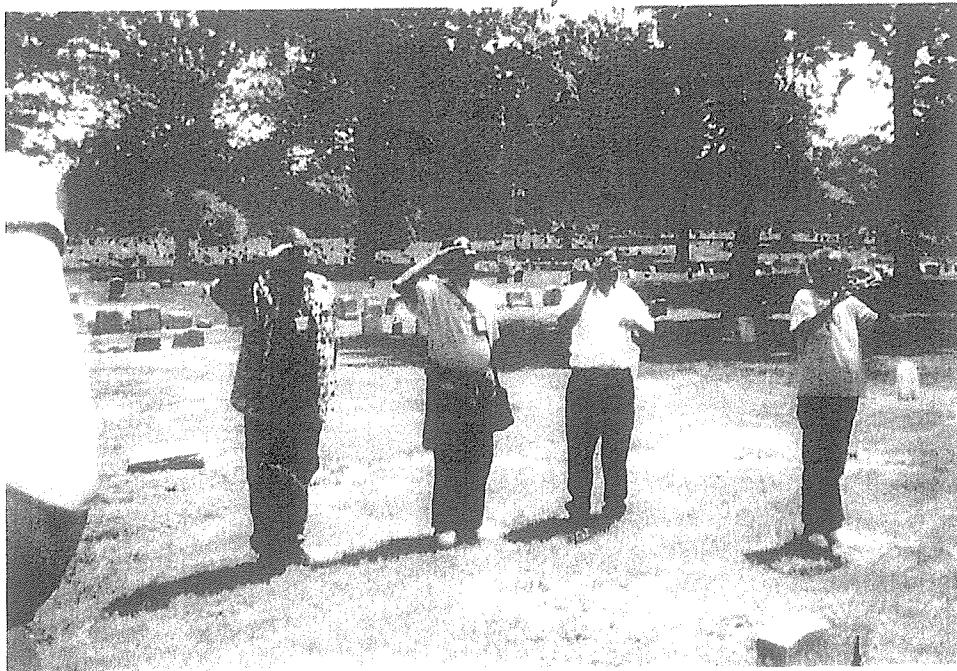


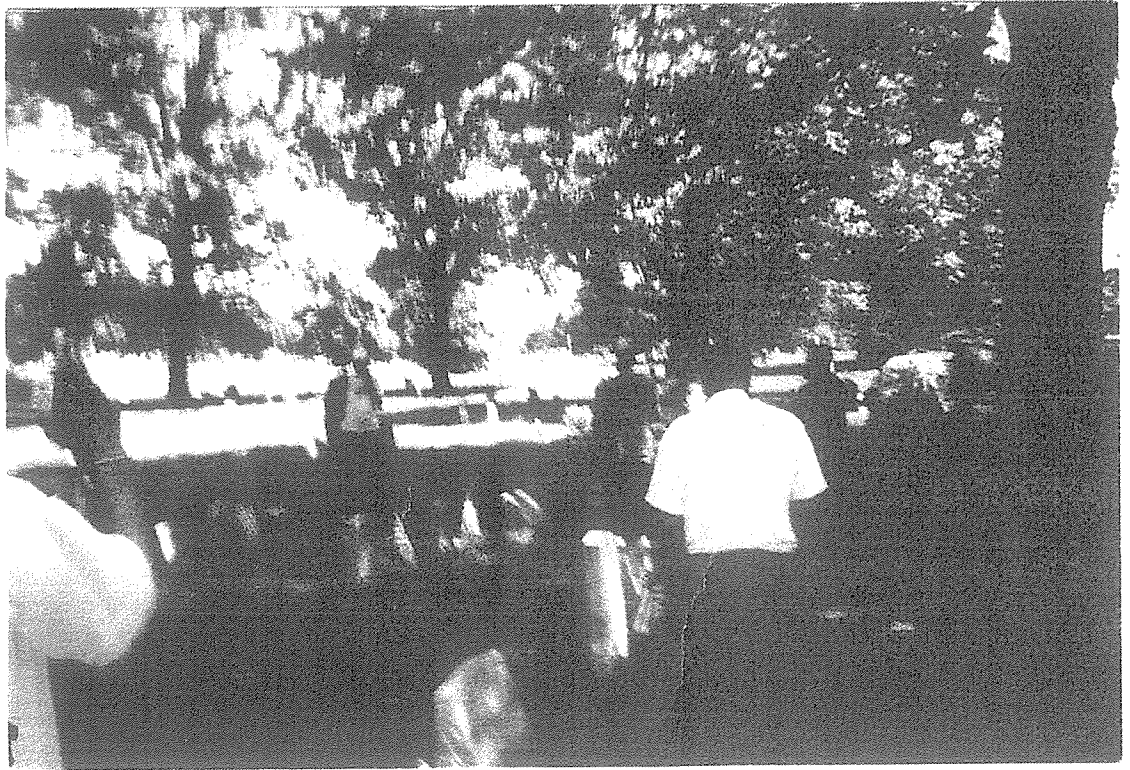
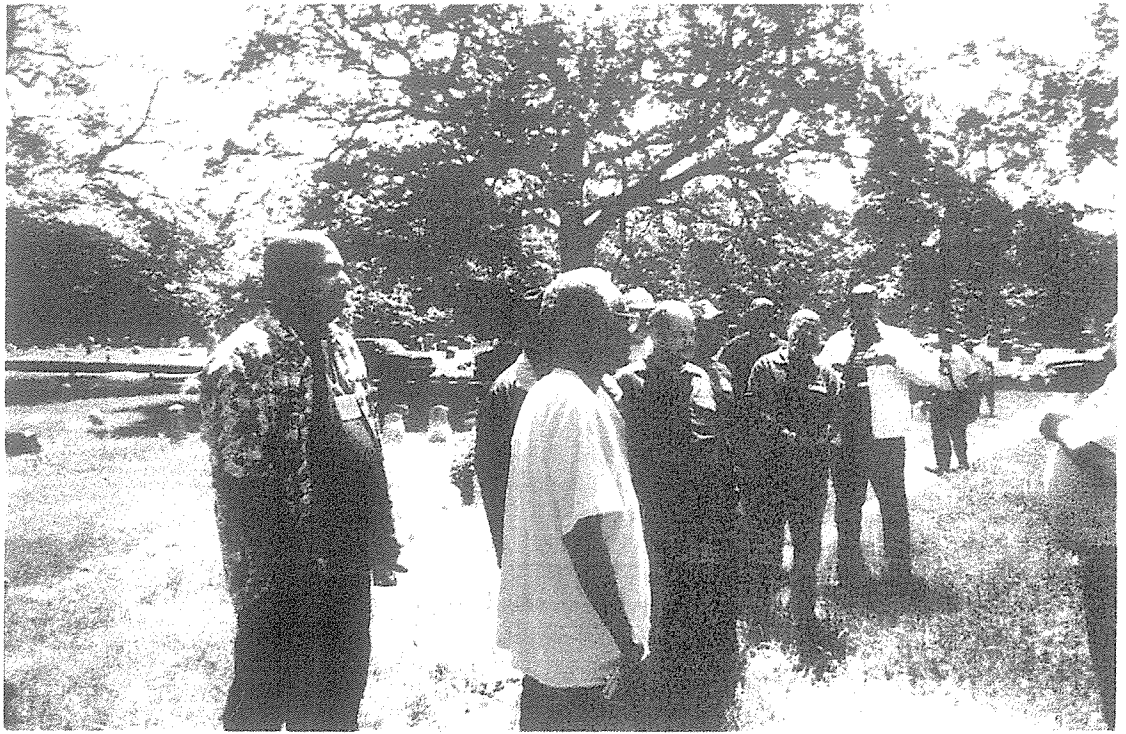
United State Colour Troop
Evergreen CemetARY.
BKlyn.

20th Reg. U.S.C.T.

MILITARY

HONOR





Members of VAG. Group



CARE TAKERS

GATE KEEPERS

The New York City Council – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 10AM

**T2016-3942 Oversight – Examining the Future of Hart Island
Int 0134-2014 A Local Law to amend the administrative code of
New York, in relation to a transfer of jurisdiction
over Hart Island from the Department of
Corrections to the Department of Parks and
Recreation.**

I am speaking to you regarding transferring Hart Island to the Parks Department. As a City Island resident, member of the Civic Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and a long time volunteer in the community, and visitor to Hart Island in June of 2015. The process for visiting was not daunting and a response and date to visit was given in 2 days. The Island was well manicured at the time of my visit; it was peaceful and serene as it should remain to show respect for those buried there. Therefore, I am opposed to Hart Island becoming a public park. I realize, the community board and 44 members of the Civic (1% of the City Island population) have approved of this; however, most of City Island residents are not in favor of this. I am here representing the people who have signed the petition in opposition to a public park. The City Island community, became aware of the proposal to transfer Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department when we were urged to write to Community Board 10 in support of the transfer to prevent the city from using the land for prisons/homeless shelters/incinerators. We are a small community, when there is major shift, which would impact the community we have large public forums, such as the City Island Bridge, the firehouse, etc., for this we did not, and most City Islanders were caught unaware, with this having already been passed by the Civic Association and the Community Board 10.

Since that time, many articles have been published after these votes, advocating for a public park or National Monument, comparing what could be to other former potter's fields that are now successful public parks, such as Madison Square Park and Governor's Island, which was also referred to as a Sunday picnic in the park. No, we do not want this which would lead to full public access to Hart Island. This is what led to the petition opposing the transfer to Parks Department since the bill has no parameters.

Potter's Field is a burial ground, which should be considered sacred and not turned into a public park. We have no problem with access granted to the site for respectful remembrance, but we have not heard how the Parks Department plans to guarantee the maintenance of the due respect that we owe to these buried souls.

The only viable access to Hart Island is via the Fordham Street Ferry Terminal on City Island in the Bronx. Fordham Street is extremely narrow with no room for constant two-way traffic and no space for public parking in the immediate vicinity of the Ferry Terminal. Adding traffic will on jeopardize the public safety of island residents and visitors alike, as emergency access to the island is further dangerously compromised. Even the NYCLU Lawsuit against the city for family access that the plaintiffs won, cites "Because of the extremely limited street-side parking available in the vicinity of the Hart Island Ferry Dock - bordering a private residential area - each group of visitors will be requested to coordinate travel to the City Island dock so as to bring as few vehicles to the site as possible."

The amount of funds to clean up the island and prepare it for public access would seem to be enormous. It would include toxic cleanup, the abandoned missile silos and buildings razed. Why not put those funds into Pelham Bay Park, which is adjacent to City Island and Hart Island. City parks can be used for a multitude of activities (skating rinks, concert venues, ball fields, etc), which are all good things, but not needed here, next to the largest park in New York City. In addition, parkland can be alienated for a multitude of reasons, Rodman's Neck is an example of alienated parkland.

For such a small amount of residents in favor and few requests to visit Hart Island, why would the City or our community take on such burden and expense of another public park.

Thank you,

The Petitioners of City Island



**City Island
Civic Association, Inc.**

PO. BOX 117
CITY ISLAND, NY 10464

FEBRUARY 4TH 2014

**Bill Stanton
Barbara Dolensek
John Doyle**

**President
Second Vice-President
Corresponding Secretary**

**Fred Ramftl
Janie Blanks
Tom Smith**

**First Vice-President
Recording Secretary
Treasurer**

The Honorable Elizabeth Crowley
New York City Council Member
Chair of the Fire and Criminal Justice Committee
250 Broadway Suite 1765
New York, NY 10007

Dear Ms. Crowley:

We, the City Island Civic Association are writing on behalf of the 4,500 residents of our community with respect to New York City's ownership of Hart Island. As you are likely aware, City Island is the nearest community to Hart Island and has not only historical but also current and deep ties to this area. Our community is the launching point to connect all of those who visit Hart Island.

Hart Island has had a unique and fascinating history that spans hundreds of years. During that time period it served admirable progressive goals of education and mental health rehabilitation to darker chapters such as a disease-ridden prisoner camp for Civil War soldiers. It currently serves as the last remaining Potter's Field in the City of New York and is the final resting place for over one million New Yorkers. However, in recent decades there have been also been proposals for constructing an incinerator, a homeless shelter, and new prison facilities that would be of great concern to the quality of life many City Islanders enjoy and against which the City Island community fought a strenuous battle.

Recently, we have had the opportunity to meet with Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project. As you know, she is an advocate for having the land, which is currently under the control of the Department of Corrections, transferred to the Department of Parks and Recreation. Beyond the laudable humanitarian purposes such a transfer would enable, it would also provide protection for City Island from this land being used for purposes that could be harmful to our community. With this in mind, we would like to add our voice to those in support of your legislation to transfer ownership of Hart Island to the Parks Department. While we believe there are many factors that will still need to be worked out before the land can become a full-fledged publicly accessible park, the transfer of land helps the many families who have loved ones buried on Hart Island achieve a level of dignity and respect while visiting while harming no one. It will also hold out the hope that many of us have to restore some of the historic elements of the island and to restore and preserve its unique environmental habitat.

Please advise if there's further action we can take to support your initiative. We believe that should this legislation pass, it will turn the page on a new chapter for the history of Hart Island of which we can all be proud.

**Respectfully,
The City Island Civic Association**

CC: The Honorable James Vacca, Council Member – 13th District
Mr. John Marano/Mr. Ken Kearns, Bronx Community Board #10
Ms. Melinda Hunt, The Hart Island Project

Please visit our Web Site at: www.cicivic.org.
Find us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/city-island-civic/>

Statement from Skip Giacco, president of the City Island Chamber of Commerce:

“As a leader on City Island, I’m aware that this transfer has some risk. Indeed, something could go wrong and we could be left with an unfortunate situation on Hart Island. That being said, given the nature of both agencies, I’m far more comfortable with the gravity of a mistake being made by the Parks Department than I am with the gravity of a mistake being made by the Department of Corrections.”

