



PRESS RELEASE

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LGBTQ Youth Call For Stronger Public Space Provisions in Hudson River Park Development

White Paper Finds Hudson River Park Trust Favoring Private Development Stronger Language Needed to Protect Community Uses in Hudson River Park

NEW YORK, NY — Today approximately 100 LGBTQ youth members of FIERCE (Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment) were joined by the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center to release a white paper documenting the Hudson River Park Trust's failure to include sufficient public space in the redevelopment of the area, as called for in the Hudson River Park Act.

The white paper highlights the LGBTQ community's concerns about safety on the pier, lack of community involvement in the development process and the importance of community public space in the face of economic crisis. It recommends amendments to the Hudson River Park Act to include community-run and developed space, measures for increased accountability, and increased decision-making power for community stakeholders in the development of the Hudson River Park.

"The Hudson River Park Trust is willing to change the rules for large private developers, but they are not doing their job to ensure that kids have places to play, that rowers have affordable access to the waterfront, or that the West Village remains a historic safe place for LGBTQ youth," said Joseph Edward, a youth member at FIERCE.

Using sketch theater Wizard of Oz spoofs, including their own rendition of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," and a photo gallery exhibit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth painted a picture of community uses and needs they want to see upheld in the redevelopment of the Hudson River Park piers. In response to the Hudson River Park Trust's (HRPT) push to extend the lease term for Pier 40 to accommodate large-scale private development, youth members of FIERCE called for stronger language in the Hudson River Park Act to protect safe public community spaces on the piers in Hudson River Park.

In September of 2008, the HRPT rejected both development proposals for Pier 40 and closed the Request for Proposals (RFP) process. HRPT Board Chair, Diana Taylor, is now advocating for a legislative amendment, which would extend the lease term on Pier 40 to encourage more investment from private developers. Meanwhile, Pier 40 is still in need of serious structural repairs before it is deemed unsafe for public use.

"In the redevelopment process we have seen the Trust working against its stated mission to provide 'access to the Hudson River for all New Yorkers.' The HRPT's attempts to change the lease term on Pier 40 to attract high-end private development clearly demonstrates that the needs of common New Yorkers are not being prioritized," said Desiree Marshall, a FIERCE organizer. "We need stronger legislation that ensures that non-profit community uses are implemented in the park."

In 2007, the Pier 40 Working Group, a collection of representatives from local Community Boards, elected officials, and the HRPT's Advisory Council found that the Pier 40 development process went against the stated purposes of the Act by proposing to intensely commercialize the waterfront, limit access to public space, and develop uses that are not compatible with the surrounding community. They advocated for the public redevelopment of Pier 40, including uses such as athletic fields, schools, and a center for LGBTQ youth.

In 2008, there were five million dollars in budget cuts to LGBTQ youth services. A 2007 report by the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce estimates that LGBTQ youth make up approximately 40 % of homeless youth population in New York City. Service providers such as the Ali Forney Center, advocated that LGBTQ youth have particular needs for safe and age appropriate spaces due to the homophobia, violence and abuse they face. FIERCE has been advocating for the inclusion of a 24-hour LGBTQ youth center as a component of Pier 40's redevelopment since 2007.

“During a period of economic crisis, development should meet the needs of the communities who are the most vulnerable. The Pier 40 redevelopment process presents a timely opportunity to fill critical social service gaps while improving New York City's infrastructure. New York City and State policymakers should do this by strengthening the existing legislation while ensuring federal stimulus money is directed to Pier 40's repairs,” said Alexa Kasdan, Director of Research and Policy at the Urban Justice Center's Community Development Project.

The Executive Summary of the white paper can be found online here: <http://www.fiercenyc.org/index.php?s=1>

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