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PUBLIC HEARING -- SCHOOL SPACE ACCESSIBILITY

INTERAGENCY COORDINATING COUNCIL ON YOUTHS (ICC) PUBLIC
HEARING ON THE TOPIC: "OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS TO INCREASING
ACCESS TO PUBLIC SCHOOL SPACE IN NEW YORK CITY"

APRIL 23, 1996

WE ON STATEN ISLAND ARE CELEBRATING THE THREE-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE VOORLEZER'S HOUSE, THE OLDEST LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE STILL STANDING IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. WHEN IT WAS BUILT IN 1696 BY THE DUTCH SETTLERS, IT SERVED NOT ONLY AS THE SCHOOL BUILDING, BUT AS A CENTER OF COMMUNITY ACTIVITY.

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN, AND THE TREND IN OUR CITY IS NOW TO MAKE OUR SCHOOL BUILDINGS THE FOCUS OF COMMUNITY ACTIVITY ONCE MORE. BEACON SCHOOLS, FOR INSTANCE, WERE NOT INTENDED TO BE THE SITES OF AFTER SCHOOL YOUTH RECREATION ONLY, AS MANY MISTAKENLY ASSUME, BUT WERE REALLY MEANT TO BE COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY CENTERS TO HOUSE PROGRAMS OF ALL TYPES.

BUT WHY HAVEN'T OUR SCHOOLS, AS THE MOST NUMEROUS AND ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC BUILDINGS IN OUR CITY, BEEN UTILIZED BY MORE GROUPS SEEKING SPACE IN WHICH TO MEET OR CONDUCT THEIR ACTIVITIES? IN MANY CASES IT IS BECAUSE OF A COMPLICATED FEE SCHEDULE, AND CONFUSION ABOUT THE BUREAUCRATIC PROCESS OF MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCHOOL SPACE.

THERE IS A PROPOSAL BEING DISCUSSED TO PRIVATIZE SCHOOL CUSTODIAL SERVICES, TO CONTRACT WITH A COMPANY FOR A SINGLE FEE THAT WOULD COVER NOT ONLY BUILDING OPERATIONS DURING

THE REGULAR SCHOOL DAY BUT ALSO MAKE THE SCHOOL BUILDING AVAILABLE FOR AFTERNOON AND EVENING USE, UNTIL 10 O'CLOCK AT NIGHT, BY COMMUNITY GROUPS WHO WOULD PAY NOTHING FOR THE USE OF THESE TAXPAYER-OWNED FACILITIES -- BUILDINGS WHICH THE MEMBERS OF THESE GROUPS ALREADY OWN ANYWAY.

LET ME SAY THAT THERE ARE INDEED INSTANCES THROUGHOUT THE 32 SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF THE CITY WHERE CUSTODIANS AND SCHOOL MANAGERS HAVE FAILED TO MAKE THE BEST PROVISIONS FOR BOTH PUPILS AND THE LARGER COMMUNITY. THERE IS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, LOGIC AND A DECENT CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS (WHO SHOULD BE CALLING THE SCHOOL BUILDING THEIR HOME AWAY FROM HOME) MOTIVATING THIS PROPOSAL. IT IS CERTAINLY POSSIBLE THAT THIS MAY BE THE BEST ARRANGEMENT FOR PART OF THE CITY.

HOWEVER, LET ME OFFER A FEW POINTS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION.

FIRST, LET'S LOOK AT THE FEE SCHEDULE THAT PRESENTLY EXISTS. NO MATTER WHAT THE SIZE OF THE SCHOOL BUILDING, ANY AFTER-HOUR ACTIVITY COSTS \$17 PER HOUR, WHICH IS PAID TO A FIREMAN WHO MUST BE ON DUTY IN THE BUILDING.