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for letting us testify at this important hearing.

My name is Barbara Dolensek. I have been a resident of City Island for 40 years and an officer of the City Island Civic Association for 20; I am also vice president and administrator of the City Island Historical Society and Nautical Museum. Because I have a particular interest in local history, the subject of Hart Island has always held a special fascination for me. When I moved to City Island in 1976, Hart Island was still accessible to the public. People were allowed to go there by boat, to take photographs, and to admire the historic buildings dating back to the 1880s, along with the Civil War memorial and a chapel. One could see that there had been a real community on the island, as well as a dark and fascinating history—as a potter’s field, a prison, a yellow-fever quarantine station, a hospital for patients with TB, a sanatorium for women, a reformatory for boys, a Nike missile site, a drug-rehab facility, and of course an overflow prison for the city. In short, Hart Island has served for over 100 years as New York City’s closet for hiding unpleasant things. During the 1970s through 1991, the city proposed putting all sorts of unpleasant things on the island—a power plant, an incinerator, a homeless shelter, and of course a prison; City Island residents fought very hard to get those projects placed elsewhere, and in response the city closed it down to all visitors, except those with special permits dispensed by the Department of Corrections. People arriving on the shore by boat without permits are at risk of being arrested and no photographs may be taken by any visitor.

With no one watching, the DOC lost burial records, allowed the landscape to deteriorate (even today one cannot access parts of the island because of storm damage) and let the

historic buildings to deteriorate to the extent that no one is allowed to enter them. No one can deny that what is essentially a beautiful island that is home now to as many as a million souls, most of them sadly forgotten, has become an embarrassment to New York City. No one on City Island wants Hart Island to become a recreational facility with swings and handball courts; all that and more is all available in nearby Pelham Bay Park. What many of us do want, however, is for New York City to take care of a significant part of its history and allow it to be restored, studied, and experienced as such with the respect it deserves. This is not a responsibility that can be shouldered by the Department of Corrections, but we have faith that with time, community input, and of course the funding that must still be raised, the Parks Department can take on the challenge and do right by this important aspect of New York City's colorful past.

Thank you for listening.

Good morning, Chairpersons Levine and Crowley and members of the committees.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is John Doyle. I have been an officer and board member of the City Island Civic Association for the past six years. I'm also a twenty-five year resident of the City Island community.

Over the past twelve months, I have attended many hearings and meetings where Intro-134 has been discussed, including two meetings of Bronx Community Board 10, several meetings of the Hart Island Project, and about nine meetings of the City Island Civic Association. These groups, which are made up of people who look at this matter from different perspectives, have come to the same conclusion—that the transfer of this land from the Department of Corrections to the Department of Parks and Recreation is in the best interest of our city and our local community.

I am sure that you will hear powerful testimony from family members of those interred at Hart Island, and their voices deserve to be heard on a matter that has affected them so deeply. I sympathize with their struggle and ordeal and I admire those individuals who put together this piece of legislation, but I want to give you a view of the perspective of my association, which works on a daily basis to maintain and strengthen our community.

Given its proximity, City Island has, as you know, been intimately connected with the history of Hart Island for over a hundred years. You may not be aware, however, that Hart Island has also been the source of controversy for many decades. During the 1970s, under the Beame administration, the city selected it as the site for a 700,000-kilowatt

power plant. During the 1980s, the Koch administration identified Hart Island as an appropriate site for a garbage incinerator, a prison for 48 to 400 inmates, a prison barge housing 800 prisoners, and a thousand-bed homeless shelter. Residents of City Island organized protests and hired attorneys to fight off these projects, which were ultimately dropped, but the Department of Corrections went ahead and housed between 30 to 50 inmates on the Island for several years, in direct opposition to City Island residents.

For the past twenty years, the Island has had no resident inmates but has continued as a potter's field, where inmates are used to bury unidentified and indigent individuals who have died in the city. It is clear that the DOC views Hart Island not as a cemetery but as a corrections facility and has made it a crime for the general public to access the island without special permission. Relatives who can prove they are related to someone buried on the island and religious groups are allowed limited access, but no one else can legally visit the island.

Two years ago, in January 2014, our group spoke to advocates of this legislation and decided to weigh in – in favor of this legislation. Later that year, we visited the Island with DOC officials to see the situation for ourselves. We saw historic buildings that have been allowed to decay beyond salvage and a lack of land maintenance that is nothing short of disrespectful of those interred on the island.

The City Island Civic Association's responsibility is to "be the protection of the public interest of the bonafide residents of City Island." Given this responsibility, the history of this site and the facts as we know them to be, we came to the conclusion and the consensus that having this land converted to Parkland would be in the best interest of our community. We are aware that even after the transfer of jurisdiction, the Parks

Department would still have to go through a Universal Land Use Review Procedure in order for the Island to officially become “parkland”. That being said, this legislation is an important first step toward that goal.

By having this land converted to parkland, we would have additional protection against possible development of this site in the future. The parkland alienation process would make converting this site into another use a very difficult process. Our own council member, James Vacca, was quoted as saying “I think that this protects the island in perpetuity.” I couldn’t agree more with his assessment, and I think it sums up our association’s views as well.

I am aware that my opinion and the views of our association are not universal, nor should they be. Some have raised concerns about increased traffic on City Island as a result of this proposal. I would like to point out that if visitation were continued along the lines of what has already been established—with two ferry trips a day (or twice a week as Chair Levine suggested), one at 9 a.m. and the other at 12 noon—it would not conflict with seasonal City Island traffic, which is normally during late afternoon and early evening hours on weekends. Furthermore, the ferry that is used to transport passengers to the island (the only means of access) holds approximately 25 people, which in effect would cap the amount of people accessing Hart Island from City Island and minimize the buildup of traffic that some residents fear.

As we wrote in our original correspondence in support of this bill, many factors would need to be worked out before the island could become publicly accessible (even if it was accessible only during limited times because of the geographical limitations of the

island). To be clear, the Civic Association has not weighed in on the matter of Hart Island becoming a public park. **I would therefore urge the council that if this legislation is approved, you should also set up a transparent framework to bring in stakeholders from all sides to discuss the future uses and accessibility of the Island.** Similar methods have already been undertaken for our new City Island bridge and even the renovation of Orchard Beach. The Parks Department should listen to these stakeholders before any major changes are initiated, and additional public meetings should be held on City Island.

Finally, I would like to present for the record a brief statement from one individual who could not join us today.

From Tom Smith, a Civic Association officer and lifelong Island resident: “It is really a shame that the incredible history on Hart Island, including a Civil War monument that was built by Union soldiers to commemorate the dead they buried there, cannot be visited. We need to open up that history so people can go over and see that.”

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you again for your time.



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Status of Hart Island

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 3:47 PM

Begin forwarded message:

From: Tom Wepler <tomwepler@gmail.com>
Date: January 12, 2015 at 10:23:58 AM EST
To: bx10@cb.nyc.gov
Cc: city.island.civic@mac.com
Subject: Status of Hart Island

Dear Mr. Prince,

As a longtime resident of City Island, I am writing to strongly encourage you and Bronx Community Board 10 members to support Intro 133 and 134, the legislation transferring responsibility for Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. This is critically important because:

- Hart Island is home to a large potter's field, with over 1 million people buried there. Many of these individuals are survived by loved ones that should have the right to visit, but don't. That is unacceptable on a basic moral and human level, and steps should be take to correct this immediately.
- There have been proposals going as far back as the 1970s to repurpose Hart Island as home to a waste incinerator, a homeless shelter, and a large-scale incarceration complex. By transferring the island to the Parks Department, it can be proactively protected from these and other unsuitable uses.

The legislation is already supported by the City Island Civic Association, as well as every member of the Bronx delegation to the City Council, and there is broad support among Bronx residents. It only makes sense for Community Board 10 to put forward its support as well.

Sincerely,

Tom Wepler
44 Fordham Street
Bronx, NY 10464



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Status of Hart Island

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 3:47 PM

To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Leslie J. Gallo" <lgallo@artemis-international.com>
Date: January 12, 2015 at 9:51:17 AM EST
To: bx10@cb.nyc.gov
Cc: city.island.civic@mac.com
Subject: Status of Hart Island

Dear Mr. Prince,

As a lifelong resident of City Island, I am writing to strongly encourage you and Bronx Community Board 10 members to support Intro 133 and 134, the legislation transferring responsibility for Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. This is critically important because:

- Hart Island is home to a large potter's field, with over 1 million people buried there. Many of these individuals are survived by loved ones that should have the right to visit, but don't. That is unacceptable on a basic moral and human level, and steps should be take to correct this immediately.
- There have been proposals going as far back as the 1970s to repurpose Hart Island as home to a waste incinerator, a homeless shelter, and a large-scale incarceration complex. By transferring the island to the Parks Department, it can be proactively protected from these and other unsuitable uses.

The legislation is already supported by the City Island Civic Association, as well as every member of the Bronx delegation to the City Council, and there is broad support among Bronx residents. It only makes sense for Community Board 10 to put forward its support as well.

Sincerely,

Leslie J. Gallo
Resident: 48 Fordham Street, City Island NY 10464

Please consider the environment before printing this email.



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Status of Hart Island

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 3:48 PM

Begin forwarded message:

From: Jonna Gallo <reachjonna@gmail.com>
Date: January 11, 2015 at 10:40:00 PM EST
To: bx10@cb.nyc.gov
Cc: city.island.civic@mac.com
Subject: **Status of Hart Island**

Dear Mr. Prince,

As a lifelong resident of City Island, I am writing to strongly encourage you and Bronx Community Board 10 members to support Intro 133 and 134, the legislation transferring responsibility for Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. This is critically important because:

- Hart Island is home to a large potter's field, with over 1 million people buried there. Many of these individuals are survived by loved ones that should have the right to visit, but don't. That is unacceptable on a basic moral and human level, and steps should be take to correct this immediately.
- There have been proposals going as far back as the 1970s to repurpose Hart Island as home to a waste incinerator, a homeless shelter, and a large-scale incarceration complex. By transferring the island to the Parks Department, it can be proactively protected from these and other unsuitable uses.

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Sincerely,
Jonna Gallo
44 Fordham Street
Bronx, NY 10464



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: pending Hart Island legislation

1 message

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 3:48 PM

Begin forwarded message:

From: Stephen Swieciki <stephen.swieciki@gmail.com>
Date: January 11, 2015 at 10:23:49 PM EST
To: "BX10@cb.nyc.gov" <bx10@cb.nyc.gov>
Cc: city.island.civic@mac.com
Subject: pending Hart Island legislation

Dear Mr. Prince,

As a resident of City Island, I am writing to you to express my concern that the members of Bronx Community Board 10 support Intro 133 and 134, the legislation transferring responsibility for Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. I expect your support for two reasons.

First, Hart Island is home to a large potter's field - over a million people have been buried there. Many of these individuals are survived by loved ones that should have the right to visit, but don't. This situation is unacceptable, and there is a moral imperative to correct it.

Second, there have been proposals going as far back as the 1970s to repurpose Hart Island as home to a waste incinerator, a homeless shelter, and a large-scale incarceration complex. By transferring the island to the Parks Department, it can be proactively protected from these and other unwanted uses.

The legislation is already supported by the City Island Civic Association, as well as every member of the Bronx delegation to the City Council, and there is broad support among Bronx residents. Given these facts, it is my sincere hope Community Board 10 will offer its support as well.

Sincerely,

Steve Swieciki



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Hart Island

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>

Sat, Jan 10, 2015 at 10:34 AM

To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Begin forwarded message:

From: caroloncue@aol.com
Date: January 10, 2015 at 9:35:26 AM EST
To: city.island.civic@mac.com
Subject: Fwd: Hart Island

—Original Message—

From: caroloncue <caroloncue@aol.com>
To: bx10 <bx10@cb.nyc.gov>; City.IslandCivic <City.IslandCivic@mac.com>
Sent: Sat, Jan 10, 2015 9:33 am
Subject: Hart Island

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write in support of the transfer of jurisdiction of Hart Island to the Parks Department.

Carol McCabe
160 Pilot Street
Bronx, NY 10464



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Hart Island

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 4:27 PM

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Swieciki, Maria C." <swiecimc09@bonaventure.edu>
Date: January 12, 2015 at 4:26:31 PM EST
To: "bx10@cb.nyc.gov" <bx10@cb.nyc.gov>
Cc: "city.island.civic@mac.com" <city.island.civic@mac.com>
Subject: Hart Island

Dear Mr. Prince,

As a resident of City Island, I am writing to you to express my concern that the members of Bronx Community Board 10 support Intro 133 and 134, the legislation transferring responsibility for Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. I expect your support for two reasons.

First, Hart Island is home to a large potter's field - over a million people have been buried there. Many of these individuals are survived by loved ones that should have the right to visit, but don't. This situation is unacceptable, and there is a moral imperative to correct it.

Second, there have been proposals going as far back as the 1970s to repurpose Hart Island as home to a waste incinerator, a homeless shelter, and a large-scale incarceration complex. By transferring the island to the Parks Department, it can be proactively protected from these and other unwanted uses.

The legislation is already supported by the City Island Civic Association, as well as every member of the Bronx delegation to the City Council, and there is broad support among Bronx residents. Given these facts, it is my sincere hope Community Board 10 will offer its support as well.

Sincerely,
Maria Christina Swieciki



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Support for transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island to Parks Dept.

1 message

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 3:45 PM

Begin forwarded message:

From: Alex <alinzer@freemanlewis.com>
Date: January 12, 2015 at 2:56:27 PM EST
To: bx10@cb.nyc.gov
Cc: city.island.civic@mac.com
Subject: Support for transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island to Parks Dept.

To Whom It May Concern:

I write to express my support for the transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island to the Parks Department.

