

**November 30, 2011**

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON LOWER MANHATTAN REDEVELOPMENT AND WATERFRONTS REGARDING THE PARK & PUBLIC SPACE MASTER PLAN FOR GOVERNORS ISLAND**

Good day Council Members. I am Alex Herrera speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy is a private, non-profit, organization established in 1973. We advocate for landmarks and historic districts. We are also a member of the Governors Island Alliance and as such are keenly interested in the plans to restore and redevelop historic Governors Island.

Our focus is on how the proposed plans affect the Historic District. We are in favor of the efforts to repair and upgrade Soissons's dock and to create a more welcoming arrival area. We raise no objection to the demolition of the non-significant building near the dock and are in agreement that the historic seawall at the northern part of the Island should be rebuilt in kind.

Some of our concerns are actually with certain things that are not covered in the master plan. We have long worried about fire on the Island. Earlier this year, we arranged for an expert Fire Risk Consultant to meet with the Governors Island Trust staff, inspect the historic buildings, and put forth his recommendations. We are pleased that the Trust has taken this report seriously and that they are committed to installing a wireless fire monitoring and alarm system in the historic buildings. Our hope is that the alarms will some day be directly linked with the FDNY rather than to the on-Island security center as planned. In any case, we want to see this plan implemented, especially as the houses and other significant historic buildings will be closed to the public for two years as part of the park construction plan.

That brings us to our other point. Many of the historic buildings will be unused for a fairly long period of time. We believe that in order to find new uses, the historic properties should be promoted as frequently and skillfully as the park has been and continues to be. Market conditions change; institutional needs change, the best way to find new uses for the historic buildings is to keep them in the forefront of the discussion and marketing of Governors Island. The historic landmarks on the island are the heart and soul of the place, creating its unique identity. Finding good compatible uses for them is crucial to the long term financial viability of the Island.

Our message to you today is that the Island's wonderful historic buildings are its principle assets. We commend the Trust for taking such good care of them. But we worry that vacant, unheated buildings are just naturally prone to deterioration and decay. We look forward to seeing new and varied uses infuse new life into these landmarks.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Conservancy's views.