

IN A WE ACT MINUTE

The News Bulletin of

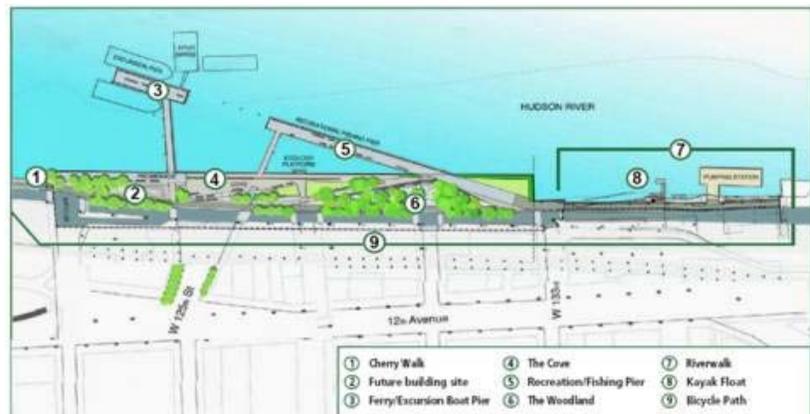
West Harlem Environmental ACTION, Inc.

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Work on West Harlem Waterfront Park Set to Begin

WE ACT is pleased to announce that the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC) recently received the necessary permits required to begin construction on the West Harlem Waterfront Park. EDC owns the piers and provides management and oversight of the property. They, along with Northern Manhattan residents, have had to wait 18 months for these permits to be issued.



Final Plans for the West Harlem Waterfront Park

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Take a Historic Boat Tour of the Hudson

On Saturday, September 24, 2005, WE ACT and the Friends of Hudson River Park will be hosting a ship tour up the Hudson River to historic Harlem. A local historian will provide a presentation/tour on the Underground Railroad and explore the history of slavery and freedom in New York. The Star-Upon-Beach yacht, which holds a capacity of 200 people, will begin boarding at 12:30 p.m. at Pier 40, which is on Houston Street and the West Side Highway. The 3-hour tour will take place from 1-4 pm.



A free buffet lunch will be provided on-board the ship thanks to a generous donation by the Dinosaur Bar-B-Que restaurant located at 646 West 131st in Harlem.

WE ACT invites everyone to come and join us for this cultural journey on the water as we travel up the Hudson River to Harlem. Admission is only \$10 and all are welcome. If you are interested in attending the boat ride, please reserve your place by contacting WE ACT at 212-961-1000, ext. 311.

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In 1998 WE ACT partnered with Community Board 9 to organize the Harlem-on-the-River project. The goal was to recruit community leaders and residents to assist in drafting a design that would both increase access to the Harlem waterfront and raise interest in Northern Manhattan's neglected neighborhoods. Working with over 200 residents, elected officials, and representatives from the New York City Parks Department, a community vision plan for the Piers was developed and submitted to the EDC by WE ACT in 1999. In late 2000, EDC scrapped their requests for proposals of a master plan and developed a



master plan based on the Harlem-on-the-River community plan. Approval for the final West Harlem Waterfront Park plan came in 2003 and applications for the construction were quickly completed.

Now that the permits have been issued, work on the Waterfront Park is scheduled to commence in Fall 2005. EDC expects completion of the project in 18 months. If you would like further information on the West Harlem Waterfront Park, its development process, or the upcoming construction, please contact Helen Chin, WE ACT's Waterfront Park Project Manager, at Helen@weact.org.

Is Columbia University Placing a Bioresearch Lab in Your Neighborhood?

How much do you know about your neighbor? Would you be concerned if you discovered he was experimenting with dangerous airborne pathogens - such as Anthrax and the Ebola - in his basement? That scenario could soon become a reality if Columbia University is allowed to continue untrammelled in their plans to expand into West Harlem.

Columbia University is currently proposing to construct a new campus in Manhattanville between West 125th and West 133rd Street, and between 12th Avenue and Broadway in West Harlem. At a Community Board 9 meeting in 2003 a Columbia spokesman revealed the new campus could include a bioresearch facility. Bioresearch facilities research microorganisms, and are assigned a Bio Safety Level (BSL) to gauge the danger of the microorganisms being studied. A BSL-1 is the lowest level and indicates the study of germs that do not cause disease. A BSL-4 is the highest level and indicates a lab will be dealing with life-threatening diseases that travel through the air and for which there is no cure, such as the highly lethal Ebola virus.

It is not yet known at what level Columbia plans to operate its Manhattanville Bioresearch facility. A better idea will be known when the University submits its zoning application for the Uniform Land Use Review Pro

cedure (ULURP). ULURP is the basic process for public review of most land use decisions in New York City. If the proposed site of the bioresearch lab is marked by an "E" designation (for potential hazardous material contamination) Columbia would be applying to do research at a BSL-4 or BSL-3 level (which designates the handling of dangerous airborne pathogens for which there are treatments, such as anthrax). If ULURP approves the application, Columbia could be studying lethal microorganisms that are also highly contagious, and for which there are no treatment, in one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the country. This has caused understandable concern among Manhattanville residents.