Best Regards,

Alexander Linzer
165 Schofield Street
Bronx, NY 10464
alinzer@freemanlewis.com
(917) 846-9797



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Hart Island Legislation

1 message

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 3:46 PM

Begin forwarded message:

From: Kimberly Best <kbest24@gmail.com>
Date: January 12, 2015 at 1:24:19 PM EST
To: bx10@cb.nyc.gov
Cc: city.island.civic@mac.com
Subject: Hart Island Legislation

Dear Mr. Prince,

As a resident of City Island, I am writing to you to express my concern that the members of Bronx Community Board 10 support Intro 133 and 134, the legislation transferring responsibility for Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. I expect your support for two reasons.

First, Hart Island is home to a large potter's field - over a million people have been buried there. Many of these individuals are survived by loved ones that should have the right to visit, but don't. This situation is unacceptable, and there is a moral imperative to correct it.

Second, there have been proposals going as far back as the 1970s to repurpose Hart Island as home to a waste incinerator, a homeless shelter, and a large-scale incarceration complex. By transferring the island to the Parks Department, it can be proactively protected from these and other unwanted uses.

The legislation is already supported by the City Island Civic Association, as well as every member of the Bronx delegation to the City Council, and there is broad support among Bronx residents. Given these facts, it is my sincere hope Community Board 10 will offer its support as well.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Best



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Bronx Community Board 10, Intro 133 and 134 - Hart Island Transfer Legislation

1 message

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 3:47 PM

Begin forwarded message:

From: Mike Phillips <michaelwphillips@gmail.com>
Date: January 12, 2015 at 9:42:33 AM EST
To: bx10@cb.nyc.gov
Cc: Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
Subject: Bronx Community Board 10, Intro 133 and 134 - Hart Island Transfer Legislation

Dear Mr. Prince,

As a resident of City Island, I am writing to you to express my concern that the members of Bronx Community Board 10 support Intro 133 and 134, the legislation transferring responsibility for Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. I appeal to your full support of this legislation for two common sense reasons.

First, Hart Island is home to the city's largest Potter's Field. There are over a million people buried on the island with loved ones who do not have the right to visit their grave site. A situation that I'm sure you will agree is morally unacceptable.

Second, there have been proposals stretching back to the early 1970s to re-purpose Hart Island as home to a waste incinerator, a power plant, and a large-scale incarceration complex. By transferring the island to the Parks Department, we can ensure that this unique NYC land is free from hazards that effect the Bronx community and the delicate ecosystem of the Long Island Sound.

The legislation is already supported by the City Island Civic Association, as well as every member of the Bronx delegation to the City Council, and there is broad support among Bronx residents. Given these facts, it is my sincere hope Community Board 10 will offer its support as well.

Sincerely,

Michael W. Phillips

77 Bay Street

City Island, Bronx, NY 10464



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd: Hart Island Meeting 12 Jan

1 message

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 3:48 PM

Begin forwarded message:

From: Maria Caruso <maria.caruso@frosch.com>
Date: January 12, 2015 at 6:35:21 AM EST
To: "'bx10@cb.nyc.gov'" <bx10@cb.nyc.gov>, "'city.island.civic@mac.com'" <city.island.civic@mac.com>, "'ggiacco@optonline.net'" <ggiacco@optonline.net>
Subject: Hart Island Meeting 12 Jan

Unfortunately, I cannot make the meeting tonight as I am out of town. But as a resident of City Island, business owner of Bistro SK Restaurant on City Island and as City Island Chamber of Commerce Board Member as Director of Tourism, I support the Parks Dept. taking control of Hart Island.

Maria Caruso

Maria Caruso, CTC
Frosch NY
909 Third Avenue, 12th floor
New York NY 10022

212-784-0279 - Direct
917-797-4524 - Cell



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Fwd:

1 message

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 3:48 PM

Begin forwarded message:

Resent-From: city.island.civic@mac.com
From: 9176022019@pm.sprint.com
Date: January 12, 2015 at 2:35:22 AM EST
Resent-To: city.island.civic@mac.com
To: city.island.civic@mac.com, bx10@cb.nyc.gov

Sent from my mobile.

I support hart Island being transferred to the parks department!



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Hart Island

Tom Smith <city.island.civic@mac.com>
To: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Wed, Jan 14, 2015 at 1:26 PM

Begin forwarded message:

From: julia <jmfd55@msn.com>
Date: January 14, 2015 at 12:55:17 PM EST
To: "bx10@cb.nyc.gov" <bx10@cb.nyc.gov>
Cc: "city.island.civic@mac.com" <city.island.civic@mac.com>
Subject: Hart Island

To Whom It May Concern:

We support jurisdiction be given to the Parks Department for Hart Island.

Best regards,
Frank and Julia DiMaio

Sent from my iPad



John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>

Hart Island

Joanne Rubino <johay16@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 12, 2015 at 8:14 PM

To: bronx10@cb.nyc.gov

Cc: John Doyle <doylejc1@gmail.com>, city.island.civic@mac.com

I am writing this letter in support of transferring Hart Island to the NYC Parks Department, and opening this cemetery to the 1000s of residents of NYC and others who have loved ones who are buried there, so that they may have a way of having closure and finally be able to visit their gravesites.

My family was affected by the loss of a child through stillbirth. We never knew what happened to our baby, Einstein offered us no information. On the last day of this year, I was able to find where she was through the Hart Island website. It gave us a sense of peace and closure. It would be nice if we were able to visit a newly renovated area at some point in the future. I believe the Parks Department would be the perfect agency to perform this task. For the sake of the 1000s of families like ours, please make this happen.





Joanne Rubino

Chairperson Parks and Recreation Committee, CB 11

BLOG CITY LIFE

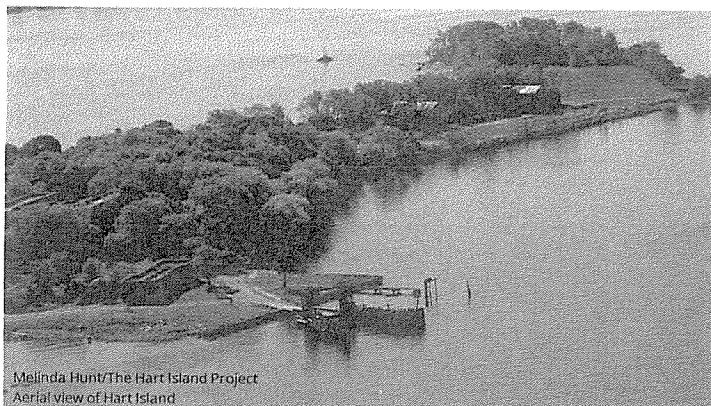
4 ADD COMMENT  LOVE IT

New York's newest park could be built atop nearly a million unmarked graves

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By Will Pulos

Posted: Friday January 23 2015, 3:04pm



Melinda Hunt/The Hart Island Project
Aerial view of Hart Island

Hart Island, which just east of the Bronx in the mouth of the Long Island Sound, boasts breathtaking views of the water, fascinating examples of Victorian architecture, 100 acres of open space and...the bodies of almost one million dead New Yorkers.

The largest publicly funded cemetery in the world, Hart Island has served as a potter's field for New York City since 1869. Since then, it's housed a prison, a workhouse for the poor, an insane asylum, a tuberculosis sanatorium and a missile base. Currently, around 1,500 bodies are buried there annually.

And in a few years, you might be able to picnic there. City Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley, who represents Ridgewood, Maspeth and Glendale in Queens, has introduced a bill that would transfer control of the half-mile-long island to the Parks Department. The goal would be to open the island to the public, transforming it into a space similar to Governor's Island (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/parks/governors-island>).

"The island has a unique, beautiful idyllic setting that is different than any place in the city," says Councilwoman Crowley. "It would be a nice place for people to visit. Especially, for those who have an actual connection to the island if you have a loved one buried there."

Since 1975, the Department of Corrections has run Hart Island (the bodies are buried by Riker's Island inmates) and the area has been mostly closed to the public. Those wishing to pay their respects have to file an application to visit the island on a ferry (which runs only once a month). Once there, visitors are not allowed to go more than 20 yards past the dock or see any of the graves—there's a designated "mourning gazebo".

Transforming the island into a park would *not* mean the land would cease to be used as a burial site, however. Instead, the proposed legislation would limit Riker's inmates' work there to two days per week, and section off the area where active burials are taking place. Crowley recently toured the island with Council Member Mark Levine, the chairman of the Parks and Recreation committee, and representatives from the mayor's office. Bronx Community Board 10 signed off on the legislation last Thursday, and Crowley says she expects a hearing on the bill by June.

But before you poo-poo the idea of an afternoon spent hanging near buried bodies, you should know that you've probably already done it. Washington Square Park (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/attractions/washington-square-park>), Madison Square Park (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/things-to-do/madison-square-park-1>), Bryant Park (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/attractions/bryant-park>) and Prospect Park (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/parks/prospect-park>) were all originally used for public burials.

Families win access to Hart Island, NYC's potter's field

Peter D. Kramer, The (Westchester County, N.Y.) Journal News 8:55 p.m. EDT July 13, 2015

Peekskill artist Melinda Hunt has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. (Video by Peter Carr/The Journal News)



(Photo: Melinda Hunt & Joel Sternfeld)

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. — For 24 years, Peekskill artist Melinda Hunt has spent her life documenting, charting and helping families gain access to Hart Island, where [New York City has buried its anonymous and indigent dead since just after the Civil War. \(http://ohud.us/1PgriH9\)](http://ohud.us/1PgriH9)

The 101-acre island off City Island in Long Island Sound holds America's largest mass grave, where an estimated 1 million plain, pine boxes hold the city's poor and unknown.

Access to the potter's field hasn't been easy.

"Lawyers tell me it's harder to get onto Hart Island than a maximum-security prison," Hunt says in her bright upstairs office and studio on South Division Street.



USA TODAY

Cops: Woman stole grave wreaths to decorate home

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/07/01/woman-steals-wreaths-from-graves-to-decorate-her-home/29562721/>

On July 8, access got easier, when the New York Civil Liberties Union settled a lawsuit with the city, granting survivors visits once a month to the gravesites of their family members. Until now, access — through the Department of Corrections, which still oversees burials by Riker's Island work crews — has been to a gazebo on the island, far from the actual gravesites.

This settlement changes that, said Christopher Dunn, the NYCLU's lead counsel on the case.

"This settlement should help bring closure to the parents, children, brothers, sisters and other family members of the generations of people who suffered the indignity of mass burial and then suffered the added insult of being forsaken by a city policy that barred family and friends from visiting," he said.

Families like Dr. Laurie Grant, a Valhalla obstetrician and gynecologist whose daughter was stillborn 22 years ago this week, on July 13, 1993, at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan. The baby was buried on Hart Island without Grant's knowledge or permission while she recovered from the difficult delivery, she says.

Grant has been trying for years to get onto Hart Island. Last March, she arranged a trip and showed up at the dock, only to have no one from the corrections department show up to take her over. She said she hopes to be among the first to visit Hart Island under the new settlement.

"This is a hard time of year for me" surrounding the anniversary, she said, but added: "It's your right to visit the cemetery."

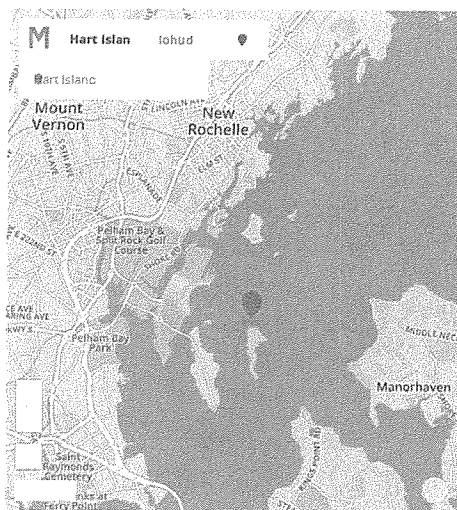


Current designated burial sites at Hart Island. (Photo: Melinda Hunt/The Hart Island Project)

The first visits will be July 19. While the details are still being worked out, Dunn predicted there would be two two-hour windows for up to 25 visitors each. (Family members wishing to schedule a visit can call the Department of Corrections at 718-546-0911.)

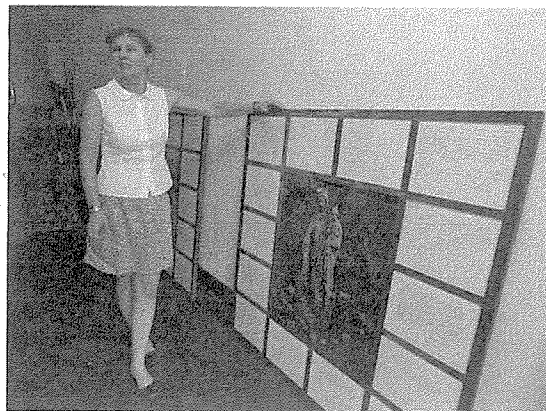
Hunt has been helping families navigate the bureaucracy for years, suing to gain access for mothers to visit their babies' graves. She turned thousands of pages of city records into the award-winning Hart Island Project website (www.hartisland.net), where she charts burials since 1980 and helps family members document the lives that led to Hart Island.

"It's like Facebook for the dead," she said. "We give people a blank slate to remember their family member, to tell their story. There's a reverence to what they write when they gather their thoughts. Unlike Facebook, we don't have nasty people show up."



Hunt also wrote the book on Hart Island, a 1998 collaboration with photographer Joel Sternfeld ("Hart Island," Scala). In it, she asked prisoners to reflect on the work detail that has them filling the vast plots that measure 20 feet by 70 feet by 6 feet. Those plots hold 165 adult coffins. Or 1,000 plain pine boxes holding the remains of babies.

