

# THE EAST RIVER PARK ACTION GROUP

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## FACT SHEET

### Common lies about the City's "*preferred plan*" for East Side Coastal Resiliency

Assembled here are the most common statements used by New York City Department of Design and Construction as they attempt to justify radical changes in the ESCR plan at "Open Houses" and other community gatherings.

#### City's statement:

***"This plan is the result of years of community engagement. We are still listening to your suggestions."***

#### Facts:

\$40 million spent on design studies, a competition among 10 teams of architects, years of community engagement in "iterative design" led to a consensus on the best plan for a resilient city: **a planted berm along the FDR, later a green deck over the drive**. Then the process stalled.

In December 2018 an untested, retrograde plan replaced the initial Big U vision, pushed in force by the City for a price of 1.5 billion. Since December 2018 an evolving presentation from the Department of Design and Construction triggers the same unanswered questions. The DDC has not made any significant change in their plan in response to community input so far.

***"We are working for your protection, this is by far the best option"***

The City's "preferred option" involves unprecedented park destruction, killing every living thing in it—bulldozing 58 acres and filling up the entire area with tons of landfill. This will have an undocumented but likely serious impact on air quality. It's an ecological catastrophe in the making, and a health hazard for neighboring residents who will breathe carbon dioxide and other contaminated dust for the duration of the project and until newly planted trees mature. There is no provision to preserve the rich topsoil in the park, on the contrary we will see an increase in 'active' space (artificial turf) and concrete, and a reduction in natural 'passive' areas.

***"The good thing with this new plan is that it cannot be flooded."***

The new plan ignores the best climate change science that promotes resilient floodable options over walls of concrete: natural and hilly areas that allow the water to come in and recede, and act like a sponge. The City of Boston for example opted for such an option after consulting with a panel of independent climate change experts. However New York City has always been reluctant to pay for workers to clean up ball fields after rainy days. Heavily reliant on stewardship organizations and volunteers the City has done little to support the important capacity and relationship building that comes with these efforts.

***"We will have to close the park entirely, for the whole duration of the construction. But this allows us to finish earlier. It will be done in 3.5 years - before the 2023 storm season."***

5 years have passed yet so far no construction plan and timeline is available to judge whether this is realistic. Common sense however predicts that such an ambitious project on such scale will more likely take 5 to 10 years to be completed. An additional 5 to 10 years will be needed for trees and plants to produce shade and impact air quality. NYCHA residents, children and the elderly, those who have no vacation home or funds will suffer the most.

***"If we don't pass this plan now the money will run out and you won't be protected from floods."***

The argument could be returned against its user. After years of delay the winning team and the community had co-designed a consensus plan. The winning project, the Big U, was to break ground in 2017, and be completed in 2020. In 2018 we heard the construction was to commence in spring 2019... Until the Mayor and the DDC decided unilaterally to dismiss all past efforts and start from scratch!

While it is possible that the City would lose the promise of \$338 million of federal money if it hasn't been spent by 2023: there still enough time to start the work.

***“Neighboring residents will not need temporary flood protection during the period of construction”***

This might be true. As the new First Deputy Commissioner Jamie Torres Springer said on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2019, the park itself might provide enough protection during the construction years - provided other flood entryways get equipped with storm barriers. Then why is it so crucial to finish work one year earlier? Why should the most resilient plan be ignored and replaced by a bad one in the name of a hypothetical 100 year storm, if we do not need temporary protection?

***“The previous option raised constructability issues: we had to close 1 lane of the FDR Drive at night!”***

Constructability issues arise in any given plan of this scale. Temporary closing of one lane of the FDR at night does not seem that serious, and the City’s preferred option also requires temporary closure of one lane of the FDR. By the way, cars are responsible for gas emissions, air pollution and precipitating climate change, which is what brings us all here.

***“The trees in the park are old, sick and dying. We would have had to replace them anyway.”***

Please take a walk in our park. The trees are stunning and healthy, many of them 80 years old as well as newly planted trees. Local residents revere some of them. Preserving the green space we already have is essential to our mental and physical health. Planting new resilient trees is also essential. Why not start now, instead of planning to uproot more than one thousand mature trees that resisted Sandy?

***“We heard how much you value proximity to the water. We did our best to give you direct access; it will be so much better than it is today.”***

There will only be 2 tiny “direct access” embayment areas in the new plan, one at the southern extremity, one up North. The new plan dramatically separates park users from the water below, while the resilient plan allowed them to contemplate the river from every slope up to the top.

***“Building a berm along the FDR would be noisy for the waterfront residents”.***

Destroying 57 acres of green parkland and filling it with “landfill” will have a serious impact on the quality of the air that residents will breathe during destruction, construction and after. Considering the large number of local residents living with asthma and other respiratory issues we ask that the health impact of the City’s preferred plan be thoroughly assessed.

***“A green deck over the FDR is a great idea, but not a realistic option.”***

Chicago’s Millennium Park, built over railroad tracks, cost \$490 million ... The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway, created during Boston’s “Big Dig” to bury its Central Artery, cost \$40 million... Building deck parks over 2.4 miles of the Cross-Bronx would cost about \$750 million, we heard. Let’s see how we can do it without disturbing those who live on the first few floors building that line the FDR. We ask that an independent panel of coastal resiliency experts seriously evaluate feasibility and cost of a green deck option.

**We demand that the City comes back to the Community Consensus Plan, a design that was less destructive, and more resilient.**