"I don't think there should be a bioresearch lab in any community with living people," says Sarah Martin, a resident of Manhattanville's Grant Houses. "We don't know what level of research they plan to do or how safe the facility will be . . . we know nothing about it. Columbia thinks that they don't have to tell the community what they are planning even though it will be our children, our air and our water that are affected if something goes wrong."

In response to this possible new threat WE ACT organized a "Community Teach-In" on the bioresearch lab for the concerned residents of Manhattanville. Held on August 17, 2005 at the Roberto Clemente IS-195 in Manhattan-



Your new neighbor?

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WE ACT Triumphs in Federal Case Against FDA

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has failed to adequately safeguard children from ingesting rat poison, a federal judge wrote this weekend in his ruling against the agency.

WE ACT for Environmental Justice and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) jointly filed the lawsuit against the EPA on November 9, 2004. WE ACT got involved on behalf of children of color, who are disproportionately poisoned by rodenticides. According to EPA figures, 57 % of all children hospitalized in New York from ingesting rat poison were black, despite only 16 % of the state's population being African-American. Twenty-six percent of hospitalizations involve Latino children, although they make up 12 % of the population. And according to U.S. poison-control centers, at least 15,000 American children are poisoned by a rodenticide each year.

In August 1998 the Clinton administration instituted 2 regulations on manufactures of rat poison: a bittering agent that would repel children from tasting the candy-like pellets and a dye that would color the mouth of anyone who ingested the poison. Incidents of poisoning were reduced to 1/3 the number before regulations were introduced.

However, in 2001, after the Bush administration took office, the EPA met 5 times with representatives of the chemical industry behind closed doors. These meetings led to the dissolution of the rat poison regu-



lations, and the number of poisoning incidents quickly rose back to pre-1998 levels.

In response to these rising numbers, WE ACT and NRDC filed their lawsuit charging the EPA with inadequately protecting children from rat poison exposure. On August 7, 2005 U.S. District Judge Jed Rakoff ruled in favor of the advocacy groups and chided the EPA for dropping the bittering agent requirement from its 1998 agreement with chemical manufacturers.

"The EPA is not in the business of reaching consensus with the 'stakeholders' it regulates," Judge Rakoff wrote in his ruling. "EPA's job is independent review, and there is no indication here that EPA filled that role so far as the bittering agent is concerned."

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However, the judge went on to write that the EPA would not be bound to enforce the inclusion of an indicator dye, as they have yet been unable to synthesize one that will both adequately stain a child's mouth and not damage household property.

"This is still a major victory for families with young children," says Swati Prakash, the Environmental Health Director for WE ACT. "Rat poison is spread indiscriminately in public housing, elementary schools and city parks. They used 800 pounds of rat poison on the General Grant Houses in West Harlem last year alone. Those pellets look like candy to little kids, and we've got to be sure that if they put them into their mouths, they'll spit them out."

Bioresearch Lab (Cont'd)

Continued from page 2

ville, residents were informed of the rights they have regarding Columbia's proposed expansion. They were encouraged to learn the facts by attending public hearings and providing written or oral testimony to the Department of City Planning. Residents were also urged to write their City Council members, who all have decision-making power in the ULURP.

In the past some communities have also chosen to confront the threat of biological agents by drafting a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA). A CBA is an enforceable agreement between community groups and developers that allows low income people to participate directly in the development process in their communities. Drafting a CBA with Columbia University regarding their expansion would allow community residents to be involved

with the placement and monitoring of a bioresearch facility on the new campus. As the support of City Council members is very influential in the drafting of a CBA, residents have been encouraged to state their approval of this agreement at public hearings.

For more information on the bioresearch lab please contact Ms. Cadore at yolande@weact.org.



Community activist Klare Allen speaking about the Biolab



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WE ACT Street Team is Cleaning up

When knowledge turns into action we become the catalysts for change that improves the quality of life in our communities.

After completing the intensive 6-week Environmental Health and Justice Leadership Training provided by WE ACT, 12 community residents decided to transform their newly acquired knowledge of pesticide exposure, garbage sanitation, and the built environment into collaborative action. These dedicated residents now comprise the core of the Healthy Homes Street Team.

The Healthy Homes Street Team is a dynamic organizing project comprised of a cadre of motivated, community leaders from across New York City, who are committed to creating healthier communities through direct action. The Street Team uses research, investigation, and peer-to-peer communication to build community capacity to address environmental health concerns.

Amongst the numerous environmental health hazards our communities face, the Street Team identified garbage and waste management as the city's most pressing quality of life concern. Ms. Faye Shabazz, a resident of Lenox

Houses and a core Street Team member, stated, "It's very nasty to see garbage piling up on the street, and the odors coming from the garbage are much worse during the summer. So I have been talking to other tenants in my complex, encouraging them to get together [with the Street Team] because we have to be united in order to make the Department of Sanitation improve the pick-up schedules."

To help the Street Team realize its vision of increasing community awareness and participation around issues of garbage maintenance, they were recently awarded a \$500 grant from New Yorkers for a Better Neighbor-

hood. The grant will help the Street Team accomplish its first project goal of creating a bilingual, awareness poster that illustrates the cycle of garbage in New York City, the linkages between rats and rodent control, and concrete ways for community members to get involved and make a difference.

For more information about the Street Team, please contact Jamillah Jordan at Jamillah@weact.org or 212 961-1000, ext 322.



The WE ACT Street Team in action