Inmate Eddie Melendez wrote: "When I first came to Hart Island, it was just a job to me. But when I found out that my baby sister was buried here it hurt me. Because she didn't get a proper beirial. For I can pay my restpecks and now when I beiry a baby I think of my sister."



Artist Melinda Hunt at her Peekskill studio July 9, 2015. She has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. This panel includes a photograph from the island and letters written by Riker's Island inmates tasked with burying New York's anonymous or indigent dead. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

Hunt also made the 2006 documentary film *Hart Island: An American Cemetery* and created a gallery work on the topic for Westchester Community College in 2012.

Hunt sees last week's settlement as a milestone in her effort to help families, but just a step on her goal to have the city parks department take over Hart Island and turn it into a city park. There is a bill before the City Council to transfer the island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department, and Hunt is hoping it will get a hearing in September.



USA TODAY

[Ice jam topples Civil-War era headstones in Ohio cemetery](http://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2015/03/17/ice-jam-cemetery-ohio-headstones/24899767/)

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2015/03/17/ice-jam-cemetery-ohio-headstones/24899767/>)

The 101-acre island could serve the same dual purpose as other city parks — Madison Park and Washington Square Park, among them — that were once cemeteries. Hart Island could become the nation's largest "green cemetery," where bodies are not embalmed and are buried in plain pine boxes, as they have been at Hart Island from the start, permitted to degrade and feed the soil. That effort would require an organized landscaping plan, something better suited to the Parks Department than the Corrections Department, Hunt said.

"I'd like to make it like Governors Island, where kids go on field trips," Hunt said.

For now, those trips are limited to family members, once a month, on a Department of Corrections ferry.

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BRONX

Part of Bronx's Hart Island may become a park

JENNIFER H. CUNNINGHAM

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS Updated: 01/07/2014 12:40 PM ET

296



CLARE YAFFA/AP

This Sept. 13, 1990 photo provided by Claire Yaffa shows a mass burial trench for adults on New York's Hart Island. Since 1869, more than 1 million people have been laid to rest at the potter's field on the island that lies in the waters just off the Bronx borough of New York City.

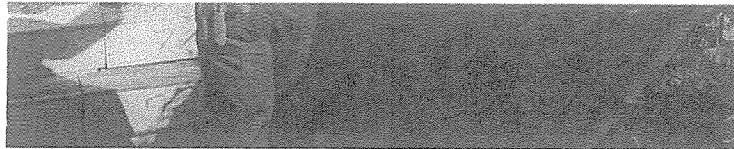
A Bronx-based potter's Field that's been in use since the Victorian era may get a new life.

Part of Hart Island, a 130-acre isle off mainland Bronx that has been used as a public cemetery since 1869, may become the city's newest park after a Queens lawmaker vowed to revisit a measure that would bring it under the jurisdiction of the Parks Department.

City Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley (D-Middle Village) said she'll re-introduce the bill she co-sponsored to transfer Hart Island's jurisdiction from the city Department of Correction. Crowley said she aims to have the bill — which died in committee on New Year's Eve — reintroduced by next month.



CLARE YAFFA/AP



This Thursday, Sept. 13, 1990 picture provided by Claire Yaffa shows the mass burial of infants in Trench 51 on New York's Hart Island. Since 1869, more than 1 million people have been laid to rest at the potter's field on the island that lies in the waters just off the Bronx borough of New York City.

"Every New Yorker should have the right to visit, without having to go through the (Department of Corrections) process," Crowley said. "My goal is to open up more of the island, and make it more visitor-friendly."

Crowley said she plans to work with the Council's new Parks Committee leadership to give the plan a fair hearing.

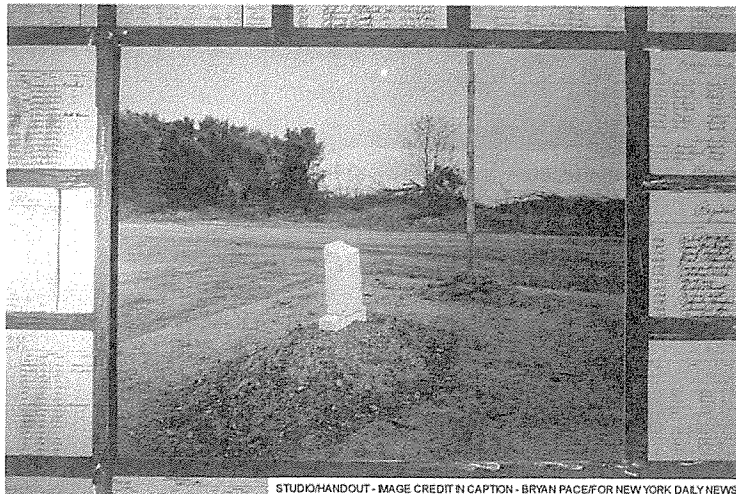


STUDIOHANDOUT - IMAGE CREDIT IN CAPTION - BRYAN PACE FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Potters Field - Title : Adult Mass Burial with Pages from the Hart Island Burial Record Books - Photo Credit : Melinda Hunt in Collaboration with Joel Sternfeld - Exhibit "Silent Beaches, Untold Stories: New York City's Forgotten Waterfront" at St. Johns University, Queens.

Currently, those wishing to visit some of approximately one million people entombed on the island have to formally request a visit and cannot visit the actual grave site, according to the Department of Correction. Visitors must take a city-operated ferry from City Island to Hart Island.

Rikers Island inmates are still burying people on the southern portion of the island. The common burial ground serves as the final resting spot for people who are indigent or those whose families don't know their whereabouts when they die.

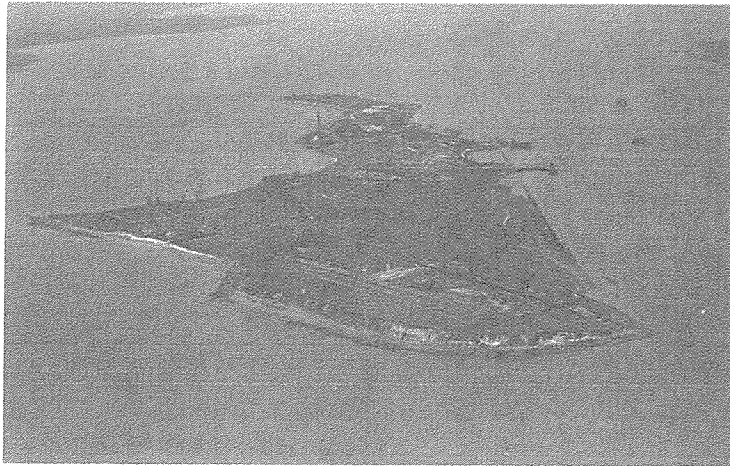


STUDIOHANDOUT - IMAGE CREDIT IN CAPTION - BRYAN PACE FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Potters Field - Title : New Mass Grave and Mussel Shells with Pages from the Hart Island Burial Records - Photo Credit : Melinda Hunt in Collaboration with Joel Sternfeld - Exhibit "Silent Beaches, Untold Stories: New York City's Forgotten Waterfront" at St. Johns University, Queens.

If the park proposal is approved, the city would have to find a way to deal with the influx of traffic onto City Island, said Barbara Dolensek of the City Island Civic Association.

"Our main concern would be the impact opening a public park would have on City Island," Dolensek said. "We do think people should be allowed to visit on a limited basis."



An aerial photo of Hart Island from the 1950s.

The northern end of the island — which hasn't had new burials in many years — could easily be turned into a park, said Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project, which is advocating for increased accessibility to Hart Island.

Hunt — whose group is hosting a hearing this month on the future uses of Hart Island — said several former potter's fields in the city have been turned into parks — including Bryant Park, City Hall Park and Washington Square Park. Prospect Park in Brooklyn is home to a Quaker cemetery.



Inmates prepare for a burial at Hart Island.

"That's really the precedent for transferring it," Hunt said. "[The cemetery] doesn't impinge on Prospect Park being an active park."

Besides burials, the small island in the Long Island Sound that's less than a mile east of City Island, has also been home to a prison, a reformatory for boys and an insane asylum.

A Parks Department spokesman said he wouldn't comment on legislation that didn't yet exist, but said the department has refused jurisdiction of Hart Island in the past because the agency won't operate on an active burial ground.

Hart Island Project Public Meeting, Jan. 18, 2 p.m., City Island Library, 320 City Island Ave.

jcunningham@nydailynews.com

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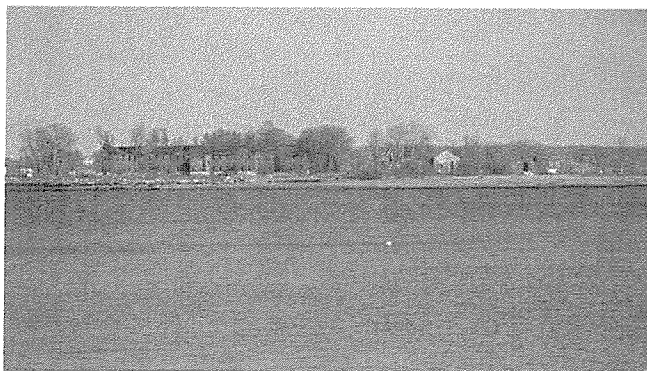
Will Hart Island be reborn as NYC's newest public park?

New York's public cemetery has been off-limits to the public for decades. But with a push to transfer control of the island-bound burial ground to the Parks Department, that could all change.



MATT HICKMAN
 January 22, 2015, 4:20 p.m.

182 3



Hart Island, a place long associated with death, disease and heartbreak, is the final resting place of over 1 million people. (Photo: Don Emmer/AFP/Getty Images)

It may come as a surprise, but New York City is an old pro at transforming burial grounds into parks.

Long before the folk singers, chess players and skate rats moved in and it rose to prominence as a counterculture congregation spot for those crusading against "the man" (and before that, Robert Moses), Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village was a rural cemetery, not yet part of the city proper, where New Yorkers killed by early 19th century outbreaks of yellow fever were interred. Rumor is, around 20,000 souls were never disinterred and remain buried under the beloved and heavily trafficked park.

The same goes for Madison Square Park. Long before the era of never-ending Shake Shack queues, the Flatiron District's most bustling green space was an 18th century potter's field — a place where the indignant were laid to rest. Fifteen blocks north, Bryant Park served very much the same function up until the 1840s when the burial ground was decommissioned and the human remains were relocated elsewhere.

And then there's Hart Island.

Officially part of the Bronx, this 130-acre landmass located just east of City Island — and Rat Island — is best known for spectacular views of Long Island Sound, a smattering of creepy crumbling buildings and tens of thousands of unmarked mass graves.

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A mile long and only about a quarter-mile wide, Hart Island is located just east of larger City Island in the Bronx. (Photo: Doc Seaman/flickr)

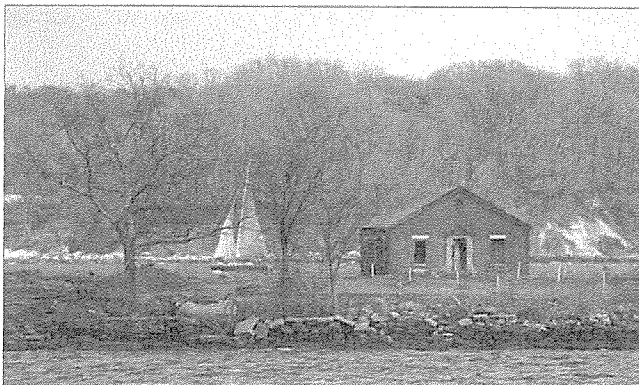
Home to what's still very much an active potter's field, Hart Island is the largest tax-funded cemetery in the world. The island has held many facilities over the years including a boot camp for delinquent boys, a drug rehab center, a tuberculosis sanatorium, a Nike missile site and an insane asylum. Since 1869 it has also been where the city sends its unclaimed and unidentified bodies (and dismembered body parts). A large majority of those buried on Hart Island include stillborn infants and young children along with foreign tourists, the homeless and the loved ones of New Yorkers who simply can't afford a private burial. More than 1 million souls are buried anonymously on the island with about 1,500 bodies arriving annually.

Once used as a prison itself including a short Civil War-era stint as a POW camp, interments on Hart Island are performed by inmates from nearby Rikers Island, New York's notorious primary jail complex. Today, these prison laborers are paid 65 cents an hour to bury the dead.

Following decades of attempts at reform and *slightly* improved access, including a monthly ferry that shuttles family of the deceased from City Island to a small gazebo "set aside for reflection" at the Hart Island ferry dock (visits to the actual grave sites are still verboten), sweeping changes are afoot at this strange and sad spit of land.

Late last week, Bronx Community Board 10 gave its blessing to proposed legislation that would transfer control of the island — pop culture junkies may know it best from the 2001 Michael Douglas/Brittany Murphy thriller "Don't Say a Word" even though no filming took place there — from the Department of Correction to the Department of Parks and Recreation. If the bill, re-introduced by City Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley after a failed attempt in 2012, is approved and the transfer is carried out, at least a small chunk of Hart Island would be christened as one of New York City's newest public parks, joining illustrious green spaces like Washington Square Park, Bryant Park, Madison Square Park and several other potter's field-to-park conversions.

Although the transfer of Hart Island to the Parks Department is a small step closer, it's still unclear what exactly this dramatic switch-up will involve.



Hart Island is home to several abandoned buildings including a boys' reformatory and a TB sanatorium. (Photo: Don Emmer/AFIP/Getty Images)

Will the island's wealth of decrepit historic buildings be razed to make way for a harder-to-get-to (and decidedly more macabre) version of Governors Island, the




Matt Hickman
Design devotee blogs about cities, innovation and architecture.

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similarly sized military base-turned-popular summertime weekend getaway just south of Manhattan in the Upper New York Bay?

Will the business of burying bodies continue on the south end of the island, where most of the mass graves are located, or will it halt altogether under the Park Department's jurisdiction?