IF THE SCHOOL BUILDING IN QUESTION CONTAINS LESS THAN 60,000 SQUARE FEET OF SPACE, THE USE OF A GYMNASIUM IS \$24, THE USE OF A CLASSROOM IS \$2, AND EACH BATHROOM IS \$4. IF THE SCHOOL CONTAINS

100,000 SQUARE FEET OF FLOORSPACE, THERE IS NO SPACE CHARGE AT ALL, AND BETWEEN 60,000 AND 100,000, THE SPACE CHARGE IS PRO-RATED. (LARGER BUILDINGS COST LESS BECAUSE THE LARGER THE BUILDING, THE BIGGER THE CUSTODIAL STAFF, SO IT IS EASIER TO RE-DEPLOY STAFF IN LARGER BUILDINGS.)

LET'S TAKE A HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE. AN EVENING PROGRAM THAT RUNS FROM 7 P.M. TO 10 P.M., THAT USES THE GYM, A BOYS' AND A GIRLS' BATHROOM AND TWO CLASSROOMS IN A SMALL SCHOOL BUILDING WOULD COST \$87 PER NIGHT. FOR A GROUP THAT MEETS ONCE A WEEK, THAT WOULD BE OVER \$3,000 A YEAR. FOR A GROUP THAT MEETS EVERY DAY, THAT'S OVER \$1,700 A MONTH, AND OVER \$12,000 A YEAR.

NOW, IF A CONTRACT WERE TO BE MADE WITH A PRIVATE COMPANY FOR SCHOOL CUSTODIAL SERVICES, AND THAT CONTRACT WERE TO INCLUDE AN OPEN-ENDED CLAUSE ABOUT MAKING THE SCHOOL AVAILABLE WITHOUT FURTHER FEES TO COMMUNITY GROUPS THAT WISH TO USE IT IN THE EVENINGS, THAT MAY SAVE THESE INDIVIDUAL GROUPS THE HEADACHE OF BEARING THESE EXPENSES, BUT THE BILL FOR HAVING PERSONNEL AVAILABLE TO KEEP THE BUILDING OPEN (REMEMBER, THEORETICALLY SEVEN DAYS A WEEK) AND OPERATING THE BUILDING'S SYSTEMS (NOT TO MENTION THE COST OF ELECTRICITY, HEAT AND SUCH) WOULD HAVE TO BE BORNE BY THE

TAXPAYERS WITH A COST FIGURED INTO THE TOTAL FEE TO BE MADE IN THE CONTRACT PAYMENT.

LET ME ALSO POINT OUT THAT INCREASED USE OF SCHOOLS BY COMMUNITY GROUPS WILL MEAN INCREASED WEAR AND TEAR ON BUILDINGS -- THINK, FOR INSTANCE, OF THE INCREASED WEAR AND STRESS ON AUDITORIUM SEATS ALONE. THE COSTS OF INCREASED WEAR, OF GREATER MAINTENANCE NEEDS AND OF BREAKAGE WILL ALSO HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED IN EITHER A PRIVATIZATION CONTRACT OR IN THE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S CAPITAL BUDGET.

WHILE WE MAY BE WILLING TO MAKE THIS COMMITMENT FOR THE SAKE OF FACILITATING COMMUNITY GROUPS (AND I THINK SUCH A COMMITMENT SHOULD BE MADE), WE MUST BE AWARE THAT IT WILL NOT BE WITHOUT COST.

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT WE NEED TO ENTER INTO A NEGOTIATED CONTRACT WITH THE CUSTODIANS OF OUR SCHOOLS -- WHOEVER THAT MAY BE IN A GIVEN INSTANCE -- THAT WILL HAVE AN ALL-INCLUSIVE CLAUSE FOR AFTER SCHOOL FEES. THE FAIRNESS WE WISH TO GIVE TO OUR COMMUNITY GROUPS IS WELL WITHIN OUR REACH. CLEARLY, HOWEVER, WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT WHETHER WE HAVE PRIVATIZATION OR CUSTODIAN MANAGEMENT OF OUR SCHOOL BUILDINGS, FEES FOR USAGE BASED ON MANPOWER PRESENCE AND TECHNICAL COMPETENCE HAVE TO BE PAID. AN ALL-INCLUSIVE

CONTRACT WILL, THEN, BE PAID FOR BY THE CITY.