Will a park that's home to more than a million human remains and a history of illness and imprisonment prove to be a tough sell for solace-seeking, outdoor recreation-hungry New Yorkers?

Has the entire island been stigmatized beyond repair?

And does the Parks Department even *want* jurisdiction of Hart Island considering that it has declined control of it in the past?

These questions remain mostly unanswered. However, if anything, removing control from the Department of Correction and lifting Hart Island's technical status as a prison will likely result in more frequent ferry service and ease the ironclad restrictions on gravesite visits. It would provide a sense of much-needed closure to hundreds upon hundreds of families with loved ones buried on the island.



Hart Island, circa 1990. (Wikimedia Commons)

"Every New Yorker should have the right to visit, without having to go through the (Department of Correction) process," Councilwoman Crowley explains. "My goal is to open up more of the island, and make it more visitor-friendly."

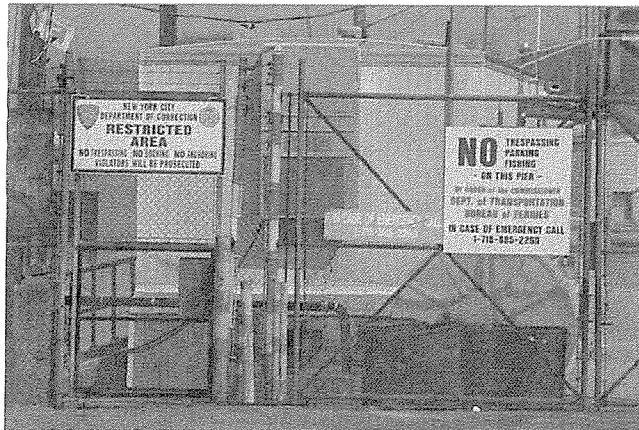
A separate class-action lawsuit filed by the New York City Civil Liberties Union is calling for the Department of Correction to allow access to Hart Island's burial sites.

On top of the lawsuits and proposed legislation, there's also been the recent launch of a haunting, gorgeously produced interactive website from artist and activist Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project, a grassroots advocacy group pushing for continued reform and visitors rights on the island. To even set foot on the island, relatives of the deceased currently must submit to a byzantine process via the Office of Constituent Services.

Unveiled last December, the Hart Island Project's new website not only tells the grim but fascinating history of the island, but allows users to locate the exact gravesite locations of the 62,200 individuals buried on the island since 1980 using global positioning data obtained through the Freedom of Information Law. Once friends and loved ones locate an individual's grave through the digital database, they can post photographs and written remembrances to the Hart Island Project's Traveling Cloud Museum — a virtual cemetery of sorts described as "an attempt to preserve the histories of who is buried for present and future generations."

"It's gorgeous in an otherworldly kind of way. What is really problematic is that it's

hidden, that it is controlled by the prison system and that we are ashamed of it," Hunt told Bloomberg. Although, for now, visitors are strictly forbidden from venturing beyond the aforementioned wooden gazebo, Hunt believes that the addition of the Traveling Cloud Museum, which adds an element of creative storytelling to the raw data, will enable friends and relatives to remember the deceased as more than just a name attached to a point on an online map.



Entrance to the once-a-month limited-access ferry to Hart Island. (Photo: Don Emmert/AFP/Getty Images)

Freshly minted parkland aside, Hunt believes that burials on Hart Island, a place she refers to as "New York City's family tomb" where "we don't always get along, but we do live and die and are buried close to one another," could continue under the auspices of the Parks Department but in a more respectful manner. She writes in a 2013 op-ed for the *New York Times*:

With recent technologies, and fewer burials, it should be possible for Hart Island to be cleaned up to become our newest park, restoring and reclaiming the landscape for public access and moving away from unseemly mass burials. GPS technology already invisibly marks grave sites; future burials could be scattered individually across the landscape and tracked similarly. Under Parks Department management, every unclaimed New Yorker could be given a green burial and a unique location, and every visitor would have a view of the Long Island Sound.

Spend some time at the Hart Island Project website to learn more about the island — and what's being done by folks like Hunt and Crowley to change it for the better. You can also peruse the names of those interred and learn more about their unique stories. Among them is the first child to die of AIDS in New York City, who, unlike other children buried on the island, was laid to rest in an individual grave instead of a massive communal plot. Kelsey Campbell-Dollaghan of Gizmodo has also written a wonderful firsthand account of an incredibly rare visit to Hart Island along with a small handful of other journalists, the first sanctioned press trip since the island was deemed as off-limits in the 1980s.

Do you think the proposed transfer could work? Have you had the chance to visit Hart Island in decades past?

Via [NY Daily News]

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Paying Our Respects: Deal Will Open City's Potters Field To Public

Posted on July 30, 2015 by tribune in Feature



Photo Courtesy David Trawin/Flickr

By Lynn Edmonds, Staff Writer

New Yorkers are now able to visit the graves of loved ones on Hart Island.

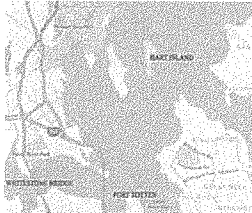
The New York City Department of Correction, which manages operations on the island, settled a lawsuit with the American Civil Liberties Union on July 8 that aims to make it easier for families to pay their respects to loved ones interred there.

Since 1869, more than 750,000 dead may have been buried on Hart Island, which serves as New York City's "Potter's Field." It's the only cemetery the DOC has jurisdiction over, and nearby prisoners from Riker's Island continue to dig the graves and maintain the island.

The 101-acre island is about five miles northeast of Fort Totten Park.

DENIED ACCESS

Fresh Meadows resident Elaine Joseph's five-day-old daughter Tomika was buried on Hart Island in 1978, after she died in surgery during the winter storm that shut down New York City. Stranded in Brooklyn, Joseph could not get to Mount Sinai Hospital before they had taken her daughter's body to be buried. Officials claimed Joseph had signed papers authorizing this.



Top Photo: Hart Island is home to New York City's Potter's Field. Hart Island is located in the Long Island Sound about five miles northeast of Fort Totten.

"No I didn't sign papers for the city to take care of it," I wasn't at the hospital," Joseph said in a phone interview. "That's what they called it, 'take care of it.'"

For decades, Joseph wasn't able to find out where her daughter was buried. Pre-Internet, she searched the yellow pages for "city cemetery." Finally, six or seven years ago, she saw a news segment about Hart Island, and she began concentrating her efforts there. Joseph learned that a New York City death certificate that has the place of burial left blank, like Tomika's was, mean that she was buried on Hart Island.

But realizing her daughter was buried on Hart Island did not immediately mean Joseph could visit her grave. Until July, mourners were restricted to visiting "the Gazebo," a spot on the island that did not have the graves in sight, one weekday per month.

Joseph filed a lawsuit, along with seven other women, to get access to her daughter's grave. She was the first of the plaintiffs to make the trip, doing so on March 2014. Capt. Martin Thompson, who managed operations on the island, left flowers on Tomika's grave - or the site an expert had deduced she would have been buried at, according to the year and her age.

But that was a one-time trip. "I want to go back when I want to go back," Joseph said.

Tellingly enough, Joseph was going to visit her parent's grave when she had answered the call for an interview with the Queens Tribune. She said she visited them frequently. "But the one I can't visit is my daughter," she said.

THE SETTLEMENT

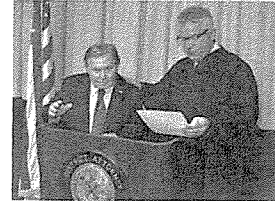
Under the July 8 settlement between the ACLU and the DOC, Joseph, and other relatives and guests, should be able to visit the island on one pre-determined weekend day every month. Visitors will be escorted to the location of the burial by a DOC officer, and they will be allowed to leave mementos such as teddy bears, flowers and photos. The DOC will add burial plot numbers to their online database of those interred on the island, in order to help individuals determine the location of their loved one's remains. Additionally, the DOC will maintain an online and telephone system for scheduling visits. The first gravesite visits for family members took place on July 19. The weekday visits to the gazebo continue, and are open to the general public.

New York Civil Liberties Union Associate Legal Director Christopher Dunn said the settlement "should help bring closure to the parents, children, brothers, sister and other family members of the generations of people who suffered the indignity of mass burial and then suffered the added insult of being forsaken by a city policy that barred family and friends from visiting."

Public Advocate Letitia James also supported expanded visitation rights, writing a letter to the DOC in March and visiting the island in April. She released a statement the day after the settlement.



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"The grieving public has been kept for far too long from getting the closure they need after a loved one is buried on Hart Island. I have pushed for expanded visitation to Hart Island because burial sites on public grounds should be open to all individuals who need to mourn. Anyone who has ever lost a loved one is aware of the undeniable importance of being able to visit their burial site," she said.

Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley (D-Middle Village) also adopted Hart Island as an issue in her position as chairwoman of the Fire and Criminal Justice Services Committee, and saw the settlement as a positive step.

"This change in policy will give visitors a level of comfort that they don't get by being restricted to the Gazebo area," she said.

DOC Commissioner Joe Ponte said he shared a common goal with the plaintiffs. "We want to enable access to the cemetery on Hart Island in a compassionate and safe manner," he said in a press release. "We look forward to implementing this historic settlement, and pledge to work closely with the NYCLU in order to make the compassionate access it envisions a reality."

A PARK?

Melinda Hunt, a visual artist and founder of the Hart Island Project, has been an advocate for increased access to Hart Island for years. She called the settlement "an important step forward."

"Using the prison system to lock away the dead removes the dead from the community," she said. "You are interrupting a normal commemorative process that is shared in all cultures."

Her non-profit organization aims to bring the dead interred there back from anonymity, by creating a virtual space to tell stories about them, advocating for family members who want to access graves, and pushing for the island to be opened up to the public.

She has a larger vision for Hart Island, which she describes as a beautiful landscape, devoid of human markers.

She would like the New York City Parks Department to take over the management of the island from the DOC. That way, the island could be opened up to the general public, and the living and the dead would not be locked away from each other, she said.

Hunt said that currently, there are still many obstacles that bar the island from being safe and easily accessible. Mass graves three coffins high, two across, and 70 feet long, remain open for up to a year, she said. She described the graves as unsafe, destructive to the ecology, and offensive to people.

"It's a 19th century burial process, but we don't have as many epidemics, we don't need to bury people in huge groups like this," Hunt said.

She invited a landscaper from England, where many city cemeteries are also parks, to discuss potential plans for Hart Island with Bronx Parks Commissioner Iris Rodriguez on July 28.

She envisions Hart Island as a place where the living could play, as well as commemorate the dead.

"People have this idea that cemeteries need to be removed. They're in the city, but they have fences around them, you can't go there and play ball and ride your bike, and do things that you do in a park," Hunt said.

She also advocated for the cemetery to become the first "natural burial" site in the United States, meaning the dead, buried in biodegradable pine boxes, would provide nutrients for the soil. The dead on Hart Island are already buried in pine boxes, so it wouldn't require much of a change, she says.

"All they have to do is reorganize how they bury people," she said. "DOC could still dig holes, and plant trees. It's just a different way of doing it that's more environmentally friendly and community oriented."

LEGISLATION

Crowley is working on legislation to transfer control of the city cemetery. She is lead sponsor of bill Int. 134 to transfer jurisdiction of Hart Island to the Parks Department, and bill Int. 133 to require the Department of Transportation to start a ferry service to the island. Crowley aims to schedule hearings in the fall.

"Parks has the ability to make Hart Island a sacred space for the public to both remember their loved ones buried there and also enjoy the green space away from the bustle of our city," Crowley said.

CONCERNS

Greater access might be a benefit to many New Yorkers, but the issue is most pressing for those who long to visit their loved ones.

Joseph was concerned about whether she would be able to visit under the settlement, because the volume containing Tomika's burial records was lost in a fire, and she's not in the doc's database.

After contacting the DOC multiple times, Joseph got her answer. She could go.

Joseph is scheduled to visit her daughter's grave in August.

Reach Lynn Edmonds at (718) 357-7400 x127, ledmonds@queenstribune.com or @Ellinoamerikana.



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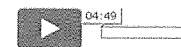
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A sea change looms for once-sleepy City Island

Big moves afoot for the enclave—but on residents' terms.

By Kerry Murtha

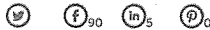


Photo: Erik Ipsen

City Island dock for ferry to Potter's Field.

Change usually comes only two ways on City Island: gradually and grudgingly. Residents, known as clamdiggers (as opposed to land-lubbers), take pride in the place's isolation and in their own way of doing things. That's what makes this current moment in the history of the mile-and-a-half-long speck of land just off Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx so extraordinary.

On the horizon looms the largest raft of changes since the last of the island's renowned builders of yachts—including many America's Cup winners—sailed off into history in the 1960s. In the next two years, residents will not just bid farewell to the century-old bridge that links them to the mainland, they will also see the opening of the first new large-scale residential development in decades.

What's more, they'll witness a jump in the number of visitors streaming through en route to the city's Potter's Field just offshore—the final resting place of more than 1 million indigent New Yorkers.

"Like every community, City Island needs to change, if even a little bit," said John Doyle, a member of the City Island Civic Association.

But he and his fellow clamdiggers are determined it should come on their own terms. Take, for instance, the badly corroded 17-foot-high steel span that links them to the mainland. Yes, it has to go, but when city officials proudly unveiled plans to replace it with a roadbed suspended on cables from a soaring 160-foot-tall tower, residents filed suit to block it. They railed that it didn't mesh in their hamlet of modest two- and three-story houses, bait shops and seafood restaurants.

"We can't build houses higher than 35 feet," said Barbara Dolensek, vice president of the City Island Nautical Museum, which is housed in a white clapboard former school that dates to the late 1800s. "Having such a massive structure at the entrance of the island would have been inappropriate."

In the end, the city radically scaled back its ambitions, substituting a low-rise causeway-style structure. "It's a simple design that reflects the context of the community it connects," said Polly Trottenberg, commissioner of the city's Department of Transportation, which has slated a 2017 opening for the \$105 million link.

Blending in

Meanwhile, 43 new condominiums will rise on a five-acre waterfront site overlooking Long Island Sound in the next two years. Jeff Simpson, chief executive of the project's builder, Greystone Property Development, stressed that it was designed to fit in seamlessly with its surroundings, including the island's 1,500 single-family, mostly clapboard homes. He noted that there will be 22 freestanding townhouses, each with two stacked units, giving the appearance of one-family homes.

"We were worried at first that the complex would be tacky, but it blends in with the community," said Ms. Dolensek.

Simply dubbed On the Sound, the development will offer a mix of two-, three- and four-bedroom units complete with private driveways, gardens and elevated terraces. A community esplanade and gazebo are also being built. Prices start between \$450,000 and \$500,000 for a two-bedroom and run close to \$600,000 for a four-bedroom. More than a third of them have sold already, according to Mr. Simpson.

"We were planning to stagger construction, but given the demand, we're forging ahead," he said.

On the Sound is one of the biggest condo complexes on City Island to go up since the opening of the Boatyard, a 70-unit development erected in the 1980s on the former site of a shipwright's shop that, like many others, fell victim to the public's growing preference for fiberglass hulls. The boat makers are long gone, too. The island is now best known for its summer traffic jams and day-trippers who flood in to enjoy a respite from harried city life.

Many of those tourists remain blissfully unaware that neighboring Hart Island lies just several hundred yards away offshore. This summer, residents will help launch a campaign to make it a national monument. The effort includes plans to create more accessible parkland by transferring Hart Island from the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. City Council hearings on the transfer are scheduled for this fall.

Added ferry service

Residents and elected officials hope the transfer will provide better upkeep of the island and protect it from any future development. A ferry now makes a monthly weekday run from the foot of Fordham Street on City Island to Hart Island, but a recent lawsuit settled by the city will now allow family members of those buried there an additional monthly weekend visit as well.

"Making Hart Island a national monument will draw the attention of the National Park Service," said Melinda Hunt, founder of the Hart Island Project, which has helped recover thousands of burial records. Ms. Hunt said country singer Emmylou Harris has agreed to perform at an Aug. 29 rallying event at the ferry-dock entrance on City Island's Fordham Street.

A version of this article appears in the July 13, 2015, print issue of Crain's New York Business as "A sea change for City Island".

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In one victory in a battle for public access to the city's potter's field. Beginning Sunday, relatives of people buried in the municipal cemetery on Hart Island will have easier access to the graves of loved ones. NY1's Erin Clarke filed this report.

The ferry to Hart Island will soon be open to the public more often, and people from near and far who have relatives buried in the city's potter's field will be able to visit those graves much more easily.

"For the very first time families will be able to visit the gravesites. They'll be able to leave mementos, perform religious ceremonies there if they want to," says NYCLU Associate Legal Director Christopher Dunn.

The change is the result of a settlement between the city and the New York Civil Liberties Union. Until now, visitors could only go alone to Hart Island—and only to a gazebo nowhere close to the graves.

Under the new policy, one day a month—a Saturday or Sunday—25 people will be permitted to visit Hart Island for two hours.

For the first time, visitors will also be allowed to bring as many as four other people with them.

"They can walk to a gravesite so that you know that that person has been interred," says Elaine Joseph.

Joseph was one of seven women who did just this last spring with the help of the Hart Island Project. Her infant was buried on Hart Island in 1978 because of a mistake by a hospital. The trip gave her closure that she says millions of others deserve.

With this victory, advocates and family members believe they're one step closer to achieving another goal: turning Hart Island into a park.

"It is a physically beautiful island. It just needs some work on the infrastructure," Joseph says.

"It would become a woodland again and a much nicer place for families to visit," says Hart Island Project Director Melinda Hunt.

The Parks Department manages former burial sites at Washington Square and Madison Square parks, but it would have to figure out how to operate a park alongside an active cemetery.

Legislation to transfer jurisdiction of Hart Island to the Parks Department from the Correction Department is awaiting a City Council hearing.

"We expect over the next year or two Hart Island will be more and more open and within a couple of years anyone can visit," Dunn says.

Now, it is truly a sanctuary for those who are buried here, and their loved ones.

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Families win access to Hart Island, NYC's potter's field

 Peter D. Kramer, pkramer@lohud.com 4:18 p.m. EDT July 10, 2015

Peekskill artist Melinda Hunt has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. (Video by Peter Carr/The Journal News)



(Photo: Melinda Hunt & Joel Sternfeld)

For 24 years, Peekskill artist Melinda Hunt has spent her life documenting, charting and helping families gain access to Hart Island, where New York City has buried its anonymous and indigent dead since just after the Civil War.

The 101-acre island off City Island in Long Island Sound holds America's largest mass grave, where an estimated 1 million plain, pine boxes hold the city's poor and unknown.

Access to the potter's field hasn't been easy.

"Lawyers tell me it's harder to get onto Hart Island than a maximum-security prison," Hunt says in her bright upstairs office and studio on South Division Street.

On July 8, access got easier, when the New York Civil Liberties Union settled a lawsuit with the city, granting survivors visits once a month to the gravesites of their family members. Until now, access — through the Department of Corrections, which still oversees burials by Riker's Island work crews — has been to a gazebo on the island, far from the actual gravesites.

This settlement changes that, said Christopher Dunn, the NYCLU's lead counsel on the case.

"This settlement should help bring closure to the parents, children, brothers, sisters and other family members of the generations of people who suffered the indignity of mass burial and then suffered the added insult of being forsaken by a city policy that barred family and friends from visiting," he said.

Families like Dr. Laurie Grant, a Valhalla obstetrician and gynecologist whose daughter was stillborn 22 years ago this week, on July 13, 1993, at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan. The baby was buried on Hart Island without Grant's knowledge or permission while she recovered from the difficult delivery, she says.



Current designated burial sites at Hart Island. (Photo: Melinda Hunt/The Hart Island Project)

Grant has been trying for years to get onto Hart Island. Last March, she arranged a trip and showed up at the dock, only to have no one from the corrections department show up to take her over. She said she hopes to be among the first to visit Hart Island under the new settlement.

"This is a hard time of year for me" surrounding the anniversary, she said, but added: "It's your right to visit the cemetery."

The first visits will be July 19. While the details are still being worked out, Dunn predicted there would be two two-hour windows for up to 25 visitors each. (Family members wishing to schedule a visit can call the Department of Corrections at 718-546-0911.)



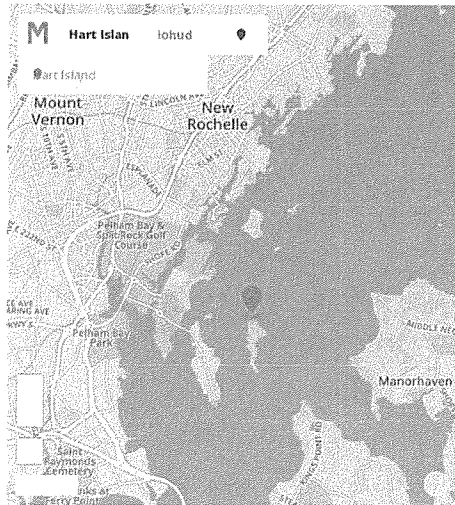
Artist Melinda Hunt at her Peekskill studio July 9, 2015. She has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. A photograph behind her shows an open plot on the island. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

Hunt has been helping families navigate the bureaucracy for years, suing to gain access for mothers to visit their babies' graves. She turned thousands of pages of city records into the award-winning Hart Island Project website (www.hartisland.net (<http://www.hartisland.net/>)), where she charts burials since 1980 and helps family members document the lives that led to Hart Island.

"It's like Facebook for the dead," she said. "We give people a blank slate to remember their family member, to tell their story. There's a reverence to what they write when they gather their thoughts. Unlike Facebook, we don't have nasty people show up."

Hunt also wrote the book on Hart Island, a 1998 collaboration with photographer Joel Stemfeld ("Hart Island," Scalo). In it, she asked prisoners to reflect on the work detail that has them filling the vast plots that measure 20 feet by 70 feet by 6 feet. Those plots hold 165 adult coffins. Or 1,000 plain pine boxes holding the remains of babies.

Map: [Hart Island \(https://a.files.mapbox.com/v4/lohud.mmm767c7f/page.html?access_token=pk.eyJ1IjoiYjG9odWQilCjhljoiNFV1V2RlOCJ9.eAM4e213IsPc9bxAxOxOVO#12/40.8754/-73.7771\)](https://a.files.mapbox.com/v4/lohud.mmm767c7f/page.html?access_token=pk.eyJ1IjoiYjG9odWQilCjhljoiNFV1V2RlOCJ9.eAM4e213IsPc9bxAxOxOVO#12/40.8754/-73.7771)



Inmate Eddie Melendez wrote: "When I first came to Hart Island, it was just a job to me. But when I found out that my baby sister was buried here it hurt me. Because she didn't get a proper burial. For I can pay my respects and now when I bury a baby I think of my sister."

Hunt also made a 2006 documentary film ("Hart Island: An American Cemetery" (<http://www.newfilmmakersonline.com/mpvie-download/8514.2542/Melinda-Hunt-Hart-Island-An-American-Cemetery/>)) and created a gallery work on the topic Westchester Community College in 2012.

Hunt sees last week's settlement as a milestone in her effort to help families, but just a step on her goal to have the city parks department take over Hart Island and turn it into a city park. There is a bill before the City Council to transfer the island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department, and Hunt is hoping it will get a hearing in September.

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Artist Melinda Hunt at her Peekskill studio July 9, 2015. She has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. This panel includes a photograph from the island and letters written by Riker's Island inmates tasked with burying New York's anonymous or indigent dead. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

The 101-acre island could serve the same dual purpose as other city parks — Madison Park and Washington Square Park, among them — that were once cemeteries. Hart Island could become the nation's largest "green cemetery," where bodies are not embalmed and are buried in plain pine boxes, as they have been at Hart Island from the start, permitted to degrade and feed the soil. That effort would require an organized landscaping plan, something better suited to the Parks Department than the Corrections Department, Hunt said.

"I'd like to make it like Governors Island, where kids go on field trips," Hunt said.

For now, those trips are limited to family members, once a month, on a Department of Corrections ferry.

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GROUPS WANT CITY'S POTTER'S FIELD OUT OF THE JURISDICTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

Community Board 10 discusses legislation on Hart Island transfer to Parks Department

By Patrick Rocchio

Bronx Times

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Community Board 10 chairman Martin Prince (c) listens to Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project during a parks and recreation committee meeting on Monday, January 12. The future of Hart Island was on the agenda.

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Community News Group / Photo by Patrick Rocchio

The ferry dock to Hart Island at the eastern end of Fordham Street on City Island.

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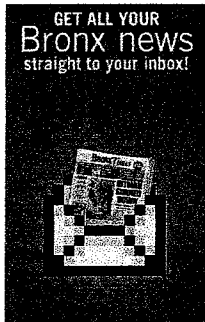
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It appears that Community Board 10 will debate the merits of two new City Council bills about jurisdiction of the city's Potter's Field on Hart Island.

The CB 10 Parks and Recreation Committee meeting hearing on Monday, January 12 included a lively discussion about two bills currently before the City Council's Fire and Criminal Justice Committee that seek to transfer the primary jurisdiction of Hart Island from the Department of Correction to the Parks Department.



The matter has been referred to a full-board by the Parks and Recreation Committee in a unanimous vote on January 12. A committee vote was not taken because a quorum was not present.

A group of local activists from City Island Civic Association want to see the island transferred to Parks because they believe it would prevent Hart Island, off the coast of the shoreline community, from being used as a full-time prison, said CB 10 district manager Kenneth Kearns.

Currently, inmate labor buries bodies at the city's Potter's Field on the island, the location of approximately one million graves, for only 16 hours a week.

This City Island activists' concerns are complemented by those of the advocacy group Hart Island Project, whose leaders believe that having the island made a park would make it easier for people to visit relatives and friends buried there.

At the meeting, CB 10 chairman Martin Prince expressed his reservations about transferring jurisdiction, in effect saying he would prefer to work with the existing framework to make the situation more workable for people who want to visit the island.

"My belief as chairman is that we work within city agencies, we try to get productivity out of those agencies, and advocate for the people who live within the board," said Prince, adding that he believes this means advocating for the deceased on Hart Island.



"We know that in dealing with city agencies, in city transfers a lot can get way off track and the situation can become much worse," he added. "I don't believe that our dead deserve to be politicized, they need to be revered."

Prince said that it is easy to say transfer jurisdiction of Hart Island to the Parks Department, but asked what happens once it is under the department's purview.

One of the advocates for the transfer, CICA corresponding secretary John Doyle, said that all of the Bronx's City Council delegation supports the bills advocating the transfer. The primary sponsor of the bills is Queens Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley.

"We have done all of the leg work," he said. "We are just looking for an up or down vote on this."

Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project believes that a 100-acre park, as opposed to a facility run by the Department of Correction, would be more inviting and welcoming to grieving families who visit graves on the island.

She pointed out that many parks were once potter's fields, including Washington Square Park, Madison Square Park, Wards Island, and Randall's Island.

A visit to the Hart Island by a delegation from the City Council is being planned for Friday, January 16, said Hunt.

Reach Reporter Patrick Rocchio at (718) 260-4597. E-mail him at procchio@cnglocal.com. Follow him on Twitter @patrickfrocchio.