HAVING SAID THIS, LET ME OFFER A SECOND POINT, OR RATHER, OFFER AN INVITATION. ON STATEN ISLAND, WE HAVE BEEN LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE HAD ONE PERSON IN CHARGE OF AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM ARRANGEMENTS FOR OVER 30 YEARS. THE SUCCESS WE EXPERIENCE IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR SCHOOL CUSTODIANS, DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS IS WITHOUT RIVAL IN ANY OF THE OTHER THIRTY-ONE DISTRICTS IN THE CITY. WHATEVER WE HAVE NEEDED, AS A DISTRICT, FROM A CUSTODIAN IN MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCHOOL EVENTS FROM 3 TO 10 P.M., HAS BEEN PROVIDED FOR NOT MERELY ADEQUATELY, BUT RATHER FULLY. OUR SCHOOL CUSTODIANS HAVE GIVEN OF THEMSELVES OUT OF A UNIQUE CONCERN FOR THE COMMUNITY OF STATEN ISLAND AND HAVE MAINTAINED EXCELLENT CONDITIONS IN THE SCHOOLS FOR AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES.

LET ME RESPECTFULLY SUGGEST THAT THIS COUNCIL, THE MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL EXAMINE THE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF SCHOOL MAINTENANCE ON STATEN ISLAND AND GIVE IT FULL SCRUTINY AND EVALUATION. AFTER WITNESSING HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO, WHAT OUR DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION'S RELATIONSHIP IS TO CUSTODIANS, HOW WE CALCULATE FEES FOR SERVICE, AND HOW WE EVALUATE MAINTENANCE ISSUES, I BELIEVE THE CITY CAN DEVISE A DEFINITIVE

PLAN FOR SCHOOL MAINTENANCE AND FOR COMMUNITY ACCESSIBILITY THAT WILL RESTORE FULL CONFIDENCE IN THE WAY SCHOOLS INTERFACE WITH PEOPLE.

MAY I ADD THAT THE STRENGTH OF THE STRATEGY OF ANY GOOD MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, REGARDLESS OF WHAT PEOPLE SYSTEM IS BEING MANAGED, IS A FUNCTION OF THE MANNER IN WHICH ALL PEOPLE CONCERNED CONDUCT THEMSELVES, FEEL RESPONSIBLE TO ONE ANOTHER AND SHARE A VISION OF THE GOALS AND OUTCOMES DECIDED UPON. YOU SEE, THAT IS STATEN ISLAND, THAT IS DISTRICT 31; THAT IS THE WAY OUR SUPERINTENDENT, CHRISTY CUGINI, CONDUCTS BUSINESS AND THAT IS THE WAY OUR CUSTODIANS COMPORT THEMSELVES.

SO, I WOULD RESPECTFULLY SUGGEST THAT FOR STATEN ISLAND TO UNDO WHAT WORKS SO WELL FOR US AND THE GROUPS IN OUR COMMUNITY NOW, WOULD HURT US, AND FORCE CONDITIONS ON US WHICH WOULD NOT BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF MAINTAINING QUALITY SCHOOL BUILDINGS FOR QUALITY AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE MAY BE A NEED FOR A NEW SYSTEM OF SUPPORTING SCHOOL MAINTENANCE AND SCHOOL ACCESSIBILITY IN OTHER PARTS OF THE CITY.

WHATEVER THE SITUATION IN A PARTICULAR DISTRICT, IT REMAINS CLEAR TO ME THAT THE MAYOR IS LOOKING FOR THE BEST

SYSTEM OF SCHOOL MAINTENANCE; THE ONE THAT WILL BE THE MOST COST EFFECTIVE AND WILL GENERATE GREATER OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COMMUNITY TO BE RIGHT AT HOME FROM MORNING UNTIL EVENING, I JOIN WITH HIM IN THE PURSUIT OF THESE GOALS.