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HART ISLAND PROJECT CONTINUES TO ADVOCATE FOR TRANSFER OF HART ISLAND TO THE NYC PARKS DEPARTMENT FROM NYC DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

City Island Civic Association, Chamber visit Hart Island and take tour

By Patrick Rocchio

Bronx Times

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The ferry dock at Hart Island, at the eastern end of Fordham Street on City Island, is clearly marked as a restricted area by both the Department of Correction which runs the island, and the Department of Transportation which operates the ferry.

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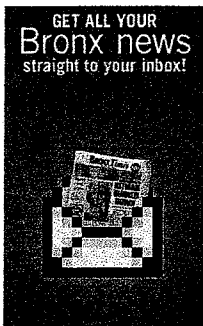
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City Island leaders toured Hart Island in a continuing effort to gain support for its transfer from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department.

Home to the city's Potter's Field, a delegation of 20 people, including key leaders in the City Island Civic Association, City Island Chamber of Commerce, representatives from Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.'s and Councilman James Vacca's offices, toured the 100-acre island with the DOC on Wednesday, November 5.

Advocates of the public getting easier access to the large mass graves on the island, located just off the coast of City Island and Orchard Beach in Long Island Sound, are hoping that the visit provided adequate reasons for the transfer of the island's jurisdiction to the Parks Department.



Among the transfer supporters was Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project.

She said that the City Islanders were supportive of a change, and believes that at least the northern side of Hart Island would be a perfect place for a park since it is not an active burial site and doesn't have a lot of grave markers. The markers it does have could be removed, as grave sites can be found using a Global Positioning System (GPS).

"They were very supportive in terms of transferring jurisdiction in some way," said Hunt of the City Islanders who were on the rare visit.

Pual Klein, vice-president of the City Island Chamber of Commerce, said the group visited areas accessible by roads, describing the trip as an "overview of the space."

"It terms of space, there are beautiful views," said Klein. "I think it would be a great addition to the Parks Department."

Klein said he thinks that there should be a ferry to Hart Island from Orchard Beach, with a possible stop on City Island.



"I think it should be open to the public," he said, adding "I think it would be a great thing."

Most of the abandoned buildings on the south side of the island have been left to nature, said CICA corresponding secretary John Doyle, who was on the trip. He said the tour took about two hours. Mobile phones were taken from the attendees before they were put on the ferry and shuttled across part of the sound, he said.

"It would be nice to open it up a little bit to the public, and I didn't see anything there that changed my mind about doing that," he said. "I think it was helpful for our associations, the civic and the chamber, to get the same tour and the same briefing so we are basically on the same page."

Citing a history that includes the final resting places of generations of New Yorkers, and a Civil War Memorial, Doyle called it a "unique piece of history," and said that the group was given a longer and more extensive tour than most visitors receive when visiting the graves of their loved ones.

There is currently legislation before the Fire and Criminal Justice committee of the City Council calling for a change in jurisdiction, said Hunt. Yet, ironically, there was no representative from the Parks Department on the site visit, she added.

Vacca's chief-of-staff, Michael Rivadeneyra, was on the trip representing the councilman. After the tour, he said issues like the examination of the capacity of the Parks Department's budget to determine if the cost of a new park can be absorbed, and if they can turn the island into a place where people can come to pay their respects, should be explored.

He said that currently, all but three members of the Bronx's City Council delegation have expressed at least some support for the bill.

The position of the Hart Island Project has been that Parks would be a more appropriate agency to manage the island to more easily facilitate visits by grieving people who have loved ones buried there.

Reach Reporter Patrick Rocchio at (718) 260-4597. E-mail him at procchio@cuglocal.com. Follow him on Twitter @patrickfrocchio.

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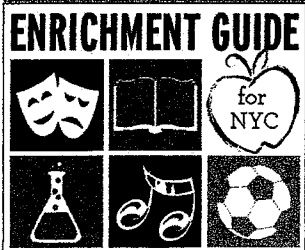
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December 23, 2014 / News / Pelham Bay

LEGISLATION TO TRANSFER JURISDICTION OF THE NEW YORK CITY'S POTTER'S FIELD FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS TO THE PARKS DEPARTMENT IS NOW BEFORE A CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE

Hart Island lawsuit calls for more public access as advocacy continues on multiple fronts

By Patrick Rocchio

Bronx Times

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The ferry dock to Hart Island, at the eastern end of Fordham Street on City Island, is marked as a restricted area by the Department of Correction and the city Department of Transportation.

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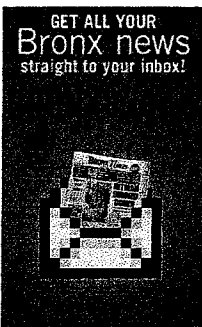
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Hart Island, home to the city's Potter's Field burial sites that's now off limits except for relatively infrequent visiting days, could soon be abuzz with visitors. Two recent developments seem to signal that momentum is there to open the island to visitors, either through a City Council action transferring its jurisdiction from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department, or through the courts, sources said.

These developments include the unveiling of a new Global Positioning System by the advocacy group Hart Island Project that can help visitors locate over 62,200 grave locations on their smartphones, and a federal lawsuit by the New York Civil Liberties Union seeking more public access to the burial grounds based on the belief that the city's policy limiting visitors violates constitutional rights of due process and religious exercise.



Melinda Hunt, of the Hart Island Project advocacy group working on behalf of the public to gain more access to the nearly 1 million gravesites on the island, said that a legislative remedy by the City Council or actions by the courts would have the desired effect.

"I'd rather the City Council update the Administrative Code and assign an appropriate city agency," said Hunt, who said she was also open to legal remedies.

"I would like (the city) to review the whole burial process, because it would be much better to build structured vaults and have the Department of Health and the medical examiner deposit bodies without using inmate labor," she added.

Currently, DOC inmates bury bodies on the island in mass graves. The transfer of jurisdiction legislation, so far, is still sitting in the council's Fire and Criminal Justice committee.

The City Island Civic Association supports that legislation and all but one of the members of Bronx's City Council delegation have agreed to support the transfer of Hart Island's primary jurisdiction to Parks, said CICA corresponding secretary John Doyle. He has been lobbying for the borough's council delegation to support a change in jurisdiction.

Making Hart Island a park could be a boon to City Island, since it is the closest residential community to the island, as has been previously reported in the Bronx Times.

The CICA supports the goals of gaining more access to the island for families of people who are buried there, said Doyle when asked about the NYCLU suit.

"We have been sympathetic to the humanitarian arguments allowing fundamental fairness in having people visiting their dead loved ones," said Doyle, who added "opening Hart Island hurts no one, and provides a level of comfort and closure to a large group of people."

Doyle said that he hopes the legislation transferring jurisdiction will be taken up by the council in the next year.

"From a community standpoint, making Hart Island parkland protects the community from the next bad idea that city bureaucrats come up with," he said.

Members of the CICA board and the City Island Chamber of Commerce, as well as representatives from elected officials, toured the island in November. CICA second vice president Barbara Dolensek said Hart Island is in poor overall condition, and that she believes DOC should just be there to bury bodies.

The lead counsel on the NYCLU case, Christopher Dunn, stated that there was no reason for people to suffer in order to visit a cemetery.



"By preventing people from visiting the graves of their loved ones, the Department of Corrections is robbing people of the basic right to mourn and express their grief in the way they want," said Dunn.

Reach Reporter Patrick Rocchio at (718) 260-4597. E-mail him at procchio@cnglocal.com. Follow him on Twitter @patrickfrocchio.

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Plain Language Summary

CURRENT INTRODUCTION NUMBER:

Int. No. 134

PRIME SPONSORS:

Council Member Crowley

TITLE:

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to a transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island from the department of corrections to the department of parks and recreation.

BILL SUMMARY:

This plain language summary is for informational purposes only and does not substitute for legal counsel. For more information, you should review the full text of the bill, which is available online at legistar.council.nyc.gov.

This bill would transfer jurisdiction and control over Hart Island, the City's public burial ground, from the Department of Corrections (DOC) to the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

CODE SECTIONS AFFECTED:

- Amends section 21-110 of the Administrative Code.

EFFECTIVE DATE:

One hundred eighty days after its enactment.

NOTE: In the full bill text online at legistar.council.nyc.gov, language in proposed consolidated laws that is enclosed by [brackets] would be deleted, and language that is underlined would be new. Language in proposed unconsolidated laws, in contrast, will not have brackets or underlining because it would be entirely new. Consolidation means that the law is placed in the New York City Charter or Administrative Code.

LEGISLATIVE IMPACT:

Please select any of the following which apply to this legislation.

- Agency Rulemaking Required:** Is City agency rulemaking required?
- Report Required:** Is a report due to Council required?
- Oversight:** Are there seemingly clear points for City agency oversight and/or evaluation?
- Sunset Date Included:** Does the legislation have a sunset date?
- Grace Period Applies:** In the case of fines or other penalties, is a grace period established?
- Council Appointment Required:** Is an appointment by the Council required?
- Other Appointment Required:** Are other appointments not by the Council required?
- Council Operations:** Might this law affect the Council's own operations?

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

-----X
ROSARIA CORTES LUSERO, MARIE CRUZ
GARCIA, and MICHELLE CANER, on behalf of
themselves and all others similarly situated,

Plaintiffs,

- against -

THE CITY OF NEW YORK,

Defendant.

**STIPULATION AND ORDER
OF SETTLEMENT**

14 CV 9533 (VSB)

-----X
WHEREAS the plaintiffs commenced this action by filing a complaint on behalf of themselves and of a proposed class of similarly situated individuals, on or about December 3, 2014, alleging that the defendant City of New York (hereinafter “the City”) violated the plaintiffs’ rights by refusing to permit them to visit the gravesites of family members interred at Hart Island;

WHEREAS the City has denied any and all liability arising out of the plaintiffs’ allegations; and

WHEREAS the parties now desire to resolve the issues raised in this litigation, without further proceedings and without admitting any fault or liability;

IT IS HEREBY STIPULATED AND ORDERED:

1. Effective no later than July 2015, the City shall provide individuals with access to the gravesites of family members buried on Hart Island on at least one weekend day per month (hereinafter “visitation day”), with six Saturday and six Sunday visitation days per year. Subject to Paragraph 15, below, each quarter shall have at least one Saturday and one Sunday

visitation day. If the City determines that demand warrants a change in the apportionment of Saturday and Sunday visitation days, it may change the schedule with written notice to plaintiffs' counsel. For purposes of this Stipulation and Order, "family members" shall include, but is not limited to, parents, step-parents, children, step-children, spouses, siblings, step-siblings, half-siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, first cousins, second cousins, legal guardians of the deceased, wards of deceased guardians, and domestic partners. Each family member may be permitted to be accompanied on their gravesite visit by up to four other individuals (who do not have to be family members of those buried on Hart Island). Any family member wishing to bring a larger group to a gravesite visit may request such a visit, and the City shall make reasonable efforts to accommodate any such request, subject to Paragraph 8, below.

2. On each visitation day, the City shall provide ferry service to transport visitors to and from Hart Island.

3. On each visitation day, there shall be at least two periods for gravesite visits (hereinafter "visitation periods"), each of which shall last for two hours, including travel time, with the earlier visitation period not starting before 9:00 a.m. Visitors may be required to arrive at the City Island dock thirty minutes before the scheduled visitation period.

4. For each visitation period, the City shall provide for a maximum of twenty-five visitors to visit their requested gravesites for the duration of the visitation period, escorted as the New York City Department of Correction ("DOC") deems appropriate. It is the intention of the parties that the City will seek to accommodate as many visitors as it can, up to the twenty-five visitor limit. At its discretion, the City may provide for additional visitors beyond the maximum of twenty-five.

5. So long as Hart Island remains under the jurisdiction of DOC, the City may use DOC employees to escort visitors to Hart Island gravesites, and such employees may be attired as required by DOC rules and regulations.

6. The City shall maintain an online system and a telephone system through which individuals may schedule Hart Island gravesite visits for designated visitation periods. The City may require individuals to notify it of a requested visit up to twelve business days in advance of the visit and may require the person requesting such visit (“requestor”), on that person’s own behalf or on behalf of a group of visitors to the same gravesite, the following information: the requestor’s name and contact telephone and/or email address; the name of the deceased; affirmance of the requestor’s relationship to the deceased; preferred date of visit; the number of people they wish to be accompanied by; and, for each additional member of the requestor’s party, if any, each visitor’s name and whether they are a family member of the deceased or an invitee. If the requestor provides an email address, the online system shall generate an automated confirmation receipt to the requestor confirming the details of the request. Except for the affirmance described above and except as provided in Paragraph 19, below, the City will not require documentation of a requestor’s familial relationship to the deceased unless the City has a reasonable basis for concluding that, notwithstanding such affirmance, no such family relationship exists between the requestor and the deceased, in which case the City may require documentation if it has been unable to confirm the relationship through other credible means.

7. Within five business days of a request for a visit, the City shall contact the requestor to confirm the request, modify the request, or seek to reschedule the request. Visits shall be scheduled for the requested date unless accommodating a request is not feasible due to

the inability to locate gravesites due to the age of gravesites; the proximity of a gravesite to open, active gravesites; weather conditions; a lack of availability on the date requested due to the maximum number of visitors being reached; and any other factors beyond the City's control, in which case the City shall make reasonable efforts to reschedule the visit for the next date requested by the requestor. If a deceased person's specific gravesite is either unidentifiable or is otherwise inaccessible for reasons that cannot reasonably be remedied before the date of the requested visit, the City shall so advise the requestor in advance of the requested visit and shall, at the requestor's option, permit a visit to an alternate gravesite or other location reasonably proximate to the requested gravesite. There shall be no limit on the number of times a person is permitted to visit.

8. In the event that demand for visits exceeds capacity, the City reserves the right to give visit priority to family members. No non-family member visitor whose visit has been confirmed shall have that confirmation rescinded with less than three business days' notice.

9. The City may require visitors to sign a liability waiver as a condition of visitation, and the waiver will be available online and also at the City Island dock on the day of visitation. Visitors shall execute and submit any required waiver of liability in advance via email or regular mail, so that it is received by the DOC prior to the day of visitation, or in person on the day of visitation. Upon arrival at the City Island dock, visitors may be required to provide valid identification and sign the Hart Island Visitor's Book.

10. Because of the extremely limited street-side parking available in the vicinity of the Hart Island ferry dock – bordering a private residential area – each group of visitors will be requested to coordinate travel to the City Island dock so as to bring as few vehicles to the site as possible.

11. The City reserves the right to search visitors consistent with its legitimate security concerns. City employees escorting visitors to gravesites shall maintain a respectful distance while visitors are present at a gravesite consistent with legitimate security concerns. The City may require visitors to surrender electronic devices, which the City shall safeguard until returned to the visitor at the conclusion of the visit.

12. Visitors shall be permitted to leave the following mementos at gravesites: flowers without vases, small stuffed animals, photographs, prayer cards, small flags, and blankets. When requesting a visit, requestors may seek permission to bring other mementos, which the City will consider on a case-by-case basis. Nothing in this paragraph bars the City from adding to the list of permitted mementos.

13. The City will continue to maintain a publicly accessible database for members of the public to locate persons buried on Hart Island (either the current Hart Island Lookup Service or another equivalent service). By July 31, 2015, and continuing thereafter, the name, date of death, and Hart Island burial plot number shall be accessible in the database within thirty days of a person's burial.

14. Separate and apart from the gravesite visits specified in this Stipulation and Order, the City shall continue non-gravesite visits to Hart Island on a monthly basis.

15. The City shall not be liable for failing to fulfill the above-described obligations for reasons of equipment or ferry malfunctions, unanticipated staffing shortages, inclement weather, or other circumstances beyond the City's control. In instances where any of these circumstances prevent a visitation day from taking place, the City will make reasonable efforts to promptly notify each requestor scheduled to visit that day, to remedy the situation

promptly, and to reschedule that visitation day as soon as practicable. Nothing in this paragraph relieves the City from the obligation to provide twelve visits every twelve months.

16. By July 31, 2015, the City shall post and then maintain on the DOC website with the online visit request form described in Paragraph 6 the sum and substance of Paragraphs 1-14 of this Stipulation and Order. The City shall also post and maintain on the website a listing of specific scheduled weekend visitation dates for at least the next six months.

17. Within forty-five days of the end of each quarter, starting with the quarter ending September 30, 2015, and concluding with the quarter ending March 31, 2018, the City shall provide the plaintiffs' counsel with the following information, which may be derived from its online request portal or other sources, for each visitation day during the quarter: (1) the number of gravesite visit requests; (2) the number of persons, including guests, included in the requests; (3) the number of requests granted for an alternate date; (4) the number of requests neither granted nor rescheduled and the reason for the decision (including but not limited to the conclusion that the requestor was not related to the deceased or that the requestor was unable to produce documentation requested by DOC as provided in Paragraph 6); (5) the total number of gravesite visitors; and (6) the total number of family members and guests whose requests were not granted or were rescinded during the quarter because of lack of capacity. Following each quarterly production and upon request by Plaintiffs' counsel for good cause, the City shall produce any requestor's name and contact information for the quarter, unless the requestor has objected to the production of such information.

18. Following production of the information specified above for the second quarter of 2016, the parties shall meet and confer in good faith to determine whether to make changes to the frequency of visitation days or the number of visitors who can be accommodated

on visitation days. Should the parties agree to modify the frequency of visitation days or the number of visitors who can be accommodated on visitation days, they shall submit a proposed Amended Stipulation and Order to the Court for approval. Should the parties disagree about the need to modify the frequency of visitation days or the number of visitors who can be accommodated on visitation days, the party seeking modification shall notify the other party in writing at least thirty days before filing any motion seeking said modification. Any motion must be made by November 15, 2016.

19. In any motion by the plaintiffs to increase the number of visits or visitors to Hart Island for gravesite visits, plaintiffs shall be entitled to a modification only upon proving that members of the class are being denied gravesite visitation in violation of the federal and/or New York State constitutional provisions alleged in the Complaint in this action. In any dispute raised pursuant to Paragraph 18, above, or in any motion made pursuant to this paragraph, the City reserves its right to seek discovery of, and to use in response to the dispute or in defense of the motion, documents and other information relevant to the proof or disproof of requestors' familial relationship to the deceased they visited on Hart Island. In no event shall any modification sought without consent by both parties include an extension of the termination date of this Stipulation and Order, or of the Court's jurisdiction over the terms thereof, except as provided in Paragraph 22, below.

20. If plaintiffs believe that the City has not substantially complied with a material term of this Stipulation and Order, plaintiffs shall notify the City in writing of the purported noncompliance and of plaintiffs' basis for believing there is noncompliance. The parties shall then engage in good-faith efforts to resolve the issue. If those efforts are unsuccessful, plaintiffs may seek judicial relief to enforce the relevant term(s) of the Stipulation

and Order but may not initiate such action until forty-five days after having provided the written notice required by this paragraph. In any such motion by the plaintiffs based upon the City's alleged non-compliance, the City shall be considered to be in compliance therewith unless plaintiffs establish that the City's failures or omissions to meet the terms of this Stipulation and Order were not minimal or isolated, but were substantial.

21. If at any time after entry of this Stipulation and Order, plaintiffs' counsel believes that there have been instances in which individuals have attempted to call DOC to request a visit using the telephone system referenced in Paragraph 6, above, and such call was not answered by DOC, plaintiffs' counsel shall notify the City promptly. Plaintiffs shall not use the City's alleged failure to answer visit requests made by telephone as grounds for modification, enforcement, contempt, or other relief.

22. The jurisdiction of this Court shall terminate for all purposes on December 1, 2018, except that the Court shall maintain continuing jurisdiction over this action for the purpose of resolving any motion timely made by plaintiffs seeking modification, enforcement, or contempt, pursuant to Paragraphs 18-20, above. Once jurisdiction of the Court ends, nothing in this agreement shall bar the plaintiffs, including any putative class member, from filing suit to seek judicial relief ordering the City to provide gravesite visits.

23. The parties agree that the plaintiffs are prevailing parties in this matter for purposes of attorneys' fees and costs. They shall work in good faith to resolve any request for reimbursement for fees and costs. Should those efforts fail, the plaintiffs may file a motion for fees and costs.

24. The parties stipulate to the certification of a plaintiff class pursuant to Rule 23(b)(2) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure that is defined as follows:

All parents, step-parents, children, step-children, spouses, siblings, step-siblings, half-siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, first cousins, second cousins, and legal guardians of deceased individuals buried on Hart Island; wards of deceased guardians buried on Hart Island; and domestic partners of deceased individuals buried on Hart Island, who wish to visit the gravesites of said deceased individuals.

25. The parties understand that this Stipulation and Order is subject to Court review and approval pursuant to Rule 23(e) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Pending approval by the Court, the parties agree to be bound by the terms of this Stipulation and Order as of the date it is submitted to the Court.

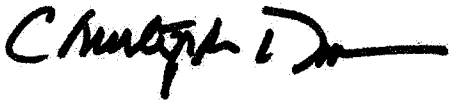
26. In the event the Court does not approve this Stipulation and Order, the parties shall meet and confer in good faith to determine whether to agree upon a modified Stipulation and Order. If they are unable to do so, this Stipulation and Order shall become null and void, and this case shall be restored to the active docket so the plaintiffs can proceed with the litigation.

27. The plaintiffs shall each execute and deliver to the City's attorney all documents necessary to effect this settlement, including but not limited to, releases from plaintiffs and plaintiffs' counsel and a W-9 form for plaintiffs' counsel.


28. This Stipulation and Order contains all the terms and conditions agreed upon by the parties hereto, and no oral agreement entered into at any time nor any written agreement entered into prior to the execution of this Stipulation and Order regarding the subject matter of the instant proceeding shall be deemed to exist, or to bind the parties hereto, or to vary the terms and conditions contained herein.

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By: 

Christopher Dunn
Attorney for Plaintiffs

By: 

Omar Tuffaha
Jonathan Pines
Attorneys for Defendant

Dated: New York, New York
July 8, 2015

SO ORDERED:

U.S.D.J.

Dated: New York, New York
_____, 2015

TO: Melissa Mark-Viverito, Speaker, NYC Council

DATE: September 1, 2015

cc: Elizabeth Crowley
James Vacca

Subject: Intro Bills 133 & 134
(Transfer of Hart Island to the Parks Department & changes in Ferry Service
from Fordham Street in City Island to Hart Island)

We, the residents of City Island, are opposed to Intro Bills 133 & 134, which would transfer Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. While we agree that families should be able to visit the gravesites of their loved ones, the Bill has no parameters. Interviews with both Elizabeth Crowley (the Councilwoman sponsoring the Bill) and Melinda Hunt (President of the Hart Island Project) advocate for a public park or National Monument.

Currently, the only access to Hart Island is through Fordham Street on City Island in the Bronx, which is a narrow two-way residential street with limited parking. City Island also has a tremendous amount of traffic, especially during summer months; There is only one access route, making it difficult for Police and emergency services to respond quickly. The additional traffic a public park or National Monument would create would exacerbate the problem significantly, further limiting quick access to the island by emergency responders which in turn will present further risk to the public safety of both City Island residents and visitors.

Thank you for your consideration,

The undersigned residents of City Island

attach.

From: Stephen Swieciki [<mailto:stephen.swieciki@gmail.com>]
Sent: Tuesday, January 19, 2016 10:44 PM
Subject: Testimony concerning Intro-134

Dear Councilmembers,

My name is Steve Swieciki and I am a lifelong City Islander, dues-paying member of the local Civic Association, and community activist. Although my obligations as an educator prevent me from attending today's hearing, I would like to share my perspective on Intro-134 along with some facts that are relevant to this subject.

The "Hart Island debate" has been discussed within the community extensively. The Civic Association held at least eight meetings over the course of two years on the topic. When a vote was eventually held, the Civic membership voted 44-2 in favor of opening up Hart Island.

It was next deliberated at a minimum of two meetings of Bronx Community Board 10. With the exception of a single abstention, the community board also voted to support opening up Hart Island.

Additionally, there have been at least three presentations/Q&A sessions pertaining to Hart Island held at the City Island branch of the New York Public Library. All of these meetings have been advertised to the public, open to the public, and well attended by members of the community. And local publications such as the *Island Current* and *Bronx Times* have covered this issue and printed letters to the editor that have argued both for and against the proposal.

Despite this very open, very prolonged discussion, a small but vocal group of individuals continue to insist to anyone who will listen that the effort to open up Hart Island constitutes a conspiracy that will cause irreparable harm to City Island. They further assert that this issue has not been sufficiently discussed and that they represent the majority opinion of island residents, and attempt to substantiate this claim with a petition that has garnered many signatures.

It needs to be stated in no uncertain terms that these individuals do *not* represent the majority opinion in this community. Their petition is rife with inaccuracies designed to stoke the fears of island residents. The fact that the petition deviates so dramatically from reality has been repeatedly raised to the petition advocates to no avail. They remain headquartered in a cocoon of denial, ignorance, and paranoia.

With this legislation, the City Council has an opportunity to right a wrong that has been perpetuated against the families and loved ones of the deceased on Hart Island. These people have endured enough indignities under the current visitation system. To delay any longer and further infringe upon their rights over something as trivial as inadequate parking – especially when there is no discernible evidence supporting such a claim – is petty, selfish, and not at all what the City Island community is about.

Sincerely,
Steve Swieciki

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Luther Bolden
Address: 89 Porter Ave Bklyn
I represent: Urban Justice
Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rogers
Address: 5 W 119 St
I represent: Picture the Homeless
Address: Harlem NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 134 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: Wed 20 Jan 2016

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Yeagley
Address: 316 East 88th Street NYC 10128
I represent: those interested in NYC history; many in the gay community
Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/20/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Barbara Dolensek

Address: 21 Tiev St - Bronx

I represent: City Island Civic + Historical

Address: 190 Fordham Bx Society

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Doyle

Address: 28 Schoteld Sr 10464

I represent: City Island Civic Assoc

Address: P.O. Box 112 10464

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 3A

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/20/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carleen McLaughlin

Address: Director of Leg. Affairs

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 134 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/20/14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cathy Cebelk

Address: 981 Winters St

I represent: City Residents

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Charles Johnson

Address: 81 Linden St

I represent: Veterans Action Group

Address: 665 Willoughby

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: HERBERT SWEAT

Address: 236 Miller Ave

I represent: Veterans Action Group

Address: 665 Willoughby Ave

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 134 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: January 20, 2016

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amy Cunningham

Address: 198 Maple Street

I represent: Fitting Tribute Funeral Services

Address: 1283 Coney Island Ave Bklyn 11230

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 134 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 1.20.16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tupper Thomas

Address: 55 Broad St., 23rd Fl. NY, NY 10004

I represent: New Yorkers for Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 134 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: Jan. 20, 2016

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melinda Hunt

Address: 8 South Division St, Peekskill NY

I represent: Hart Island Project

Address: as above

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 134 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ELAINE JOSEPH
Address: 7547 184th ST; FRESH MEADOWS NY
11366

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rosalee Grable
Address: 203 W 107th St 10025
I represent: Myself
Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chris Dunn - NYCLU
Address: 125 Broad Street
I represent: New York Civil Liberties Union
Address: 125 Broad / NY / 10004

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 134 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 1/20/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matthew Dray
Address: 317 East 91st Street NY, NY 10128
I represent: NYC Parks + Recreation
Address: The Arsenal 5th Avenue NYC

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0194-2014 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 1/20/2016

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Florence Hutner, General Counsel
Address: Ofc. of Chief Medical Examiner, 421 E. 26th St
NY NY 10016
I represent: OCME
Address: same

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms